Corporately Imposed Music Cultures: An Ethnography of Cruise Ship Showbands

By David Cashman, Central Queensland University

Abstract: Cruise ships are among the most visible postmodern tourism products, and cruise tourists are the antithesis of cultural tourists. Within the physical cocoon of the ship, a social and cultural cocoon is constructed by the cruise line, sheltering the temporary inhabitants of the ship from the realities of the ports visited. Despite the portrayal of a cruise as an “exotic” holiday, onboard the ship, cruise ships construct a representation of western culture, particularly with the assistance of onboard musical performances. This article considers the performance of the showband, a central ensemble to the musical experience of a cruise vacation. It is the result of an extended period of participant-observation on cruise ships and interviews with showband musicians. The contribution of the showband is found to be central to the construction of a western and cosmopolitan music culture within a deterritorialised and mobile geography. By performance mode and genre, appearance, repertoire, and nationality, the showband constructs a façade of music culture; however, the reality behind the façade is quite different. If the ship may be considered an empty vessel into which culture is poured, it is the music of ensembles such as the showband that creates and defines this culture.

Introduction

One night in the middle of a cruise, amidst the lights, noise, and scantily-clad dancers of an evening production show, the showband pianist quietly slipped off the bandstand and moved to the wings. There was nothing unusual about this; it happened every time the production show was performed. On cue with the singer, he moved to the middle of the stage where a convincing mock-up of a grand piano was spotlighted. He sat down and pretended to move his fingers over the keys, miming to a recording while the singer writhed atop the constructed piano. Finishing, the pianist returned to the bandstand and continued with the show. After the curtain dropped, he put his charts back, made his way to the crew bar for a few drinks, and put the mimicry from his mind. The next day, in the breakfast buffet line, an older passenger stopped him, saying how much she loved jazz and had particularly enjoyed his solo in the show last night. The pianist, not wishing to shatter her illusions, simply thanked her, and moved on to his scrambled eggs and grapefruit juice.

The guest’s misinterpretation of the veracity of the performance is understandable, as the cruise ship entertainment product relies on fabrications of culture (Wilkinson 1999). Aboard a cruise ship, one is accosted by fabricated jazz clubs (Cashman 2013a), surf (FlowRiders), rock-climbing cliffs (Kwortnik 2008), representations of cultural performances (Cashman and Hayward 2013), and gardens (this last aboard some of the Royal Caribbean ships). Cruise ships are “polyvalent leisure environments” and “money traps” (Chardon 1992), and the very essence of post-tourism.

The creation of new and fabricated touristic products is not, of course, limited to cruise tourism, nor to post-tourism. The demands of twenty-first-century tourism include the pre-packaging and commodification of cultural representations. Tourists who particularly seek out cultural experience are referred to as “cultural tourists,” a term used by Erik Cohen (1979) to navigate the counterpoint between Daniel Boorstin’s view of tourists as dupes (1961) and Dean MacCannell’s view of them as seeking (but not necessarily finding) authentic culture (1976). However, the constructions of culture they do find may overemphasize “pastness, exhibition, difference, and where possible indigeneity” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995:370). The processes of postmodern tourism—also referred to as “post-tourism”—are similar though the intent is markedly different. Post-tourism creates value by the construction of fabricated and hyperreal culture (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995:396; Eco 1986). Controlled and closed sign-systems invite guests to engage playfully as in a game, an idea core to the concept of post-tourism as originally expounded by Maxine Feifer (1985). Thus, both cultural tourists and post-tourists engage with a cultural construction; however, cultural tourists encounter representations that profess authenticity, while post-tourists (including cruise tourists) engage playfully with an overt fabrication that is not designed to be “real.”

Cruise ships are examples of post-tourism, because value is contained within these constructed sign-systems (Berger 2011; 2004). The constructed onboard culture (especially the music culture), presented as an alternative to the perceived authenticity of cultural tourism, is implemented by the corporate decision of the shipping line. Cruise tourists engage with this constructed culture, aware that the music culture offered by cruise ships is neither maritime nor local, but is a diversion that permits engagement at a superficial and uncritical level. Indeed, the cruise ship goes so far as to actively reject the very physical and cultural environments in which it finds itself (Cashman 2013b) rather than interacting with the oceanic environment in the manner of an aquapelago (Hayward 2012). Rather than comprising an engagement with a visited society, cruise tourism comprises “a social and cultural practice, that . . . reflects and embodies the values and norms shared by the members of a particular group or society” (Vogel and Oschmann 2013:5). A cruise ship is a container for a temporary society formed of two codependent groups, the guests (“tourists”) and the crew (“locals”). Guests are literally and figuratively encapsulated within the cruise experience for an extended period, obliged to interact with a fabricated, ambiguously “western” culture provided by the cruise line and by the crew (acting under management instructions).

The consideration of authenticity has been a more-or-less constant debate in tourism studies for the past fifty years. For Boorstin (1961) and MacCannell (1976), authenticity was something that existed behind the tourist facade and was impossible to present to tourists. For Ning Wang, authenticity was an existential concept, incapable of being constructed (1999). More recently, for Britta Tinn Knudsen and Anne Marit Waade, authenticity is something negotiated between tourist and local (2010). Cruise tourism, however, is a post-tourism product (Berger 2004, 2011; Nilsson 2007; Vogel and Oschmann 2013; Weaver 2005), and as such, the quest for authenticity is not a significant factor in the construction of cruise ship culture.

Such fabricated cultural representation is, of course, common within tourism. Hotels from New York to New Delhi co-opt signs of western culture within their hotels and tourism environments, creating such a homogenous western experience that the superficial touches of local culture stand out (Culler 1981). Postmodern and hyperreal tourist destinations including cruise ships, theme parks such as Disneyland (Carson 2004, Pachter 2009), and themed cities such as Las Vegas (Loi and Kim 2009, Loi and Pearce 2008, Wood 2005), construct and represent cultures with which tourists interact. At most of these venues, guests escape to their own lives and cultures at the end of the day.

