

# 14 Cavern journeys

## Music, migration and urban space

*Sara Cohen*

This is not a programme about the Beatles ... but rather about the place the Beatles came from and the people they left behind. The place of course is Liverpool, to my mind the strangest of all the cities of the North. Not the nicest, for 'nice' is hardly a term that one can apply to Liverpool, but hard drinking, hard living, hard fighting, violent, friendly and fiercely alive. Indeed, if one had to sum up the so-called Liverpool Sound in one word, the sound that has swept south and become the musical sensation of this year, I'd use the word 'vitality', sheer, staggering vitality, and this is characteristic of the whole background of Liverpool. ... This is really the place where it all started about four years ago, in this steaming, smoky, sweaty cellar known as the Cavern. The lights are turned down so low that you can hardly see, and the volume is turned up so high that it is hard to hear the actual tune, but at the very least the atmosphere is intensely alive and exciting.

(presenter's introduction, *Beat City*, 1963)

This chapter uses a case study on the Cavern Club, and the so-called 'Liverpool Sound' of the early 1960s, to explore the relationship between music, migration and cities. The first of its three parts introduces the Cavern and media representations of the club as a place of musical migration, hybridity and creativity. It also introduces three groups of musicians who performed at the club during the early 1960s, including the Beatles, whose residency there made it famous. The second part positions the Cavern Club in relation to the movements, memories and journeys of those musicians. In doing so it highlights the agency of musicians in the transformation and circulation of musical styles and the creation of musical landscapes that characterize cities. The third part of the chapter positions the Cavern Club within a wider political economy and broader landscapes of music, movement and memory. This enables some general conclusions about the relationship between music, migration and cities, and how this relationship is shaped by a politics of musical style, mediation and urban space.<sup>1</sup>

### **Musical styles, cities and material urban environments: the Cavern Club**

The Cavern first opened in 1957 as a jazz club situated in the barrel-vaulted cellar of a Liverpool city centre warehouse, and it soon became popular with

young people interested in bohemian culture. Jazz bands performed live at the club on a regular basis, and eventually skiffle bands also began to play there, although the club's owner was not too keen on skiffle, an improvised style of country, blues and jazz-influenced folk music. He was not keen on rock'n'roll either, a style often referred to as 'beat music' and described as a 'weaving together of elements from distinct US styles: rhythm and blues, country, folk, gospel and blues' (Negus 1996: 144, citing Frith 1983; Gillett 1983; Longhurst 1995). Under new ownership, however, the Cavern became a key venue for rock'n'roll and beat groups, most notably the Beatles, who performed live at the club on 292 occasions between 1961 and 1963.<sup>2</sup> The group's residency at the club is commonly regarded as having enabled them to refine the musical skills they developed during their prior residency at the Star Club in Hamburg, providing a basis for the further transformation of their musical style from skiffle to a unique version of rock'n'roll, and for their development from amateur to professional musicians, and from local to national and international notoriety. Just six months after their last appearance at the club the Beatles set off to tour the US and spearhead what became known as 'the British invasion'.<sup>3</sup>

The Beatles thus made the Cavern Club a focus for media attention. Their connection with the club has been represented through countless publications, films, documentaries and websites, and through stories told and retold by Beatles fans, biographers and entrepreneurs. One example of this is a 1963 film called *Beat City*. As he states in the above quotation taken from the start of the film, the film's presenter, Daniel Farson, journeyed to Liverpool to investigate the origins of the Beatles and the new style of rock'n'roll or 'beat' music known as 'the Liverpool Sound', and to tell a story about music and place. The film features scenes of urban dereliction and represents Liverpool as an exotic, violent port city, a place of migration and a mix of social groups and ethnicities, including Irish and Afro-Caribbean. The Cavern Club is introduced as a noisy, damp cellar, and excerpts of performances there by local beat groups are inter-spliced with those in other local venues featuring Irish folk and country music, doo-wop singing and jazz, thus suggesting a mix of styles and traditions influencing the Liverpool Sound.

Whilst the *Beat City* film now seems rather old-fashioned, by representing Liverpool and the Cavern Club as harsh, edgy, uncomfortable places, but also as the origin of extraordinary musical sounds and styles, it provides an example of how cities and material urban locations are commonly, if sometimes ambivalently, celebrated and romanticized as places of musical migration, hybridity and innovation. The following discussion presents a different and more complex account of the relationship between music, cities and migration. It does so by positioning the Cavern Club along the journeys of three groups that performed there during the early 1960s, and within stories and memories of those journeys and the musical styles involved.<sup>4</sup>

