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“Still Here Dancing With the Groo Grux King”:
Dave Matthews Band, Tumblr, and an Ethnomusicology of Mainstream Popular Music

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Music

by

Elizabeth Maxson Wood

June 2015

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Dedication

For my dad, Keith

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“Still Here Dancing With the Groo Grux King”:
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by

Elizabeth Maxson Wood

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Music
University of California, Riverside, June 2015
Dr. Jonathan Ritter, Chairperson

Drawing on fan studies scholarship and ethnomusicological methodology, this thesis argues for online ethnography as a productive approach to the study of mainstream popular music. At a time when fan experiences encompass both physical and online worlds, and access to artists is restricted by their very popularity, I argue that online ethnographic research benefits both ethnomusicology and fan studies, as well as fields beyond those disciplines. Through online ethnography, researchers connect with fans as they check in with other fans, and thereby acquire knowledge about fan networks, modes of communication, and topical interests related to the subject of their fandom. To demonstrate, I focus on Dave Matthews Band, a popular US-based jam band, utilizing online ethnography to examine how fans educate each other about and commemorate the 2008 loss of band saxophonist LeRoi Moore. By connecting on Tumblr, a social blogging platform, and sharing posts during the periods when the band is not touring, Dave Matthews Band fans extend their fan experiences beyond attending concerts on the

annual summer tours and remind each other throughout the year about LeRoi's importance and absence.

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Introduction

Drawing on fan studies scholarship and ethnomusicological methodology, this thesis argues for online ethnography as a productive and even necessary approach to the study of mainstream popular music. At a time when fan experiences encompass both physical and online worlds, and access to artists is restricted by their very popularity, I argue that online ethnographic research benefits both ethnomusicology and fan studies, as well as fields beyond those disciplines. Since the rise of the Internet in general and social media in particular, the lived experiences of fans in the United States and Europe have taken two formats. The first, what I would call the analog format, constitutes the IRL (in real life) practices and experiences of fans. These include going to concerts, meeting other fans at shows, joining fan clubs, and so on. These were already common practices before the rise of personal computers and smartphones, and have been rendered no less important by the influence of the Internet. However, the second format of fan experiences are what I call digital lived experiences, including taking part in online discussion groups, joining fan communities on social media, reading and commenting on blogs, and following artists on social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. These practices have caused fan experiences to extend beyond the analog moments, which generally occur only a few times per year, to a more constant form of fan practice via the digital world.

While there has been significant prior research conducted on fandoms, this body of work tends to focus primarily on the analog aspect of fan experiences (e.g. Cavicchi 1998; Jenkins 1992). However, the extension of analog, yearly fan practices into the digital, and almost daily, format creates a new realm of fan experiences that have yet to be seriously examined by scholars. I argue that through online ethnography, researchers access this

digital world of fandom as they connect with fans, who in turn check in with other fans, and thereby acquire knowledge about fan networks, modes of communication, and topical interests related to the subject of their fandom. To demonstrate this thesis, I focus here on Dave Matthews Band (DMB), a popular US-based jam band, utilizing online ethnography to examine in particular how fans commemorate and educate each other about the 2008 loss of DMB saxophonist LeRoi Moore. By connecting on Tumblr, a social blogging platform, and sharing posts during the periods when the band is not touring, I show how Dave Matthews Band fans extend their fan experiences beyond attending concerts on the annual summer tours, and remind each other throughout the year about LeRoi's importance and absence.

Examining these issues requires thinking first about how other music scholars from various fields have looked at these issues in the past. Earlier in the twentieth century, Theodor Adorno approached questions about popular culture and power with a broad lens, thinking in terms of society as a whole. Adorno theorized the "culture industry" as something that works to produce mindless consumers who obey the will of the elite (Adorno and Horkheimer 1993). In the fifty years since the publication of Adorno's work, scholars have debated his conclusions. While Adorno convincingly establishes that the production of "culture" often functions as an industry, many scholars argue that his analysis precludes any discussion of the agency of consumers to pick and choose what they listen to, or to resist what later scholars would call the "mainstream." Moreover, Matt Hills points out in his book *Fan Cultures* that all too often "the fan" is theorized in opposition to "the consumer," with Adorno's work for support, even though fans are also consumers (2002). More useful, he argues, is an analysis that considers the dual role fans play as both active and resistive consumers of the product created by Adorno's culture industry. For Hills, fans act as

selective consumers whose “appropriation of a text is . . . an act of ‘final consumption’” (2002: 35). Thus, even as fans resist the “industry,” they act as consumers, but that act of consumption is in itself an act of resistance. This kind of consideration, when applied to the questions of popular music which this thesis addresses, can allow fans of mainstream popular culture to be resistive of the hegemonizing effects of mass culture while still acknowledging their role in the machine that continues to produce such material.

Sociologists have also addressed the issue of how to study popular music. Many scholars in the British school of popular music studies come from sociology and have approached the issue of popular music with more quantitative methods. These scholars collect information through surveys and other means of hard data collection, and draw conclusions from the results. For example, Cornel Sandvoss and Paul Stoneman from the Department of Sociology at the University of Surrey are conducting a project which aims to quantify the cultural value applied to various forms of cultural expression in order to provide a means for comparison between forms (Sandvoss and Stoneman 2015). Sandvoss and Stoneman distribute surveys to a mass population in the UK, then select a number of participants for follow-up interviews. Although this methodology includes interviews, and thus, some subjectivity, the focus is on attaining objective, quantitative results. Such quantitative methods seek to give fans a voice, as opposed to the kind of top-down analysis of Adorno, and serve to gather the largest sample size possible, thereby producing an analysis of a broad cross-section of society, the results of which are generally valid. However, the broad focus of such methods does not always address or even attend to those individuals (or small groups of individuals) who deviate from what the general population think, although there are scholars who focus on those pockets of difference.

Finally, ethnomusicologists have increasingly studied popular music, primarily popular music of non-Western societies, since the 1980s. Influenced by anthropological methods, ethnomusicologists typically take an ethnographic approach to popular music. Scholars like Joshua Tucker and Martin Stokes, for instance, focus intently on a specific site of music making (Peru and Turkey, respectively), and do extended fieldwork in those countries, complete with interviews with industry personnel, musicians, and fans. In contrast to a sociological approach to popular music studies, such ethnographic work is necessarily narrowly focused and seeks only to examine a specific person, place, or genre in great depth, rather than take a broad look at the musicians and fans of a particular region or genre. However, this methodology is rarely applied to Western popular music studies, despite ethnomusicology's claim that the field incorporates music from all over the world (supposedly including the U.S., Canada, and Europe) as well as popular music studies' claim that the field incorporates ethnography. Moreover, in both ethnomusicology and popular music studies, the in-depth ethnography that characterizes an ethnomusicological approach to popular music is rarely applied to mainstream Western popular music, which I define as music that reaches across social groups, and artists that carry name recognition even among people who do not listen to that music. Furthermore, "mainstream" often carries negative connotations and serves as a foil against which people can define their interests as subcultural or unique. Mainstream in this sense is synonymous with the unoriginal, which could be one of the reasons academics have traditionally shied away from studying it, despite the insights that stand to be gleaned from examining cultural products that have significant social value on a mass scale, i.e. beyond particular cultural subgroups.

I argue that the tools of ethnomusicology, especially ethnography, in conjunction with the theories and methods already set in place by popular music scholars from other fields, can address these issues of access to the stars, recognizing agency, and the shallow yet broad research into fandoms that is typically conducted. Through in-depth interviews and participant observation, ethnography can provide a more comprehensive look into how particular fandoms organize, maintain, and express themselves. This approach is necessarily more specific than the broad cross-sections examined by more sociological methods, yet can provide valuable depth and individuality that is impossible with wide spread surveys and statistics. Moreover, I argue that online ethnography can be a useful tool towards such an examination of popular music fandom, as the Internet allows people from all over the world to connect virtually on particular websites, thus creating a community that can be accessed from anywhere with relative ease. Especially with Dave Matthews Band and similar groups, whose identities revolve around live performance, the circulation of materials online extends the fan experience throughout the year beyond the live tours. This element of fandom is one that can only be studied through online ethnography and is one that often shapes other elements, like concert attendance. Many of the tools of traditional ethnography are still applicable in online ethnography, like participant observation, and therefore the researcher is able to conduct her work after a fairly short period of assimilation where she must learn how to navigate the site and determine her target population. However, online ethnography, because of the capability to access people across geographical boundaries, as well as the ability for those people to remain relatively anonymous, presents benefits and challenges beyond those of traditional ethnography.

In this thesis, I argue that through online ethnography, ethnomusicological tools can be combined with those of popular music studies to study mainstream popular music and yield results beyond those attainable by either field alone. I begin with a more thorough examination of the theories and methodologies applied towards the study of popular music, and fandoms in particular, by several fields. I explore cultural studies scholarship, sociology-based scholarship, and ethnomusicology in order to demonstrate how my ideas will enhance the existing body of scholarship. I then introduce the group I will use for my case study, Dave Matthews Band, and explore how their longevity as a group, their musical style, and their emphasis on liveness make them an exemplary case study for how we might introduce ethnomusicological methodologies into the study of mainstream popular music. I examine their online presence and their fan base on Tumblr, a popular social blogging platform, and explain how ethnography can be, and needs to be, applied online to study fandoms. I conclude with a case study of how fans educate each other about and commemorate one of the seminal moments in the history of the group, the death of saxophonist LeRoi Moore. The connections made in this final case study are based on information attained primarily through online ethnography, and demonstrate the kinds of results that are thereby possible.