This article discusses the construction and presentation of the fabricated music culture of cruise ships. It is an unusual ethnography in that the culture under discussion is not the result of humans living together, but one constructed by corporate decree. The “local residents” of the cruise ship (i.e. the crew) do not inhabit the cruise ship by birth, but for reasons of economic necessity, adventure seeking, or interest in becoming tourists themselves. I focus my attention in this article on the ship’s showband. This ensemble is core to the cruise experience. While other ensembles perform in their particular cruise venues, the showband performs in various locations around the cruise ship. Moreover, the showband typically accompanies the main evening show that frames and focuses the cruise ship entertainment product.

This research is the result of an extended period of participation/observation as the author undertook employment on several cruise ships. Following this, surveys and formal interviews were conducted with cruise ship musicians, other onboard employees, and shoreside personnel; which created a mixed-method approach to data collection and analysis. As the focus of the research is on the corporate cruise ship culture, interviews were not undertaken with guests, who form a temporary addition to the cruise ship.

Cruise Ship Music Culture

Cruise ships are now so large that they can be described as “shipscapes” (Kwortnik 2008), as “mobile tourist enclaves” (Weaver 2005), and as mobile geographies unto themselves (Cashman 2013a). The RMS Titanic (1912) that displaced 46,328GRT, was the largest ship in the world at the time.[1] By contrast, the latest Oasis-class mega-cruisers operated by Royal Caribbean International displace 225,282GRT. They utilize solar power, contain

sixteen passenger decks, and are constructed as “neighborhoods” with living parks, theatre districts, and dining areas. There are now nine ships over 140,000GRT, all built within the last decade; nine more will be delivered over the next four years. Such large constructed geographies create and define an area within which humans can live, creating temporary cultures which last the length of the cruise, which can be as short as three days or as long as four months.

These mobile geographies have also been referred to as “cocoons,” as they protect guests from the realities of the environments through which they pass (Huang and Hsu 2009; Mastin 2010; Papathanassis and Beckmann 2011; Vogel and Oschmann 2004). For example, ships limit interaction with the natural aquatic environment, while fabricating and mediating guests’ interactions with water (Cashman 2013b). Instead of interacting directly with the aquatic environment, guests are accosted onboard by enormous waterslides, fabricated surfing experiences on Royal Caribbean’s FlowRiders, and water features in atriums. Many companies also lease islands from Caribbean nations, altering the physical environment to match popular representations of island paradises. Disney, for example, unhappy that the original state of its island (which it renamed Castaway Cay) did not match the popular perception of a Caribbean paradise, dredged sand from the middle of the bay, cleaned it, ground it up finely, and deposited it on the beaches (Wood 2000:362).

In the same way, the culture of cruise ships is constructed to keep the tourists (“faux-voyageurs” in the words of Jean-Didier Urbain [1986:295] and John Frow [1990:127]), from interacting with the local cultures through which they travel. In fact, potential interaction with local culture, Robert E. Wood notes, is often disturbing to and unwanted by cruise ship guests (2000:360). Contact with local culture is mediated through “shore excursions” to locally-themed tourist attractions within and around the port area (Jaakson 2004), or through the provision of onboard “local shows,” choreo-musical presentations of local culture (Cashman 2011).[2]

Cruise ships delineate western culture by a series of semioses that are purposefully implemented and offered to guests. The external and internal design of the ship is opulent and deemed aesthetically beautiful by western standards. Western linguistic and textual signs are imposed by the use of English in public areas of the ship.[3] Musically and choreographically, western culture is presented by the performance of western music, often popular western music, to guests. In some cases, representations of other cultures are incorporated into this culture as signifiers for “exoticism,” for example, by the use of a resident Caribbean or Latin band, or of the “local” shows. However, overwhelmingly, the majority of cultural representation is of western culture.

In the constructed and mobile geography of the cruise ship, the “local” residents are the crew. However, these “local” residents are from many different ethnic groups. Gibson notes that in some cases a single crew may comprise more than fifty nationalities (2008:45-50). Typically a single crewmember will undertake a contract that may last a few months or more than a year. The crew thus comprises, in a very real sense, a floating population of individuals coming and going from the ship, living in extremely close proximity to each other and speaking a variety of languages. This comprises an unusual culture in many ways; significantly, it is a culture created by corporate decree.

The Music Culture of Cruise Ship Showbands

There are several types of musicians onboard cruise ships. There are ensembles of collectively-contracted musicians who perform a popular representation of a particular genre (e.g., jazz, classical, or rock) in a themed venue. Soloists operate in a similar fashion, but are individually contracted and perform on their own. Guest entertainers perform the evening cabaret show and can be musical (singers or instrumentalists) or non-musical (usually comedians, jugglers, or ventriloquists). Production singers and dancers comprise the onboard “cast” and perform in the themed production shows. The focus of this study is on the fifth category, the showband, also known as the ship’s orchestra. It is the showband’s musical responsibility to accompany the evening guest entertainer or production show and to perform in various locations around the ship as needed.

While a version of the showband exists on every large cruise ship, they vary in size and lineup. Most often, the showband consists of between five and nine performers and is of two kinds: the “traditional” showband is a cut-down swing band with a horn section (often consisting of trumpet, one or two saxophones, and trombone) and a rhythm section (usually piano, bass, drums, and guitar). This instrumental lineup permits the group to perform jazz standards well, but some instruments become superfluous in the performance of rock. The “modern”

showband, which is used on some Carnival Cruise Lines vessels and on the Holland-America Line, is an adapted version of the band on the American television program *Saturday Night Live*. It is comprised of a single saxophone and rhythm section (in Holland America's case, augmented by a second keyboard) and is able to perform rock more easily than swing.

