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Philip Tagg (22 February 1944–9 May 2024)

The editorial board of Popular Music was very saddened to hear of the death of our esteemed friend and pioneer of Popular Music Studies, Philip Tagg. Here colleagues and friends pay tribute to his life and legacy. RIP Philip.

MARTIN CLOONAN

Phil Tagg. Where do you start? By acknowledging a totally unique and amazing human being who pioneered work in his field and thus made the world a better place for thousands of scholars. A true one-off, the like of whom we shall not see again. An obsessive, contrary and brilliant character whom you could never forget meeting. A great bloke to go for a pint with and a bastard to argue with. All this and more.

I will remember Phil best as a wonderfully warm person whose generosity matched his brilliant mind. There was never a dull moment with Phil. He made you think and provoked you. He did all this because he absolutely believed that scholarship *mattered*, that it was important to get things *right*. In part, I think, this was because in its early days what became Popular Music Studies faced a lot of opposition within the academy. It would win few friends with shoddy scholarship and Phil was determined that that would not happen. He *cared* and wanted other people to care too. Otherwise, what was the point?

To attend a talk or lecture by Phil was to be dazzled by both depth and scope. Thousands of references could be made to the meaning of one note and the world of music encountered the worlds of art, film, language, literature, and much more besides. Agree with him or not, you were never in doubt that you were in the presence of a *serious* scholar. Not that this meant a lack of humour. Very far from it. I laughed *a lot* with Phil. A lot. His humour was infectious. Being serious also entailed being fun. Many of my memories of Phil include laughter, often of the barely containable type.

With Phil's passing Popular Music Studies has lost one of its true pioneers and the world has lost a great human being.

Thanks Phil. You lit up the world.

JOCHEN EISENTRAUT

Philip Tagg was a tireless force in the world of popular music studies and a personal friend. His voracious intellect pulverised intra- and interdisciplinary boundaries, combining a range of approaches to music and culture in original and invigorating ways. He famously brought a weighty conceptual apparatus to bear on musical miniatures such as an ABBA song, or a TV series signature tune, revealing

a wealth of meaning and expressive power in the interplay between such music and the listener. Semiotics was a particularly fecund source of manoeuvres for analysing fields of musically indicated meaning.

Phil was undoubtedly part of a wave of scholarship taking a fresh, post-Frankfurt School look at popular culture in the 1980s. Vernacular music was noticed, studied and allowed meaning and value. In music much of this came initially from outside musicology, which was mesmerised by the 'classical' canon, ideas of absolute music and modernism.

However, Tagg had read music at Cambridge and was an active musician. For him a purely sociological or cultural studies approach would not do and he insisted on considering the musical nuts and bolts with copious transcriptions and notational explanations of modes, harmonic progressions and melodies. These made conventional academic publishers shy away from his work, which often appeared outside the Anglophone mainstream. The foundational nature of his ideas nevertheless made him a frequently quoted and referenced figure. He both published and taught in languages other than English, being a keen and gifted linguist. The beginning of his career unfolded in Sweden and in his mature years he was professor at the Université de Montréal. He also worked for nearly 10 years at the Institute of Popular Music, University of Liverpool.

In person Phil's enthusiasm was infectious and for many students his lectures were revelatory, opening up ways of thinking about quotidian music and its analysis beyond the narrow confines of Schenker or Adorno. In this way minds were opened and lives were changed around the world. Disciplinary affinities and connections frequently turned into friendships and not only did many of his students pursue research in popular music along Taggian lines, but their careers and personal lives were also positively impacted. A memorable video tribute at his wake came from Peter Wicke. He had met Phil during a left-wing music festival in what was then East Berlin. Phil was there performing with his Swedish band. They found common ground in their academic interests and Phil invited Wicke to give a talk in Sweden. Of course, this was problematic since travel to the 'West' was usually prohibited for East Germans. But Phil persisted and with his help Wicke eventually obtained permission to make the trip. Once he had returned to East Germany and the precedent had been set, Phil invited him to contribute to other events abroad and Wicke was able to go. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, East German academics had to re-apply for their jobs and many were replaced by Western academics, being seen as tainted by association with the former communist regime. Wicke, thanks to Phil, had by then acquired extensive international experience and this enabled him not only to find employment at the Humboldt-Universität Berlin but also to build a distinguished career as a popular music scholar.