Theory and Methodological Questions

Fan studies emerged as a distinct subfield in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Emblematic of the first wave of fan studies, Henry Jenkins (1992) worked to deconstruct the “fanatic” stereotype associated particularly with Star Wars fans and to reconstruct them instead as agentive. Fans, he argued, were not passive, obsessive consumers of material fed to them by the mainstream media. Rather, fans actively engaged with their favorite TV

shows and created new material that responded to and sometimes critiqued or contradicted the media's version. The second wave of fan studies, in the late 1990s, took a more critical look at the fans and argued that there are multiple levels of fandom and that these fandoms, often unintentionally, worked to replicate the same social hierarchies found in the mainstream (Sullivan 2013: 206). Fan studies as a field spans across media studies, with many of the first studies, like Jenkins, focusing on television and film audiences.

However, popular music studies also focuses on fandom, beginning most notably with Daniel Cavicchi's 1998 book *Tramps Like Us*. Rather than addressing Bruce Springsteen directly, Cavicchi's study focused on Springsteen fans and fan experiences. Through surveys distributed on electronic mailing lists and message boards, as well as through follow-up interviews and concert attendance, Cavicchi collected fan stories that reinforced the agentive view of fandoms proposed by Jenkins, discussed above. He sought not to generalize fan culture but to examine how one specific group of people conducted themselves and made meaning out of their fan experiences. Moreover, Cavicchi's subject position as a Bruce fan himself departed from other studies done by scholars who were not already fans. Being a fan allowed Cavicchi's informants to relate to him in a different way and gave Cavicchi access to the community that could have been difficult to acquire otherwise. Cavicchi's status as a "scholar-fan," as outlined in Hills' *Fan Cultures*, discussed briefly above, also further complicates the distinctions between fans and academics that seems to exist in many scholarly works about fandoms, whereby the two categories of fan and scholar tend to characterize themselves as mutually exclusive, despite the many overlaps between them (Hills 2002: 2). One recent example of this divide is found in Melissa A. Click, Hyunji Lee, and Holly Willson Holladay's 2013 article-length study discussing Little

Monsters (Lady Gaga fans), in which they examined how “Little Monsters identified with and made sense of their relationships to Lady Gaga” (367). As with Cavicchi, Click et al. distributed surveys online to recruit participants and followed up with interested individuals for more extensive interviews, but they did not self-identify as fans. Finally, Mark Duffett has worked on mainstream popular culture, as demonstrated in his 2013 book *Understanding Fandom*, which I will come back to later for his discussion of fan practices. In addition, Duffett has written extensively for *Popular Music and Society*, a journal focusing on mainstream popular culture and fandom. In his “Introduction” to the journal’s third edition of its thirty-sixth volume (2013), he draws on publicized stories of fans of Justin Bieber and Britney Spears to outline new directions in popular music fandom that fan studies has yet to explore. I will draw on the above discussions of the objectives and methodologies of fan research as outlined by Cavicchi, Click, Lee, and Holladay, and Duffett, to examine what kinds of questions fan studies scholars are asking and how they are answering them.

Questions

First, much of the scholarship on fans addresses demographics, even if that is not the primary aim of the study. Cavicchi discusses his “insider” status among Bruce Springsteen fans, but complicates that status by pointing out that not all of the fans he interviewed (and not all fans, period) had the same class, age, and gender identification as he did, and thus would have varying experiences as fans. Cavicchi does not mention race, however, and rather identifies his informants by name, age, and occupation. We might surmise that the majority of the people he spoke with were white, based on Springsteen’s image, but this is never addressed in the book. Later studies, including Click, Lee, and Holladay’s, detail the demographics of their pool of informants: “mostly white and mostly American, equally male

and female, and equally gay and straight. They ranged in age from 14 to 53 (the mean was 21.67)” (Click et al. 2013: 367). While this information is useful in situating the reader in relation to the people they are reading about, we are rarely told anything beyond this basic information. Scholars do not seem eager to explore what it might mean that a survey about Lady Gaga (a very popular, mainstream artist) distributed across various online platforms turned up a mostly white fandom, even though gender and sexual orientation were fairly evenly split.

Another common issue explored by fan studies scholars is the matter of fan identification, or how fans identify with the artist.¹ This is a critical part of fan studies that reflects the agentive move of the first wave – a fandom is not limited to the traits and characteristics ascribed to it by the media and others, but is rather defined individually and collectively by members of that fandom. Among Bruce Springsteen fans, Cavicchi asserts that “being a fan is about having a special feeling of ‘connection’” with the artist, which “means making the music a deeply felt part of one’s life” (1998: 40-41). Similarly, Little Monsters are “‘obsessed,’ ‘hardcore,’ and ‘dedicated,’ and [have] made their interest in Lady Gaga a ‘way of life’” (Click et al. 2013: 368). In addition, fans often distinguish between “fans” and “audience” a distinction that indicates an awareness of varying levels of fan involvement as promoted by the second wave of fan studies. Springsteen fans identify themselves in opposition to the nonfan audience at a show (Cavicchi 1998: 86), and Little Monsters see themselves as “more engaged than lesser-invested Lady Gaga fans” (Click et al. 2013: 368). As Cavicchi notes, however, being a fan is a deeply personal experience and

¹ The artist or band around which a fandom evolves is often called the “fan object.” While this is a useful term in some aspects and might apply well to TV shows or films, I find its use when talking about celebrities to be

journey, and that personal aspect complicates much of the seemingly straightforward distinctions made by fans and researchers.

A key part of identifying as a fan is practicing fandom. Primary to this, as described by Cavicchi, is the “becoming-a-fan” story, a specific genre of discourse among fans (1998: 42). These stories help fans identify each other and are often used as introductions or ice breakers between newly acquainted fans (ibid). Cavicchi notes two general processes that fans follow: the sudden change, where a fan is indifferent, but then there is a moment of change, followed by intense listening; and the volitional-gradual process, where a fan’s relationships with other fans (whether family members, friends, or significant others) influences their increasing movement into fandom. Once someone identifies as a fan, other practices maintain their experience. Going beyond the standard practices of going to concerts and buying albums, Duffett theorizes these practices in his book *Understanding Fandom* as three categories: practices of connection (with the goal of meeting or interacting with the artist), practices of appropriation (where fans take the product – the music, in this case – and create new works from it), and practices of performance (where fans actively perform fandom through engagement with the music, whether through attending concerts or purchasing merchandise or creating fan videos that showcase themselves). This again reflects the first and second waves of fan studies, first by constructing fans as agentive (creators of their own work and relationships) and second by recognizing that fans engage in varied practices – a fandom is not a homogenous group. Moreover, not all fandoms engage in all three of these practices, as I will discuss further below.

Finally, an important question in fan studies is the way fans conceptualize their relationship to the star.² A consistent theme throughout the literature is how fans see artists as friends or family. Cavicchi notes that Springsteen fans

report feeling an odd closeness to [Springsteen], referring to him by the familiar 'Bruce,' as if he were some sort of close friend whom they have known for many years. Indeed, despite Springsteen's singing to a large audience composed of many people, fans feel that he is singing to them personally (1998: 52).

Click et al. discuss a similar phenomenon with Little Monsters, except that in this scenario Lady Gaga is seen as a mother figure, a leader, or a mentor. She is referred to as "Mother Monster," the protector and "birther" of the group (2013: 371). In both of these cases, it is clear that despite many of these fans having never met the artist, they still feel a sense of familiarity and intimacy. However, scholars have not explored *why* this happens. We might speculate that in Gaga's case it is because of the perceived level of access to her through social media, but in Springsteen's case this is not applicable. Rather, the intimacy his fans feel likely stems from the content of the music he produces and his image as "a genuine, down-to-earth person" (Cavicchi 1998: 64). Although thoroughly examining the nature of this difference is beyond the scope of this paper, I would like to keep this frame in mind during the discussion of my own work below. Before getting to that, though, I turn to a discussion of the various methodologies that fan studies scholars, as well as scholars doing online ethnography not related to fan studies, have used to collect information.

² I intentionally leave out the other side of this equation – how stars conceptualize their relationship to the fans – because I have not come across any studies that address this issue. All studies focus on bottom-up relationship building.

