

# Responses to Simon Zagorski-Thomas's talk on 'Dead White Composers'

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On BBC Radio 4's programme *Four Thought*, Wednesday April 20, 2016, 20:45, the musicologist Simon Zagorski Thomas, Professor at the University of West London gave a talk entitled 'Dead White Composers'. At the time of posting this, **the talk is still available to listen to online**; I also reproduce a transcript at the bottom of this post, which can also be read **here**.

Zagorski-Thomas's talk has generated a good deal of reaction, not least on social media, and I felt that some of the responses should be made public. With this in mind I am printing a range of texts of varying lengths from musicians, academics, students and others, beginning with text of my own, then others in alphabetical order of names. I am open to including further text; those wishing to contribute can either post in the comments section below, or e-mail me at [ian@ianpace.com](mailto:ian@ianpace.com) if they would like me to consider including something in the main text here. All responses are welcomed, though I request strongly that posters refrain from personalised attacks or abuse.

## **Ian Pace: Pianist, Musicologist, Head of Performance, City University London**

Simon Zagorski-Thomas's polemical talk raises questions – about the types of music studied, taught and researched in educational contexts – which deserve proper consideration and debate. These are not new in such contexts, as can be witnessed through tonnes of published verbiage on issues of relative valorisation of so-called 'high' and 'low' cultural traditions, both in music and other cultural fields. Yet so often these debates become simply territorial and lack nuance, instead relying upon false dichotomies, straw man characterisations, populist rhetoric, and easy appropriation of the language of identity politics in order to bolster a sense of moral self-righteousness, and I am afraid that this is no exception.

The focus of this talk is upon music education in the UK, and I will stick to that area, though hopefully the issues raised have a wider application. Zagorski-Thomas portrays a stark dichotomy within the UK music higher education sector, between 'classical' and 'popular' music, with Russell Group universities focusing on the former, post-1992 universities on the latter. As he puts it:

*...broadly speaking, the higher status Russell Group universities do Mozart, and the lower status post-92 universities do Blur. Could it be that the prestige of some academic subjects over others could be determined by prejudice and snobbery, rather than by relevance, complexity, or academic rigour?*

But this is a huge over-simplification which does little justice to the diversity of tertiary musical study. I count 53 departments offering various types of music or music-related degree (excluding the ten UK conservatoires, and a few others where the degrees are hosted within other types of departments), 19 of which are in the Russell Group, 21 of which are post-1992, and 13 of which belong in neither category (including my own, City University London). Even a cursory glance at the modules offered in a cross-section of these demonstrates a wide range of areas of study and research well beyond canonical classical music: for example film music, ethnomusicology, community music, study of musical institutions, music education, sound recording, music technology, sound art, music business, music therapy and so on.

The picture of Russell Group institutions presented by Zagorski-Thomas is very one-sided. Liverpool and Newcastle Universities both offer degrees in popular music, and almost all the others offer modules in popular music and jazz, sometimes as part of a compulsory core curriculum. Many of these are in areas of Popular Music Studies and History of Popular Music, but others on the likes of 'Popular Music and Consumption in the Digital Age' (Manchester), 'Pop Production' (York), 'The Music Industry in the Digital Age' (Cambridge) not to mention various modules on jazz, Broadway Musicals, non-western popular musics, and so on. Other modules, such as 'Music in California' or 'The Sixties' (both at Birmingham) or 'Music in Context' (Leeds) incorporate popular and other musics. Oxford even has 'Global Hip Hop' as a compulsory core first year module. Popular musics are also well-represented in my third category of universities above; one can do modules in 'The Beach Boys and The Who' (Open University), 'The Beatles' (Bangor), 'Rock and Popular Musicology' (Hull), or 'Jazz and Pop Arranging' (Brunel), to name just a few. At my own institution, I have up until this year taught a core first-year module entitled 'Investigating Western Music 2: 1848-2001', in which all types of popular music are deeply integrated into wider historical approaches: from music hall, the French *café-concert*, brass bands, minstrelsy, and vaudeville, through jazz, blues, gospel, cabaret, to 1950s rock 'n' roll, soul, funk, prog, art rock, punk, fusion, free improvisation, electronic dance music and more, as well as classical and avant-garde traditions. As electives we offer 'Popular Music Studies', 'Popular Music Now', 'Global Popular Musics' and 'African-American Music: Gospel and Blues', whilst other modules on music traditions of the Middle and Far East, or Sound, Art and Technoculture engage with a plurality of types of music including popular genres. Many students have also done third year dissertations in popular music subjects.

Zagorski-Thomas says:

*Musicology should be about trying to discover why we like the things we do, and how music works. Too often, though, it's based on the assumption that classical music is by definition of value, and that musicology's job is simply to demonstrate why.*

This picture just might have been true in the 1950s or before, but not now. Even then (and well before), there was always a critical tradition with respect to classical music, and often highly disparate views as to the value of differing composers or sub-sections of the repertoire. It is unlikely that many musicologists working on classical music would think it *all* to be of little value; otherwise why spend one's life studying it? I certainly do not see my job either as a teacher or researcher as being about demonstrating the value of certain music, and am quite sure I am very far from alone

in this respect. Rather it is about equipping students with the critical, analytical, historical, aesthetic and other tools to be able to arrive at their own intelligent and informed judgements about many things to do with music. What Zagorski-Thomas describes is more akin to an adult education 'music appreciation' class than much of the critical work which is done in universities of many levels.

I view 'popular music' as dating back roughly to the early-ish nineteenth century, and constituting a predominantly urban range of traditions associated with the growth of cities through industrialisation, though there are of course major exceptions. This would separate it somewhat from folk and other vernacular traditions, though strict and inclusive definitions can be difficult to pin down.

I certainly believe there is value in teaching and researching popular music of all types in education, but it is not unreasonable to consider what form and extent this might take in order to maintain high levels of scholarship and rigour, as well as considering the purpose it ultimately serves. Classical music is a highly skilled and literate tradition, as are some other musical traditions in the world, and music degrees at respected institutions still generally require a fair level of developed skills prior to entry; it is not a discipline one can simply start from scratch at degree level. Yet a lot of popular music scholarship I have read either concentrates on almost anything *but* the music – the lyrics, the fashion, the publicity, the record sleeves, the world of celebrity, the workings of the industry, and so on. These are all certainly valid areas of study, but when the sounding music ceases to play a part, I do not believe this should be considered the study of music, but rather would be better pursued under the auspices of sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and so on. And even when the music does feature in written scholarship, often this is only at a very basic level, with descriptive prose which is closer to the sort of writing one might expect of intermediate students at secondary school. There are major exceptions, for sure – such as the analytical work of Richard Middleton or Allan Moore, for example – but these are increasingly out of fashion, though some younger scholars are taking on their mantle.

There are pressures on university music departments to recruit and maintain students despite falling levels of pupils studying music at GCSE and A-Level, and also to bolster numbers taking elective modules by being able to offer these to those studying other subjects. It does sometimes appear to me one way of doing this, not least in some post-1992 institutions, is by what **I have elsewhere called** 'deskilling' of the discipline, removing the requirement to be able to engage with sounding music in any detail, or have developed any sort of wider historical or global awareness of various musical traditions and their contexts. Unfortunately, there are less able students who see popular music modules as a 'soft option' for these reasons, and it is not difficult to see how they might get such an impression from some of the published literature. This is not to deny the value of other, different skills, distinct from those acquired in a more traditional musical education, but that returns to the issue of whether such study is better undertaken in other departments and degree courses in which those skills are more widely pursued in a rigorous fashion. I would be horrified to see music study, or indeed any other specialised and skilled discipline, relegated to a mere sub-section of cultural studies (or the increasingly ubiquitous title of 'cultural industries').

It is not too difficult to see how scholarship relating to classical music interacts with the wider worlds of composition, performance and listening (not to mention

recording, publicity, and so on). Study of historical trajectories, social context, performance practice, analysis can in my view fruitfully feed back into all these activities, and conversely are at best informed by regular engagement with musical activity undertaken outside of the academy. Throughout the history of musicology (and other forms of scholarship on music which pre-date the formalisation of the discipline in the late nineteenth century), there have been many scholars who have combined practical activity – as composers, performers, and so on – with other forms of writing and research on music, and the teaching of music in schools and universities has followed this pattern. I believe all these fields would be the poorer without the others, and one of the strengths of music as a subject (as recognised by many employers) relates to the high range of different skills cultivated therein.

But can one necessarily say the same in the context of popular music, primarily a non-literate tradition, which has largely flourished outside of an academic context, and for which it is much harder to make a case for a regular interaction between academic writing and music-making? How many popular musicians or popular music fans ever read any of the not inconsiderable amount of scholarship produced on their fields; or, how much does this scholarship inform more accessible and popular forms of writing, as for example in journalism? Short-term impact is not the only measure of the value of research, for sure (notwithstanding the fact that current government research funding policies tend to force it to be), but if such scholarship has only a marginal impact of any type over an extended period, it is not unreasonable to ask some questions about its value, if it is to amount to anything more than a closed talking shop for academics.

As to this point of Zagorski-Thomas:

*So what does it say about us, as contemporary culture, that we value the activities of a small group of Central European dead men more than we value the activities of our contemporary musicians?*

For a start, the domination of a Central European repertoire only really applies to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; before then English, Franco-Flemish and especially Italian repertoires are more dominant, whereas in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries the tradition of art music has come to encompass most nations in the developed world and numerous beyond. It is true that before recent times the opportunities for women composers have been very limited, and this is to be deplored; nonetheless scholars have nonetheless done important work in bringing to public attention previously forgotten or neglected women musicians (as far back as twelfth-century abbess, composer and much else Hildegard von Bingen, and even earlier figures such as Shakdukht or Kassia). Using ‘dead’ as an implied pejorative adjective is only tenable if one believes historical music is of purely secondary value, a point of view I wholly dispute. Furthermore, there are many types of ‘contemporary musicians’, and I do not believe their value should be gauged primarily in terms of the market utility of their work. On the contrary; a university should offer a place where a plurality of creative activity can be studied (and practised), with some degree of autonomy from the need to attain short-term commercial success.