### *Three groups and their Cavern journeys and stories*

#### *The Beatles*

Throughout their residency at the Cavern Club the Beatles performed at many venues in Liverpool and beyond,<sup>5</sup> but *Beat City* illustrates the symbolic significance of the Cavern in stories told about the Beatles and their musical journey. These stories are recycled, traded and circulated as part of the international market for Beatles-related products (Tessler 2009). They conventionally feature the Cavern Club as ‘the place where it all began’, and as the site of the group’s first encounter with their future manager Brian Epstein, which changed the course of their career, helping them move on from Liverpool to global success. Recalling this occasion (on 9 November 1961), Epstein is quoted as saying that he was ‘immediately struck by [the Beatles’] music, their beat, and their sense of humour on stage – and, even afterwards, when I met them, I was struck again by their personal charm. And it was there that, really, it all started.’<sup>6</sup>

Despite such descriptions of the Cavern Club as the site and point from which the musical journey of the Beatles began, stories of the group’s journey *to* that club are also well known. Members of the group grew up in south Liverpool, and three of them – Lennon, McCartney and Starr – had performed at the Cavern Club with skiffle groups during 1957/8 when Lennon was studying at the Liverpool School of Art. Their career under the name ‘The Beatles’ began in 1960 with a residency at the Star club in Hamburg, and a year later they were back in Liverpool and the Cavern Club, where they often performed on stage with skiffle and jazz groups, although by 1962 the club was dominated by rock’n’roll.

Stories about the Beatles commonly involve well-worn tales and myths of how rock’n’roll travelled to Liverpool from the USA not only through the radio, but also through records brought into the city through the transatlantic crossings of local sailors. John Lennon, for example, has described how he tuned in to stations such as Radio Luxembourg to hear early US rock’n’roll as well as US rhythm and blues and gospel-influenced groups such as the Drifters, the Dominoes and the Coasters. He is also quoted as saying, ‘Liverpool is cosmopolitan, and it’s where the sailors would come home with blues records from America.’ The city, he added, ‘has the biggest country and western following in England besides London. ... I heard country and western music in Liverpool before I heard rock and roll’ (quoted in Wenner 1987: 102). More recently, Paul McCartney (2002) has referred to the ‘melting pot of music’ in Liverpool, and how the Beatles combined US musical influences with British vaudeville, music hall and Irish song. In the nineteenth century, Liverpool was a destination of mass Irish migration, and members of the Beatles were of Irish descent. Yoko Ono alludes to this on the sleeve notes of John Lennon’s album *Menlove Avenue*, where she writes: ‘John’s American rock roots, Elvis, Fats Domino and Phil Spector are evident in these tracks. But what I hear in John’s voice are the other roots, of the boys who grew up in Liverpool, listening to Greensleeves, BBC radio and Tessie O’Shea.’

*The Chants*

The Chants were one of several black doo-wop vocal harmony groups from the postal district of Liverpool 8, where most of Liverpool's long-established and highly diverse black population was (and still is) concentrated. Members of the group were born of West African seafaring fathers and white Liverpool-born mothers, and like the Beatles they were influenced by 1950s North American rhythm and blues as well as by musical styles such as gospel, a cappella and soul. They and other local black musicians of a similar age have told us stories of how records by US groups such as the Flamingos, the Ravens and the Miracles were brought to the African and Caribbean clubs and community centres of Liverpool 8 by black American servicemen stationed at the Burtonwood military airbase situated 10 miles east of the city, and how those men impressed and inspired local black youths with their confidence, style and musical knowledge and skills:

the American GIs always had lots of records. We couldn't buy the records off them, but we used to nick [steal] 'em anyway. The GIs used to bring guitars and stuff and start playing at parties. Many times we'd say, 'What's this guy doing in the army?' Excellent voices and singers. It was like a privilege to sit in with them and sing a few harmonies here and there.

(member of vocal harmony group the Valentinos,  
personal communication 1991)

The Chants' first official public performance was at the Cavern Club in 1962. They had auditioned at the club earlier that day following a previous chance encounter with the Beatles at a Little Richard concert. They passed the audition and, performing on stage at the Cavern that night, they were accompanied by the Beatles. The symbolic significance of that moment – of local black musicians being *backed by* the Beatles, has since been much dwelt upon in stories told by members of the Chants and other Liverpool-born black musicians. In fact the Chants were the only local black group to perform alongside the city's beat groups. They were eventually managed by Beatles' manager Brian Epstein and later signed to Pye records in London, but they did not achieve the commercial success they desired. They have blamed this on a music industry that at that time had little experience of dealing with black musicians, and have expressed frustration at the way their black doo-wop style was 'whitened' by London-based record producers. One of the group's members explains, 'They used to record The Chants like a white pop band, which we weren't,'<sup>7</sup> whilst according to a fan of the group