Methods

One of the simplest ways fan studies scholars recruit informants is by distributing surveys or advertisements. Cavicchi discusses how he posted advertisements in online forums and Bruce Springsteen listservs to recruit people during the first part of his research. During a later phase, he also distributed a survey in Springsteen fanzines, a copy of which he includes in the appendix of the book. This survey, he explains, “was not meant as a systematic survey; I wanted to use it instead as a form of contact, a way to introduce myself and meet others” (Cavicchi 1998: 15). This use of the survey departed significantly from previous uses of the survey – whereas surveys are typically used to collect and average data to generate a “typical” answer, Cavicchi’s survey functioned instead to recruit participants and to collect basic data on which further, more personal interviews could be based. Thus, we can see how research tools can function as both a method of information acquisition as well as an icebreaker or rapport builder. Key to this process, however, are the follow-up interviews, which Cavicchi conducted with several of the respondents from his survey. One-on-one interviews are the only way to get the more personal information that characterizes individual fan experiences. Had Cavicchi relied only on observations and the results from his questionnaire, *Tramps Like Us* might have turned out to be a very different book. Similarly, Click, Lee, and Holladay put out a call for participants on various fan sites and blogs, with a link to an online survey. Participants who indicated they would be willing to conduct a follow-up interview were contacted individually via phone or video messaging software (Skype or Google Chat, for example). Again, these follow-up interviews functioned to give the project access to more personal experiences.

Click, Lee, and Holladay's use of online and digital tools raise an important point that is central to this paper. Fan communities exist online and access to these communities can provide new insights into how people make meaning from the music and the personal connections created from being part of the fandom. However, René Lysloff raises two important issues in conducting ethnography in such communities: "the nature of 'presence' in a disembodied medium such as the Internet" and how a locality and community might be established in a medium that has no location (2003: 234). He examines these issues through an ethnography of an online music/"mod" community and utilizes chat, instant messaging, and email to talk to his interlocutors. Lysloff effectively becomes a part of the community he is studying, much as a traditional ethnographer might go live in the community she is studying. He argues that "although the Internet is made up of IP (Internet Protocol) addresses that are unlocalizable in observable space, it is nonetheless *all about place*. It is an imaginary universe filled with a multitude of places" (ibid: 244, emphasis in the original). Indeed, even the terminology we use when discussing the Internet indicates that it is a place: we "go" or "navigate" to a webpage, we spend time there, we "go back" or "search." If websites are places, then, it follows that communities can be built and exist there.

Tom Boellstorff, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and T.L. Taylor, in *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Methods*, reinforce this point through a discussion of how one might actually conduct ethnography in these Internet communities. Boellstorff et al. maintain, like Lysloff, that ethnography can be conducted in similar ways to an IRL (in real life) ethnography:

Like many scholars, on occasion we conversationally use phrases like ‘digital ethnography,’ ‘virtual ethnography,’ or ‘internet ethnography.’ However, we find these labels misleading overall because ethnographic methodology translates elegantly and fluidly to virtual worlds. We see ourselves as ethnographers conducting research in virtual worlds, not as ‘virtual ethnographers’...The successful deployment of ethnographic methods in virtual worlds is, for us, a ringing endorsement of their enduring power to illuminate novel dimensions of human experience. (2012: 4)

They argue for participant observation as a useful tool, wherein the researcher creates an online presence, observes how people interact, and participates in discussions. Moreover, our subject position (age, ethnicity, gender, political leanings, and so on) characterizes our work as it would in the analog world. Just as in real life Boellstorff et al. recommend in some cases doing participant observation to learn the lay of the land (so to speak) before conducting interviews. In virtual worlds, some background knowledge of the best practices and possibilities in that world can help frame and inform interview questions to be as useful as possible. Finally, Boellstorff et al. recommend collecting chatlogs, screencaps (which function the same way as photographs), video, and audio. While Boellstorff et al. focus primarily on establishing virtual ethnography as similar to real world ethnography, they do occasionally offer ways the two are different. For example, and importantly for this study, virtual communities are not geographically (and I would add temporally, as users can interact presently with past materials) bound. Rather, communities are configured in different ways depending on the software or platform that the virtual world is built on. This can pose challenging questions to an ethnographic study of a virtual world: namely, if the community is not bound in the same way it is in real life, how do researchers discuss where it begins and ends and who it includes?

Wendy Hsu (2012) goes one step further and discusses how she used an API (Application Programming Interface) bot to crawl through the MySpace page of the bands

she was working with to gather information about fans' geographical location, which allowed her to uncover social patterns that she otherwise would not have noticed. Essential to this consideration of what to capture is the temporality of the Internet: researchers cannot assume that the material that is on a certain page will still be there in a week's time. Therefore, they must collect as much as possible as it happens in real time with date and time stamps and URLs, although these may not be active when they try to return to the site.

Once everything has been collected, virtual ethnographers must analyze and interpret it, just as a real-world ethnographer would do. Of course they can do this analysis qualitatively, examining what people say and how they interact with their virtual surroundings. However, they can also analyze digital material quantitatively. For example, Click et al. state that in order to identify common themes in the interviews they collected, they transcribed everything, and then created a code and framework for analyzing the data. They are not explicit about what exactly this coding entailed, but I can assume that it involved running the transcripts through some sort of software to draw out numerical representations of the content. Hsu offers other methods for quantitative analysis of data, utilizing software and coding programs. Specifically, she discusses how data might be literally mapped out and interpreted in regards to geography – for instance, by mapping out the locations of the fans of the bands she worked with, she found an unexpectedly large population of fans in Indonesia, which opened up a new line of inquiry for her work (2012). Quantitative methods like these enable us to retrieve new kinds of data from our collections, so that we might see new patterns or lines of inquiry to be pursued in follow-up, and, when taken as a composite with qualitative analysis, create richer insights.

An Ethnomusicological Turn Towards Pop Music

I see a need for an ethnomusicological approach to mainstream popular music because such an approach can contribute to an interdisciplinary dialogue between ethnomusicology and popular music studies that would be useful for both fields. Popular music's primarily sociological and theoretical approach can offer methodologies and theories on which ethnomusicologists can base their research. Scholars like Adorno and Chomsky have already laid the basis for a critical look at mass mediated culture, and fan studies scholars like Jenkins, Cavicchi, and Duffett, as discussed above, have provided a framework for analyzing fan practices and experiences. Ethnomusicology, on the other hand, offers a more inclusive focus for popular music studies by prompting the field to examine popular musics outside of the UK and the US. More importantly, though, ethnomusicology's focus on ethnography as a methodology offers popular music studies a way to take a more qualitative approach to its work. Rather than focusing primarily on survey and questionnaire responses and the tangible results of fan engagements with an artist or group, ethnography offers a way to understand fan experiences and the ways fans make meaning from the music they listen to – essentially, the intangible results of fan engagements with an artist or group. Through participant observation and research ethnomusicologists can strive to understand teenage Taylor Swift fans just as they strive to understand punk vocalists in Mexico City (Tatro 2014).

In summary, I argue that online ethnography can help solve the issues of access to fans and artists for ethnographic research in popular music and can offer insights into popular music fandom beyond what is often written about in popular music studies. In the pages that follow, I specifically explore Tumblr, a social blogging platform, as a site for fan studies

ethnography, and I argue that by examining the ways Tumblr offers its users access to celebrities and the ways fans organize themselves into communities, researchers can uncover insights about how fans relate to each other and to their favorite artists. As such, I explore how Tumblr can function as an educational tool that works to assimilate new fans into a cross-generational fandom through the practice of shared and spontaneous memorials.

Dave Matthews Band

Dave Matthews Band (DMB) is an all-male rock/jam band formed in 1991 at a small bar called Miller's, in Charlottesville, Virginia. They quickly rose to fame, making their first national appearance on the *Late Show* with David Letterman in 1995. The band includes: frontman Dave Matthews, who sings lead vocals, plays rhythm guitar, and is responsible for writing the majority of the group's songs; drummer Carter Beauford, who also lends backup vocals on many songs; violinist Boyd Tinsley; and bassist Stefan Lessard. The original group also included saxophonist LeRoi Moore, whose death in 2008 prompted recurring waves of fan commemorations and memorials, which are the subject of this case study. The group has also had peripheral members over the years who have performed with the band on tours and studio recordings, but today only three appear regularly with the group: lead guitarist Tim Reynolds, trumpeter Rashawn Ross, and saxophonist Jeff Coffins, who took over LeRoi's role.³ The band's style is hard to define due to their unique instrumentation and their incorporation of jazz, rock, and extended improvisations, referred to as jams. In addition, Carter's drumset is one of the most complex of any rock group, boasting eight

³ I refer to band members by their first names throughout the rest of this paper in order to reflect the familiar nature with which fans talk about the group.

drums and sixteen cymbals, as well as auxiliary percussion equipment such as timbales, jam blocks, cow bells, granite block, wind chimes, shakers, and an acupad that triggers various sounds electronically. Rashawn often switches between trumpet and flugel horn, and LeRoi (and now Jeff) plays baritone, alto, and soprano saxophone, as well as flute. Each musician improvises across these instruments at each show, resulting in a repertoire of songs that is never performed the same way twice.