But who is the ‘we’, or indeed the ‘contemporary culture’, of which Zagorski-Thomas speaks? Personally, I can rarely go into a bar without being barraged by Japanese *gagaku* music, cannot go shopping without a constant stream of

Stockhausen, Barraqué, mid-period Xenakis, or just sometimes examples of both French and Rumanian *musique spectrale*, piped over the loudspeakers, whilst when I jump into a taxi cab in most countries, I can be sure that there will be no escape from music of the Italian *trecento*. This is not to mention the cars going past blaring out the darkest Bach cantatas, or the endlessly predictable torrents of Weimar modernism which the builders will always put on the radio. Or not, obviously; in all of these cases I can be sure to hear Anglo-American popular music from the last few decades, which should make one ask which musical forms are genuinely hegemonic in contemporary culture.

Now I like a lot of popular music myself, of all types, and have done so since very young, but I would find it a bleak world if this was all that was heard, produced or studied. And I would hope that in high-level education we can do more than simply teach students about music with which they are already well-familiar, but open their minds and ears to a much wider range of music and sounds from different times, places, social strata, and so on. Furthermore, that it is possible to study musical traditions in *detail*, rather than just styles to be surveyed in the manner of a tourist. Many of those studying non-Western musics, music technology and indeed popular music are allowed to concentrate primarily on their specialism; I do not see why classical musicians should not be granted the same privilege, though it is increasingly frequent that this is not the case, at all levels of education.

Many of these other musics do not have the obvious commercial utility of Anglo-American popular music, nor the same amounts of capital behind them, the same amount of saturation media coverage, and so on. This is the real ‘hierarchy’ and ‘inequality’, rather than that to which Zagorski-Thomas refers. I do not believe value to be synonymous with commercial success; arriving at alternative conceptions is far from easy, but to give up on the task is to surrender to the values of the free market, as various critics of popular cultural studies, including Fredric Jameson, Todd Gitlin, Robert McChesney, Keith Tester, Thomas Frank and Joseph Heath, have argued cogently. This would not, I venture, be a positive move forward, though other aspects of the educational situation are encouraging it. If we were to take Zagorski-Thomas’s outlook on board, I fear this would only accelerate the process.

### **Response from Simon Zagorski-Thomas:**

Despite Ian’s survey of the two Russell Group universities’ popular music courses and ten others that serve up popular music modules (although you forgot to mention Edinburgh where the dreaded Frith lurks – the spoiler of all things Tovey) – indeed, I’m sure there are more – despite this, I believe that my general point, positioned at the foot of this blog although posted a couple of days before this, about the sociological focus of popular music studies and it acting as a reinforcement of the entrenched idea that there is no value in popular music, still stands. The implication is that serious academics wouldn’t study the music, only the social and economic mechanisms by which it is disseminated and ‘consumed’. For that reason I’m afraid Ian’s survey, something like which I conducted myself, seems entirely irrelevant to me. I’m going to skip the section on definitions as I’ll respond to that in relation to Jim Aitchison’s post which deals with the topic in greater detail.

I agree entirely that we should teach and research popular music and that “it is not unreasonable to consider what form and extent this might take in order to maintain

high levels of scholarship and rigour”. I don’t recall saying the opposite. Ian suggests that studying popular music requires or at least currently entails a de-skilling of music education. I completely disagree that it requires it (it’s hard to tell from your argument if that’s a straw man I’m attacking) but I also take issue with the idea that current problems in popular music performance pedagogy are that simplistic. That they don’t require a semi-redundant (to popular music before anyone faints) set of music literacy skills is not a great problem for me. That the alternative skills that are important in popular music are still in the process of being developed does mean that there can be significant problems. There are also lots of people working away on those problems – although generally it’s unfunded research.

I’m afraid I found the next section to be somewhat muddled. You maintain that you would like there to be a musicology of popular music that studies the music (you mention Middleton and Moore who, contrary to what you say, have been followed and extended by many) but the section on de-skilling suggests that you don’t want students to study the performance or creation of it? Or that you want them to study it using the music literacy skills of the classical world? And you think there’s a danger that including the musical skills required for popular music would push courses to be studied in cultural studies departments? I don’t understand the thrust of this section at all – it seems very confused and contradictory to me. There’s no logical thread, just a series of related statements that are juxtapositioned to suggest causality. If this does extend to a rather tiresome response to a response to a response, perhaps you could explain what you mean.

I’ve been accused by Ian of creating false dichotomies and, as I say, there are simplifications and generalisations in my talk which I’m glad of the opportunity to expand on. One direct comparison that Ian makes, though, I have to take issue with on a categorical level rather than in terms of simplification or generalization. He states that there are within classical music departments “many scholars who have combined practical activity – as composers, performers, and so on – with other forms of writing and research on music” and that is compared to “How many popular musicians or popular music fans ever read any of the not inconsiderable amount of scholarship produced on their fields”. That’s highly disingenuous. There are also many popular music scholars in universities who are also active musicians – practically everyone in my department for a start. And if I were to pass a copy of Cook and Everist’s *Rethinking Music* around an average group of orchestral musicians their engagement with it would probably not extend beyond ripping out some pages to wedge under their music stand to stop it wobbling. The former is a blessing and the latter is a problem in both classical and popular musicology. That’s a false dichotomy Ian.

And how about those straw men? Ian says “Using ‘dead’ as an implied pejorative adjective is only tenable if one believes historical music is of only secondary value”. It’s not an implied pejorative adjective, it’s an explicit delimitation. I make the point several times that I don’t think we should stop studying classical music – that’s a patently ridiculous idea that provides the straw man for a large proportion of my negative commentators to tilt at. When I say “it shouldn’t only be ‘a’ but we should include ‘b’ as well”, I see no implication in that sentence that I believe ‘a’ is inferior and should be ditched so that ‘b’ can take over. This is exactly the same kind of idiocy that led to the idea that white men were threatened by the notion of sexual and racial inequality. When someone suggests that they want to remove inequality it is surely

irrational to believe that they want to replace it with a similar inequality in their favour. I certainly don't in this case.

The argument about the economic dominance of popular music may display Ian's distaste for both the economic system and for the lowest common denominator music that it pushes to the fore, but that is completely irrelevant to my argument. If he asks if I'm in favour of the commodification of higher education – as that seemed to be where he was going with his argument – of course not. I quoted Michael Gove as saying he wanted children to study “the subjects the Russell group universities have said they value most” and I think that is just as distastefully commodifying as Ian's point that standards are being lowered to get bums on seats. Is this as simple as Ian's populist rhetoric makes out? No. Academics can't decide which courses students should want any more than students should determine course content. I'm certainly not suggesting that change is being handled well at the moment but denying that change should happen is as equally idiotic as suggesting that market forces should drive it. That is where an interesting and informed debate should be taking place, rather than the near hysteria that's greeted the idea that popular music should be accorded a more equal place in the university system.

Ian says “Yet so often these debates become simply territorial and lack nuance, instead relying upon false dichotomies, straw man characterisations, populist rhetoric, and easy appropriation of the language of identity politics in order to bolster a sense of moral self-righteousness, and I am afraid that this is no exception.” Right back at you Ian.

#### **Ian Pace replies:**

My list of popular music courses at Russell Group universities was not meant to be exhaustive. Since you mention Simon Frith, I will say that I think we have reached a low point when someone so abjectly unconcerned with matters sonic/musical, indeed contemptuous of them, is a Professor at a Music Department. In terms of ‘serious academics’, each can decide for themselves who is ‘serious’, but I am going on the basis of reading a lot of popular music studies. Certainly some do study the music, but on balance, the extent to which it receives detailed and intense attention is small compared to that in various other musical fields. This is not the only musicological sub-discipline for which this is often the case, but one of the worst in this respect.

I think Simon is being deeply disingenuous if he denies that popular music courses do not appeal in large measure to students with fewer developed musical skills than for other courses. In many broader departments, classical and ‘world’ music students are capable of also studying popular music, but the reverse is much less true. And it is well-known that while many scholars of other musics can also teach popular musics, again it is rare for the reverse to be true.

Simon does not think it is a problem if we have an increase in students without music literacy skills, which he calls ‘semi-redundant’ for popular music. This must be the only field of activity in which literacy is not valued. There are multiple possibilities for notation, but how many students come with experience of other things too? How much detailed study of actual music is possible without some developed musico-analytical skills, usually using some form of notation? Otherwise writing on popular music reverts to simple description, the ‘sort of writing one might expect of intermediate students at secondary school’. The fact that Middleton and Moore do

indeed use notation (and relatively standard Western notation) is the precise reason why their work is treated with disdain by some (including Frith, in his comments on Middleton – I do think it is relevant to **note that he is a collaborator of Zagorski-Thomas**). If music literacy skills are not important, then students will not be able to engage with this body of work.