FRANCO FABBRI

Perhaps it would be easier to reconstruct more than 40 years of friendship by recalling the episodes and places that Philip and I shared, and the multiple occasions in which, even at a great distance, we found out that we had been thinking of the same things. Here I want to share one of the aspects of his character that struck me the most and that I have found in very few other people I have known. Philip never stopped. I mean, he never stopped thinking about music and its meanings,

and the theories he was developing (or that were hidden somewhere in his head), at any time of day or night, wherever he was. This sometimes made me uncomfortable because I was unprepared, immersed in other thoughts, or simply in standby mode. It took just an insignificant detail: a spice while we were cooking, a photo, a fragment heard on the radio, and Philip would light up, raise his eyebrows, point a finger and say 'aha!' Of course, that particular sound in a disco music track was like lip gloss or nail polish; and the sound of a marimba is 'corporate' (you know this, yes) because it reproduces the order and cleanliness on a top manager's desk – made of wood – and so on.

Last year, I reviewed albums, films, books, concerts for Swiss Italian radio, and I sent the podcast to my friends. Some would reply with a heart emoji or a smiley face, some would thank me for introducing them to something they didn't know. Philip would call me. Each time for about an hour. At first, he would comment on my review or mention its subject. He often told me that what I was doing was 'good edutainment,' and that made me proud because I have always considered Philip the best edutainment author in the Galaxy. But then he would start, again from a detail, and link it to the things he was working on (lately, another monumental edition of *Fernando*), confident that I was listening to him, indeed, that I understood him. Sometimes I did, but Philip had too much faith in me. He was my greatest friend, and I am told that I was the same for him, but I often thought that he overestimated me.

One of the last times he called me I was walking in the centre of Milan; I had to walk down one of the noisiest streets in the city, a sort of canyon travelled by cars and trams, with fashion and shoe shops blasting out loud music. I tried to tell Philip that I couldn't hear him well. He had made an exciting discovery on the theme of Renaissance 'Folía', and I hope he later had time to write about it somewhere, because at a certain point during the call I gave up trying to listen, and now I can't tell you what it was about. But on this and other similar occasions, I didn't have the courage to tell Philip that it was better to finish and speak another time. And I think I did the right thing.

SIMON FRITH

I first met Philip Tagg at a seminar in the music department at Keele University at the end of the 1970s, where he introduced himself by saying that we had been at school together. It was a boarding school, we were in different houses and years, so I didn't think we had actually met there, but I quickly realised that he was *that* Philip Tagg, the legendary school organist!

The Keele event was my first experience of a gathering of scholars interested in popular music, and it turned out to be a harbinger for the development of 'Popular Music Studies', a kind of dry run for the 1981 popular music conference in Amsterdam at which the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) was formed. Philip provided the driving energy for this development and he and I now began to meet regularly: at subsequent local and international IASPM conferences, committees and planning meetings. He became a key figure in my scholarly life, not least by introducing me to a remarkable range of international colleagues.

Like all the best friendships, ours revolved around our differences. I was a sociologist and rock journalist, rooted in the Anglophone world; Philip was a musician and music teacher, who seemed to feel at home in almost all European countries, East

as well as West, and speak all their languages. We shared (loosely) a socialist politics and a lack of respect for classical musicology, but for different reasons. I thought that any kind of formal analysis of rock music was irrelevant to my sociological (and Marxist) approach to Popular Music Studies. Philip thought the task (academic and socialist) was to develop new musicological methods of formal analysis. Our subsequent disputes (public and private) remain important.

We were temperamentally different too – Philip tended to the obsessional, I to an intellectual dilettantism. Philip, I think, mostly enjoyed being a scholarly maverick, for all its frustrations. I, alas, was mostly happy to become part of the academic establishment. We were, we once agreed, envious of each other. Popular music studies didn't, in the end, develop in the way Philip would have liked but, then, without him it wouldn't have started at all. My favourite Tagg article remains '"Universal" music and the case of death', which I commissioned for a death issue I edited for *Critical Quarterly* in 1993. It is particularly poignant to read it again now.