DMB's emphasis has always been on live performance. Since their debut, they have released only nine studio albums, but fourteen commercial live albums and thirty-two albums as part of their Live Trax series, which is a series of live albums that are generally only available through the band's online store, i.e., not commercially released. While the band's albums are fairly popular, with an estimated 30 million records sold worldwide, they are most famous for their annual summer tours. Every year since their start, with the exception of 2011, they have done at least one tour, usually in the summer, and often played at various other venues throughout the year. Thus, DMB's success is measured largely by their tour and merchandise revenue, which has enabled their longevity in an age where record sales are declining. Moreover, each show on each tour is unique, prompting many fans to attend multiple shows each summer. A standard show lasts three hours or more, with the band often playing between twenty and twenty-five songs each time, filling the set with improvised jams. These jams often appear at expected places, where the song itself is a set-up for a jam, but the band sometimes improvises an intro or outro at unexpected places. These surprises are part of what draws fans to multiple shows each year. One of my informants on Tumblr, Danielle, age 26, elaborated:

I usually go to 2-3 DMB shows each year...I love how complex their sound is due to all the different types of instruments used and all the different musical background that they come from. Their music has so much energy, it has a great message, and it always makes me feel good. Every time I listen, I always find new little bits and pieces that I didn't hear before. I also love getting to listen to all different live performances so I can hear the progress of the band over the years and all the different versions of my favorite songs. It is really powerful to hear the crowd reactions also (personal communication via Tumblr, March 2015).

Moreover, many fans “chase” songs, an attempt to experience every song performed live at least once, as another informant, Jordan, age 23, explained regarding his favorite show on December 22, 2012, in Philadelphia:

Since I really wanted to see “Pig” live, I hope to get [it] at the show that I’m going to. So every show I go to that I haven’t gotten [it] yet, I hope they play it. But now that I got it, there are different songs I hope to get now... I only need “Dreaming Tree” live to complete *Before These Crowded Streets*. So I’m chasing that one. Also chasing “Typical Situation” (personal communication via Tumblr, March 2015).

Clearly, then, DMB’s emphasis on live performance is one of the main draws of the group, but it is one that can be examined online during the off-season when the band is not on tour.

DMB’s longevity as a group has resulted in a multi-generational fandom, which is reflected most clearly at live shows. However, younger fans who have had a lot of exposure to the group (whether from parents or older siblings), and who are active on online sites like Tumblr, often educate newer fans who turn to the Internet to research their new interest. The resulting fan community circulates materials during the summer regarding upcoming shows, and throughout the year they exchange material that celebrates the live concert experience and thus extends the fan experience into the online world. In addition, fans regularly circulate material about LeRoi and thus continually remind each other about his influence on the group and educate newer fans (who may not have been fans when he was alive) about him. Before examining these materials more closely, I turn to an explanation of Tumblr and the DMB online community.

Applying Online Ethnography

Founded in February of 2007, Tumblr is a New-York based social blogging platform with 226.6 million blogs⁴, with 80.5 million posts made every day. I call Tumblr a “social” blogging platform because users interact with each other in the manner of a social media site like Facebook, but engage in blogging, posting, and reblogging each other’s material as a form of communication. Users can also chat with each other using either of two functions. The Ask function sends a short message (500 characters maximum) from User 1 (with the option of anonymity) to User 2’s inbox with the option for User 2 to respond to User 1’s Ask either publicly or privately. Once User 2 responds, User 1 would have to submit another Ask in order to continue the conversation – there is no reply function. Users can also use the Fan Mail function, which sends a longer message, with no character limit, from User 1 to User 2, with the option for User 2 to reply directly to User 1 and User 1 to respond in kind.

People become Tumblr users by creating a personal blog, which becomes their avatar and profile, much like on Facebook. When a user logs on to the site, they are taken to their dashboard, which is a scrolling feed of the material that the users they follow have most recently posted (see Figure 1). Intermixed with these posts are public replies to Asks, as described above, as well as sponsored posts from businesses from which Tumblr is receiving advertising income. As a user scrolls down their dashboard, they “like” and reblog various posts, depending on their personal requirements for maintaining the aesthetic of their blog. For example, I follow Dave Matthews Band fans, Taylor Swift fans, cooking blogs, hiking blogs, and web comics, among other things. My blog is crafted, as discussed below, to

⁴ Some users run multiple blogs, therefore it is difficult to ascertain the number of users on the site. However, even if each user ran two blogs, I would still estimate the population at well over 100 million users.

reflect my identification as a Dave Matthews Band fan; thus, I might like cooking and hiking posts but I might not reblog them. The result is a dashboard that reflects my own interests but a blog that reflects the interests I want to display to my followers. This becomes particularly important for users who create “DMB only” blogs – blogs that are separate from their personal ones and only contain posts directly related to their subject. Many of the users who have these exclusive blogs also have personal blogs on which they post material about their own interests beyond the subject of their exclusive blog. For example, *dmbaudio* (Fig. 1), is a DMB-only blog run by a twenty-four year old woman from Bulgaria named Mirela. In addition to *dmbaudio*, Mirela also runs *drinker-joker-soulsearcher*, which is her personal blog that incorporates her own interests beyond DMB related material. However, her identification as a DMB fan is still present in her personal blog, as her handle (user name) is a reference to “Christmas Song,” the final track on the 1993 album *Remember Two Things*, DMB’s second studio release. Mirela estimates that about ten percent of the material she posts on her personal blog is DMB related.

Users who reblog similar material, and who often follow each other, talk with each other, and become friends even if they have never met in the analog world, are considered to be a part of the same community. These users find each other based on their handles and the material they post – thus the handle a user chooses and what they decide to reblog become very important in determining their performed identity. They often create inside jokes and circulate material amongst themselves. These materials, and the quantities thereof, reveal community values and often reflect the divisions of fan practices discussed by Duffett. Moreover, reblogging is critical to being an active part of the community. Since Tumblr is

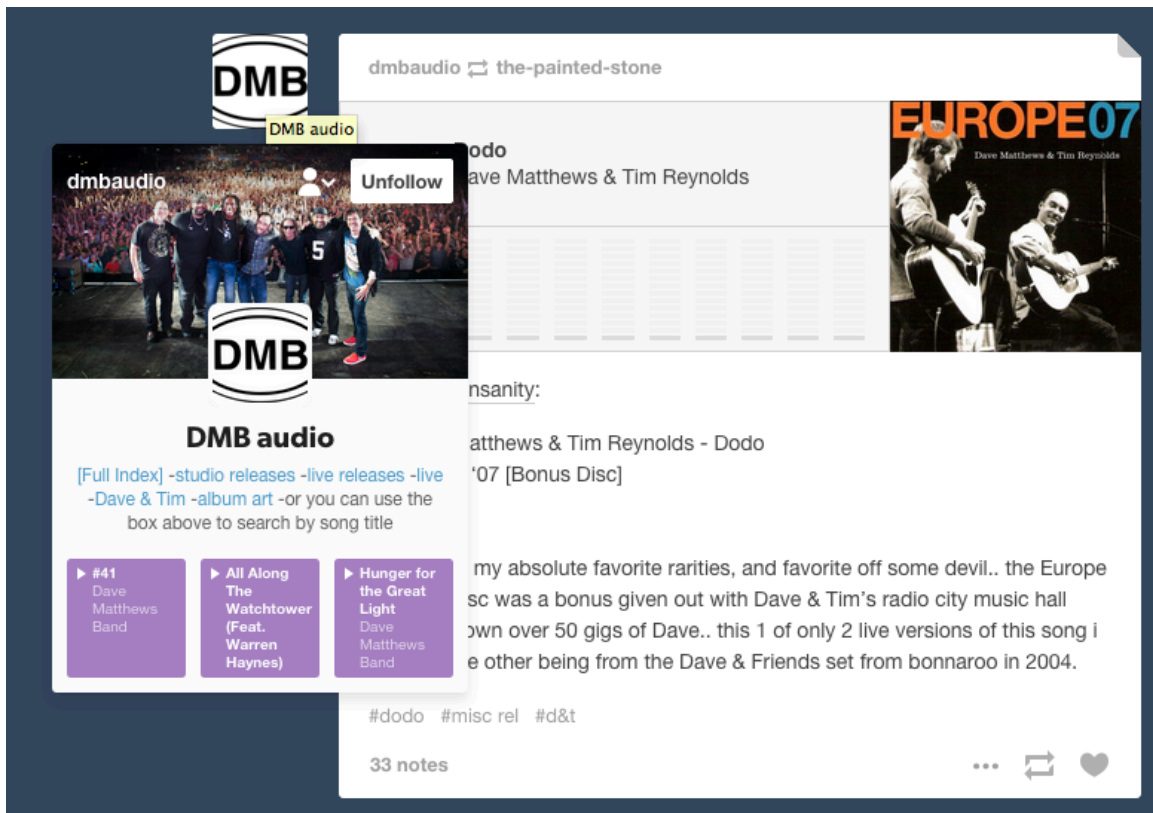


Fig. 1. An audio post. dmbaudio is the user who posted this, as their avatar is located on the left. dmbaudio reblogged this from the-painted-stone, as indicated by the double arrows. Hovering the mouse over the avatar reveals a box, which gives the header image and avatar of dmbaudio, along with their description and three of their recent posts (the purple boxes at the bottom). This post had 33 notes at the time it was captured. Clicking on that number reveals the list of users who have liked (by clicking the heart at the right) or reblogged (by clicking the double arrows) this post.

optionally anonymous, one of the primary ways to identify oneself and participate is through reblogging. A user who only views posts and never reblogs is known as a “lurker” – i.e. a voyeur, one who gazes. Lurkers are not considered a part of the community, and thus in order to be recognized as a fan, one must actively participate through reblogging. I turn now to an explanation of my work and evolving methodology on Tumblr to highlight some of these issues in context.