their style and aesthetic ran contrary to the music business and the musical forms of the day. We had local talent who themselves were fusing gospel, [a cappella], and producing driving R'n'B when the overall musical culture of the UK was narrow and insular. ... In the UK, there were no Motown, Stax, Atco equivalents, so Black artists were given material to record that was contrary to their own musical aesthetic, yet blue-eyed White boys were given R'n'B records to cover.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, racial tensions and levels of unemployment were higher in Liverpool 8 than in other local neighbourhoods, and musicians have commented in the early 1960s and since on the area's social and cultural isolation from the rest of the city. Many city centre clubs operated, on either a formal or an informal basis, a so-called 'colour bar', which meant that they prohibited entry to black audiences. One member of the Chants recalls the group's walk down to the Cavern Club for the above-mentioned audition, and how he had to persuade the rest of the group to accompany him because the club and surrounding area were not places they usually frequented (Brocken, personal communication 2009). For some local black musicians we spoke to, the Cavern was, like many other local music venues at that time, a 'site of whiteness' (Doss 1999: 195) described by one musician as 'a shiny beacon of apartheid'.<sup>9</sup>

### *Hank Walters and the Dusty Road Ramblers*

One of Hank Walters' favourite anecdotes is about the time he first met John Lennon at the Cavern and told him he did not much like his music and the Beatles would not get anywhere unless they 'got on with it and played country'. During the early 1960s the Cavern was not really known as a country music venue, but the country band Hank Walters and the Dusty Road Ramblers performed there on various occasions. Hank likes to describe country music (often referred to at the time as 'country and western') as a 'diamond with many faces' – a mix of styles that had travelled to the USA from Britain, Ireland, Germany, Africa and elsewhere, and at the start of the 1960s Liverpool was home to around forty country groups. For Hank, however, his encounter with Lennon at the Cavern marked the beginning of the decline of local country music as the groups lost their younger audiences to rock'n'roll (McManus 1994: 12–14, 16). It also marked the beginning of a split between the so-called 'purists' who played an old style of country music, and a new wave of young bands producing a style that fused country with rock'n'roll. Hank and the Dusty Road Ramblers were in the former camp and rejected the new style of country in favour of the traditional and authentic.

Members of the group were second-generation immigrants from North Liverpool and an area of Irish and Welsh settlement close to the waterfront and dockside labour market. Some of them, like many other country musicians, told us of their strong seafaring connections and related stories that pointed to the influence of sailors on local country music. Hank, for example (who worked in full-time dock-related employment) had grown up listening to country music because his grandfather had a collection of Jimmie Rodgers records acquired during shipping trips to America.<sup>10</sup> He and his fellow musicians also described to us how during the 1950s and 1960s the decline of Liverpool's port activity had led, along with North Liverpool post-war redevelopment initiatives, to the closure or demolition of many local country music pubs, and the splintering and displacement of the communities that had provided their main audiences (Cohen 2007).

## **Urban musical styles and the movements and memories of musicians**

The Cavern journeys and stories of the Beatles, the Chants, and Hank Walters and the Dusty Road Ramblers have only been briefly touched upon, but they nevertheless help to highlight the agency of musicians in the creation and circulation of musical styles. As will become more evident in the sections that follow, they also suggest how musicians interact with material urban environments through movement and memory to produce shifting landscapes of music that characterize cities. Just as importantly, they suggest an alternative to celebratory media accounts of cities and musical migration: an exploration of the relationship between migrating musical styles and cities that moves beyond binaries such as mixing and division, the exceptional and the mundane, the innovative and the traditional.

### *Mapping the journeys of urban music-making*

The Cavern Club was situated at the centre of Liverpool, close to the city's marketplace and the junction between its north and south, and near the main bus terminals. It was one of many venues in which the Beatles, the Chants and Hank Walters and the Dusty Road Ramblers performed and their regular spatial journeys converged. Mapping these journeys and venues helps to represent the Cavern not as an exceptional site and point of origin, but as just one nodal point along the regular, performance 'circuits' of these musicians.<sup>11</sup> Like many musicians, members of all three groups started their journey as performers with public performances in their home neighbourhoods before moving on to venues in the city centre and further afield. The map in Figure 14.1 features the Liverpool venues that all three groups performed in most frequently during the early 1960s, although during that period all three also performed outside the city in the north-west region, the rest of the UK and elsewhere in Europe.

The map shows that the Beatles, like other local beat groups, criss-crossed Liverpool to perform largely in suburban ballrooms and dance halls. The Chants and Hank Walters and the Dusty Road Ramblers occasionally performed alongside the beat groups at some of these venues. However, the Chants also performed in the community clubs and centres of the Liverpool 8 area, as did other local doo-wop and soul groups, whilst Hank and other country musicians performed in a cluster of traditional pubs and social clubs in the north of the city. So although it focuses on the routes of individual groups, the map nevertheless indicates the micro-topographies of particular musical styles, similar to Laing's mapping of dance, folk and beat music in the Manchester area (2010). It thus indicates performance circuits that were distinguished by style but overlapped and intersected at certain points to suggest encounters between styles, although this very much depended upon the particular venues and contexts involved.