Musical ensembles akin to the showband have existed on passenger shipping since the 1880s (Cashman 2014). The showband is descended from the bands of earlier passenger shipping, such as the famous Titanic musicians. The first ensembles were brass bands on the German Norddeutcher Line, which performed arranged parlour music, light classical music, and German melodies. From the early 1900s, string players appeared on Cunard and White Star, but the emphasis would remain on performing classical music for first-class passengers until the 1920s and 1930s. From this time, dance bands began to appear on passenger ships and would remain until the dawn of modern cruising in the 1960s and the establishment of the showband proper. While the focus of the job has changed from this early time, the fundamental requirements have not.

Participants

Showband musicians, through their ethnicity, education, and backgrounds, say much about the focus of the constructed culture of the cruise ship. These musicians are obliged to be well-trained in western popular music, particularly in jazz and rock. They ideally must be both strong improvisers and strong readers, as the showband may be called upon to perform a variety of genres including light classical music, rock, jazz, and ballroom dance music.

In the welcome aboard show held on the first night of a cruise, a standard line used by many cruise directors makes reference to how well the many nationalities aboard the ship get along. The ship, they say, is a veritable "mini-United Nations," and "the real U.N. could learn a thing or two from us." The reality is quite different, with a near-caste system of officers at the top, staff in the middle, and crew at the bottom. Crew from certain countries (particularly Indonesia and the Philippines) are paid less for doing the same job as their counterparts from other countries (Wood 2000:353-358). Musicians, considered to be staff, are in the middle of this hierarchy.

Showband musicians tend to be young, though older musicians also exist. While 30% of the musicians sampled were under the age of thirty, none were under twenty-five. By contrast, 25% were over forty-five, and 7% were over sixty. Showband musicians are far more likely to be male (83%) than female (17%). They may be of a variety of nationalities, but are traditionally from western countries, such as the United States, Canada, UK, and Australia. In fact, showband musicians are more likely to be from western countries than almost any other group of shipboard employees. In recent years, however, there has been an attempt to employ showband musicians from Southeast Asia (especially the Philippines) and Eastern Europe. However, informants report that, from a musical point of view, this has been generally unsuccessful because of the perceived lack of reading ability among Filipino musicians (though they are considered excellent improvisers) and of improvisational ability among Eastern Europeans (though they are considered excellent readers). However, as the salary of musicians from these countries is lower, it has been successful from the financial point of view of the cruise lines. Cruise ship musicians are also highly educated, with 77% of surveyed musicians holding a tertiary qualification, compared to 27% of U.S. citizens (U.S. Census Bureau 2009) and 24% of Australian (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007). Showband musicians are typically contracted for around four months, though shorter and longer contracts exist. They sign onto ship's articles, meaning that they are governed by the laws of the country of the Flag of Convenience (a process by which a ship is flagged in a country apart from that where the shipping line headquarters is located) and are subject to the discipline of the captain.

The social structure of showband musicians' music culture is controlled and defined by two aspects: musical ability and social skills. Of the two, musical ability is of vastly greater consequence. Cruise ship musicians, like many performing musicians, are harsh judges of talent and impatient with sloppiness, requiring of others the same standards that they demand of themselves. Showband musician Brett Caine gave the following advice to a hypothetical guest entertainer:

> Hey, here's an idea. . . . Take some vocal lessons, learn to play your instrument, study the best comedians and learn from them before you bring your crap-ass little dog and pony show out here to my ship where

> you've spent more money on your freaking wig and make-up than you have on your charts! This ain't supposed to be amateur hour, and you're wasting my time making you look better than you really are! (Interview, 2011)4

While social skills are of secondary importance, they also form a part of the social structure. The highest rung of showband culture is the "great musician, great guy," who enjoys strong support from all players. Lower quality musicians are pegged lower on the structure of shipboard society, even if they are personable. The lowest rung of the social ladder is reserved for those of low social and playing skill.

While musicians generally feel positive about the cruise experience, the continued commodification of their art coupled with the repetitive nature of the music they create can cause long serving cruise ship musicians to become "dark." "Darkness" is an industry term for feelings of general negativity, helplessness in the face of perceived harassment by management, and depression. It is manifested in a darkly humourous and aggressive manner among musicians between themselves. Musicians wear their "darkness" as a badge of pride. It signifies that a musician has been on cruise ships long enough to become dark and is unafraid of consequent harassment by the official shipboard hierarchy. This attitude can encourage other musicians to also develop negative attitudes towards their employment. Showband musician Thomas Mason describes the phenomenon of "darkness" as the result of disappointment in musicians' employment:

> Too many of us believe in some mythical, perfect gig out there that simply doesn't exist, and consequently we get dark about whatever job we're currently on. Normally we'd walk away from the gig at the end of the night, get up the next morning, and go on to the next thing;but on the ship you do it day after day after day. There is no home to go to; you live there. You constantly put up with the petty rules and regulations of a wannabe navy that has little (other than the corporate office) to keep it in check. It's a dictatorship, and what the officers say goes. Combine that with the sheer boredom and monotony that occurs when you don't go out of your way to mix it up, and things get dark fast. (Interview, 2011)

Cruise ship crew, including musicians, have a tendency towards substance abuse, a position tacitly (and sometimes actively) encouraged by cruise ship management.5 In the documentary, *Ships*, a cruise ship officer says,

> [When you arrive onboard] you have two options: either you have fun,or you don't have fun. Go for the first option. Have fun! Enjoy what you do! Be proud of your job. At the end of the day, hang out with your friends. Have fun! Drink! If you don't want to drink, don't drink. But if you want to drink, drink crazy! (Eldib 2011)

Most surveyed musicians agreed that alcohol abuse is prevalent among cruise ship musicians. They cited three main reasons for this phenomenon: general boredom (71%), the need for a coping mechanism for the stresses and anxieties of ship life (24%), the boring and repetitive nature of the gig (14%), and alcohol's use as a social tool (9%).