I started my work on Tumblr in December 2014. I chose a handle that would attract DMB fans, and after much deliberation, I settled on “girl-on-greystreet,” a reference to the

popular track “Grey Street” from the 2002 album *Busted Stuff*. This reference was one that I knew DMB fans would recognize, but to be sure I uploaded a photo I took at a concert in 2012 to be my header image. I also titled my page, “Life is short, but sweet for certain,” another reference to lyrics, this time to the very popular song “Two Step” from the 1997 album *Crash*. Thus, when other users scroll over my handle, they see several signifiers of Dave Matthews Band fandom. I then searched “dmb” tags to find blogs that I could start following and gradually branched out as new blogs and posts showed up on my dashboard.

I avoided posting personal information for several weeks, hoping to maintain some level of anonymity, before realizing that the most popular blogs were ones with definite personalities behind them. My goal was not to become a popular blog, but I did understand the benefit of learning from other bloggers how to conduct oneself on such a site. I updated my avatar picture to one of myself (it had been a picture of my favorite spot on Mt. Rubidoux in Riverside before) and began posting original material and commenting on posts as I reblogged them. I quickly noticed a difference, as more people began following me – whereas at first I only had five or six followers, I now have forty-seven. I remain a relatively unnoticed presence on Tumblr, but this is a continuing project.

An issue emerged when I began following Taylor Swift fans in an effort to examine that fandom. Although this thesis does not incorporate my research on Swift fans, the insight I gained in the process of studying that group proved valuable for my research included here on DMB. My blog was all about DMB (with some comics and personal posts thrown in), and even though I was following people from both Taylor Swift and DMB fandoms, only DMB fans were following me back. This was somewhat intentional, as I was most interested in DMB fans, but it created a problem when it came to what I reblogged and thus saved on

my blog (or, I might argue, my archive). If I began reblogging material about Taylor Swift all the time, I ran the risk of alienating my Dave Matthews followers as those two groups rarely overlap. I decided instead to only like the posts that dealt with Taylor Swift and her fans (rather than reblogging them) and reblogged the posts that dealt with Taylor Swift on a broader level – appearing in interviews, fanmade vines and videos, and some photos and gif sets. This way, I found, I could maintain the main aesthetic of my blog, while allowing for a secondary interest to emerge and saving much of the material I observed through the use of the “like” function. I still have access to everything I have liked, as Tumblr easily allows users to see a feed of all the posts they have liked since the beginning of their blog.

After observing the site for a couple of months, I began doing interviews. I posted a call for help but received no responses. As a different strategy, I chose DMB fans that I was following and began sending Asks to see if they would be willing to help. While there were no outright rejections, there were several implicit ones, as it is easy to reject someone by simply not responding. Overall, though, the majority of people were supportive and helpful. As I heard back from each informant, I copied and pasted their responses into a Word document, one for each person, so that ultimately I had a full transcript of an interview. I so far follow seventy-nine DMB fans, thirteen of whom I conducted extensive interviews with. I also follow Dave Matthews himself.

Dave Matthews Band Fandom

The Dave Matthews Band fandom on Tumblr consists mainly of young, white adults, with both genders represented more or less equally.⁵ My interviewees were between the ages

⁵ This is based on my observations, rather than a more systematic examination. Such systematic research might reveal something different, but that has not been the object of this study.

of eighteen and thirty, although fans on Tumblr are often as young as sixteen. Of the band members, only Dave Matthews himself has a Tumblr account, but he does not interact with his fans very much, if at all. Many of my informants expressed an apathetic sentiment regarding Matthew's online presence; they follow him because he is Dave Matthews, but they don't actively try to connect with him. Mirela notes, "I wouldn't say I'm waiting with bated breath for updates, but it's always nice when they happen. Dave has a quirky mind and it's interesting to see insights into it on here" (personal communication via Tumblr, March 2015). Fans tend to circulate photos and gif sets of Dave Matthews and the band rather than original artwork or candid photos of the group. A favorite subject for gif sets is Dave's famous quirky dance moves from various live shows throughout the years, sometimes accompanied by the tagline, "Dancin' Dave." Less often, fans circulate art based on Dave Matthews' famous monologues between songs during live performance, referred to as "DaveSpeak" (see Fig. 2). Fans also circulate audio clips, to which an entire blog is dedicated to generating (dmbaudio, discussed above). These audio clips range from live shows to studio recordings to bootlegged recordings captured on tour. Occasionally these are circulated with captions explaining where they were recorded or special facts about them (see Fig. 3) but very often they are left to speak for themselves. Looking back to Duffett's descriptions of fan practices, then, we can see that practices of performance and appropriation are not as important as practices of connection among Dave Matthews Band fans. Moreover, these practices of connection function mainly to bring the fan community together and not necessarily to connect with the band. Finally, the circulation of live performances in photo, gif, or audio form, extend DMB's emphasis on performance into the online realm, so that fans who do not have access to the group during tours (especially those



Fig. 2. A gif set (although rendered still in this format) which celebrates Matthews’ dancing and highlights his short monologues between songs (called “DaveSpeak”).



Fig. 3. Audio files circulated among Dave Matthews Band fans are occasionally captioned with interesting facts pertinent to that recording.

fans outside of the US) can still experience the band's liveness on some level. I turn now to a particular moment in the band's history to explore how these practices can also serve as an educational tool to help new fans learn fan practices and customs, and how they work to shape conceptions of the band beyond its current lineup and repertoire.

LeRoi Moore and Fan Memorials

On August 19, 2008, at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, DMB played what was probably the most difficult show of their lives. Rumors had been flying around the message boards online that LeRoi, who had been injured earlier that summer, had passed away, but nobody wanted to believe it. Besides, if he had really died, why would the band still be playing a show?⁶ With the lights still down in the arena, the band walked out and faded in on a vamp. As soon as Carter began to play, the lights came up and the audience screamed its adoration. This first piece was "Bartender," a song that was a fairly common opener up to that point but which opened each show for an entire year afterwards:

*If I go before I'm old
Oh brother of mine, please don't forget me if I go
Bartender, please, fill my glass for me
With the wine you gave Jesus that set him free after three days in the ground
And if I die before my time
Ah sweet sister of mine please don't regret me if I die
Bartender, please, fill my glass for me
With the wine you gave Jesus that set him free after three days in the ground*

The unusual part about this intro was the absence of the joyous expressions and animated energy that the band usually has while performing. Carter in particular is famous for his big

⁶ A full account of this show and the day leading up to it is found in Nikki Van Noy's *So Much To Say: Dave Matthews Band, 20 Years on the Road*.

smiles while playing, but this time whenever the camera focused on him, he wore a grim, determined face.

At the close of the song, Dave confirmed the rumors that LeRoi had passed away earlier that day. The crowd fell mostly silent while he spoke but almost immediately began shouting LeRoi's name and yelling, "We love you, LeRoi!" According to an MTV News account of the show, the rest of the concert became a celebration of LeRoi's life, playing songs that he had loved and talking about him between sets (Kaufman 2008). One particular story that Dave told resonated deeply with fans and still makes its way as a text post around Tumblr: Dave used to work at a bar in Charlottesville where LeRoi would play, and one night LeRoi had a bit too much to drink. He stumbled up to the stage and leaned on the bar for support, "because standing had become somewhat of a chore," and he proceeded to play "the most beautiful version of 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' I ever heard in my whole life... I just wanted to tell that story 'cause that's the day I fell in love with him and I'm still in love with him." That concert, then, marked the beginning of an era in DMB history filled with memorials and tributes, and in which old recordings acquired new meanings, enabling newer fans to be nostalgic for a man they never knew.

I turn here to an examination of those memorials, both online and in person, in the context of a broader narrative of famous deaths. I incorporate the results of my work on Tumblr to demonstrate how online ethnography was critical to understanding how fans educate each other about LeRoi outside of the live performance context. By circulating the materials discussed below, younger fans who joined the fandom after LeRoi's death are able to take part in the continued celebration of his life that is one element of being a DMB fan. To position this discussion in a broader context, however, I first explore the ways supporting

musicians are grieved differently by their fans and the broader public. Informed by interviews with fans and supported by posts that circulate on Tumblr, I then examine three of the ways LeRoi has been memorialized by both the band and its fans: through the tribute album, the resignified live recordings, and the spontaneous performed memorials that take place at shows. Finally, I will explore the nature of nostalgia and collective memory in the context of fandoms in which some fans joined after the death of one of the musicians.