I did not think the next section was so confusing (nor have many others who have read it). There are several points here: one is a critique of the straw man argument that musicology is about demonstrating value; another is an attempt at a definition of popular music, at least one I use in teaching, though offer it there for critical discussion; the other point is that (as stated above), a lot of popular music does *not* engage with the music. I argue simply that when it gets away from sounds, it would be better studied in another department. But also that a deskilled musicology (requiring little in the way of prior skills for investigating specifically musical matters) is definitely a bad move, though it might help recruit or maintain students who would not manage music degree courses otherwise. When you take the music out of musicology, it does become little more than cultural studies, to be studied by those with no prior disciplinary expertise. What results is most often what the Marxist writer Ben Watson has called the ‘Popsicle Academy’ (on which subject I would recommend his article ‘Semen Froth So Useless’, in Watson, *Adorno for Revolutionaries*, edited Andy Wilson (London: Unkant, 2011), pp. 131-148), ‘pop sociology’s lightweight theoretical armature and its musical predilections’ (p. 136), most fond of ‘Playing off commerce *versus* academy’ (p. 140 n. 5), in the lack of any coherent theory of capital. I wonder if the money spent on a lot of this type of teaching and research might be better spent on supporting young working-class musicians in forming bands?

As far as works of the ‘New Musicology’ are concerned (and Cook/Everist certainly belongs within this category), I agree that this has little relevance for active musicians, but on the whole I think this has been a very regressive move in musicology anyhow. This is by no means representative of the breadth of musicology, and mostly constitutes a particular Anglo-American tendency. Simon might look at some of the other types of examples I suggest instead.

I would like to know more about examples of active popular musicians who are also in universities, and would like to see examples of what constitutes their research. But I was asking for concrete evidence of a wider symbiosis between the world of popular musicians and fans, and academics studying the field. I am not convinced this exists to any notable extent.

The argument about the economic dominance of popular music does indeed reflect my distaste for the Thatcherite/Reaganite economics which I believe underlie Simon’s positions. He may say ‘of course not’ to my charge of favouring the commodification of higher education, but I think that is the inevitable outcome of his ideas, which would give a new level of backing to music already in a deeply unequal position in wider society (deeply in its favour). To pretend that this is simply about pluralism is nonsense. There are problems with the whole conception of the Russell Group, for sure, but to say that to favour the subjects themselves favoured by a certain group of universities is ‘just as distastefully commodifying’ is to misunderstand the whole nature of the concept of commodification.



There is not ‘near hysteria’ greeting ‘the idea that popular music should be accorded a more equal place in the university system’; on the contrary, popular music content is increasing in many places. I note that Simon makes no comment about the fact that I have taught it extensively myself, and worked hard to integrate it into core music history modules. I do not want to see it crowd out everything else; Simon claims that is not what he wants, but he ignores the economic realities. I am surprised to see my own belief that universities should continue to offer a plurality of skilled options, not just keep students in their musical comfort zones, as ‘populist rhetoric’. How wide are the range of non-popular options available at the music department of the University of West London (where I did once upon a time use to teach piano, when it was the London College of Music and Media)?

I do think that the provision of education should not simply be driven by student demand – and, for example, departments specialising in continental philosophy, medieval literature, all types of languages (for example various African and South-East Asian ones), and so on, should be supported even when they do not recruit well. The same goes for all types of music. Simon’s totally false dichotomy between ‘classical’ and ‘pop’ suggests these each constitute something like 50% of the music one might study, and he does not mention any other types. Western classical music has a history of at least a millenium; Anglo-American pop (and let’s not kid ourselves that popular music courses are going to attract many students who can engage with popular music not in English) is one of numerous other Western musical styles and genres. I do not think it should receive a greater profile in universities simply because of its commodity status.

**Nicole Grimes also replies:**

As we risk entering a hall of mirrors where we are confronted with responses to responses to responses, I wish to add one more note. My dismay at SZT’s broadcast is compounded by his response to Ian Pace’s response. There is nothing in his latest contribution to dissuade me that “the finest aspect of SZT’s neat Orwellian trick is the fact that he denies having played the trick in the first place.” Let’s for a moment set aside the question of the subject matter of the disciplines involved and remind readers of strategy: in his broadcast, SZT’s promotion of his brand of popular music studies was premised upon a carefully crafted denigration of classical music studies. If his broadcast has been met with “near hysteria” (his use of emotive language is duly noted), then this is because of a palpable sense of outrage at the disingenuous manner in which he has framed the debate. That this is set against a backdrop of approval for David Cameron’s erstwhile “Big Society” is, at this stage, merely grist for the mill.

**Jim Aitchison, composer:**

In this talk, Simon Zagorski-Thomas attempted to make a case for increasing the funding given to HE research activity around popular music, in his view, righting what he sees as a fundamental injustice arising from what he describes as a ‘hierarchy of inequality’. As far as the general case itself goes, personally, I’m not sure what the answer is: the terrain is extraordinarily difficult and there are complex arguments on both sides, and there will be winners and losers in any battle. The figure quoted of there being only 5% funding given to popular music research projects by the AHRC in comparison to what he describes as those relating to ‘classical music’, points to a

situation worthy of further investigation. Zagorski-Thomas comes across as down to earth and as a warm, intelligent and engaging speaker, however, in terms of the talk itself, there are some hugely problematic issues.

Listening to the talk closely, it is impossible not to be aware of how often the terms ‘classical’ music and ‘popular’ music are pitted against one another directly as the sole polarities. It is hard to understand what the speaker means by the former characterization in particular and why: is it naivety? Or is it a rhetorical minimizing/undermining device that deliberately provokes prejudice in listeners by alluding to implied resonances of privilege and elitism? Or is he really only referring to the art music of Western Europe during the 70 years or so in the second half of the C18th and the beginning of the C19th? This lack of definition leaves a very large hole in the argument. In addition, this narrowing of the currents within HE music provision to just two interlocutors – a few decades of late C18th and early C19th European art music vs. popular music – seems a very strange formulation. What has happened to all of the other musics studied at universities across the UK currently? What about all the other histories of music? What about experimental music, film music, game music, electroacoustic music, computer and studio-based composition, sound design, sound art, modern and contemporary art music, folk and world music?

Zagorski-Thomas goes on to ask why the status given to what he calls ‘classical music’ assumed by some parts of the HE music sector (he singles out Russell Group universities) is unquestioned, and then stretches this into a general point about a privileged position being given to ‘classical music’ across society at large by default, which I’m not sure how can be substantiated. I absolutely agree that all quasi-hereditary ‘hierarchies of inequality’ must be held up to scrutiny, and that in my view not to do so risks allowing these to stifle unsanctioned innovation, while also becoming stagnant themselves. However, if you are going to do this, thorough familiarity with your target is advisable. Zagorski-Thomas makes a bid to undermine the supposed preeminence of what he characterizes as ‘classical music’ with the following propositions:

- Using the example of the absurd, discredited and hugely flawed ‘Mozart effect’ phenomenon to suggest that a similar force operates that has led to a significant number of cultural arbiters somehow blundering into a false belief in the superiority of ‘classical music’, because of an inherited cultural predisposition of unquestioned bias.
- Suggesting that there is a widespread tendency to characterize an opposition between ‘classical music’ and popular music unfairly (e.g. he suggests instead of pitting Mahler against Bieber, it could be Rieu against Autechre).
- That there is a tendency to privilege music that emphasizes ‘harmony and formal structure’ against music that emphasizes ‘rhythm and tone’.
- That there is another tendency to privilege music that emphasizes ‘Logic and reason’ over music that emphasizes ‘expression and emotion’.
- The fact that examples of popular music can be every bit as complex as ‘classical music’ is ignored.
- That there is craft in popular music, but which is not valued in the same way as ‘classical music’ (‘Why isn’t Aphex Twin, with his carefully crafted synthesizer pieces considered more important than Schumann?’).
- That popular music exhibits subtleties every bit as sophisticated as ‘classical music’.

- ‘We value the activities of a small group of Central European Dead men’.

There are many propositions here, some thought-provoking, but others underpinned by highly questionable assumptions and beliefs as untested as those he accuses proponents of ‘classical music’ to be entertaining. I will offer responses to most of the above, but in some ways it does seem a little pointless to do so, as every single proposition is put forward in support of what I have already described as a fundamentally flawed underlying position: that of what Zagorski-Thomas believes he means by ‘classical music’ (of which we are not informed in any detail), and exactly how he believes this phenomenon is manifested in society in general and in academia in particular.

The reference to the so-called ‘Mozart’ phenomenon is an example of taking one specific instance of unproven relevance (in the context of his argument), inferring general implications and causes and effects and then applying this in service of the larger contention. Not only are there other possible explanations that may account for his conclusions, but to suggest that this somehow proves an inbuilt false bias towards ‘classical music’ (again, this is so difficult, when we don’t really know what he means by this) across the whole academic and cultural community is very hard to substantiate. This bias may or may not exist, but the instance above is not proof of it.

The possibility of a widespread tendency to characterize an opposition between ‘classical music’ and popular music unfairly is, very broadly, possible, but again is a huge generalization and is more conjecture (he is attempting to legislate on behalf of a large constituency whose views he cannot possibly know). However, the example he gives of reversing polarities and pitting Andre Rieu against the Electronic music duo Autechre, is a thought-provoking one.

The supposed tendency to privilege music that emphasizes ‘harmony and formal structure’ against music that emphasizes ‘rhythm and tone’ is very curious. It is well known that in the Western European Art Music, harmony as a functional entity in the Common Practice sense was in decline by the beginning of the C20th, and that rhythm and timbre were to become increasingly significant as compositional vectors. So, by any measure, this is a strange charge to lay. And in any case, to propose that such parameters are separate is also most peculiar. I think that Stravinsky would be surprised to discover that structure played no part in his use of rhythm in the composition of the Rite, and Debussy similarly that structure was absent from his use of timbre.