Officially, any crew member must maintain blood-alcohol content of under 0.05% at all times, considered necessary for efficient handling of the ship in case of an emergency. All shipping lines may at any time run alcohol tests among any of the crew members; however, this is rarely enforced, and may be used to get rid of people or make a point. Showband musician Mike Johnston notes, "If they tested and fired everyone coming out of the crew bar drunk when it closed, they wouldn't have enough people left to run the ship." The officer interviewed in *Ships* states that "on cruise ships, you're supposed to have [no more than] a certain level of alcohol in your blood. But, to be honest with you, it doesn't matter" (Eldib 2011).

The response of onboard management to extreme alcohol abuse varies depending on how useful the performer is. An experienced cruise director, Jack Alexander, recounts a story:

> I'd just become cruise director. I was working with a captain who I'd known for a few years, great guy. There was a singer on the ship who was great, had been with the company about ten years longer than I had and . . . was a notorious drinker—notorious. I sat there in a captain's meetings one day and the captain said to me, . . . "You need to tell him to stop drinking." . . . I said, "No, he's an adult. He can do exactly as he pleases. He knows the rules, and if he wants to break the rules, he can break the rules. He knows the consequences and he'll go home; and it's your decision, Captain, whether you want to enforce the rules and get rid of him or because you like the guy you just let it go." And he was like, "Oh, okay, okay. Well, we'll see." . . . The rules are there and if [musicians] want to drink to excess you can drink, and the sad side of it is, I did it constantly. No, that's not the sad side, because I had fun doing it. (Interview, 2011)

Opportunities for sexual encounters and romance are frequently available aboard cruise ships and can be a strong incentive to undertake shipboard employment. Many crew are young, single, and with few ties on land. The constant turnover of crew provides a flow of possible sexual partners. The opportunity for sexual encounters on cruise ships is so available that crewmembers may become serial monogamists. A female crewmember stated,

> It feels like guys have this mentality that you don't know their past and their histories, so they can sweep you off your feet if they so choose—you know, "you're the only one for me!" But you damn well know that as soon as you get off that boat, there's going to be someone else who is the "only one for them" for that contract. It's the fine print, you know? (Eldib 2011)

Most musicians share cabins, limiting sexual opportunities. Arrangements between roommates may be made, such as a previously determined signal that one is with a sexual partner (for example, a tie or a hat will be left over a door handle) or a roommate negotiating a time during which one musician has the exclusive use of the room. For musicians unwilling (or unable) to engage in onboard sexual activity, in certain locations of the world, particularly the Caribbean and South America, musicians may avail themselves of the services available in brothels. More than other crew, musicians are able to leave the ship for the day, making sexual encounters with prostitutes a viable alternative to onboard sexual encounters.

Ships may encourage consensual sexual encounters between crew, but sexual encounters between passengers and crew are officially forbidden. Crew are not supposed to be in guest cabins at any time. The danger of cultural misunderstandings or misperceptions with consequent legal issues for cruise lines is too great. That said, some crew do undertake illicit sexual encounters with passengers. According to a musician who worked for Carnival Cruise Line and Royal Caribbean Cruise Line, "Sex between crew and passengers happens all the time. Every cruise, every day. Crew go into passenger cabins, and guests go into crew cabins. Both seek it out, passenger and crew" (Klein 2002:64). Such liaisons have been occurring for so long to have become nearly institutionalized. In the 1970s,

> passing through a crew hallway with the Mardi Gras' second-in-command at the time, a senior Carnival executive noticed a young female passenger slipping out of an officer's cabin, obviously after a rendezvous. Even in those swinging days, this was a serious breach of company policy . . . "You see," the executive said, pleased, "She'll be back again." (Garin 2005:103)

Showband musician Daniel Clarke says,

> Lots of lady passengers come on the ship that are mature-age and single. Maybe they've just divorced hubby and they've taken a cruise on the payout. You're not supposed to hook up with passengers, but a lot of guys do. A buddy of mine used to have a thing running with the security. They'd knock on the door and say, "Mr. John, Mr. John, we're coming back in ten minutes" just to give him time to get out and back to his

cabin. (Interview, 2011)

Generally, the showband's relationship with fellow performers is warm, except sometimes towards guest entertainers. Guest entertainers receive large salaries and have shorter contracts and vastly greater privileges than showband musicians, sometimes without the essential musical talent that defines and socially ranks showband musicians. Guest entertainers, on the other hand, can perceive showband musicians as jealous, negative, and complaining. There is some truth to both of these perceptions.