The “Untimely Death”

LeRoi’s passing can be seen situated within a larger narrative of famous musicians who have passed away “before their time.” The narrative is generally one of regret for the loss of young talent, and the dead are mourned intensely for a period before the mainstream media moves on. Moreover, while the mainstream media may return periodically to the death of a frontman, there doesn’t seem to be much concern for the supporting musicians once the initial mourning period has passed. However, fans often hold on tightly to that loss, to the extent that new fans often develop nostalgia for a person they never met or heard live.

The leaders of groups generally achieve more recognition over the course of their lifetime than their fellow musicians and supporters. Thus, musicians like Kurt Cobain are internationally recognized, whereas the other members of Nirvana (apart from David Grohl, who is now frontman for the Foo Fighters) are not immediately remembered. Similarly, Jerry Garcia’s name recognition earned him an ice cream flavor, whereas most of the other members of the Grateful Dead are still relatively obscure (other than, perhaps, Mickey Hart, who became known among academics after his tenure as Grateful Dead drummer). Because of their fame, these frontmen are very publicly mourned by the media and the public at the time of their death and beyond. However, a cursory search on Tumblr revealed only a few

posts mourning their death today. Rather, each of these musicians is held up as an icon of tortured souls (in Cobain's case) or marijuana advocacy (in Garcia's case). Of course, this is not to say that Tumblr users do not miss Cobain or Garcia and do not return to their music or post fan art of them in tribute fashion. However, the nature of the posts about Cobain and Garcia are vastly different from the ones about musicians like Randy Rhoads (Ozzy Osbourne band), Clarence Clemons (Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band), and LeRoi. Whereas posts about Cobain and Garcia generally refer to broader cultural issues, posts about Rhoads, Clemons, and LeRoi tend to refer to their identities as beloved musicians. I might speculate that this is because it has been twenty years since these men died; however, Randy Rhoads, who died twelve years before Cobain, in 1982, has a multitude of memorial posts dedicated to him. A different reason that might be more plausible is that because Cobain and Garcia were mourned widely, the diehard fans who post memorials don't make it through the media noise. These memorial posts are immediately visible, however, when searching for supporting band members like Clemons and LeRoi.

This brings me to my next point: other band members who die young are publicly mourned at the time of their death, but after the media and the general public have moved on, the fans of the band continue to remember them. Clemons died in 2011, and a Tumblr search reveals many memorial posts, all very similar to those about LeRoi that I will discuss later. Many of them refer to him by his nickname, "The Big Man," and feature black and white photographs of him, sometimes with Springsteen. When isolated, these posts seem like typical fan posts; however, when taken in the context of Clemons' death and seen together, they clearly work to memorialize Clemons and create nostalgia in the fandom. Even non-fans can feel a sense that something was lost. I might venture to say that the continued

remembrance of Clemons and LeRoi (and Rhoads, to an extent) is because the bands they played with are still together and the frontmen of those bands have appeared publicly to mourn their loss. However, this is only part of the reason. Rather, I argue that the fans of each of these groups also work to memorialize the lost musicians, and that new fans take part in these memorials as a part of the fan culture, thereby creating nostalgia for someone they never experienced live. I will examine these memorials and the created nostalgia in depth through the case of LeRoi and DMB fans.

The Life and Death of LeRoi Moore

LeRoi Moore was born on September 7, 1961, in Durham, North Carolina, and raised in Charlottesville, Virginia. He played saxophone throughout high school then attended James Madison University before moving back to Charlottesville to be a gigging musician. There he met Dave Matthews, who as previously noted, worked at Miller's, a bar near the University of Virginia known for hosting live music. Dave and LeRoi, along with Carter, Boyd, and Stefan, formed their group in 1991 and quickly rose to fame, with LeRoi's saxophone sound being central to many of their songs. In June of 2008, LeRoi was involved in an ATV accident while working on his farm outside of Charlottesville. He was released from the hospital and expected to make a full recovery, but died suddenly of complications after flying from Charlottesville to Los Angeles to begin a rehabilitation program. Jeff Coffin, a Grammy-award winning saxophonist who used to play with Béla Fleck and the Flecktones, was playing with the group while LeRoi was recovering, and ultimately filled his spot in the band (although, as many fans assert, he will never *replace* LeRoi; see Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. A tumblr post lamenting LeRoi's death and noting a feeling of dissatisfaction with Jeff, his replacement.



Fig. 5. One of the many photos on Tumblr that highlight LeRoi.

LeRoi's image and sound became an iconic part of the band during the seventeen years he toured with it. He often played with his sunglasses on or with his eyes closed, standing on stage left until his turn to solo when all attention would settle on him as he filled in the space with rich tones and skillful improvisation. As Nikki Van Noy describes it,

He often seemed to be waiting out the music, and then, at just the right moment, he would raise a horn to his lips and slide effortlessly into the music, reminding everyone that he was there. Sometimes he would do so with bellowing notes, but he also had a knack for "whispering"; at just the right moment, he would lay back into his horn, releasing quiet, captivating sounds (2011: 152).

The photos of him that circulate on Tumblr also focus on this brooding image, as seen in Figure 5. LeRoi's absence, then, was striking even before his death, from the very first show he missed in June after his accident. Memorials and tributes to him began with that first missed show and continue even today, eight years later. In this next section, I examine three ways the fans (and the band) mourned LeRoi and create(d) memorials to him.

The Tribute Album

LeRoi died while the band was working to complete their seventh studio album, *Big Whiskey and the GrooGrux King*, which they turned into a tribute to him - the "GrooGrux King" of the title is a reference to LeRoi.⁷ The cover, a drawing by Dave, features a face that bears an uncanny resemblance to LeRoi's at the center of a New Orleans funeral celebration, and the first tune on the album, "Grux," is a recording of LeRoi improvising in the studio. The album also closes with a short hidden track that features saxophone and percussion, and although this is not explicitly attributed to LeRoi, fans assume that it is another salvaged studio clip. Apart from these tracks, the album is strikingly free of the soulful sax sound that

⁷ A Rolling Stone article about the album includes Dave's explanation of the name: "Carter and Roi came up with the GrooGrux...it's their word for something that was happening, something that was cool, something that was amazing. It was sort of like a spirit or a musical thing, 'That's the Groo Grux.' And Roi was the King, LeRoi" (qtd. in Serpick 2009).

had been prominent in albums and performance up to that point, a decision that likely reflected the band's unwillingness to let someone else step in so soon to fill that role in such a permanent way.⁸

Several of the tracks between contain references to LeRoi, and the progression of the album has been described by Dave as “[going] deeper and deeper until there’s this goodbye” (qtd. in Serpick 2009). Indeed, the album’s first track, “Shake Me Like A Monkey,” is an upbeat, pop/rock number filled with the hallmarks of Dave’s playful, innuendo-laden songwriting. The next two tracks are more contemplative, questioning the nature of why things happen the way they do, before arriving at “Why I Am,” the second single from the album. This track, as I will discuss below, has become a way for fans to memorialize LeRoi during live performances, particularly because of these lines:

*Why I am still here dancing with the GrooGrux King
We'll be drinking Big Whiskey while we dance and sing
And when my story ends it's gonna end with him
Heaven or hell, I'm going there with the GrooGrux King*

The next several tracks mix reflexivity (“Dive In”) with pop/rock aesthetics (“Alligator Pie”) and sex (“Seven”), standard for a DMB album, though a couple of them ponder the meaning of life and happiness (“Squirm”). It is not until “Time Bomb,” though, that we see a more direct reference to LeRoi’s death and the band’s struggle to understand it. Dave notes that it was a song that LeRoi liked, but that they had not done much with it while he was alive. After he died, they revisited the song and it took on a different meaning (ibid). The song escalates in volume and intensity throughout, a reflection of the spiraling frustration, anger,

⁸ Jeff does, however, make several appearances on *Big Whiskey*, most likely because while they could make the decision to cut out the solos, eliminating the saxophone from the band’s sound altogether would have been a serious departure from the band’s aesthetic and, presumably, a disservice to how LeRoi would have wanted the record to go.

and grief people often feel when mourning a loved one. By the end of the song, Dave is practically screaming and the song becomes a vent for his pain: “*Baby when I get home, help me pick up the pieces, hammer in the final nail, I wanna believe in Jesus.*” The very next song, though, “Baby Blue,” is the release of that pain – Dave describes it as a goodbye, as “one clean, simple idea of, ‘See you later’” (ibid):

*Confess, not quite ready to be left...
You will rest your head, your strength wants saving,
And when you wake you will fly away,
Holding tight to the legs of all your angels,
Goodbye my love...*

The album ends with “You & Me,” a sort of pick-me-up after the trauma and a hopeful look into the future.