Then we have the notion that there is a tendency to privilege music that emphasizes ‘Logic and reason’ over music that emphasizes ‘expression and emotion’. The idea there is any music comprised of pure ‘emotion’ and nothing else is something I have never encountered before, and, characterizing, by implication, whatever he means by ‘classical music’ as being based only upon ‘logic and reason’ is also something that I have never come across. That these kinds of conceptions are floating around is rather alarming.

That examples of popular music can be every bit as complex as ‘classical music’ is ignored, is a proposition that needs thorough exploration. What does he mean by ‘complex’? I wonder if, by complexity the speaker really means density. Again, definition of terms would be helpful here.

That there is craft in popular music, but which is not valued in the same way as ‘classical music’, is possible again, of course, but the question posed as to why Aphex Twin ‘with his carefully crafted synthesizer pieces’ isn’t ‘considered more important than Schumann?’ is a complicated question that would take time to answer. However, I would ask, why Aphex Twin needs to be considered in competition with Schumann, and, point out that Mr. James has had 25 years of extensive exposure to make the case for his music.

That popular music exhibits subtleties every bit as sophisticated as ‘classical music’ is once again, a big provocative statement that requires proper discussion, substantiation and detail. Unfortunately, stating that, ‘the harmonic progressions in Beethoven are not where there is going to be interest and nuance’ doesn’t provide confidence that there is a grasp of such subtlety in terms of one side of the comparison, which rather undermines the argument.

That ‘we value the activities of a small group of Central European Dead men’ is a regrettably crude device of minimization. We could also decry valuing the work of the dead white man who wrote a few plays 400 years ago in just one small market town in Northern Europe. Many of us do ‘value the activities of a small group of Central European Dead men’ because they were and are extraordinary and of singular value in terms of the whole of human history. For anyone to feel intimidated and be unable to acknowledge that seems to me to be somewhat of a tragedy, especially if this attitude prevents others from engaging with their work. To worry about the same happening to the world famous, consistently visible/audible, and extraordinarily wealthy stars of various kinds of popular music would seem a less pressing priority for now (though that is not to say that there are not many unjustly neglected practitioners).

The talk as a whole, proposes that popular music studies are unfairly relegated to a low position in the academic hierarchy due to a kind of institutionalized prejudice. It seems a great shame that he ignores all of the other kinds of music and sound studied at universities, and that his remedy for his dilemma is to try to drag down whatever music it is he sees as being unfairly privileged (though I am still unsure as to which music he is referring to), rather than focusing upon the positive qualities of the music he loves and believes in and building an argument based upon rigorous exposition of these qualities.

The other serious problem with this talk, in terms of its tenor, is that I, and no doubt many others, who try to keep an open mind and feel the great importance of putting up with the discomfort of the uncertainty around these issues in order to keep debate and intellectual and creative possibilities open, are being forced to adopt polarized simplistic positions in order to counter what is being put forward here.

I am sure that Simon Zagorski-Thomas is well-meaning and quite naturally wants the best for his subject, which is commendable, however, I do hope that he might think again about the substance of his arguments.

### **Simon Zagorski-Thomas replies:**

Jim, you are quite right to castigate me about using the term “classical” in such a loose manner. From now on the term which I am going to use is “music that has developed out of the cultural and economic hegemony of the southern and central European systems of aristocratic and ecclesiastical patronage and which relies on a

symbolic representation of those socio-economic forms of dictatorship in the form of the conducted symphony orchestra and the bourgeois, furniture-based status symbol of the piano as the primary media through which composers can achieve status (although only by creating a printed contract, known as the score, to which all performers must agree to be subservient)". For the sake of brevity in a 12 minute radio discussion this can be abbreviated to MTHDOOTCAEHOTSACESOAAEPAWROASROTSEFODITFOTCSOATBFBSS OTPATPMTWCCAS(AOBCAPCKATSTWAPMATBS). Although that may be a flippant response in one sense, it does make important points I think: Is it such a "strange formulation"? You cannot get away from the fact that there are "resonances of privilege and elitism". That is the journey through which this musical tradition has developed. You can point to all the interesting twists and turns that have happened along the way but the historical development of all these instruments, modes of performance and pedagogy, structural forms, the development of and certain subsequent usages of the equal-tempered tuning system, the traditions of passive and reverential listening and, perhaps most importantly, the stave based notation system – these are all regularly reduced to the short-hand phrase "classical". Indeed, everyone who has criticized this reductionism has somehow magically managed to understand it enough to take issue with it.

You also accuse me of stretching my point about the HE sector "into a general point about a privileged position being given to 'classical music' across society at large by default". I thought I said "that the state – and status – of music in our higher education system doesn't reflect the state of music in 21st century Britain". I did make several points that relate to the idea that "classical music" – MTHDOOTCAEHOTSACESOAAEPAWROASROTSEFODITFOTCSOATBFBSS OTPATPMTWCCAS(AOBCAPCKATSTWAPMATBS) – is sophisticated or intellectual and popular music isn't. I think that (unfortunately) being considered sophisticated or intellectual doesn't put you in a privileged position in society. Generally it's money that does that – and, of course, popular music has been making more money than "classical music" for a long time. (I'll come back to this after a not-so brief diversion).

I'm not sure if you understood the point I was trying to make about the Mozart Effect. Of course it's absurd and discredited and I said so – although not quite as bluntly. I also said I was "not interested in the reliability of the science part here but in our reaction to it". My point was that when it was Mozart, the media and a large number of middle class parents jumped to the improper and logically flawed conclusion that there was something in the music of Mozart that improved the mind. When it was Blur they looked for something elsewhere – familiarity rather than some innate quality. If I understand you rightly, you suggested I thought this proved something. Well that does bring us to the question of whether musicology can ever be said to have proved anything. I think that the vast majority of argument in the humanities and arts is not about proof but about providing an opinion that's supported by evidence. This is a twelve minute opinion piece on the radio and not an academic article so I didn't have room for more evidence. Do I think that I could find further evidence to support the claim that there is a widely held view in society that "classical music" is more high-brow than popular music. I think I could. To be honest, even if I'd had time, I don't think I would have thought it necessary.

That does bring us on to the next section which has caused quite a lot of consternation and confusion – and that makes me think I may not have made my position clear here. I wasn't trying to attribute any of the oppositional binaries (logic and reason over expression and emotion etc) as being characteristics of either style. I was trying to point out that applying criteria like this to distinguish between popular and classical music was a pointless exercise because both sets of music can provide examples that meet those criteria. In retrospect “complex” was a poor choice of words but what I meant was that, however you judge it, the widely held view that “classical music” is more high-brow than popular music is entirely dependent on the examples that you choose. My opinion (emphasis on my again) is that the music that will stand the test of time (in terms of being ‘important’ or ‘art’) from the second half of the twentieth century will include just as many people like Hendrix, Zappa, Coltrane, Prince, Public Enemy and Aphex Twin as Ades, Boulez, Birtwistle, Cage or Finnissey. That is a “big provocative statement” and I would have loved the opportunity to discuss that. Once again, please note well that the statement is not decrying the value of the ‘dead white men’. Why is it that I can't question the dominance of this musical tradition without being accused of wanting to denigrate, destroy or remove it? As I responded to Ian above “When someone suggests that they want to remove inequality it is surely irrational to believe that they want to replace it with a similar inequality in their favour. I certainly don't in this case.” Ian's response is that “Simon's totally false dichotomy between ‘classical’ and ‘pop’ suggests these each constitute something like 50% of the music one might study”. No. I have no idea what the percentages might be and I haven't talked about ethnomusicology, jazz studies, music psychology, music informatics etc because they don't impinge upon my sphere of interests very much (and I had to make a 12 minute program). I was stating that I think there's an historical imbalance in the system as it stands. Lots of people have agreed with me and lots of people have disagreed with me – but also, lots of people have accused me of wanting to undermine and denigrate classical music or to replace it with popular music in HE. In your response you accuse me of wanting to “drag down whatever music it is that he sees as being unfairly privileged... rather than focusing upon the positive qualities of the music he loves”. It perhaps makes sense in light of Ian's politics (I know nothing of yours Jim) that the solution to economic inequality is to “drag down” the rich – those are my politics as well in a crude form – because economics is a ‘zero-sum’ game. I don't think that the aspiration to develop the research culture so that we understand popular music better and prize the valuable elements of it, requires us to “drag down” classical music.

Going back to the question of privilege and money – of course it's true that the economic dominance of popular music provides it with a ‘sonic dominance’ in everyday life. As Ian points out, it's the popular music that sells the most that fills our pubs and restaurants and allows it to enjoy the privilege of ubiquity. But there are forms of cultural and symbolic, as well as financial, capital that can leverage power. Classical music is the form of art music that the state has decided to bestow its financial capital upon in the forms of arts funding. Of course it's complicated by the fact that it has decided to be relatively populist in its programming but the contemporary art music that receives the crumbs that fall from that populist classical plate – such as Salonen's ballet and Iain Bell's new opera in the forthcoming Royal Opera House season – are not matched by commissions for experimental electronic dance music or other forms of ‘art’ music. The recent decision to use a small amount of Arts Council money to fund start-ups for bands in the field of popular music was

highly criticised but also is closely contained within the notion of community music making. There's no suggestion that this might lead to music of artistic worth, simply that we should also be encouraging 'low level' musical activity. It's also telling that on one of the very few occasions when public money was spent on a project by a 'popular' musician – Damian Albarn's *Monkey: Journey To The West* for the Manchester International Festival in 2007 – it was a piece for orchestra – because, of course, that's what 'proper' art music is. I'm not proposing anything about the quality or worth of Salonen's, Bell's or Albarn's work – that isn't my point. My point is that the state support of art music overwhelmingly favours music that is "classical" – or MTHDOOTCA... etc etc. Please don't extrapolate from this that I'm proposing the state support of "extraordinarily wealthy stars of various kinds of popular music" or that we should put Madonna on at the Opera House. I don't even think that I'd want to propose that arts funding should be spent on experimental or unpopular popular music – although it would be nice to see it spent on some more culturally diverse musical traditions. I just want to point out that these state subsidies are a marker of cultural capital – that this tradition benefits from those markers of value in many different ways. And just as a reminder, this isn't the issue that I was raising – I was talking about the status of popular music in HE.