Due to the social status derived from musical ability, talented guest entertainers establish a certain respect among musicians. These performers are lauded for several virtues: short rehearsals, superior charts, acceptable responses from the audiences, and the rare privilege of a night off (if the performer does not need the showband). In some cases, when an act may not be as entertaining as other acts, showband musicians may still support them if they are perceived as good musicians and respectful of the talents of the band. Other guest entertainers are despised among the showband musicians as weak performers with bad charts, who are perceived as using the showband to make themselves look good. Showband musician Joshua Davies reported,

> The feelings of the showband vary quite dramatically towards the entertainers. This depends a great deal on the quality and attitude of both parties. Although I can recall perhaps a dozen entertainers whose shows were of high quality, many were not, and there is a certain amount of resentment in playing for people who seem to have a lower skill set than the band who earn significantly more than you. One such example to me was performing the show of a saxophone player of considerably lower standard than myself. (Interview, 2011)

The social ability of guest entertainers is also important. A weak or unmusical guest entertainer who buys the band a round of drinks after the show to show their appreciation may get a certain grudging respect. However, guest entertainers less than pleasant in their dealings with the band create antipathy among the musicians. This hostility can manifest itself in various ways. A musician may simply play the chart as written (known as "phoning in" a performance) rather than "stepping up to the plate" and playing to the best of one's ability. They may have a few drinks before the main show rather than waiting until afterwards. They may not smile on stage. Joshua Davies notes,

> The great guest entertainers . . . tended more to galvanise the band both on and off the stage, socialising and endearing themselves to the musicians so they wished to perform to their best for these entertainers, who had become their friends. Some entertainers had significant egos, and, in line with most musicians, this is a defense mechanism for their own flaws. In the same way that when I have met Phil Woods, Branford Marsalis, Bob Mintzer, etc., they have not been bitchy, only encouraging. . . . The "bitter and egotistical" kind of guest entertainer is, however, more common on the whole, and the better ones more of a rarity. (Interview, 2011)

One guest entertainer in particular, asked showband musician Daniel Jackson to write some charts for him in 2005. According to Jackson, the payment offered was a case of beer (which would cost twenty-four dollars as opposed to the standard price of $150 per arrangement). When Jackson declined, the guest entertainer grew hostile and said, "Well, it's getting late. You know, I think I'll have a sleep in tomorrow morning. Enjoy your boat drill, boys," crudely rubbing his higher status in the musicians' faces. For many years after that, whenever this particular entertainer played with musicians who knew the story, there was a certain sullenness about the band (Interview, 2011).

Performances, Repertoire, and Spaces

Within the themed cruise entertainment product, venues, as the subencapsulators of the musical experience of the

cruise ship, deserve specific consideration. Vision has long been held to be of significance within in tourism studies (Gillespie 2006; Scarles 2009; Urry 1990; Urry and Larsen 2011), although in recent years other senses have come under scrutiny (Pine and Gilmore 2011; Schofield 2009; Brambilla et al. 2007; Everett 2008; Dann and Jacobsen 2003; Hall and Sharples 2003; Hjalager and Richards 2002). Venues contextualize and physically situate performances utilizing physical and arising aural signs to convey the particular theme of the performance.

Specifically, cruise ship venues are designed to create interaction between the audience and performers. Michael S. Minor et al. note, “The spatial layout and functionality aspects [of performance venues] are of high importance for the service encounter due to the purposeful nature of the service encounter” (2004:10). The design and functioning of a performance space directly affects patrons’ enjoyment of musical performance, and this is nowhere more evident than aboard cruise ships. Onboard theatres and performance spaces are designed with care and consideration. Seats in theatres are usually comfortable, and venue sizes are appropriate to traffic and audience sizes. Often they are themed to the point of becoming fantasies of their genre (Cashman 2013a).

Physical factors uniquely impact upon the design and experience of performing in cruise ship venues. Due to the ever-present possibility of violent movement on cruise ships, chairs in theatres are usually immobile, unable to be moved at a passenger’s whim. From a safety and venue management viewpoint, sudden ship movement cannot be permitted to scatter chairs. Large internal spaces such as the theatre weaken the physical structure of the ship and require large support columns running from the ceiling to the floor, supporting the weight of the upper decks. Such columns can create sightline issues, and venues must be carefully designed to allow the areas behind these columns to be free of seats. Cruise lines construct their entertainment to be inclusive and powerful. Jack Alexander, the previously quoted cruise director, notes that guests must be physically close to the performer; as he says, “up close and personal with the drum kit” (Interview, 2011) Venues are thus designed with little space between the performers and audience, encouraging interaction.6

The Evening Show

The evening show is different from other performances. One important goal of most onboard performances is to attract guests into a venue where they are encouraged to consume alcohol, the second-biggest onboard revenue stream (Becker 2006). However, at the evening production show, guest alcohol consumption occurs only marginally; the musical performance is of primary import, and socialization among guests secondary (the reverse to most shipboard performances). Evening shows exist to provide a focus for shipboard entertainment and to prevent guests, as much as possible, from retiring for the night.

The most typical performance space for showband musicians is the theatre, a venue that forms a representation of an opulent land-based theatre including semiotic signals for high social class and theatricality. The theatre aboard Cunard’s RMS Queen Mary 2 is typical of the cruise ship theatre. The large thrust stage reduces the distance between the performer and audience, encouraging interaction despite the barrier of the high stage. The showband may be placed at the front of the stage in a pit that can be raised or lowered, or (more typically) at the back of the stage. The red hues of the decor and the chandelier above the stage area encourage the perception of the theatre as a special place associated with luxury, high class, and expense.

Production shows are themed choreo-musical performances performed by the onboard cast and showband. They are described as “Vegas-style” (Gulliksen 2008; Wood 2004) or “flesh-and-feathers” (Dickinson and Vladimir 2008:59), but are carefully sanitized to remove anything that may cause offense. Blandness and “cheesiness” are criticisms often levelled at cruise ship entertainment (Minarcek 2011; Ritzer 2010; Clemence 2012). As a single production show is typically performed twice on its designated night to the necessarily broad demographic of guests, production shows need to be of wide appeal and devoid of anything offensive. The latter is dealt with by careful implementation and a general lack of dialogue in shows. The former is dealt with by careful matching of production show themes to the guest demographic.

