

# EDITORIAL

## IN DEFENCE OF FESTIVALS

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*The fiesta was really started. It kept up day and night for seven days. The dancing kept up, the drinking kept up, the noise went on. The things that happened could only have happened during a fiesta. Everything became quite unreal finally and it seemed as though nothing could have any consequences. It seemed out of place to think of consequences during the fiesta. All during the fiesta you had the feeling, even when it was quiet, that you had to shout any remark to make it heard. It was the same feeling about any action. It was a fiesta and it went on for seven days.*

The fiesta of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) set the scene for this issue of *Riffs*. The pages that follow consider the liminal and the repetitive, the real and the unreal, time and perception, noise, and the experience of the festival. In a journal dedicated to experimental engagements with music, this theme is apt. The festival experience is a strange one; real and unreal. Forced into tents and muddy fields, tins of beans and all-day drinking (if not something stronger) become a strange and liberating normality; unwashed bodies and eclectic 'festival clothes' (brought out just for the occasion) can transform even the most placid soul into a demon dancer. And the music. Forced up against another disparate set, of sharing that experience in the sun, rain, snow, wind, with those that won't remember and those for whom this moment will be indelibly etched, to be recalled in claims of belonging; that "I was there". The cornerstone of musical histories.

To study music festivals in their myriad forms is to study music culture in its most transient but iconic state. The boundaries of pleasure and work meet, and are fraught with peril. 'Festival ethnography' a sitting duck to those bemoaning the flippant excesses of academics wont to spend taxpayers money on good-times and naval-gazing. Yet as these pages will attest, much can be learnt from the seemingly consumerist and escapist nature of festival attendance. Hemingway's fiesta offers the increasingly nihilistic characters seven days of the inconsequential and the unreal, a brief respite from the realities of their entangled and emotionally complicated lives. The blur of the fiesta brings a pause to their problems. And so it must do for some festival (or fiesta) goers. Yet, in his iconic study of carnival in Brazil, anthropologist Roberto DeMatta (1979) lifts away the veil of chaos and disruption and demonstrates the clear social function that carnival plays in defining the roles and rules of Brazilian society. Any of us who have found ourselves changed on the silent journey back home know the true power of the liminal, of repetition, the strange/unreal, and the noise.

The sheer size, scale and scope of festivals can act to intensify the musical experience, shocking all of our senses into living with the music. If only for a couple of days, our sole focus is to negotiate the people, places and sounds of the festival space/place, carving our own paths into and through them. We create our own narratives of these musical experiences and we make sense of them to ourselves and others, both at the time and upon reflection. For who knows what will be remembered as a pivotal moment when all we wanted to do was to dance and to sing.