The map draws attention to spatial journeys involved with musical performance; the significance of such journeys emerges in the kinds of oft-repeated stories and anecdotes illustrated earlier. They included stories of the Chants and their walk down to the Cavern from Liverpool 8 and the racial boundaries it marked

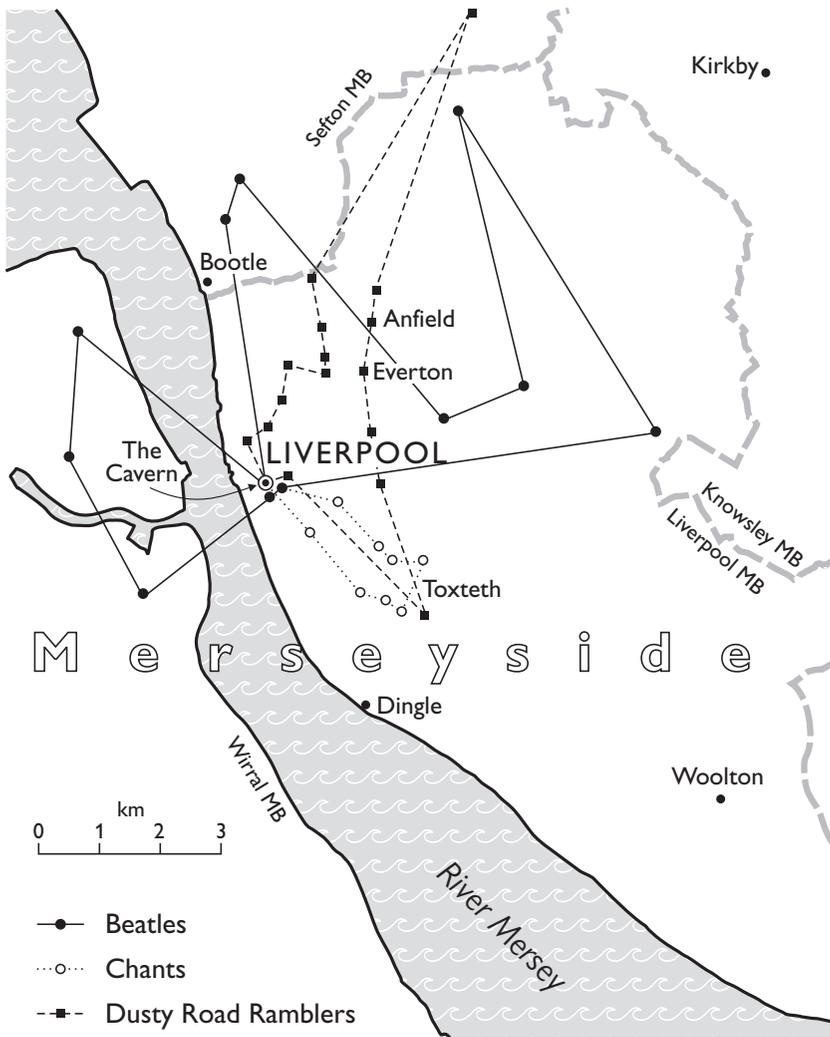


Figure 14.1 Musical routes of the Beatles, the Chants and the Dusty Road Ramblers

out; stories of Hank Walters and the Dusty Road Ramblers, and of disappearing North Liverpool venues and communities; and stories of the Beatles that chart the band's journey to the Cavern via a series of legendary places and events.<sup>12</sup> These stories position the Cavern Club within the biographical journeys of all three groups, and help to illustrate the social and symbolic significance of music performance venues. Such venues have provided meeting points – sites of social and musical encounter through which the career trajectories and musical styles of musicians are shaped and transformed, and a focus for popular music mythology. In Beatles stories the Cavern Club is significant as the site of their encounter with Epstein and a meeting point between local and global success. In stories of the Chants, the club marked the group's first major public performance and

an encounter with the Beatles that shaped their subsequent and uneasy engagement with the music business. For Hank, the club was the site of an encounter with Lennon that symbolized an emerging division between rock and country, and a choice and tension between musical purity and hybridity that had shaped the subsequent musical journeys of him and his fellow musicians.