Theming a production show permits guests to easily contextualize the production show before they have seen it, and the theme is usually clearly identified in the title of the show as well as the onboard advertising; thus, Princess’s *Motor City* is about Motown, Carnival’s *X-Treme Country* performs country music, and Cunard’s *Zing Went the Strings* is about music sung by Judy Garland. Based on the responses of interviewed showband musicians, by far the most common themes revolve around western popular music. Other themes that are significant include musical theatre, jazz, western dance, and film—themes that are somewhat more esoteric, but

certainly of broad interest. Only one musician reported a production show that explicitly addressed world music cultures, and it involved a world tour in popular music; France was represented by a can-can, Italy by Dean Martin's *Mambo Italiano*, and so forth.

In a time frame of forty-five to sixty minutes, a production show needs to present a musical representation of the theme. Necessarily, this involves a sampling of a large number of songs from the genre. P&O UK's production manager Michael Bee says his production shows "are very punchy, very bright, very fast moving." Audiences weaned on television programs such as *The X Factor* and *Strictly Come Dancing* are "used to seeing shortened numbers, medleys, and a lot of visual stimulation" (Quinn 2011:22). These techniques are used to sample large numbers of songs very quickly; for example, the Supremes medley in *Motor City* contains eight different songs sung by The Supremes.

The production show is currently changing. Royal Caribbean has replaced production shows on its larger ships with trimmed Broadway musicals such as *Chicago*, *Hairspray*, and *Saturday Night Fever*. Further, the showband's role in the production show is declining. Several lines now use pre-recorded backing tracks. Some musicians report having to mime production shows, reducing their role from specialist performers to instrument holders.

The guest entertainer show focuses attention on a particular cabaret entertainer who is contracted for a period of time, which may be as short as a few days. The guest entertainer provides arrangements, which are rehearsed in the afternoon. The show itself is performed twice in the evening. The repertoire chosen by the singer should be familiar and entertaining. Songs are chosen for one of the following reasons:

- To showcase the talents of the performers: a pianist may choose an overly technical but accessible work, such as Liberace's "Bumble Boogie," to showcase their technical ability. A singer may sing a "pattersong" far too fast to demonstrate their talent.
- To form a bond with the audience: the relationship between the performer and audience is important, and the performer must be liked. Thus, singing a song with which the audience is familiar and likes will assist that relationship.
- To affirm the audience's appraisal of them as significant artists: a singer may sing songs from the shows they have performed on Broadway or in the West End.

Helen Lewis, a guest entertainer says,

> My goal is very simply (on a cruise ship) to keep them interested, involved, and awake! My rule of thumb generally is to do a mixture of songs they know and comedy songs. Maybe occasionally you can throw in an unknown number, but only if it's extraordinary and there's an interesting story behind it. I think we all use "the tricks" too—picking songs with big and long notes at the end and also pattersongs sung at ridiculously fast tempos. (Interview, 2011)

When evening shows go wrong, they go very wrong. I performed in a comedian's show in an onboard 1100-seat theatre and, because of the perceived old-fashioned show, there were perhaps twenty guests by the end. As the pianist, I was forward of the orchestra, and I watched guests streaming out the exits after perhaps ten minutes. This was a potential disaster for the line, as there were now eleven hundred disgruntled guests onboard who were possibly heading back to their cabins. The show had failed to engage the audience, an essential aspect of cruise ship entertainment.

Evening shows are significant onboard events. As they are designed to engage guests and prevent them from retiring for the night, both types, the production show and guest entertainer show, must be engaging and not overly taxing on audiences. They must be energetic and uplifting, and place guests in a good frame of mind to go out and enjoy the amenities of the ship, even when they are tired from a day in port.

Ballroom Dance

Music to accompany the social and choreographic practice of ballroom dance forms a significant musical repertory performed by showbands. This music is arranged and performed to accompany ballroom dancing, images of which are strongly associated with pre-war passenger shipping. Cunard vessels contain a second showband (known as the “Queens Room Orchestra” that performs this music in a designated ballroom, but most lines co-opt the showband for this role, performing once or twice per cruise in a shipboard venue that has a dance floor.

Venues for ballroom dancing contain a bandstand and seating, but also a dance floor between the audience and band. The onboard ballroom descends from earlier steamship ballrooms, which were themselves recreations of hotel ballrooms of the 1910s and 1920s. As such, modern ballrooms reference these earlier shipboard ballrooms, attempting to recreate the glamour of earlier shipping. They are luxurious and opulent and focus attention on the dancers rather than the musicians; however, they are also increasingly rare on cruise ships.

Onboard ballroom repertoire reflects traditional ballroom dance repertoire and is commonly drawn from popular music of the swing era, though examples drawn from earlier or more recent music are not necessarily excluded as long as they meet the demands of dancers. Cruise ships collect large numbers of arrangements to permit ballroom dancing. One such collection of dance music, called the *Princess Dance Book*, used across the Princess fleet, contains 155 arrangements covering the ten official styles of international ballroom and Latin standard dance. The vast majority of these arrangements are by a few arrangers, including Dave Wolpe (a Florida-based arranger who contributed more than half the charts), Dan Higgins, Rusty Dedrick, and Tom Kubis.

Other Performances

Showband musicians are employed to be versatile, equally able to sightread and improvise, and to temporarily adopt the role of an ensemble or soloist. Such performances may provide an additional performance of a type that exists onboard, or may provide an addition to onboard offerings. In the former instance, such performances may provide additional offerings to the shipboard entertainment schedule, performing small-ensemble jazz in a cruise ship that already has a jazz ensemble onboard, or performing a cocktail piano set additional to that performed by the soloists. While these may vary the original onboard offering (by the addition of horns to a jazz set usually performed by a piano trio, for example), they replicate the purpose of the original set. Showbands are typically jazz-centred ensembles and perform rock—even the tame rock provided on cruise ships—with difficulty. In the case of a small cruise ship the showband may form the defacto ensemble, providing all onboard music. Even in large ships with a range of performers, the showband can be required to provide special shows. In the author’s experience, the showband of the Grand Princess in 2007 was obliged to play popular representations of traditional jazz when leaving New Orleans.