Perhaps it would be good to conclude this with a summary of what I was trying to say: I do see the classical tradition as something based on a form of notation, ways of thinking about pitch, instrument and ensemble types, performance and listening conventions, and formal structures that our culture routinely differentiates from popular music. I see that tradition as having unfairly maintained a virtual monopoly on being considered art music and therefore being more 'high brow', more valuable and more worthy of academic study. I think there is some popular music (mostly unpopular instances it must be said) that is as worthy of study as the 'best' classical music. That requires a different set of intellectual tools and unfortunately the research required to develop them isn't being funded because the HE funding system is dominated by the classical tradition. I also think that the practical skills of making popular music are as important as the practical skills of making classical music and research that helped to understand those skills better should be funded. I don't want popular music to replace classical music. I don't want popular music research to replace classical music research (or any other forms of music research). I don't want to 'drag down' classical music. Some of my best friends are classical musicians... and as long as they do it in the privacy of their own homes and don't rub my nose in it, I sincerely believe that they can perform a useful and positive role in society.

**Jim Aitchison replies to this:**

This is a spirited, enjoyable and engaging defence of the talk that *should* have happened, not the one that did. I don't think I need to respond in detail again, as folks can read text of the original talk, my response, Simon's response, and then draw their own conclusions. And so, it seems to me that one of the fundamental problems was that the talk itself was given far too small a space (by the BBC) to deal adequately with absolutely huge issues involved. With the benefit of hindsight, I don't think the debate was served well on either side by the broadcast, and perhaps it wasn't such a good idea to take part in as I don't feel it really helped anyone, in my humble opinion. Far be it for me to judge, as goodness knows, I have created text for things in the past with too little space and time, and the results have sometimes been problematic.

Though, of course, it could be argued that it has sparked a lively discussion, which I hope will be beneficial...

**Genevieve Arkle, Post-Graduate Student in Music, King's College, London:**

‘Notes and Thoughts on ‘Dead White Composers’ and Simon Zagorski-Thomas’

Zagorski-Thomas belittles classical music stating that its sophistication comes merely from ‘complicated harmony and large formal structures.’ There are many classical works that use simple harmonies and structures but still maintain a strong emotional impact and provide light enjoyment for the listener. Furthermore, to claim publicly that ‘classical music is seen as intellectual’ only adds to the public’s belief that classical music is inaccessible or elitist; these sweeping generalisations that he makes about classical music are merely a projection of society’s stereotypical assumptions and it is precisely these views and opinions that are slowly killing the progression of classical music in our 21<sup>st</sup> century musical society. Classical music, just as with popular music, does not require any ‘mysterious rites of initiation’ as Kramer puts it, however due to what I believe to be our increased lack of exposure to it in our modern society, those who take an active interest are seen to be elitist or snobby in contrast to those who enjoy the more accessible popular music. What popular music apparently lacks in terms of ‘intellect’, classical music is currently lacking in terms of mainstream ‘popularity.’ It does not make one better than the other.

To claim that musicology suffers from ‘institutional bias’ and ‘doesn’t reflect the musical society of 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain’ is utterly absurd. Having attended two different universities in London for my undergraduate and my Master’s degree, I have seen the wide range of courses offered in both departments and the versatility and continual exposure to popular culture and the impact of music in popular society. Perhaps these topics do not get the critical acclaim they deserve and popular attention in the field because there is literally less to discuss and analyse than there is in the plethora of classical music spanning the last six centuries and more. Zagorski-Thomas says: ‘Too often though, it is based on the assumption that classical music is, by definition, a value, and musicology’s job is simply to demonstrate why.’ – Musicology’s job, in my personal opinion, is as a field of study that enables individuals to have the opportunity to reassess, reinterpret and retell a part of music history, and there is no reason I can see that popular music should not be treated similarly; the value or nature of the musical work itself, popular or classical, is in my eyes near-irrelevant. Musicology does not merely claim to fight for classical music’s value, it provides debate, interpretation, discussion and advances our knowledge of a genre of music that has been hugely influential in reflecting history, politics, philosophy, and more, and equally is the foundation on which our currently popular music came to be formed.

My question to Simon would be to find out how he hopes to see popular music approached in musical institutions in order for it to be treated with similar academic credentials to those found in classical music musicology? Can popular music be analysed, scrutinised and interpreted with the same variance of meanings and emotional impact? Can popular music today truly stand the test of time that classical music has demonstrated through past centuries? I do not doubt that popular music



studies is essential to the progression of musicology as a genre, as we have advanced departments in classical musicology, ethnomusicology, jazz studies and so on, and popular music should certainly be incorporated, and currently is in numerous music departments all across the world. But to treat the genres as equally sophisticated seems unlikely, as each genre of music works under its own rules and its own unique character. I will take back my comments if I can see a popular music song analysed to the same extent as a five-hour Wagner opera that intimately reflects the ideologies and philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, or coins the progressive and innovative use of the *leitmotiv*. This is not to say that Wagner's opera maintains greater value or greater significance in musical culture, or that it requires an intellectual mind or an elitist upbringing in order to comprehend or enjoy it; neither am I saying that Bieber's music does not deserve to be analysed for its composition or for its no doubt huge impact on modern society and its listeners. But to say that they should be considered equal in their complexity and therefore in their analysis is inappropriate. Perhaps, much like ethnomusicology, popular music studies should be formed into its own separate entity, enabling it to be a unique genre that while still reflecting musicological values can gain its own critical acclaim without being associated with the 'elitist' and 'intellectual' classical music that is supposedly damaging its reputation.

Zagorski-Thomas makes a humorous comparison, stating:

*Is classical music really more complex than popular music? Well, if I compare Mahler to Justin Bieber you might want to say 'yes'. But is that a fair comparison? Mahler is a choice based on expert opinion and Bieber is a choice based on popularity and sales.*

Here I could not disagree more. Mahler is not a choice based solely on expert opinion. In late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century musical culture Mahler's music thrived and was exceptionally popular and in demand in concert halls around the world. Still today, his works are performed regularly due to their popularity with the current and 'popular' classical music world, a world Zagorski-Thomas seems to casually berate as being out-dated and only for the likes of the intellectual or those wanting to appear to be intelligent. Heaven forbid one should enjoy classical music for any other reason. Just because the music does not fall into *mainstream* contemporary music culture, it does not mean that classical music is no longer popular today.

### **Julian Faultless: Horn player, brass teacher, and tutor in Arabic at Oxford University.**

One of the most striking things I find in this whole debate and which is very rarely mentioned is that pop music is far, far better represented in universities in the UK than the literary or artistic equivalent. Should popular novels or pop song lyrics be studied much more in university English departments? Would most people in English lit departments not find the idea ludicrous? Would that be sheer snobbishness? Would literature students even want that? (Incidentally, I speak as someone with a serious admiration for the best pop music and I do think it should be studied).

What Z-T should acknowledge is that the overwhelming majority of pop is in 4/4 and uses an incredibly limited harmonic palette. Math rock is utterly unrepresentative.

**Dr Nicole Grimes, Lecturer in Musicology, Keele University:**

‘Simon Zagorski-Thomas and the Musicological Brexit’

In his broadcast “The Only Good Musician is a Dead Musician” on BBC Radio 4’s *Four Thought* (Wednesday 20 April), Simon Zagorski-Thomas (hereafter SZT) plays a neat Orwellian trick. He presents a false dichotomy between the cultural value of classical and popular music, diminishes the value of classical music studies, and then lays claim to a self-appointed moral triumph for his ideology of popular music studies. This is done by way of proving that there is an “institutional bias” in the British higher education system that “doesn’t reflect the state of music in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain.” SZT’s concern is that music scholarship in the university sector is “in danger of becoming out of touch and irrelevant” to “our experience of music now.”

“Is it about snobbery” he asks, before demonstrating that his false dichotomy relies on a series of flattened and oversimplified binary oppositions:

- “Is classical music really more complex than popular music?”
- “Is harmony and formal structure more important than rhythm and tone?”
- Are “logic and reason” thought of “as more important than expression and emotion”?

Few academics working in university music departments will be able to relate to the bifurcation of knowledge that SZT presents. Nor will they understand their intellectual engagement with the sonic, cultural, emotional, expressive, and analytical parameters of music to breakdown neatly along the lines of SZT’s false oppositions. Most will agree that the rich and complex study of music in all its guises defies such parsing and resists such polemical misrepresentation. Many musicologists will therefore question the manner in which SZT frames his debate. Pointing to a perceived shortfall in the amount of research funding awarded to popular music studies, he bemoans the fact that “We live in a world where classical music is considered intellectual and popular music is not—just look at universities: broadly speaking, the higher status Russell Group universities do Mozart and the lower status Post-92 universities do Blur.” He asks:

*Could it be that the prestige of some aspects of academic subjects over others might be determined by prejudice and snobbery, rather than by relevance, complexity, or academic rigour?*

Taking issue with SZT’s false dichotomy and the manner in which he frames the debate, I challenged him on Twitter: “Must we oppose European composers to contemporary musicians? Must it be either/or?” His response: “If you listen to the program, I’m asking for both, not either/or.” The finest aspect of SZT’s neat Orwellian trick is that he denies having played the trick in the first place. And yet even a cursory listen to his broadcast tells us that, despite professing a love for “that amazing music,” his promotion of one academic discipline (popular music studies) is premised upon the denigration of another (classical music studies). His argument is based on a crude attempt to dislodge the cultural weight and intellectual significance of Western art music (his examples of which are *The Mozart Effect* and *André Rieu*), and to undermine those aspects of higher music education that require prior

knowledge and skills (namely harmony and formal structure, logic and reason, in short, music analysis).