Thus, whilst the Cavern Club featured along the spatial and biographical journeys of these three groups, and in stories about those journeys, it also featured in stories of their journeys through musical style. These included accounts of the discovery of particular musical styles not just through particular records, juke boxes and radio stations, but also through migration and the transatlantic crossings of sailors and servicemen – both highly symbolic figures in local narratives of place. Examples of these were the stories of the sailors and migrant communities that had shaped country music, as well as the ‘ordinary’ working-class communities that the music spoke for and to; stories of the African-American servicemen and black US musicians who had influenced local doo-wop groups; and stories of the US and Irish influences on the Beatles and so many other local groups. Such stories were drawn upon to explain the development and distinctiveness of local popular music styles. They show how these styles helped to create a sense of tradition and shared experience by providing a vibrant repository of collective memory inscribed with the buried narratives of, and dialogues between, social groups (Lipsitz 1990: 159), and a meaningful map through which individuals and groups could locate ‘themselves in different imaginary geographies at one and the same time’ (Hall 1995: 207 on diaspora; Cohen 1998). The repeated telling and circulation of these stories helped to foster local cultures of remembering, and diasporic identities and imaginations that influenced how particular musical styles were practised and understood.

In the Liverpool of the early 1960s, country, rock’n’roll and doo-wop harmony singing were generally imitative of US styles and involved the performance of songs by US composers. Yet groups like the Beatles, the Chants and Hank Walters and the Dusty Road Ramblers were drawn to those styles partly because they were able to connect them to their own particular social situation and adapt them accordingly via storytelling, lyrical and musical variations and the occasional new composition (or more in the case of the Beatles). Moreover, the styles of those groups continually changed throughout the course of their musical careers, and a few were able to develop and further hybridize these already hybrid styles and create something relatively new. Brocken (1996: 14), for example, analyses the US popular songs performed by the Beatles early on in their career, and argues that the group developed a taste for comparatively obscure rhythm and blues and Motown music that was unique within a British context, whilst much has been written about how the band eventually combined US influences with those from elsewhere to create their own distinctive style.

### *Urban musical landscapes*

The Cavern journeys and stories of the Beatles, the Chants, Hank Walters and the Dusty Road Ramblers highlight landscapes created through musical practice: first through a regular series of routes and events that formed circuits of

live performance; and secondly through a performance of memory based on those circuits and involving stories, anecdotes and myths connected to particular performance sites. The sharing and circulation of these memories contributed to the creation of collective identities associated with particular musical styles, and the fame of the Cavern Club meant that stories about that site were particularly well rehearsed and mediated, with the same anecdotes continually recycled through conversation and interview, websites and books. The club appeared as a land- and soundmark in those stories, and as a narrative device and point of departure for tales of urban mobility and migration. Much like the performance routes of these musicians, which extended way beyond the city, those tales expanded local musical landscapes. They connected the Cavern Club and Liverpool to musical styles and social groups associated with other parts of the world, such as Ireland and the US, and positioned them along the transatlantic routes of musical styles, migrants, sailors and servicemen. They also connected them to previous historical events and eras and accounts of continuity and change.

Groups like the Beatles, the Chants and Hank Walters and the Dusty Road Ramblers also shared stories of the city through songs, thus creating landscapes in music. These songs drew on their spatial and biographical journeys to provide a musical mapping of movement and memory, characterizing material urban environments through sounds, lyrics and associated visual images, and through the conventions of musical style. After leaving Liverpool, for example, members of the Beatles composed several nostalgic songs based on memories and journeys of their Liverpool childhood, including songs such as 'Penny Lane', 'Strawberry Fields' and 'In My Life', which were about the leafy and relatively affluent suburb of south Liverpool where Lennon and McCartney met and grew up. Daniels (2006) has pointed to the pastoral imagery in these songs, images influenced by progressive and psychedelic rock and quite different from the scenes of urban blight and dereliction featured in the *Beat City* film.

The Chants composed a song about the Liverpool 8 community centre in which they used to rehearse, and one of the group's members later devoted an entire album to the Liverpool 8 area as part of a soul group he founded with three other musicians. Entitled *4 from 8*, the album involved a more politicized soul music that had emerged from US Civil Rights and Black Power movements, with a sleeve image that represented Liverpool 8 as a site of dereliction lying in the shadow of the city's Anglican cathedral. According to the group's founder, 'Growing up black (in Liverpool 8) gives you different experiences than if you were white and from a middle-class area,'<sup>13</sup> and the group wanted to reflect those experiences in their music, which displays little of the nostalgia in the Beatles songs about Liverpool. Meanwhile Hank Walters went on to compose a couple of sentimental and nostalgic songs about his north Liverpool neighbourhood of Everton, which by the end of the 1990s was officially categorized as one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Europe. He later produced an album of local country music (*City with a Heart*) intended to raise funds for that neighbourhood, whilst also preserving what is described on the album sleeve as 'Liverpool's own unique Country Music Culture and Heritage'. The sleeve features a sketch of Hank gazing northwards over what appears to be a busy dockland scene.

### **Music, migration and urban change**

I now want to broaden out gradually from the micro-focus on the Cavern Club and its position within highly localized landscapes of movement and memory, and allow the club to stand in for Liverpool, a place much larger in scale. This shift from performance venue to city will enable a more focused discussion on music and urban migration.