It is important that all such performances are accessible. A shipboard jazz performance, for example, caters to the touristic and popular culture image of the jazz band at sea and provides high-class popular cultural signifiers. However, it tends to be conservative rather than innovative and may include traditional swing works from the 1930s and 1940s, such as “Satin Doll,” “Don’t Get Around Much Any More” and “Take the A Train.” Guests attending a performance will be comfortable with such jazz standards. Musicians, however, often prefer to perform 1950s and 1960s jazz or 1970s jazz-rock, which is of more interest to them. Such jazz-influenced performances conflict with the desires of the audience for listenable tunes that stay in the background. Songs that merge rock or funk beats with a strong melody (such as “Sidewinder” and “Cantaloupe Island”) are performed as a compromise. Similarly, tunes that have a strong melody and musically interesting chord progressions (such as “Blue in Green”) may be used.

Performances that do not adhere to this rule of accessibility may find themselves at odds with the cruise ship aesthetic. Classical performances, a style that signifies the high-status required by cruise ships but which are less accessible to the guests, has the potential to cause problems. Thus, shipboard classical repertoire is drawn from the popular classical canon for that instrument with an emphasis on popular classics. A harp may perform Pachelbel’s Canon, or a pianist may perform Chopin’s Op. 9/2 Nocturne or the first movement of Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata*. However, the illusion of performing classical music is more important and acceptable than the reality. Joshua Davies recounted the following story:

> When I was on the Star Princess . . . we had a classical piano player come on in Europe who was a guy called [name redacted], and he was world class. Carnegie Hall piano player, did concertos with theNew York Philharmonic, had CDs out under his name. And he did a beautiful recital where he played pieces by Liszt and Chopin. He even tried to dumb down his products by doing some Gershwin. He told the story about when Gershwin was interviewing for *Porgy and Bess*, that the first singer came in and sang "you say potayto and I say potayto, you say tomayto and I say tomayto," (laughs). So he really tried. But he got fired that evening because people just walked out of his show. The piano player in the orchestra and myself knew the level of this guy, having spoken to him earlier in the cruise. So we went to the second show, bought a bottle of wine and just sat a couple of rows from the front. Be the time we got to the end, everyone else had left. I'm not exaggerating, literally, by the end of it, only the two of us were sat there, listening to the best pianist I've ever heard. (Interview, 2011)

Other musicians recounted several similar stories. Cruise ship guests are interested in the fabrication of classical music culture, rather than the reality.

Showband performances outside the ballroom and theatre may take place in any venue on a ship. Often they occur in permanent venues such as onboard bars or the atrium. Sometimes they take place in temporarily adopted venues, such as on the lido deck. However, showband performances are more general than others, which are typically related to a particular genre, and so rarely occur in themed venues.[7]

Performances of Music of Destination

While musicians have limited opportunities to stray from the repertoire associated with the constructed and cocooned onboard culture, they do occasionally reference the cruise ship's destinations by the performance of popular music that is associated with the destination. More unusual destinations, with a greater sense of exoticism such as Hong Kong or Mumbai, are more likely to be referenced than more typical cruise destinations such as the Alaskan inside passage or Acapulco.

The showband occasionally references the destination of the cruiseship, albeit in a westernized and popular manner. When performing music for ballroom dance, a showband may play a popular and recognizable song strongly associated with the destination, such as a cha-cha version of "Istanbul (Not Constantinople)" the night before arriving in Turkey, or a quickstep version of "Waltzing Matilda" before arrival in Sydney. When I was performing on a ship out of New Orleans, during sailaway the band would attempt to portray traditional New Orleans jazz through the performance of Dixieland tunes before reverting to the standard repertoire with which we were more comfortable. Such performances are popular representations of the destination best understood within the dominant western culture of cruise ships.

Onboard performances other than those by the showband can represent a fetishized "exotic" culture, but these too are typically drawn from musical styles already popular in western musical cultures. For example, many ships carry a "Caribbean" band. While the performers are usually Caribbean islanders, the repertoire performed by these bands incorporates Caribbean music made famous in the west over the last fifty or so years (Cashman and Hayward 2013). Calypso and 1960s reggae is more common than more recent genres such as dancehall and reggae fusion. These performances, typically occurring beside the pool in the afternoon of a sea day, are constructed to represent "exoticism" and "island culture" rather than local Caribbean culture.

On rare occasions a ship may be in a particularly exotic and unusual port such as Tahiti or Buenos Aires, a place where passengers may require a closer (if mediated) encounter with local culture. Choreomusical performances may take place as part of local tours, or (if the ship is overnighting, itself a rare occurrence, or sailing late), a "local show" may be performed onboard. These performances involving local performers need to be, in the words of one cruise director, "classy and colourful" (Logan 2011) rather than representative, an approach to touristic cultural portrayal that Linnekin describes as the "*Reader's Digest* approach" (1997:232).

Material Culture

Physical objects on cruise ships used for musical purposes are divided into objects directly used in the process of and in response to musical performance (designated musical objects) and those used indirectly (non-musical objects). The provision of instruments varies by instrument. If instruments are portable enough, musicians supply them; this group includes horn players, guitarists and electric bass players. However, ships always supply pianos, keyboards, and drum kits due to their impracticality as luggage, and they may also supply upright basses. However, this can result in performance on old and poorly maintained instruments. Drummers often choose to bring their own cymbals, as ship-provided cymbals are usually very poor quality due to shipboard economic priorities and occasional contact with sea air. The decision between playing a known instrument that musicians have to transport themselves and playing an unknown instrument that makes for an unpleasant performance is a difficult one for musicians, but one that is usually made by cruise lines.