The broadcast betrays SZT's extremely reductive understanding of the nature of musicology as a discipline, which, in his formulation, "should be about trying to discover why we like the things we do and how music works." This impoverished characterization denies musicology's historical, sociological, anthropological, aesthetic, philosophical, and international significance. This is directly bound up with what Ian Pace has cogently characterized as the de-skilling of musicology. Moreover, it speaks to a utilitarian understanding of the role of the university whose task is to reflect society, in this instance, a particular strand of British society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for whom dead European composers and their rich and varied traditions have become an irrelevance. Britain alone, embracing an anti-European prejudice. If this reflects "the plurality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" to which British universities should aspire, then this musicologist casts a firm vote to remain in Europe.

**Joan Arnau Pàmies: Composer, D.M.A. candidate at Northwestern University:**

At this point, it should be rather evident that commodified music has the hegemony across most societal infrastructures. There is an aesthetic absolutism, not necessarily in terms of style or genre, but rather as for what the social purpose of music may be (i.e., escapism via simple forms of entertainment). Furthermore, I think it is crucial to differentiate popular music from mass music and/or commodified music. Most so-called 'popular' music out there does not emerge from communities of citizens, but rather is treated as a product that demands some profitable outcome. And, even in the case that popular music does indeed emerge from outside the industry, it may be easily repurposed into a commodified form if some sort of financial gain may be gained out of it. I'd like to suggest that instead of calling this academic discipline 'popular music studies', it seems to me that 'commodified music studies' would be much more appropriate.

PS: Classical music is also commodifiable, as we know from the reiteration of similar programming in concert halls and orchestra seasons.

My biggest concern about popular music studies is that often the hegemony of the market ideology is barely questioned. In some cases it is even justified.

In my classes, I barely use the term popular music, even when I'm referring to music that is considered to be popular. That is because my understanding of 'popular' has not much to do with the allegiance to the present neoliberal ideology.

**Dr Tom Parkinson, University of Kent, Centre for Higher Education:**

This was a short piece for radio, and as such its remits were gentle provocation and accessibility rather than precision and detail, so I'm going to respond mainly to the spirit of what Professor Zagorski Thomas says rather than the finer points. However, I would like to take small issue with the characterisation of the Russell Group as elitist, stuffy and unappreciative of popular music; my own doctoral research focussed on the

institutional culture of popular music departments, and I reviewed a number of programmes across institutional types- it is my informed view that Newcastle and Liverpool Universities, both Russell Group, provide some of the best popular music education in the country, and indeed produce some of the best research. This, for me, highlights the problem with treating the Russell Group as a homogenous bloc- as do Michael Gove's comments that ZT refers to in fact. It is too often ignored that the Russell Group is a mutual interest group and not a meritocratic 'premier league'; it is therefore inaccurate (and in Gove's case, entirely inappropriate) to use Russell Group as a shorthand for elite higher education (Sorry- bugbear exorcised).

Anyway- ZT's reminiscences of school music education certainly chimed with mine. I was led to believe that I wasn't a 'real' musician, despite writing and recording my own music in my teenage years, because I didn't play an orchestral instrument. My own music education was, like ZT's, mainly autodidactic, informal and experiential, until I returned to university to study (not popular) music in my late twenties. Having taught in schools earlier this decade, I'm heartened by the prominent place popular music now plays in children's music education. This gives space and structure for young people to explore and find meaning in their (and each other's) filial and affiliative cultures, where previously these aims were seen as less important than inculcating an uncritical reverence for European dead composers. An education that overwhelmingly privileges the Western art canon, can, in some settings and circumstances, seem like symbolic violence, not to mention a total waste of everyone's time, unless we can find a persuasive argument for its universal value to all (the assumption of universalism is dangerous). The issue of relative quality or musical value in such circumstances seems moot, where equality seems to be at stake.

At the same time, however, I'm uneasy about the oppositional rhetoric that often characterises this debate. I've also witnessed the macabre sight of hundreds of brass instruments languishing in a dusty portacabin behind a school music block. Often it feels as if classical music has been driven out of secondary music education entirely, which is a terrible outcome- socially, educationally, and musically.

The ideal is surely to accommodate both (or all) kinds of music; the perennial challenge of course is striking an appropriate balance. The inevitable corollary of including something in the curriculum is that you leave something else out, and there is precious little time in the arts curriculum. In higher education however, there is an opportunity to establish a more holistic and inclusive culture that acknowledges value and intellectual complexity across musical forms, and shapes its curricula and pedagogies accordingly. There are moves in this direction- an institution in my study had abandoned their earlier discrete 'Music', 'Popular Music' and 'Music Technology' degrees in favour of a single 'Music' BMus. Thus the preposterous implicit notion of a legitimate 'music' was abolished, and students were free to pursue their interests within a non-hierarchical landscape. Crucially, they were also exposed to the cutting edge of all of music's sub-fields, rather than siloed within a limited aesthetic and analytical paradigm. This, to me, is the most frustrating aspect of the classical/pop divide- that so often criticism is levelled at the other side without the courtesy or academic nous to become acquainted with its theoretical advances (or even foundations) first. This is evident in the most surprising places. Roger Scruton, for example, one of the world's leading conservative intellectuals, has been taking aim at popular music for decades, without any serious engagement with the now vast research base in popular music studies, or the well-rehearsed defences of popular

music as a legitimate object of scholarly focus. Instead, he trots out the same rhetorical takedowns time and time again (I'm usually a fan of Scruton's, btw).

ZT refers to the common assumption that classical music is self-evidently sophisticated, where pop is self-evidently less so, and correctly identifies the confirmation bias that reinforces this assumption among scholars. In my view, this is also symptomatic of the same wilful conceptual illiteracy, particularly regarding popular music composition and production, but this works both ways. In my experience, pop music academics can be equally ideological, and resentful of the classical world to the point that they deny themselves the opportunity to even try and understand or (heaven forbid) enjoy it. The bifurcated research infrastructure compounds this problem, and sustains discrete research communities whose participants share departments and offices, but not ideas.

**Sam Richards, improviser, composer, writer, Lecturer in Music, University of Plymouth, author of *The English Folksinger*, *John Cage as...*, *The Engaged Musician* and other works:**

Curiously, I feel this is quite an old issue – the valuing of classical music over popular. For me the pendulum has swung the other way. Some classical music students where I work have complained that they are less catered for than rockers. They have argued that they're obliged to do improvised, blues, rock things in practical sessions, but that rock musicians are not obliged to learn classical techniques – which apparently now includes notation.

**Pamela Rose, piano teacher, music education writer, creator of [www.learngrade5theory.com](http://www.learngrade5theory.com) :**

Simon Zagorski-Thomas is in the business of academic music education. I am a private piano teacher, music education writer and creator of [www.learngrade5theory.com](http://www.learngrade5theory.com), a series of 18 videos dedicated to teaching theory at the piano. I am as passionate about teaching music as Simon is about music as an academic study – but there the similarity ends.

“As Simon says”, due to his “shockingly mediocre music education at school” he felt excluded by not being able to study what he terms “his subject” – music.

Instead he played in rock bands and worked as a sound engineer.

He repeatedly tells us he's “doing very well” BUT , and it's a big but, Simon is unhappy. He seems to feel hard done by his exclusion from the Russell Group and his perception that the Russell Group monopolises music research funding. However, instead of devoting his efforts to securing what I believe is a better music education for others he develops a complex series of arguments that in the end are intended to elevate ‘cult stud’ to the status of classical analysis. We already have professors of music who can't read music and can't play an instrument. What of their students and their students' students? Will this not simply reinforce and perpetuate a social divide because it is educationally legitimised?

From my point of view and more to the point, he has not undergone the rigorous discipline of learning to read music and play a musical instrument to a high standard. He has not dedicated his life to the pursuit of what I consider to be musical beauty. It is not possible for him to understand the degree of mental, emotional and physical effort it takes to perform classical music.

I care passionately about music education.

At present in the UK, we award BMus degrees on popular music courses to the likes of Simon Cowell's "One Direction". Only a few popular music degree courses require Grade 5 Theory as a condition of admission. Apparently, this is not enough for Simon Zagorski-Thomas. He wants equal access to grant funding for post graduate research into the music they play. To me this is commercialism gone mad.

He wants to raise their 'cult stud' status on an academic playing field to which they can never belong...unless of course, they pay for it.

Music is sometimes a life saver, sometimes a life changer and always a life enhancer. For these reasons, I believe the teaching of music is a great responsibility. For me that responsibility is the creation of independent musicians. Independence comes from knowing and understanding and this cannot be achieved without learning notation.

It beggars belief that we can have professors of music who can neither read music nor play an instrument. In a recent conference I heard a Labour Minister boast he could not read a note of music but as he was in the Parliamentary Rock Band he saw no reason for it to be part of a musical curriculum – well that's an end to it!

