

Digital Lecture Sampler

Examples of a Form Thriving in Popular Music Studies during Covid

One effect of the Covid crisis has been to highlight digital lectures: the recorded combination of a speaking voice, a PowerPoint, and perhaps an on-camera presence. As “asynchronous presentations,” these works have substituted for in-person teaching and also for in-person conference talks. They have the strong disadvantage of removing liveness from the equation: attention might be divided, consumption might be partial. But they do also put a somewhat new kind of voice into the world, which we can contemplate from the position of popular music studies. Digital lectures, often about 15 minutes long in their conference form, can be seen as podcasts with visuals, or off-the-cuff moments you can subsequently share with those unable to attend in person. Ideas about music, presented and received in this way, can take shapes that other formats don’t as easily afford.

For this issue, as a first exploration of the digital lecture form, and as a partner to the Field Note on remote versions of conferences and other on-line communication, we present three examples, all originally distributed as part of the 2020 MoPOP (Museum of Pop Culture) Pop Conference, delayed by Covid from April to September. Transcripts follow this opening statement, meant to serve both as a captioning aid and as a text version for the journal as we work through the details of how best to incorporate digital lectures into the overall contents of an issue.

But our main attention should be on the works in their intended format. The three digital lectures posted elsewhere have different winning qualities: S. Alexander Reed’s rich range of AV material, Maya Angela Smith’s personal narrative, Emily Gale’s incorporation of an utterly charming, somewhat amateur performance of an otherwise unhearable sheet music work. That last piano and singing interlude makes clear that there is no need to stress slick production as the only way to make a digital lecture successful: that privileges those with time and resources. As we have all learned in classrooms, whether as teachers or students, there are many ways for a lecturer to effectively communicate. Digital lectures are a tool to extend that process, as useful in conferences as classes, ultimately a style of public address, a means to revoice our ideas

about culture, including popular music, by wrapping our writing in sounds, imagery, and motion.

Look elsewhere for our call for more works in this vein. We hope to publish a wider batch of them sometime soonish, with a roundtable discussing how we might view digital lectures—an important, still emerging presence in popular music studies. ■