The problem is exacerbated for pianists, who are at the mercy of large and heavy shipboard instruments, and is compounded by cruise lines regarding pianos less as musical instruments and more as pieces of furniture imbued with semiotic meaning. Most modern ships are equipped with Kawai or Yamaha mid-size grand pianos in performance venues. The constant motion of the ship causes shipboard pianos to go out of tune more quickly than land-based pianos; however, maintenance can be haphazard as pianos are maintained in turnaround ports at the request of the musical director, and in some parts of the world it can be hard to find competent piano tuners. Out-of-tune pianos are consequently endemic on cruise ships. Static pianos are held in place by piano chucks that are attached to the floor of the ship. Stage pianos that must be moved are held in place only by the friction of the locked wheels of the piano trolley.8 Ship designers place grand pianos for their visual properties as much as or more than their musical properties. A pianist in a tuxedo playing a beautiful, shiny, black piano is an important image for cruise ships. Some pianos are placed for visual reasons rather than performance and are rarely played. Performance on poorly maintained and poorly placed instruments can make quality performance difficult.

Musical notations form another designated musical artifact. Showbands, formal dance bands, and classical ensembles all use notated music. Charts are typically provided by the cruise line or by the leader of the ensemble. Charts used by the showband are usually stored in large black folders in a central location, and are the responsibility of the individual musician. Production show charts remain in order from one show to the next, allowing the musicians to quickly turn to the next chart. Dance-set charts are usually maintained in alphabetical order and are “pulled,” (or physically ordered so as to allow uninterrupted accessibility to arrangements in the correct order) before playing, a process that may take fifteen minutes. After the performance, these are carefully replaced in the folder in the correct order. Besides the instruments, these notations form the most important physical artifacts for musicians.

The amount of performance space required on the bandstand varies from player to player. Pianists, drummers, and keyboardists need the most space with their large instruments. Bass players, guitarists, and trumpeters have a relatively small “footprint.” Trombonists need space in front to allow for the slide, and saxophonists need both space in front to hold their instruments, and space to the side to place their doubles. Onboard sound and lighting equipment are important to cruise ship musicians who wish to be heard over the guest conversation. Even relatively small venues such as Carnival’s piano lounge will have a built-in entertainment system. Performance spaces and equipment must also be designed so as not to affect the ship’s buoyancy (Dickinson and Vladimir 2008:54).

Conclusion

At the start of this paper, I argued that cruise tourism (as other forms of post-tourism) utilizes a different model of touristic engagement; unlike many other forms of leisure tourism, the cruise industry does not seek to construct a representation of the destination. To a large extent, it rejects the destination and constructs a play area within which tourists engage in a constructed manner. To Robert E. Wood (2004), cruise ships form a deterritorialized destination, one that has had all traces of actual physical and cultural location excised, designed to focus guests’ attention on the ship rather than the destinations, and encourage guests to consume, and creating, in George Ritzer’s words, “cathedrals of consumption” (2010:9).9 The cruise ship experience does not reflect reality, but creates a hyperreality that, more than distorting the cultures through which the ship travels, attempts to sanitise and

expunge them from the ship. The vessel forms a barrier that separates tourists from the physical and cultural environments through which they travel.

Onboard musical performance colludes in this cocooning, constructing a homogenized and bland western music culture, and enveloping guests in the familiar and western rather than the different and local. Musical performances are typically by musicians of western nationalities performing cosmopolitan western popular music. This is particularly so with the showbands, which, made up of predominantly of American, Canadian, British, and Australian musicians, present the carefully managed production and guest entertainer shows.

In a recent study of tourist motivation for undertaking a cruise, Hung and Petrick (2011) found that the most important reasons cited were self-esteem and social recognition (e.g., “I cruise to do something that impresses others”). Learning and discovery (e.g., “I cruise to experience other cultures”) were much further down the list. Within this motivation lies the key to understanding the postmodern tourism product of cruise ship music. The cruise industry demographic wishes to be pampered and to retreat from daily life in the context of a safe vacation, albeit one that is seen by others as exotic. The cruise industry responds to this need by providing huge mobile holiday resorts that cruise between exotic destinations with which cruise guests need not actually engage. Instead, tourists experience a relaxing, undemanding, and fun entertainment product in an encapsulated and fabricated environment rather than a mediated cultural encounter. Guests that engage more exclusively with this onboard experience—which includes live musical performances—are more likely to spend larger amounts of money and contribute to the profitability and success of the cruise industry.

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- 1. GRT stands for Gross Register Tonnage, a measure of the permanently enclosed volume of the ship. One GRT is equal to 100 cubic feet (2.83m2).
- 2. Between 50 and 80% of guests partake in shore excursions (Klein 2005:93-95). Ocho Rios in Jamaica is one example of a carefully-controlled tourist environment offshore (Garin 2005:276).
- 3. It should be noted that some lines, notably Costa Crociere, Iberocruceros, and Croisières de France do cater to non-English speakers. However, they still represent a western culture.
- 4. Names given in this article are pseudonymous as requested by some of the participants.

- 5. On Regent Seven Seas Cruises between 2007 and 2010, musicians received a $100 per month drinking allowance to be used in passenger areas.
- 6. For more on cruise ship venues as spaces for engagement, see Cashman 2012.
- 7. See Cashman 2013b for a discussion of the role of theming in cruise ship venues.
- 8. The researcher had the experience of playing a guest entertainer's show when the ship hit an unexpected wave, and the piano started rolling towards the audience. He managed to hold the piano until the technical staff ran onstage to assist.
- 9. The concept of deterritorialization been discussed by Appadurai (1990) and Deleuze and Guattari (1972).

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