



Britishness, Popular Music, and National Identity: The Making of Modern Britain (Routledge Studies in Popular Music)

By Irene Morra

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This book offers a major exploration of the social and cultural importance of popular music to contemporary celebrations of Britishness. Rather than providing a history of popular music or an itemization of indigenous musical qualities, it exposes the influential cultural and nationalist rhetoric around popular music and the dissemination of that rhetoric in various forms. Since the 1960s, popular music has surpassed literature to become the dominant signifier of modern British culture and identity. This position has been enforced in popular culture, literature, news and music media, political rhetoric -- and in much popular music itself, which has become increasingly self-conscious about the expectation that music both articulate and manifest the inherent values and identity of the modern nation. This study examines the implications of such practices and the various social and cultural values they construct and enforce. It identifies two dominant, conflicting constructions around popular music: music as the voice of an indigenous English 'folk', and music as the voice of a re-emergent British Empire. These constructions are not only contradictory but also exclusive, prescribing a social and musical identity for the nation that ignores its greater creative, national, and cultural diversity. This book is the first to offer a comprehensive critique of an extremely powerful discourse in England that today informs dominant formulations of English and British national identity, history, and culture.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This is a brilliant work of interpretation of modern British culture...[it is] a good book to read for people who are working on pop culture studies themselves, historical or otherwise: it gives words to a definition of modern British culture that many people have probably thought about but never articulated. Also, it will make for a good final reading in a modern British history course at the seminar level, especially one focused on the postimperial era." - David Simonelli, *Journal of British Studies*

"This is an informative and often engaging read, which covers a broad sweep of the history of British popular music with an evident enthusiasm for its subject. It represents a valuable contribution to the corpus of academic literature on both popular music and national identity, and would be a welcome addition to the reading lists of scholars and students of History, Music and English Literature, as well as Cultural and Media Studies." --Ruth Adams, *King's College London, LSE Review of Books*

"This volume is a fine examination of English pop music and evolving social attitudes and a must for all academic libraries, but it really is more than that. Morra opens new areas of discussion and reframes long-held competing theories and debates surrounding popular music. The book is not a mere academic exercise. There is nothing dry or dull here, as Morra maintains that popular music unsullied by sanitization imposed by the music industry is the legitimate voice of Britain. She invites her audience to re-examine their music collection in new ways and to listen again, this time for the sounds that have struggled to reshape Britain into a modern nation." - James Martens, *Popular Music and Society*

About the Author

Irene Morra is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English and Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory, Cardiff University, UK.

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