So what of musical education now? Presumably if it's acceptable to the cult stud to have music academics and their students who cannot read music, how far are we from English Literature students who are not required to be literate?

There are things that are immutable. The physical and neurological benefits of reading and playing music are manifold and far outweigh any benefits derived from simply listening to music. This alone is sufficient justification for learning notation. I realise that this is often a privilege only available to children of well off middle class parents which widens the class divide.

The arguments expounded by Zagorski-Thomas, once filtered down to an already desperately deprived state sector music education, will widen the class divide between the 'haves' and 'have nots' and not, as he thinks, narrow it. The ultimate conclusion to the logic of his argument is that the teaching of classical music would be outlawed.

Learning to read music and play a musical instrument to a high standard requires rigorous discipline and dedication.

For ease, for popularity, and crucially lack of funding our state schools are teaching children something they normally teach themselves outside of school – how to be in a pop band. Is this music education?

To my mind all education gives us choices. We may not choose to become classical musicians but this choice should be ours and derived from the freedom that

knowledge, understanding and education give. Education should not narrow our options but allow us choice – something Simon says he was not given.

Recently, I read on a blog by a senior and respected teacher “Over the last 100 years a great deal of research has been carried out that shows that a notation focused approach to early instrumental lessons has a detrimental effect on listening skills and musical development.” – there were no citations.

### **Jeroen Speak, composer:**

Characterising all music that isn't 'popular, contemporary' music as 'a small group of central European dead men', and to reduce the difference between 'pop' and 'classical' idioms as 'harmony and formal structure' vs 'rhythm and tune', is quite ridiculous, and a remarkably unacademic way to support his assertion that pop music deserves more academic 'value'.

It can be assumed (given our exposure to popular culture), that someone studying classical-based music has made a conscious decision to do so, but also will have experience and an understanding of both, yet (and this seems to be the main problem here) this rarely applies to the reverse situation. So, it would seem far more educationally beneficial (if indeed the purpose of a university today is to supply 'higher' education) that classical music subjects should take precedence. Shouldn't a higher education be balanced, rigorous and inclusive ?

Zagorski-Thomas' assumption that music funding, and research funding tends to go to research which addresses only 'classical' -based research is patently not true, a glance through recent PRS funding results shows quite the reverse in fact. On top of this, the criterion for funding has increasingly moved towards elements like 'impact' 'public participation' and 'cross disciplinary' which plays quite comfortably into the hands of a rock concert ! I feel there is little reason to regard research of pop culture as any different to any other form of research, so long as the research is of high quality. But Zagorski-Thomas doesn't make it clear whether he is talking about pure research or musical practice.

He is right about questioning the way pop culture is integrated into higher education however. A scan of the course content of UK universities shows that students doing popular music courses are rarely, or never, exposed to classical music practice, composition, analysis or history. That seems to show a distinct bias in the opposite direction to the one Zagorski-Thomas is implying, and a very un-academic one.

As far as pop music not being taken seriously enough..... Pop music grew out of pubs, garages, and teenage anxiety, and then, harnessed and marketed by cynical commercial interests, entered into every element of our lives from supermarkets to airports to message machines. It has bludgeoned all of us for the past 50 years to the point where we actually genuinely consider the immature bleatings of a love sick 17 year old as more important than some of the greatest philosophical, artistic, musical, and political minds of the last millennia. Popular music accounts for more media space than any other form of culture. So, I think its done quite well for itself without needing to ruin my chance, or my children's chance of getting a thorough musical education.

**Dr Peter Tregear, Department of Music, Royal Holloway College, University of London. Former Head of School of Music, Australian National University.**

Zagorski-Thomas's talk was more a case of missed opportunity than musical mission. His overarching thesis was not the need for an expansion of intellectual and aural horizons of our tertiary music curricula, rather for a redistribution of limited educational resources. But the state of affairs he depicts does not reflect the realities of tertiary music education market place today. Jobs for lecturers in popular music studies proliferate at the expense of not just the traditional areas of research interest (including, to be sure, the spectre of 'dead white male European composers' he invokes at the beginning of his talk) but also the traditional disciplinary skills of notation, theory, analysis, and criticism.

We lose, however, much more than just a Euro-centric hegemony in Zagorski-Thomas' brave new educational world. We lose our capacity to understand the basics of the very history that led us here.

Mahler matters not so much because his music might indeed contain, as he suggests, a greater richness of harmony and formal structure, but because his musical structures and materials are also in dialogue with history; his music demands an historical self-awareness from the listener that cannot but produce a relationship with his music that is both more self-aware and, yes, self-critical. Music history matters in the same way history itself matters—to remind us that the world we experience was neither the same, nor needs to be the same, as it is now.

Zagorski-Thomas asks us, instead, simply to institute a "musicology more relevant to our experience of music now". If so, who will decide what is 'relevant'? Can we really be sure it will not overwhelmingly be the marketplace itself? One does not have to be of the left of politics to recognise the impoverishment of historical and political imagination that follows.

Thus the real opposition in music education we must resolve today is not between so-called classical and popular musics, but that between music which asks us, through sound, to think more deeply about ourselves and our world, and that which doesn't. Instead, it seems, Zagorski-Thomas asks us simply to replace one limited sonic horizon, one set of snobberies, with another.

**Dr Ian Wellens: Former Associate Lecturer in Music, Dartington College of Arts, Author, *Music on the Frontline: Nicolas Nabokov's Struggle Against Communism and Middlebrow Culture***

1) Ironically the term 'music' is very often used to describe a small subset of the world's music, but in just the opposite way to that which Simon Z-T suggests ...

**<http://www.bbc.co.uk/.../music-awards-2015-the-line-up>**

For another example, try the Guardian website where 'music' means pop & rock.



2) It seems to me that – for musicians operating within that family of post-50s popular musics, there are a lot of constraints in place – most of which apply most of the time. Their effect, taken together, is to put a ceiling on what can be achieved: it becomes difficult to create impressive, substantial music.

They include: restriction (across entire genres) to song forms; brevity; harmonic simplicity; the ever-present backbeat on drum kit; reliance on huge amounts of verbatim repetition; restricted instrumentation; reliance on very clear 1,2,4 or 8 bar units; the absence of any development or transformation of ideas; restriction to a single point of focus in a texture (i.e no polyphony); the fixed (and hierarchical) roles of instruments within an ensemble.

3) What's also a bit hard to swallow is this sense that popular music is the upstart, the marginalised outsider merely seeking fair shares. I'd have thought a fair-minded observer would see a musical culture where pop & rock are massively, overwhelmingly dominant. I'm not an academic or in education any more, but I'd have thought that popular music is highly present in HE, and probably enlarging its presence. The same thing has happened in school music. Already in 2010 (when I left HE) music applicants to our degree course often had a thin and rather tokenistic knowledge of non-pop music.

When you look at the whole picture, I feel the idea of this hugely pervasive music as somehow excluded just doesn't wash. And as someone else said, isn't one important role of education that it should promote, encourage and maintain a space for cultural practices which are outside the commercial mainstream?

***Initial Response from Simon Zagorski-Thomas, April 27, 2016:***

I'm going to provide some more personalized responses to the points made above – some of which I take on board and some of which I take issue with – and Ian has kindly agreed to post them after the various responses. It will take me a little while so they are coming in installments – the responses are nearly five times the length of the original talk. First of all, though, just a reminder of what Four Thought is. A “Series of thought-provoking talks in which the speakers air their thinking on the trends, ideas, interests and passions that affect culture and society” is what it says on the website and the sub-theme that guides the BBC's choice of speakers is that they are looking for a personal journey. So – 2000 words of which a substantial part needs to be some of my personal story, doesn't leave room for a fully nuanced argument so it's great to be able to follow it up with some more detailed discussion.

I don't suppose it makes much difference in retrospect but the title and the summary were chosen by the BBC and appeared on iPlayer without consultation. My original title was 'The Only Good Musician Is A Dead Musician'. A couple of general points: Of course, the terms 'classical' and 'popular' are highly problematic and there's been plenty of discussion in both fields about how useless and disruptive the terms are and yet they still maintain a general currency that was useful for this kind of talk. A good few people seem to think that I'm suggesting that 'popular' music should replace or dominate 'classical' music in universities and/or research funding. That is not what I said. Read it or listen to it again.

Another point that I didn't have time to make and which is why I distinguished specifically between the sociology of popular music and the study of the music and musical practices of popular music, is that I believe that popular music studies in the form that dominates outside the post-92 sector i.e. the study of the social and economic systems involved in popular music's distribution and 'consumption', mostly serves to reinforce the idea that I suggest still dominates music departments: that the music is not worthy of study. And I would also suggest that if you use tools of musical analysis that were designed to work on music as it is written on the page to try to analyse popular music (or jazz or electronic music for that matter) you will only succeed in concluding either that the tools aren't up to the task or that the music isn't. CMPCP and CHARM started the job of developing tools to analyse the sound of musical performance but they have remained mostly classical. Some of us have been working to follow up pioneers such as Middleton, Tagg and Moore to do this from within popular music.

