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The Urban
Music Scene



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The Urban Music Scene

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Since its beginnings in the nineteenth century, musicology as an academic discipline has focused on high culture, as represented by written works composed by the greatest, widely recognised masters. Music was viewed as close to absolute reality and far removed from the material nature of everyday life. For this reason, all the popular music phenomena, and in particular those designed as entertainment and leisure activities, as well as people's everyday musical practices and preoccupations in their living space – have until lately remained marginal to musicologists' work. This academic bias notwithstanding, music of varied provenance performed outside the elitist concert halls, including open-air performances in urban space – has attracted enormous audience interest and frequently also substantial funding from the municipal authorities, associations, and social institutions. Free from any ideological and stylistic restrictions or commitments, open-air urban music has been a platform for the free flow and exchange of forms, contents, genres, and performance styles. In many contexts it formed a second, 'unofficial' cultural conglomerate of the supranational, supra-ethnic, and classless urban music scene.

In the life of European cities there are many examples of such 'unofficial' music scenes serving the purpose of entertainment rather than that of sophisticated aesthetic contemplation, and catering for music lovers who in many cases had no or little musical education. The Vienna of the famous Johann Strauss I and the Strauss dynasty is probably the best-known example of the success of such open-air music. Musical life has naturally also flourished in the streets of many other European cities and towns, attracting vast audiences. It is that 'other' open-air urban music scene that we have chosen as the subject of the present volume of *Musicology Today*. Chronologically the oldest period is discussed here by Ryszard Wieczorek in his paper "'Besolte Instrumentisten der Königlichen Stadt Breslaw": The Hess Brothers' Anthology (1555) and Its European Context'. Owing to its status as Lower Silesia's political and ecclesiastical hub, Wrocław (Germ. Breslau) was the meeting place for many traditions and cultures. Its rulers, as well as the clergy, merchants, and burghers maintained lively contacts with many other European centres, which resulted in wide-reaching cultural transfer, assimilation, and transformations of imported music material. This is also true of instrumental dance music, which was originally passed down 'by the ear' in oral memory in the urban spaces of Wrocław.

Moving on in time, Rafał Ciesielski's 'Żary – The City of Georg Philipp Telemann' presents the musical culture of Żary (Germ. Sorau, now Western Poland), which pivots around the figure of young Georg Philipp Telemann, who resided and worked there in 1704–1708. Local musical initiatives take place in urban spaces symbolically associated with that eminent German composer who is known to have pursued a vivid and fruitful interest in Polish folk culture.

Małgorzata Woźna-Stankiewicz presents a detailed panorama of the everyday open-air music life of Cracow in the then Galicia (1866–1918), richly illustrated with source material. Magdalena Dziadek focuses on analogous musical activities in the parks and streets of Warsaw between the two world wars, which represent a previously unresearched and uncharted area of study.

In her paper on klezmer music in the streets of Tarnopol (now Ternopil, Ukraine), Jolanta Guzy-Pasiak discusses Karol Rathaus' memories of Chune Wolfsthal and his role in shaping the former composer's musical sensitivity. Joanna Dobrzańska-Chorzępa's text on 'The Artistic Profiles and Experiences of Street Musicians in the Urban Spaces of Montpellier, Sète, and Paris' draws on French ethnological studies of busker practices. Detailed interviews with street musicians and audiences are complemented here by the Author's own experiment as she herself assumes the role of a busker in order to fathom the full experience of that profession.

Open-air spaces undergo intense transformations as the structure of the city changes to meet the needs of its residents. One example of such new forms and spaces are Wrocław's beach bars. Their role in shaping Wrocław's local music scene is the subject of a paper by Jakub Kopaniecki, who discusses these open-air riverside venues, typically equipped with artificial sandy beaches, as places of growing importance to the city's local music life.

Electronic dance music is the hallmark of a new era in urban culture. It develops in varied contexts, which include the given city's cultural and political past, but also various segments of contemporary urban policies and management, which contribute to the development of electronic music scenes encompassing a wide spectrum of computer and instrumental music, from the commercial mainstream to niche elitist underground genres. Urban electronic music may take many forms, which range from illegal dance parties held in clandestine venues to large-scale festivals held in remote islands retreats such as Ibiza and Goa, far removed from the limiting spaces of everyday life. Regardless of whether these events take place in derelict suburban industrial zones or faraway modern heterotopias, the electronic music scene and its soundscapes are becoming more and more complex and diversified, reflecting the diversity of urban contexts. The place of electronic music in European, American, Asian, and Australian urban environments has been the subject of a large and constantly growing literature,¹ which makes it worthy of note in a volume dedicated to open-air urban music culture.

¹ Cf. e.g. Sébastien Darchen. Damien Charrieras and John Willsteed, eds, *Electronic Cities. Music, Policies and Space in the 21st Century* (Singapore, 2021).