Clearly, then, *Big Whiskey* can be seen as a tribute album to LeRoi. However, it is not like most other tribute albums. For one thing, most tribute albums are not created by the band or artist to whom they are a tribute, but the band points to LeRoi as the reason the album was started in the first place. It had been four years since the last studio album the band released and they had been going through a dark phase as a group. Dave had struck out on his own to release an album [*Some Devil* (2003)], and there was some infighting between group members. They managed to work it out and began writing songs together again, something they had not done as much since *Crash* (1996). LeRoi was most excited about the new album and insisted on pursuing one that would be as good as what they can do as a live band. Another reason it is not like most tribute albums is simply because it is not marketed as a tribute album. George Plasketes notes that many tribute albums are conceived of and marketed as such, not only for commercial gains but to make a statement about some issue or

to attract new audiences (1992). *Big Whiskey*, on the other hand, functions as a tribute album in that it pays homage to LeRoi, but it is marketed first and foremost as a Dave Matthews Band studio album, no different than any of the others in that sense. The tribute-like nature of the album is more for fans and the band: it tries to live up to the dream that LeRoi had for the band and provides a sonic record of that extremely difficult point in the band's history and their efforts to work through it.

I introduce this album not because it is backed up by extensive Tumblr-based research, but because this album was a pivotal moment on the DMB timeline. All of the LeRoi photos captioned "GrooGrux King" are a result of this album and the tribute-like nature of it – LeRoi was not publicly nicknamed the "GrooGrux King" prior to the release of *Big Whiskey*. All of the spontaneous performed memorials during "Why I Am," discussed below, are a result of this album. Moreover, many of my informants on Tumblr became very involved in the fandom right around or after this album was released, as Mary, 22, explained: "I've been a fan since *Big Whiskey and the Groo Grux King* came out. I'd never heard of them before that!" (personal communication via Tumblr, April 2015). However, many of those fans had experience with the group in its earlier years through siblings or parents. Jordan, 18, notes, "My older sister was a huge fan so she was the one that got me into the band. My first show was in '08 so I've been a fan for 7-8 years" (personal communication via Tumblr, March 2015). Her fan story thus begins around the time of LeRoi's death and *Big Whiskey*. Jordan, 23, grew up with the albums:

My parents had UTTAD when it came out, and I remember listening to "Satellite," "Ants Marching," and "Rhyme & Reason" a lot as a kid. But, it wasn't until late middle school into high school did I really get into them (personal communication via Tumblr, March 2015).

While his story began before *Big Whiskey*, that album still marked the end of an age, as the group that performs today, post-*Big Whiskey*, is not and cannot be the same group that he and other fans grew up hearing. *Big Whiskey*, then, is a key album in the DMB discography and a key moment in their history and the history of the fandom.

The Live Recordings

The opening track of *Live at Piedmont Park* (2007) closes with a rendition of “Happy Birthday” for LeRoi, whose forty-sixth birthday was the day before the show. Dave acknowledges this at the end of the opening piece (“LeRoi Moore, twenty-two today...”), and some people in the crowd begin singing “Happy birthday.” Butch Taylor⁹ joins in on the piano and the entire crowd follows, so that the words are clearly audible on the recording. The whole thing only lasts about a minute but it is captured and archived thanks to the band’s practice of recording their live concerts.

It is this practice of capturing live performances that allows DMB sonic memorials to be created. The live recordings that before functioned mainly for commercial gain acquired new meaning after LeRoi’s death. Due to the improvisatory nature of the band’s music, no performance was ever exactly the same, and certain songs that heavily featured LeRoi (“#34” and “#41” for instance) are now recognized as snapshots of his musicianship and personality. “#34” in particular became a sonic memorial for LeRoi after the band used it as a soundtrack for the tribute video they played during the intermission at a concert at the Gorge, Washington, ten days after his death (see Fig. 6). Multiple versions of the song still make

⁹ Taylor was a pianist who toured with the band for several years in the early 2000s, until he left for personal reasons in early 2008.

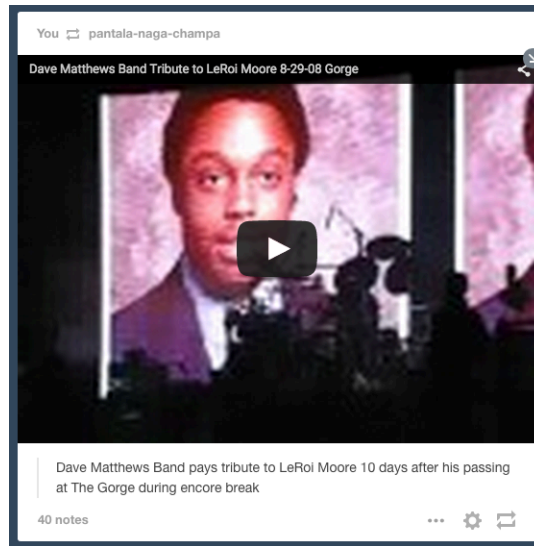


Fig. 6. A screncap of a post containing a link to the YouTube video of the memorial video played by the band during intermission at The Gorge (a popular DMB venue in Washington), with #34 as the accompanying track.



Fig. 7. A screncap of an audio post of a rare recording of #34, featuring LeRoi. The caption under the post refers to LeRoi's playing, as evidenced by the album picture accompanying the audio track.

their way around Tumblr, often with captions like, “RIP LeRoi,” or tags that convey a sense of loss (see Fig. 7). Fans also look to various versions of “#41” as examples of great LeRoi moments. As Jordan, 23, said, “LeRoi hated #41, and ironically one of his best solos is from #41 (Listener Supported). He’s missed greatly by everyone.” The “Happy Birthday” recording described above also becomes a sonic memorial, as it captures a personal moment shared between the band and the audience, a moment that will never reoccur live but can be replayed as a fond memory, much in the same way looking at old pictures brings back memories.

We can understand the resignification of these live recordings by drawing on Diana Taylor’s notions of the archive and the repertoire (2003). Taylor considers the archive to be anything that are “supposedly enduring materials (i.e. texts, documents, buildings, bones)” (2003: 19). The repertoire, on the other hand, is made up of those non-enduring things, usually embodied, i.e. performance, spoken language, and ritual. Taylor argues that the archive and repertoire are constantly in dialogue with one another and that items can shift from one to the other. We can think of recordings as being a part of the archive: as soon as a live performance is captured, it exists in a relatively durable state and becomes a part of a literal archive of performances. It captures the improvisations that would only otherwise exist at the moment of performance and that make up the repertoire. I argue, however, that whenever these archived recordings are replayed, they reenter the repertoire. Fans interact with them as they would a live performance and have emotional reactions to the music. On Tumblr, they circulate those recordings among themselves, pointing out particular moments of genius (see Fig. 8). As Lelio Camilleri argues, “the interpretation lies not in the reproduction of the sonic artefact [*sic*] but in the very act of listening” (2010: 200). Thus, the

ways Tumblr users listen to and engage with a recording renders it something more than just archival material.



Fig. 8. An audio post of a live recording, “arguably the best version ever performed.”

Going back to “#34,” then, we can see more clearly the shift from repertoire to archive and back to repertoire. The song was originally played as an instrumental during several shows in 1993, and was inspired by and written for Miguel Valdez, a percussionist who sat in with the band a few times in 1992 but passed away in early 1993. The band performed the song only a couple of times with lyrics in 1993, but none of these versions ended up on the studio recording. Since that recording, the song had not been performed live until 2005, and then again there was a hiatus until a couple of shows in 2013. The last performance on record (according to DMBAlmanac.com¹⁰) was on LeRoi’s birthday in 2013. The recordings circulating on Tumblr, then, are mostly from before LeRoi’s death, and all of the versions containing lyrics date back to 1993. Although those lyricized versions were in tribute to Valdez, their reappearance on Tumblr includes pictures of LeRoi (see Fig 7, above),

¹⁰ DMBAlmanac.com is a website dedicated to tracking all things DMB, especially live performances. The curators of this site update set lists after each concert, noting any peculiarities in the performance (interpolations of other songs, teasers, alternate lyrics) and tracking how long it has been since each song was last played. Songs that have gone one thousand days without being played in full at a live performance are added to a “Liberation List,” and are removed from the list the next time they are played live. The site also keeps track of which shows have been released as live albums.

indicating that a shift took place to bring those old recordings out of the archive and to resignify them in the wake of LeRoi's death.

These sonic memorials, through their recirculation on Tumblr, serve both as a way of remembering LeRoi and as a way of allowing him to play on. Part of the culture of the band is holding onto the idea that LeRoi is always around – just because he died does not mean he is gone. Because these recordings, even the ones from twenty years ago, are continuously replayed, LeRoi's iconic sound is also replayed, and thus his memory remains fresh. Moreover, posts about LeRoi increase around the anniversary of his death each year, revealing an effort on the part of the online fandom to remind each other of what was lost. This fact is further demonstrated through the spontaneous performed memorials that occur at concerts, which I turn to now.

The Spontaneous Performed Memorials

On December 11, 2013, DMB performed a show in Porto Alegre, Brazil. At the end of “If Only,” a song off of their most recent studio album, *Away From The World* (2013), the audience began singing the horn line that the band normally fades out on. The line, recorded in the studio on trumpet and saxophone by Rashawn and Jeff, is not improvisatory or soloistic in the way that earlier horn lines were when LeRoi was alive.¹¹ However, after the band stopped playing in Porto Alegre, the crowd continued singing, and then started chanting “LeRoi! LeRoi! LeRoi!” indicating that they may have been imagining what that line would have sounded like had LeRoi been alive to play it. The video of that moment is circulating

¹¹ The band made the decision after LeRoi's death not to include anymore saxophone solos on their studio albums. Jeff Coffin learned the ones that had become an important part of the repertoire up to that point, and the saxophone remains harmonically and melodically important, but neither *Big Whiskey* nor *Away From The World* have the extended solos that *Crash* and *Under the Table and Dreaming* have.

on Tumblr, with comments such as “Must have felt amazing for the band,” “I couldn’t imagine,” and “This brought a tear to my eye <3” (Fig. 9).