**Simon Zagorski-Thomas – Talk, 'Dead White Composers', BBC Radio 4, *Four Thought*, Wednesday April 20, 2016, 20:45.**

**Producer: Sheila Cook**

Introducer: Good evening, and welcome to *Four Thought*. We're in New Broadcasting House in London, with a reasonably sympathetic-looking audience, and our speaker, Simon Zagorski-Thomas. Simon is a composer, writer, and record producer, whose day job is Professor of Music at the University of West London. His latest book is *The Musicology of Record Production*. So what's a Professor doing in a recording studio, you may well ask? Well, Simon says that's a rather good question. Ladies and Gentlemen, Simon Zagorski-Thomas. [*Applause*]

Simon Zagorski-Thomas: There's an old joke in the music industry that dying is a good career move, and what I want to talk about today is whether dead musicians get a better deal than live ones. When I was a boy in the 1970s, I always found it disappointing at school that teachers were more impressed that I could play the theme from Schubert's *Trout* Quintet on my trumpet than the fact that I could play Eric Clapton's 'Leyla' on my guitar. I grew up enjoying Beethoven and Debussy as much as I enjoyed XTC and Elvis Costello, but I knew after my shockingly mediocre music education at school and a cursory look at higher education music courses that music at university level 'wasn't for the likes of me'. So I went and did a degree in Economics with Artificial Intelligence instead, but I continued to play in rock bands, and after university, I happened to be in the right place at the right time, and found myself working in the 1980s MIDI revolution in music, producing dance music, programming drums for rock acts, and generally learning to be a sound engineer and a record producer. Like many people working in music, I worked on a lot of music which I thought to be quite facile and simple because it paid well. And I used that pay to subsidise the music that I loved. The music that inspired me was from popular music styles that I felt had the same type of sophistication and artistic merit of some of the classical music that I also loved. But I was conflicted about this – I had it deeply ingrained in my musical identity that sophistication and artistic merit came from complicated harmony and large formal structures. But I also loved the more chaotic complexity of improvised and experimental music. Worse still, the energy of

punk, new wave, and then later of dance music, had persuaded me that the ability to create that sense of momentum and attitude through arrangement, performance, and record production, was an equally valid form of expression. Added to this, there was often a rampant tribalism and snobbery involved in people's value judgements about music – including my own.

The 1980s and 90s was also a time when popular music started to gain a foothold in universities – although initially not in music departments. First there was the sociology of popular music – where academics studied the cultures and subcultures of popular music rather than the music itself. And then we get the development of music technology courses. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we've seen a big growth in courses about other practices in popular music – performance, song writing, live sound and management, for example. A study commissioned by the Higher Education Academy showed that over 85% of these popular music degrees were in the newer Post-92 universities. A look at the Arts and Humanities Research Council funding for music over the last 10 years reveals that less than five percent of the money went to studies of the music or musical practices of popular music. Of course there are two things that I don't know here – it may be that the number of applications for popular music research is low, and it may be that they're not as good. The only information I have got is anecdotal and personal. In the past five years I have submitted a range of bids for funding research. The successful ones have involved a project where classical music scholars joined us in a study of popular music performance and another one where we were looking at producing classical music with recording techniques taken from popular music. But all of the funding bids that dealt solely with popular music were turned down. I should point out that isn't the only factor; the popular music bids were generally for more money, and therefore less likely to be successful. But I do think that there's an institutional bias in the system which means that the state and status of music in our higher education system doesn't reflect the state of music in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. Indeed, the 2016 report by the Cultural Value Project has criticised recent research in this area for being based on a narrow definition of art and culture.

But is this about snobbery? Or is there a reason that classical music is considered more culturally valuable than popular music? You could buy a CD from [www.mozarteffect.com](http://www.mozarteffect.com) that says you can, "Use it... for better focus and concentration" – and of course, the CD is all Mozart. The Mozart Effect, the idea that listening to Mozart makes you clever, was based on some very tentative and not very reliable science but was pounced on by the media and by parents looking for easy answers to the problem of improving their kids' intelligence. And a few years later, a much larger study, supported by the BBC, found that Blur outperformed Mozart in the same type of experiment. [*Laughter from audience*]. It's interesting that in the reaction to the original study, which compared the effect of silence, a recording of relaxation instructions, and a Mozart Sonata, the performance of some spatial imagination tasks, everyone pounced on the fact that it was Mozart (rather than just music). But when the later study found that Blur outperformed Mozart, the perception was not that Blur improved your performance, but that it must be a music that you are familiar with, or partial to, that helped. But I'm not interested in the reliability of the science part here, but in our reaction to it. It's not just that the only good musician is a dead musician – but they're also white, European, male, and they compose rather than perform, and they compose by writing it down as notation, and they write classical music, preferably for a symphony orchestra. We live in a world in which classical

music is considered intellectual, and popular music is not. Just look at the universities: broadly speaking, the higher status Russell Group universities do Mozart, and the lower status post-92 universities do Blur. Could it be that the prestige of some academic subjects over others could be determined by prejudice and snobbery, rather than by relevance, complexity, or academic rigour?

Is classical music really more complex than popular music? Well, if I compare Mahler to Justin Bieber, you might well say 'Yes'. [*Vague laughter from audience*] But is that a fair comparison? Mahler is a choice based on expert opinion, and Bieber is a choice based on popularity and sales. What if I flip those criteria? What if I compare André Rieu, the cheesy superstar of Viennese Waltz, or Il Divo, the operatic crossover boy band, with Meshuggah, the progressive metal band, or Autechre, the intelligent dance music duo? The comparison becomes more difficult – we don't want to be comparing chalk and cheese, unless we know whether we're asking which one tastes better.

And that means this is also about the criteria by which we judge complexity. Is harmony and formal structure more important than rhythm and tone? If so, then Meshuggah, with their so-called 'math rock', using multiple time signatures, would give a lot of classical composers a run for their money. Perhaps logical reason was thought of as a lot more important than expression and emotion. If so, why isn't Aphex Twin, with its carefully crafted synthesizer pieces, considered more important than Schumann?

And a frequently cited criterion for judging classical music is about the management of expectations, sometimes talked about in terms of tension and release. But when we get down to the detail, the question of which musical parameters we have expectations about is crucial. If I listen to James Brown or Beethoven, the harmonic progressions aren't going to be the place where I hear interest and nuance. If I listen to Joni Mitchell's guitar writing, or Debussy's piano writing, I can enjoy their interest in extraordinary sounds, but a good part of why they're interesting and extraordinary flows from the fact that they're different from other guitar and piano writing that we're familiar with. Musicology should be about trying to discover why we like the things we do, and how music works. Too often, though, it's based on the assumption that classical music is by definition of value, and that musicology's job is simply to demonstrate why. This assumption, despite attempts to dislodge it, is still fundamental to the way that music education and arts funding for music are run.

In 2003, when I started working at a university, I was surprised at how I felt about it. I hadn't realised how excluded I'd felt by not being able to study my subject – music – when I was a teenager. And now, as I gradually came to realise, although popular music was included in the university sector, it was still being excluded from the top table. There are glowing examples of academics who realise that using the general term music, when they're talking about a small cultural subset of the world's music, is highly damaging. It's like using the term men when talking about humanity, or the term civilization when a particular form of Central and Western European culture. It's the signs of hierarchy, of inequality.

I don't want to sound like a grumpy academic, and of course, if I'm talking about a hierarchy of inequality, and identify myself and my subject as being at the bottom end of it, then it's easy to dismiss that as sour grapes. But actually I'm doing all right individually. I'm publishing research, I'm getting little bits of funding, and as far as

I'm concerned, I'm in the best department in the country for my subject specialism of recorded music and record production. What I'm worried about is the state of music scholarship in the university sector. It's in danger of becoming out-of-touch, and irrelevant, and that danger is an inherent property of the current system.

Applying for research funding from a post-92 university reduces your chances for success. In addition, although research proposals are peer reviewed, the majority of music academics reflect the dominance of classical music traditions in university, and their ideas about what would be important topics of research are informed by that. I'm not suggesting that people are being deliberately prejudiced; in fact, in my experience the opposite is largely true. When the issue is brought up, academics are mostly broad-minded and reasonable. It's just that this isn't a system that's designed to change, and the question of change is rarely on the agenda.

So what does it say about us, as contemporary culture, that we value the activities of a small group of Central European dead men more than we value the activities of our contemporary musicians? I'm certainly not suggesting that we should abandon the study of any of that amazing music. But I am suggesting that the lack of alternative narratives of quality is stifling music in universities and contributing to this lack of balance. There's inertia in the system, that maintains the existing institutional bias. It also demonstrates how unquestioning we tend to be when it comes to seeking to understand why our culture is as it is, and what kinds of bias become embedded in our culture without us noticing. It also demonstrates how the line of least resistance or the well-trodden pathway can create rigidity in our research culture, and in society in general. It doesn't help if policy makers reduce this argument to the lowest common denominator: that there are good subjects, and bad subjects, good universities, and bad universities, and that's both how policy should be made, and how students should make choices. That simplifies a complex issue, that's dumbing down. In 2011, Michael Gove said he wanted children to study 'the subjects that Russell Group Universities have said they value most'.

Unfortunately, the Russell Group is living in a musical world that bears little resemblance to the plurality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It seems to be up to the younger universities to take the lead in analysing musical forms that live outside of the world of the classical score and to create a musicology that is more relevant to our experience of music now. Thanks.

#### **Addendum communicated by SZT to IP:**

52% of AHRC grants for music in the past ten years have been for western art music, 15% for ethnomusicology, 15% was for sociological studies of popular music and less than 5% were for studying the music or musical practices of popular music. The rest were for things like music psychology, data mining etc. The reason I separate out the popular music sociology is something that, again, I didn't have time to discuss in any detail: studying the sociology of popular music reinforces the idea that the music itself isn't worth talking about – just the social and economic structures that are involved in its distribution and consumption. I counted them up from **the source you linked to above** a couple of weeks ago. Some might take issue with some of the detail of my categorisation – e.g. a quarter of the popular music practice money that I mention was

for a study of pedagogy for adult non-musically trained singers and I've included electroacoustic composition in the western art music category.