#### *A politics of style, memory and urban space*

Whilst the journeys of musicians and musical styles can be mapped through dots and lines of movement and flow (as illustrated by the above map of performance circuits in Liverpool), the stories and memories of the journeys help to flesh out these maps and bring to life their patterns and clustering. Stories of the Chants, for example, point to boundaries and edges by describing music and door policies in operation at the Cavern and other local venues that served to keep out black musicians and styles, and licensing regulations and policing policies that restricted and confined music activity within the Liverpool 8 area.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile stories of Hank Walters and the Dusty Road Ramblers dwell on the country music pubs along the city's dockland areas, and the loss of many of these venues following the shrinking of port activity and planned programmes of demolition in neighbouring residential areas. The port had brought Liverpool great wealth, but it had depended upon a large and unskilled workforce, and brought into the city destitute immigrants fleeing from hardship elsewhere. These circumstances shaped the geography of the city, producing distinctive patterns of local settlement, strong neighbourhood identities, and striking spatial divisions of class and culture. They produced a strong territorialism that existed alongside an emphasis on local cosmopolitanism (Belchem 2000: 63).

Musicians thus create musical landscapes that characterize material environments, which in turn characterize the musical landscapes. Changes in the wider political economy have an impact on how material environments are structured and organized, and on factors affecting the spatial and biographical journeys of musicians as well as their journeys in musical style. Hank Walters and the Dusty Road Ramblers clung on to traditional, 'authentic' and 'pure' country music in opposition to a newly emerging country/rock hybrid. In doing so they embraced stability and continuity in the face of social and musical change, whilst at the same time celebrating a hybridity that was already embodied in the traditional and that connected with their cosmopolitan sensibility. Members of the Chants, meanwhile, connected US rhythm and blues and doo-wop to a sense of black pride and identity and resented (and later resisted) industry attempts to further hybridize and 'whiten' it. This helps to explain the politicized soul album about Liverpool 8 produced during the mid-1970s, and the nostalgic images of the musical past promoted in the country album of the late 1990s.

These examples highlight a politics of musical style in which, as Stokes points out (2004), choices and variations in musical sounds, structures and instruments mark important political as well as social and aesthetic distinctions; serve different

interests; and help to forge alliances and alignments across social, cultural and geographical borders. Thinking of musical hybridity in terms of strategies (ibid.) such as these helps to move beyond exoticizing media accounts of hybridity, such as that promoted in the *Beat City* film.

### ***Music, heritage and urban restructuring***

The Cavern Club has been positioned along the spatial, biographical and musical journeys of musicians, but it is important to note that music venues have their own biographies and journeys. As Doreen Massey points out, seemingly static entities of sturdy bricks and mortar are in fact fluid and in flux, comprising an 'intense multiplicity of trajectories' (2000: 226). *Beat City* told of a voyage to 'discover' the place that had produced the new Liverpool Sound, and represented Liverpool and the Cavern Club as strange, exotic others against a background of urban decline and deepening economic crisis. It took another twenty years before public and private agencies in Liverpool (re)discovered the Cavern Club as a basis for the promotion of Liverpool exceptionalism and economic restructuring. The Cavern Club had been demolished in 1973 but, following the murder of John Lennon in 1980, the site where it had once stood became a shrine of mourning, and the Beatle's connection with the club began to be exploited by urban developers and tourist entrepreneurs. Amongst other things this involved the building of a replica club close to the site of the original and another replica in the local Beatles Story museum, and the development of a Cavern Quarter incorporating the Cavern Walks shopping centre and two Cavern 'Walls of Fame'. The new Cavern Club became a focal point for tourist maps of Beatles Liverpool but continued to operate as a live music venue and was eventually franchised and taken to other parts of the world, hence the existence of Cavern Clubs in Tokyo, Buenos Aires, Adelaide and elsewhere.

The Cavern thus became the focus of organized efforts to brand and regenerate urban space. Its transformation into a Beatles heritage site somewhat obscured its position as a point and moment along the musical journeys and trajectories of other musicians and musical styles, but provoked alternative, revisionist and contested stories of the club. Memory is a social and political practice and musical landscapes are spaces not only for remembering but also forgetting. Brocken, for example, writes of the hidden history of the Cavern as a jazz and skiffle venue (2010); Hank Walters positions the club in his story of the decline of local country music and promotes that music as an alternative local heritage; and members of the Chants question the exclusion of black musicians from historical accounts of the Liverpool Sound and the claim that the Cavern was 'the place where it all began', arguing instead that the roots of the Liverpool Sound lay elsewhere in local black clubs and neighbourhoods.

