

MUSIC, MARKETS AND CONSUMPTION



# Part II

## Production Perspectives

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# 3 Music as Product

## Introduction

In order to develop a more holistic and integrated understanding of the relationship between music and the market, and consequently of music production and consumption, it is necessary to examine the notion of music as a product. The very act of exploring the relationship between music, markets and consumption immediately frames music as a 'product'. In the marketplace, music is 'produced' and 'consumed' rather than made and heard. But the language and practices of the market and of marketing go far beyond the labelling of music making and listening in this way. They are pervasive and, as such, mediate our everyday engagement with music, regardless of the role we play in the market. The way the quality of music is evaluated is dominated by measures of sales success: songs 'top the charts', artists 'sell out' stadiums and tours, and recording companies sign 'the next big thing' to contracts in the expectation of future sales. Even a particular market can be held up as measure of success: in popular music, many bands, such as the Beatles, have been deemed to be successful only after they have 'broken America' by reaching high positions on the US music charts.

Marketing practices have long been utilized in music. For example, P.T. Barnum adopted a variety of promotional campaigns and innovative pricing tactics to ensure the success of Jenny Lind's 1850 debut in America (Waksman, 2011). Tickets for the best seats in the house were sold at auction. This served multiple purposes, such as increasing revenues by forcing up the price of the ticket through competitive bidding, generating further publicity for the concert through additional advertising of the auction itself, and ensuring that ticket dealers would

not profit without adding value, by purchasing large blocks of tickets and selling them on at inflated prices. These are all practices, and problems, which have contemporary resonance. Many artists, managers and music-based organizations have expertly exploited branding and public relations, and in some cases the field of music has even been at the forefront of practice. The Rolling Stones lip and tongue logo, painted by John Pasche and first used on their *Sticky Fingers* album in 1971, is 'one of the most visually dynamic and innovative logos ever created' (Barrie, 2012) and, as such, is held in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

The notion of 'music as product' in contemporary life is not unproblematic. The framing of music as a product, like any framing, is neither value-free nor neutral. It highlights certain ways of seeing and masks others, and it can therefore influence the way people think and behave. Talking about music 'producers' and 'consumers' privileges a particular kind of musical engagement, and ignores the vast array of experiences people have when making and listening to music. 'Gone are the days when viewers went to galleries, audiences attended concerts or the theatre; they are all consumers', notes John Tusa, Director of the Barbican Centre in London (1997, cited in Chong 2003). This raises the potentially contentious nature of framing music as a product, making it all the more surprising that this perspective on music has not yet been examined in any great depth. After considering what the music product is, this chapter explores the different perspectives on the nature and value of music. This provides a basis for an emergent conceptualization of music as a product.

## The music product

There is an implicit assumption that people know and agree on what is meant by the term 'product' in the context of music. There are, however, a range of possible answers to the question: 'What is the music product?' The most seemingly obvious answer is that it is the music itself. But complexity arises when one tries to specify exactly what that is. Music comes in many forms, some of which are recordings such as