DAVID HORN

Two memories stand out from among the crowd. The first goes back to autumn 1980, late afternoon at Lancaster railway station. As the train draws in, I see two figures on the platform who I think (correctly) to be Phil Tagg and Gerard Kempers. We have met to talk about Phil's idea (he was usually called Philip then) for an international popular music studies conference (which, with Gerard's help, duly took place in Amsterdam in the summer of 1981). After an early fish-and-chips supper we get down to business at Phil's parents' house. The idea, as Phil explained, was not just for a conference but for a gathering that would mark the first major step towards the formation of an international, interdisciplinary organisation. I suppose in hindsight that it was because my own thoughts on popular research were so undeveloped in comparison that I found the picture Phil sketched out so powerful. Several things struck me and I realise now have remained with me since. First, perhaps, was just how many people Phil had contacted, and (because of his personality) already got to know well in different parts of the world. He would later write (in his paper at the IASPM Reggio Emilia conference in 1983) that it was because of his 'non-omniscience' that he had determined to make these contacts (despite drawing on 13 disciplines to study the theme from *Kojak*). What he had begun to create was not a web with himself at the centre but an already fruitful, interactive network. The second thing was his focus on cooperation and respect for each other's work, characterised by a spirit of collective endeavour. It was remarkable to hear this from someone whose individual voice was so clearly unique. As many could later attest, few people's live delivery and perhaps even fewer people's prose style were as recognisable as Phil's. But somehow individuality didn't fight collaboration, it warmed it up.

When a document was drawn up at the 1981 Amsterdam conference proposing the creation of IASPM, the first stated aim was not to further the recognition of popular music as an area for serious research – that came second. The first aim was to facilitate contact between those actively engaged in the study of popular music (Tagg 1984). That aim was collectively agreed, but was, I venture to suggest, inspired by Phil's priorities.

The second memory is more personal. It's 13 December, either 1984 or 1985, and about 8 a.m. There's a gentle knock on my wife's and my bedroom door at our home in Devon, and Phil's daughter Mia comes in, dressed in white with a red sash and a wreath around her head, decorated with candles. She is singing 'Sankta Lucia'. It's Sancta Lucia's day, a much-loved festival in Sweden. Behind Mia stands Phil, watching proudly.

BRUCE JOHNSON

I met Philip Tagg in 1991 on the day I began my first research fellowship at Liverpool's Institute for Popular Music (IPM). We bumped into each other in the corridor by chance and began a conversation which continued until late at night at the Everyman pub – the first of many such sessions, which also became all-nighters during our frequent sojourns at the cottage of IPM's then head, David Horn, in Pontllyfni, in Wales. My disciplinary base then was English Literature, where I had become increasingly interested in orality, sound and popular music. I was a novice in the field, but could not have stumbled upon a more inspiring and one-off idiosyncratic mentor, who very quickly also became a very dear friend.

Phil was not widely published. I read his extraordinary doctoral thesis on the music for the opening credits of the TV show *Kojak* from a photocopy. Throughout his career he retained a suspicion of the tendency of mainstream academic publishing to 'filter' knowledge, both what it allowed through and its specialised discourse. In reaction, he established his own publishing imprint, MMMSP (The Mass Media Music Scholars Press), launched in 2003 with a 900 page analysis of the subjects of its title *Ten Little Tunes*, co-authored with Bob Clarida. I consider that, along with his 2012 *Music's Meanings: a Modern Musicology for Non-musos*, to be *essential* reading for all students of music, models not only of original insight, but also of accessibility. He felt that all knowledge should be fully accessible in every sense. His work is available free online. He could take the most apparently trivial musical detail and make it the foundation of astonishingly broad cultural theses; see for example his analysis of the 'Scotch Snap'.[1]

Phil's influence on popular music studies was seminal. He was a significant figure in the development of IPM and one of the founders of the IASPM. He was also infinitely generous with his encyclopaedic knowledge, and he became one of the most important figures in my own development, not simply in the field of popular music, but more broadly in sound studies – it was he who introduced me to the work of R. Murray Schafer, one of the pioneers of what later became known as acoustic ecology.