The trajectory and transformation of the Cavern Club reflects, to some extent, that of Liverpool more generally. Since the global economic crisis of the 1970s, culture has been used to remodel cities across the UK and beyond as part of a wider process of social and economic restructuring governed by the politics and economics of neo-liberalism (Harvey 1990; McGuigan 1996; Robins 1991; Miles and Hall 2003). City policy-makers have been rethinking and rebranding such

cities as centres of cultural tourism, heritage and consumption. In Europe, culture has been used as a resource not just for physical and economic development but also for community development and social inclusion. Thus in January 2008 an event was staged to launch Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture, a title that marked the city authorities' embrace of culture-led urban regeneration, and efforts to characterize Liverpool as a 'modern cosmopolitan and premier European city' (Tessa Jowell, UK Minister for Culture, 2006).

The Capital of Culture launch event combined images of high and contemporary art and transnational popular culture (with Ringo Starr as the headline act), and was staged against a backdrop of historical architecture and a transforming cityscape with buildings going up and coming down. The event thus provided a platform for the demonstration through spectacle of cultural diversity. It positioned Liverpool at the heart of European and global routes and flows, as open to a diverse mix of groups and cultures, and thus as an exceptional site of creativity, multiculturalism and local distinctiveness (images that have something in common with the *Beat City* film).<sup>15</sup> Yet the similar positioning of other cities has raised questions about their sameness, and concerns about a process of city cloning somewhat similar to the cloning of the Cavern Club.

### **Conclusion: landscapes of music and migration**

The Cavern case study and the shift of emphasis from the Cavern Club to Liverpool, provide a basis for some concluding points concerning music, cities and migration.

First, they suggest that musical migration is a social, cultural and highly mediated process that can also be described in terms of movement and memory. Migrants take musical influences, instruments and traditions with them as they travel from one place to another; and, independent of this, music is disseminated through music and media industries and technologies. Cities have been centrally positioned along these migratory routes as nodal points within global networks of trade, industry, transportation and communication technologies, and thus places that people have commonly travelled to and from and where music and media businesses have clustered. Stories of these migratory journeys and the events, places and experiences involved, are also mobile and transportable, and narrated, performed and disseminated through speech, music, visual and moving images, and the mass media.

The Cavern journeys and stories point to the active role played by musicians in the migration and transformation of musical styles. In this respect musicians have been described as 'cosmopolitans': 'highly mobile and positioned at important interstices in heterogeneous urban societies, they forge new styles and communities of taste, negotiating cultural differences through the musical manipulation of symbolic associations' (Waterman 1990: 9). The Cavern stories provide examples of musicians encountering US popular music through the mass media and social interaction, and of their fascination with the newness of the musical styles involved and the tales of migration they embodied. The stories thus connect micro-musical journeys and communities to those on a larger, translocal scale, as

well as the musical past and present, and show how musicians took up and transformed musical styles on their spatial and biographical journeys.

Finnegan emphasizes the agency of musicians in her classic study of amateur music-making in the English town of Milton Keynes (1989), in which she reconceptualized the notion of musical styles as bounded and separate ‘worlds’, describing them instead as ‘pathways’ forged by musicians. The seminal work of social theorists such as Appadurai (1996), Gilroy (1993) and Clifford (1992) moves more explicitly away from fixed and bounded notions of culture, and likewise adopts a language of mobility – of travel and flow or ‘scapes’ – to describe culture in a context of contemporary globalization. As a highly mobile cultural form, music provides an excellent example of this process. Musicianship is commonly spoken and written about using metaphors of mobility: musicians go out on the road and on tour; musical sounds are disseminated around the world by the music and media industries; and descriptions of those sounds are suffused with metaphors of movement (Lashua and Cohen 2010).

Although the Cavern stories and journeys are not about migration as such, they nevertheless suggest that musical migration can be described not just in terms of unidirectional movement but also in terms of circulation. By being continually recycled, circulated and shared, migration stories, like the stories of the Cavern, help to sustain musical cultures and identities and shape geographies of belonging, involving attachments to particular neighbourhoods, cities and diasporic communities. Some of these stories may be circulated on a commercial basis for tourism and place-marketing purposes, as illustrated by the stories that romanticize the Cavern Club as the origins of the Liverpool Sound and celebrate its Beatles connection. Like most histories these stories are selectively constructed, connecting music to particular groups, places and moments and, in doing so, disconnecting it from others. In addition, migration stories may be connected to a repetition of events that influences how those events are remembered. Thus musical styles have been described in terms of regular and repeated circuits of live music performance around venues in Liverpool, including the Cavern Club, but they are likewise circulated around cities that have been destinations for particular migrant groups and, subsequently, hubs for the transnational production of particular musical styles.<sup>16</sup>

Yet whilst musical migration can be described in terms of movement, memory and the agency of musicians, the Cavern journeys and stories highlight constraints on this process. They illustrate, for example, how musicians’ access to urban space can be restricted by social, political and legal factors and policing strategies; how musical memory is hierarchical and contested, hence the dominance of particular music heritages and the exclusion of others; and how processes of stylistic transformation wrought by musical migration can be described in terms of aesthetic, social and political strategies (Stokes 2004). Cavern stories were shown to serve different groups and interests, whether musicians and local community groups, the tourism and heritage sector, or city authorities concerned to use culture as a resource for urban regeneration. The celebration and romanticization of popular music as hybrid flow, and of cities as cosmopolitan and culturally diverse, can sometimes obscure these complexities and the relations of power involved.