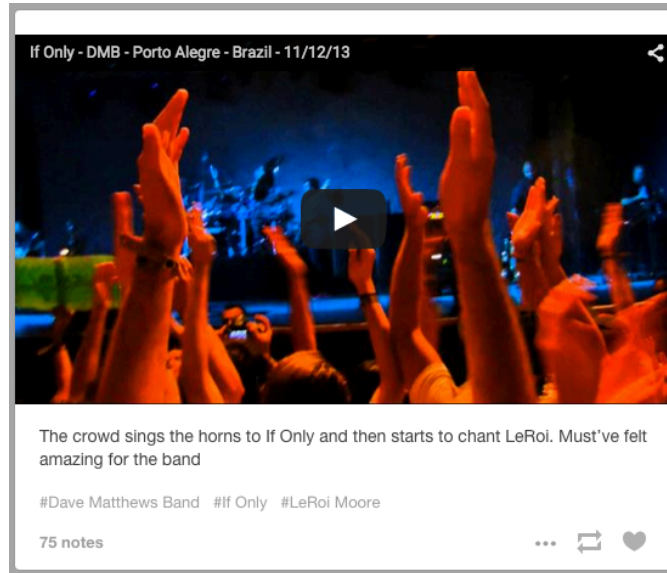


Fig. 9. A link to the YouTube video of the Porto Allegro performance when the crowd chanted LeRoi’s name during the horn line on “If Only.”

Spontaneous performed memorials like this one characterize many DMB shows post-LeRoi. While this particular one was a fairly unique occurrence, certain songs almost always evoke memorials. In particular, performances of “Why I Am” generally include an escalation in audience cheers each time Dave sings, “Still here dancing with the GrooGrux King.” At one concert I attended on July 22, 2014, the audience chanted LeRoi’s name each time that line came up. Both versions acknowledge and celebrate LeRoi’s presence in the song. I call these performed memorials because while they could be seen simply as ritualized audience participation, akin to shouting “Woo!” during the intro for “Warehouse” as heard on *Live at Piedmont Park*, the placement of these shouts at moments most closely associated with LeRoi indicates a conscious desire to literally call LeRoi back into the present. Jordan, 23, explains:

I'm sure the guys are always thinking about him, especially when they're performing. The fans know what LeRoi brought to the band, and the impact he made on them. The impact he made on the fan base as well. He was an important part of the band, and it's good for him to not be [forgotten] about... Especially if there's a new fan there who doesn't know much about the band. Let the band know that we miss him, because they miss him too, and keep his spirit alive (personal communication via Tumblr, May 2015).

Thus, these spontaneous performed memorials signal a communication between the fans themselves and between the fans and the band that acknowledge LeRoi as a part of the present moment.

Leslie Morris's concept of the "sound of memory" is helpful in further understanding this. Morris notes that "the sound of memory can be a tangible 'recording' of how an event is remembered acoustically, while the memory of sound presupposes a melancholic relationship to the sound that once was and is now lost" (2001: 368). While Morris uses this distinction as a launching point for examining how sound can influence or evoke memory, it is helpful here in understanding how these shouts of "LeRoi" are the sound of the collective memory of him. In this case, the memory of sound would simply be the memory of LeRoi's saxophone, strikingly absent from the band's sonic total. The audience shouts, on the other hand, are the audible sound of them remembering the sound that is no longer there. Significantly, not everyone who participates in these shouts was necessarily a fan of the band when LeRoi was still alive; rather, many fans' participation is driven by nostalgia for a sound they never heard live. It is to this complication of nostalgia and collective memory, as evidenced through my research on Tumblr that I have included in the above sections, that I now turn.

Nostalgia and Collective Memory

Paul Connerton (1989) discusses extensively the role of ritual and habit in forming collective memory. Specifically, he notes how the repetition in commemorative ceremonies performs collective memory and allows the ceremonies to be significant beyond that ritual occasion. Connerton uses the example of the ritual of the Third Reich to demonstrate how the ritual draws its significance from the language and performance of the re-enactment. By regularly re-performing the 1926 election of the Third Reich, the public is constantly reminded of its power. I draw particularly on this discussion of commemorative ceremonies to inform an examination of how fans who joined the fandom after LeRoi's death can feel nostalgia for the saxophonist anyway.

Through participation in the events I described above (listening to *Big Whiskey*, sharing live recordings on Tumblr, and shouting LeRoi's name at concerts), fans constantly keep LeRoi's presence in the present. The collective memory of him is not allowed to fade into the past, which means that fans who joined the fandom after his death entered a culture of which he is still a significant part.¹² As Jordan, 23, (who was a fan before LeRoi's death) told me:

LeRoi was the backbone and the soul of this band. His death was so unfortunate. I unfortunately never got a chance to see him live, but he was such a beautiful person...He's missed greatly by everyone (personal communication via Tumblr, March 14, 2015).

Significantly, most of the people I have talked to on Tumblr are in their early twenties. Some of them grew up listening to DMB records that their parents owned, but some of them didn't begin listening to the band until *Big Whiskey*, after LeRoi's death, and many of the ones who

¹² The main difference, in my estimation, between fans who joined before LeRoi died and fans who joined after is that fans who joined more recently tend to be less resentful of Jeff Coffin's presence in the band.

grew up listening to the records did not become card-carrying fans until after they reached adulthood. Thus, the proliferation of LeRoi pictures and memorials on the site is evidence of this culture of remembering that affects both new and old fans. The practices of reblogging photos and audio clips and shouting LeRoi's name during concerts are manifestations of this culture and contribute to the creation of nostalgia that new fans have for the sound they never heard live. Even fans who do not call it nostalgia have a sense of something lost. As Derek, 21, told me:

[Tribute videos of LeRoi] made me feel like I wish I would have been more in tune to listening closely. I feel like I "missed" something since I was not paying close enough attention or enjoying every bit of the music individually. When I watch some of the videos with him playing his solos and tributes, it just makes me happy that he was around and that he got to share [his] passion, but makes me wish I enjoyed the passion earlier (personal communication via Tumblr, March 20, 2015).

By reblogging sonic memorials and participating in performed memorials, fans who never experienced what was lost nevertheless constantly remind themselves of that loss and the significance of it.

Conclusion

To return to the issue with which I opened this thesis: how can researchers address the movements between analog and digital formats of fan experiences that characterize twenty-first century fandoms? I have argued that one answer lies in using online ethnography to combine the tools of popular music studies and ethnomusicology. Whereas popular music studies often relies on quantitative methodologies drawn from sociology, ethnomusicology relies on in-depth interviews and participant observation. Through online ethnography, the tools of ethnomusicology can be applied to mainstream popular music studies to yield more focused but in-depth results, while addressing issues of access to the

stars and recognizing the agency of fans. An ethnomusicological inquiry of fandom eliminates, for all intents and purposes, the need for interviews with the artists, as the more interesting questions often lie in what fans think and do rather than in what the artists intend. A focus on fans rather than artists also allows fans to have a voice, whereas the artists are usually the focus of attention in the media, rather than the fans who support their careers both emotionally and financially.

Furthermore, online research provides access to those fan experiences which transcend and connect the yearly IRL rituals like concert attendance, and offers insights into how fan communities are formed digitally and how those digital communities impact the analog experiences of their members. Online research also allows researchers to acknowledge and witness the tension in which fans are sometimes held between being “fans” and being “consumers,” as many of the fan experiences discussed and shared online revolve around practices which require some form of monetary consumption, like going to concerts and buying albums. In the case of DMB, bootlegging and sharing live recordings (a practice always common but made significantly easier since the Internet) often further complicates this tension, as DMB continues to profit financially from touring (i.e. ticket sales) even as fans circulate illegal recordings of their music for free online.

In this thesis, I demonstrated in particular how using Tumblr to access the DMB fan community online allowed me to examine how fans from around the world connect with each other and how they remind each other about a pivotal turning point in the band’s history, the death of original saxophonist LeRoi Moore. By circulating material about the band, and about LeRoi in particular, the DMB Tumblr community extends the fan experience beyond attending live shows, and underscores the necessity of an online component to fandom

research. Through this online component, the researcher is able to connect with the fandom outside of the typical ethnographic experience, and is thus able to understand and observe what keeps the fandom connected when they are not together as an audience. This has a significant implication for memory studies, as posts on Tumblr offer an observable and traceable body of material that is shared throughout the fandom and thus is a tangible manifestation of what might be observed at a live performance. Tumblr carries the memory work done at live shows into the everyday lives of fans throughout the year, and functions therefore as both an archive and a site of participation.

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