Yet he was also essential to my life and development as a friend, and it is in that capacity that I retain my most moving memories of him. From our beery all-night discussions during what became my regular visiting lectureships at IPM and conferences to his phone calls to me in Australia as he shared and discussed the questions raised by his latest research enquiries, or simply wanted to find out how I was going. Phil was not only the pre-eminent and largely foundational scholar in popular music studies, but on a personal level a much-loved personal friend, whose death hurts me deeply.

[1] https://youtu.be/R5CpMSu4soc?si=w7mHoWcjQqug5ig0

YNGVAR B. STEINHOLT

We last chatted merrily in February. Philip called to remind me (I think) about his upcoming 80th birthday. It was one of those good-old, jam-packed phone conversations that seemed to run faster and wider than we could both quite follow. A classic Philipesque exchange full of current topics, latest projects, rants about the miserable state of the world – interspersed with chuckles and healthy belly laughs. Was Philip's voice a bit tense? Had he learned something about his health? He didn't say. Later, we learned he'd been hospitalised just before his planned celebration. I texted *get well soon* and received a *do stay in touch*. Then he was gone.

80. Not bad, you may say, for a former big smoker and a man of the mind, for whom a stroll up Huddersfield's Castle Hill counted as a small expedition. What kept him going was the firm conviction of contributing something important. He was a true utopian idealist and a fighter. And for the 23 years we knew each other, he kept fighting on a number of fronts. Mostly that of truth, justice, logic and enlightenment, but with a few windmills, a dash of nitpicking, and some curiosa thrown in. Everyone loves an idealist who bravely fights for their cause, and everybody is equally frustrated by the idealist who nearly does the same. Philip was much loved and respected. He also did many people's heads in. Often the very same people. Perhaps we shared some mad mental frequency that inhibited such frustration. Or perhaps his dedication and generous support simply overshadowed everything. To those still frustrated, I can only recommend reading *Music's Meanings* and *Ten Little Title Tunes* for your enjoyment. Remember that the latter took 25 years to write (mostly without research time or sabbaticals). Never mind then, that conclusions (with a question mark) come on page 666. The devil is in the details!

Philip was an ardent and proud supporter of researchers (of music-related matters) whot found themselves at the margins of academia. Be it computer game music, yodeling or Soviet rockers, he saw the value of our projects. Also, his perfectionism extended to the rules of academic writing. The first 25 pages he received from yours truly came back literally dripping with red ink. That is, the first five pages were. The rest were without comment. Of course, knowing Philip, there was a system behind the meticulous red scribblings. Follow those very precise instructions, apply them to the whole chapter, and you have an academic text. Thus, he taught you to write. Thus, for good and for bad, I and many others with me are still academics.

Philip did not support the concept of an afterlife. However, he firmly believed in a better world. In that better world, we'll be sat on his Montréal back porch with a glass of grappa, listening to old Swedish communist songs and laughing our socks off.

Thank you for everything and for all the good times, Philip. We'll stay in touch. Always.

GARRY TAMLYN

As a former PhD student of Philip Tagg, I am honoured to have the opportunity to write a tribute for him. Philip left an indelible mark on the field of popular music. In this tribute, I will reflect on my personal experiences and memories of working

with Tagg, highlighting his significant contributions and impact on my academic journey.

My initial encounter with Philip Tagg's work was through his doctoral analysis of the theme of the *Kojak* television series (1979). As someone with a background in performing popular music genres before transitioning to classical music studies, I found it comforting to discover serious academic engagement with music outside of the Western art music tradition. While there were many journalistic and sociological discussions about popular music, musicological 'content analysis' of popular music was an undeveloped field of study and a genre largely ignored by university music departments and conservatoria. Tagg's approach was distinctive in its positioning of music as a sociocultural field of study, starkly contrasting with the musical–structural formalism that dominated my undergraduate classical music instruction in Sydney.

Later, I came across Tagg's analysis of Abba's 'Fernando' (1981) and his seminal article on semiotic analysis in the journal *Popular Music* (1982). These publications inspired me to choose semiotic analysis as the focus of a master's thesis (Tamlyn 1991). Despite the astonishment of my professors, I decided to apply Tagg's analytical method to the Sex Pistols' 'Anarchy in the UK', largely to test whether semiotic analysis could be applied to such a minimalist example of rock music. My thesis was accepted, and I proudly sent a copy to Tagg, who was then living in Liverpool and working at the recently established Institute of Popular Music (Tamlyn 1998).