Urban musical migration is thus a political process that involves a politics of

style, mediation and urban space, and is shaped by a wider political economy. Yet the Cavern case study suggests that musical migration is also a material process, with material environments playing a central role in how migrating musics are practised, experienced and interpreted, and that ‘landscape’ could thus be a useful concept for the study of music, migration and cities. The Cavern journeys and stories illustrate how musicians interact with material urban environments, ‘scaping’ them out and characterizing them through regular and routine music-making practices to create shifting musical landscapes. Performance venues emerge through this process as part of the land and musicians’ physical and metaphorical journeys through and across it, but also as sites of collective memory, mythology and social interaction.

This emphasis on landscapes of movement and memory combines Finnegan’s ‘pathways’ with Appadurai’s description of ‘scapes’ as ‘deeply perspectival constructs’ and (following Benedict Anderson) ‘the building blocks’ of ‘imagined worlds’ (1996: 33). At the same time, however, the notion of landscape also suggests a terrain that must be negotiated, where movement and memory are not necessarily easy or straightforward. Thus the Cavern case study shows not only how musicians create shifting, multi-layered musical landscapes that characterize cities, but how those landscapes are in turn characterized by cities. The visual image of a palimpsest connects these landscapes with the above-mentioned notion of circulation, suggesting landscapes ‘scaped’ out of the material environment but then erased and ‘scaped’ over again through repeated journeys, circuits and stories so that the earlier markings are often still visible. Whilst there may be more appropriate musical metaphors to describe this process, the palimpsest image nevertheless conveys a sense of musical landscapes that change over time and are remembered yet also forgotten, layered and separated yet also interconnected. In this sense the concept of landscape helps to ‘articulate’ (Hall 1996) the relationship between music, migration and cities.

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## Notes

- 1 The chapter draws on archival and ethnographic research conducted in Liverpool for a series of research projects, including a two-year project (2007–9) on popular music and the characterization of the urban environments. I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council (Landscape and Environment Scheme) for funding that project; our two project partners, English Heritage and National Museums Liverpool; and Dr Brett Lashua, who worked with me on the project.
- 2 These figures are repeated across numerous Beatles-related websites, such as <<http://www.strawberrywalrus.com/cavernclub.html>>.
- 3 A phrase used to refer to the commercial success of British bands in the US during the mid-1960s.
- 4 The term 'journey' will be used to refer to both literal and metaphorical movement.
- 5 Websites on the Beatles include those listing every live performance of the band, such as this site focusing on their performances between 1957 and 1966: <[http://www.wirtschaft.tu-ilmenau.de/~weigmann/1\\_live.html](http://www.wirtschaft.tu-ilmenau.de/~weigmann/1_live.html)>.
- 6 Online <<http://www.brianepstein.com/brian2.html>> (accessed June 2009).
- 7 Online <[http://www.alwynturner.com/glitter/real\\_thing.html](http://www.alwynturner.com/glitter/real_thing.html)> (accessed June 2009).
- 8 Online <<http://prince.org/msg/8/291783>> (accessed June 2009).
- 9 A 1968 report cited by Strachan (2010: 87) notes that many black youths in Liverpool felt insecure when they moved outside of the Liverpool 8 area, and there was widespread 'evidence of hostility to [people of] colour in white downtown areas' of the city.
- 10 Jimmie Rodgers is one of the best-known performers of early traditional country music.
- 11 Defined by Laing (forthcoming, 2010) as 'a group or network of venues at which bands or artists play in sequence'.
- 12 Such as the South Liverpool church fete where John and Paul first met, the art school crowd that John belonged to and that attracted George, and the Hamburg period that offered intensive training in live music performance.
- 13 From a videoed interview displayed as part of *The Beat Goes On* exhibition at Liverpool World Museum (July 2008 to November 2009).
- 14 For accounts of long-standing racism in Liverpool see Small (1991), Meegan (1995: 73), Parkinson (1985: 15) and Gifford *et al.* (1989: 82).
- 15 A subsequent series of music events took place throughout the year, including major events, such as the Paul McCartney concert which was broadcast across the world, but also smaller-scale events promoting stories of other local groups and styles, including country and doo-wop.
- 16 Thus Jamaica, London and New York have been centrally positioned within the journeys and development of reggae music (Connell and Gibson 2003: 181), whilst New York also emerged as a centre for the production of salsa through the circulation of musical styles and influences within a pan-American context.