

## The Rock Canon: Canonic Echoes in the Reception of Rock Albums

Carys Wyn Jones (Cardiff University)

Established canons of works and artists have been the subject of heated debate in academia for the last three decades, and yet no viable alternative to canons has been established for organising and preserving literature, art and music. Instead, canons are emerging in areas of culture that would not previously have been associated with such an elitist, high-culture concept. This paper therefore addresses the problem of canon formation in the popular reception of rock music.

Through a discussion involving Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, the soundtrack to *Saturday Night Fever* and the album *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, I shall explore the ways in which the canon influences our perception of music and how popular music has inherited canonic terms, values and mechanisms from the canons of literature and music - including issues of influence, originality, longevity and the 'test of time', the figure of author/genius and the album as a work of art. I will then consider problems and tensions inherent in the transference of ideals and values from high art to popular music, particularly in relation to the rebellious ideology of rock, canonic authority and the problem of creating a canon in a contemporary field. The paper concludes that in the reception of popular music we are not simply trying to organise the past but mediate the present; and any canon of rock music must now negotiate a far more pluralized culture, and possibly accept a greater degree of change, than has been evident in the canons of classical music and literature in the last two centuries.