

Book Review for “SONGS FROM SWEDEN: Shaping Pop Culture in a Globalized Music Industry”

By Ola Johannson. xvii and 169 pp.; maps, ill., notes, index. Singapore: Palgrave Pivot, 2020. \$59.99 (cloth), isbn 9789811527357.

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Despite spending several years conducting research on music geography, I (embarrassingly so) have had little exposure to or understanding of Swedish popular music. Sure, I could name an ABBA song or two, but that was about it. This condition did not hinder me when reading Ola Johannson's *Songs from Sweden: Shaping Pop Culture in a Globalized Music Industry*, a book that not only provides a comprehensive history of Swedish popular music and its successes, but also strives to describe how this country's music industry gained widespread prestige as it was/is interwoven into a global network through circulation, reputation, and hybridity (three theories that Johannson fully defines and contextualizes).

As an established scholar of Swedish popular music and popular culture, as well as being from Sweden originally, Johannson is well suited to offer an analysis of this topic in a book that complements his published works on music geography and popular culture, both within and outside of a Swedish context. Johannson's expertise shines within the five chapters of the book, which blend data, literature analysis, and sociopolitical review and commentary to provide the reader a holistic perspective of why Swedish music has and continues to occupy a global presence in popular culture. Useful figures, tables, and maps accompany the text to provide necessary context and supplementary information.

The chapters follow a logical flow in accomplishing the goals of the book set forth by Johannson, which are firmly situated in the Swedish Music Miracle 1.0 and 2.0, terms coined by the author to describe Sweden's growth as a global music superpower. The Swedish Music Miracle 1.0 refers to Johannson's writing on earlier successes of Swedish music in the 1990s and early 2000s, while 2.0 refers to exploring and unpacking what factors built these successes and continue to influence Swedish popular music as a global phenomenon.

Chapter 1 discusses the Swedish Music Miracle 1.0, offering compelling evidence for Sweden as a global actor in producing popular music through several theses that provide explanations for the country's prominent international role in this arena. These theses explore factors including Sweden's value of modernity, small music market, generous social services, and high levels of

competitiveness and innovation as drivers for the global success of the country's music, while also offering insight on the future of this industry given several economic, social, and political factors within and outside of the country. Chapters 2 through 5 then begin to unpack the Swedish Music Miracle 2.0, as Johannson describes how music can transcend local boundaries into global recognition through the theoretical perspectives of circulation, hybridity, and reputation, which lend insight into what makes Swedish music distinctly "Swedish" and thereby occupy a unique role in a global music network. Johannson unpacks the major actors within the Swedish Music Miracle 2.0 who comprise music networks of Sweden's major writer-producers through an extensive review of online biographies and discographies of these figures.

As a data librarian, I was particularly impressed by Johannson's clear methodology used to collect the data and structure it into a digestible format for readers, written in a manner that would be reproducible for anyone wanting to undertake a similar analysis for another music scene. Johannson also provides an analysis of songwriting and song lyrics within Swedish pop music, identifying the grassroots characteristics of this music that influence its global popularity. The book concludes with an acknowledgement of the many competing sociocultural, political, and economic factors that could reinforce Sweden's global music reputation or perhaps even push the focus to another geographical area. After all, place-based music scenes are fluid and dynamic! Upon completing the concluding chapter, not only was I thoroughly convinced of Sweden's reputation as a global music superpower, but I also found myself opening Spotify (also from Sweden) to look up many of the artists mentioned within the text.

Anyone who is reading this review and considers themselves a cultural geographer will be well accustomed to being asked the question, "How is this geography?" whenever presenting their work. Critics of the geographical nature of cultural geography will be pleased to note that Johannson does an excellent job of firmly rooting this book in place-based analyses, from a microscale (within Sweden) to macroscale perspective (from local to global).

I was particularly impressed with how Johannson clearly articulates the cultural and geographical significance of Swedish popular music through globalization theories while maintaining a tone of writing that is accessible and digestible. While it is clear when reading this book that it is a scholarly work, it does not fall into the academic trap of using jargon at the expense of concision and accessibility. For that reason, the book is excellent for novices of Swedish music, and music geography in general, but also for those with more familiarity with this music industry and its global ramifications.

If you have read this review and found it entirely complimentary, you would be right. I would absolutely use this book in a variety of settings, including in a seminar on music geography, within

a class using data to understand and interpret cultural phenomena, and undergraduate cultural geography courses within sections exploring music and landscape. Whether or not the setting actually has to do with Sweden, the chapters can be used to teach concepts in globalization, music production, music marketing, and buzz, to name a few. I would also recommend this book for anyone (within or outside of academia) interested in learning more about global music scenes and/or increasing their knowledge of Sweden's inarguable legacy within global music geography and popular culture.—Hannah C. Gunderman, Carnegie Mellon University