After numerous phone conversations and emails, I received an invitation to the Institute. Leaving the hot and humid climate of northern Queensland, where I lectured at the newly established Department of Music at James Cook University, I arrived in Liverpool during one of its coldest winters. I was greeted at Lime Street Station by David Horn, and together we travelled to Tagg's flat in Minster Court, which was a frequent meeting point for numerous international scholars of popular music. For those of us who were close to Tagg, it would come as no surprise that he had confused my arrival date and was out of town attending a conference. Regardless, our subsequent meeting forged many years of friendship, deep discussions and advice, sprinkled with liberal doses of mischief and mayhem.

During my PhD candidature, I regularly flew between Liverpool, Townsville and then Brisbane, where I had gained employment at the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University. It was a hectic period, balancing a heavy lecturing and research workload with classical music performances and recordings across northern Queensland, Brisbane and Sydney. I am deeply grateful to Philip, whose constant support and friendship sustained me throughout this time and resulted in the successful submission of my thesis in 1998.

Tagg's influence on my academic journey extended far beyond my doctoral research. In the late 1980s, the Vice Chancellor of Griffith University suggested that the conservatorium, based in Brisbane, should establish a presence at the university's Gold Coast campus. As Deputy Director, I proposed to the Vice Chancellor and the conservatorium's Director that instead of replicating the music offerings of the Brisbane campus, we should focus on popular music and create an innovative facility dedicated to its production. A visiting fellowship grant allowed Tagg to spend time at the university, providing significant gravitas to the introduction of popular music within a conservatorium context.

Tagg and I engaged in numerous in-depth discussions and debates about the focus of a popular music programme, which subsequently shaped the original

degree. Traditional practice rooms and one-to-one tuition were replaced by a suite of recording studios that served as the primary learning environment for students. Additionally, a revised version of Tagg's semiotic analysis was incorporated into the entire curriculum of popular music history subjects. The popular music programme and its dedicated campus represented a halcyon period for the conservatorium, attracting large cohorts of domestic and international students and establishing clear career trajectories for both students and staff.

My encounters with Philip Tagg and his work were profoundly influential. His pioneering approach to the academic study of popular music validated my scholarly endeavours and played a crucial role in establishing popular music studies as a legitimate field within musicology and conservatorium curricula. His influence significantly impacted many students and staff at the conservatorium, with numerous individuals advancing to roles as educational leaders, performers, songwriters, recording artists, authors, studio owners and teachers. His legacy continues to resonate through the achievements of his students and colleagues, ensuring that his contributions to musicology will be remembered and celebrated for generations to come.

MARTHA TUPINAMBÁ DE ULHÔA

Philip Tagg was my tutor in the popular study of music. Yes! With popular functioning as an adjective for 'study', and not for 'music'. With Philip, I learned that everyone could listen to and understand shared connotative meanings, and most of all, have a 'general democratic right to education about messages in the media, [that is], the right to know how music mediates attitudes'. He was convinced that everyone, musicians and non-musicians, should 'have some kind of positive control over the effect of music on themselves, not to stop those effects, but to reflect on whether they agree with them or not'. Philip and I, although 10 years apart in age, had very similar experiences. Firstly, being educated in a traditional classical conservatory setting, and secondly, having the necessity of reaching out to 'non-musos' as music teachers. He, sparking the curiosity of young students by imagining horror scenarios to the *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta* by Bartók, in the mid-1960s, and I, by trying to teach music skills to mostly theatre undergrads in a faculty of arts in Brasilia in the 1980s. It was then that I decided to do a Musicology PhD on 'popular music'. It took me some time to realise that I was in a deeper hole – how would I 'teach' popular music analysis while not being a 'popular' pianist myself? That's when I decided to go to the IPM, at the University of Liverpool, where I arrived in 1996, having no previous personal contact with Philip.

It was the typical 'Tagg's initiation'. First, some pints at The Philharmonic pub, with its beautiful Victorian rooms, designed by the same people who built the Titanic, and afterward, a Greek meal at Eureka, hosted by its owner Giorgos Yakovakis. There was not much theoretical discussion, but lots of observation and some listening tests, using my Brazilian rock material in his master's class on Music Analysis or the Music Seminar at the IPM. I also learned a lot about Phil's methodology while substituting him in the 'Music and the Moving Image' undergrad class at the Music Department.

There are many aspects to talk about Philip Tagg's legacy for popular musicology. However, if I had to choose just one thing, I could say that what impressed

me most was his Table of 'Musematic' Occurrence, which I consider an excellent score for an overview of the musical arrangement of any piece. As the table includes all the items of the musical code (musemes), which in comparison with similar minimal units may help unveil the tune's meaning, it functions as an innovative type of notation. As a detailed map of the music process, the table is a tool that allows the analyst an idea of the structural form and flow of the piece in a schematic way. Furthermore, it might help the reader or student to understand both the piece and its related context.

Tagg, for his inclusive and democratic analytical output and his involvement in the creation of IASPM, played a central role in the dissemination of popular music studies in academia. Let us celebrate his legacy.

PETER WICKE

Philip Tagg was one of those scholars for whom academic work was not merely a career, but an opportunity and a commitment to effect positive change in the world. His inaugural major project, *Kojak*, was inspired by the question of the role of music in the phenomenon of the US television series captivating three-quarters of a billion people and the influence it had on them. As a musicologist, this led him to popular music at a time when it was considered unworthy of academic discussion. However, his exploration of 30 seconds of *Kojak*'s theme music did not only lead him into the then barely explored terrain of popular music. His initial inquiry, namely the question of the impact of music on individuals, led him to the field of semiotics, which was similarly under-explored at the time. He demonstrated the potential of this field a few years later with his groundbreaking work on ABBA's *Fernando the Flute*, and remained faithful to it throughout the subsequent decades. However, for him, the theoretical and analytical study of popular music, in which he has made significant achievements, has never been a purely academic pursuit.

My initial encounter with Philip Tagg occurred in 1975 at a political song festival in East Berlin. At the time, he was performing as a keyboardist with the Gothenburg polit-rock band *Röda Kapellet.* Even back then, I recognised him as a committed and argumentative person, unafraid to challenge the status quo. Subsequently, when I had the opportunity to visit the University of Gothenburg and he invited me to stay in his small apartment, the central topic of our lengthy discussions in the thick smoke of cigarettes was the means of bringing together like-minded people scattered around the world. He had already conceived the idea of creating a forum for the isolated researchers working on popular music in universities in different countries, a forum that would facilitate the exchange of ideas and concepts. The result was the founding of the IASPM. However, he was sufficiently realistic to recognise that such an initiative would not reach the Second World in the East and the Third World in the South owing to political and economic constraints. He was also sufficiently imaginative to challenge this assumption.

Upon my return to East Berlin from my inaugural visit to Gothenburg, he had inspired, if not instigated, an idea that was as unconventional as it was innovative. As with the political song festivals, which served as a meeting place for musicians from East and West, owing to the ease of attendance for participants from Eastern Europe and the Third World, an academic meeting place should be created in the East, where the West could come to the East, as the reverse was almost impossible

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at the time. The result was the establishment of the Centre for Popular Music Research at the Humboldt University in East Berlin in 1981 by a group of students under my direction as a lecturer at the university's Institute of Musicology. The central idea that made this possible was Philip's. He proposed that study visits by students and professors from the West, financed by tuition fees in hard currency paid by funding organisations in the West, should form the foundation of the centre. This was to be the catalyst that would transcend all boundaries. Prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the Research Centre at Humboldt University was arguably the most significant forum for the exchange of ideas between East and West in the field of popular music research. When the Centre hosted the VIth International Conference on Popular Music Studies in 1991, it was thanks to the tireless efforts of Philip that it was possible to bring together participants from all parts of the world – East, West and South. Rarely has a scholar had such a profound impact on the development of a discipline, whether in terms of theory, methodology or policy. His legacy will continue to influence the field of popular music studies.

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