

# dancecult

JOURNAL OF ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC CULTURE



WOMEN AND ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC CULTURE

GUEST EDITORS REBEKAH FARRUGIA AND MAGDALENA OLSZANOWSKI

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DANCECULT: JOURNAL OF ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC CULTURE is a peer-reviewed, open-access e-journal for the study of electronic dance music culture (EDMC). Launched in 2009, as a platform for interdisciplinary scholarship on the shifting terrain of EDMCs worldwide, *Dancecult* houses research exploring the sites, technologies, sounds and cultures of electronic music in historical and contemporary perspectives. Playing host to studies of emergent forms of electronic music production, performance, distribution, and reception, as a portal for cutting-edge research on the relation between bodies, technologies, and cyberspace, as a medium through which the cultural politics of dance is critically investigated, and as a venue for innovative multimedia projects, *Dancecult* is the leading venue for research on EDMC.

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# INTRODUCTION:

## WOMEN AND ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC CULTURE

— GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION —

REBEKAH FARRUGIA AND MAGDALENA OLSZANOWSKI  
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This special edition of *Dancecult* seeks to situate women at the center of the cultural production of electronic dance music culture (EDMC) and to highlight their myriad contributions while acknowledging the intersectional difficulties they face daily. Highlighting the contributions of women while interrogating the misogyny in electronic dance music has been foregrounded in recent time and shows no signs of slowing down. Female-led collectives have been forming for years and are finally being taken seriously in public discourse and in popular press. The discourse, however, is tied together with its insistence of “a lack” of women involved, which this issue aims to problematize. While women are underrepresented in EDMC and are not afforded the same opportunities as men, several of the pieces of this issue highlight the disparities that contribute to women's marginalization rather than talking about marginalization wholesale. Women's marginalization has been brought up in the journal in the past and we hope to expand its somewhat limited scope.

In the introduction to a special issue of *Dancecult* on production technologies and studio practice, Ed Montano and Simon Zagorski-Thomas (2014) acknowledge that despite efforts and critical engagements “accounts of DJ culture—despite differing temporal and geographic contexts—describe DJ culture as primarily a ‘masculine’ pursuit”. Other articles also face this dilemma with titles such as Anna Friz’s (2004) *Heard but Unscene, women in electronic music*, and most recently, *Where is She? Finding the Women in Electronic Music Culture* (Abtan 2016), in which Abtan discusses from her own experience what a lack of women within the milieu does for EDMC.

Constantly focusing on a lack is an affront to the women who form the scene and have developed it throughout its history. There are many women who take on roles as agents, promoters, designers, VJs and other forms of labour that support EDM. Some do this while also being producers, performers and DJs, as well as having other jobs. They are an operational necessity. Tara Rodgers, in her seminal *Pink Noises* (2010), also asks: “is there perhaps more women than people expect who are using electronic technologies, but they’re left out of history?” (223). She also notes the whiteness of EDMC as a result of “a lot of music critics and the people writing histories” having been white men, and that “experimental music as it’s been constructed has been very white” (224).

While women in/and EDMC have been the theme of several articles of *Dancecult* in the past (Gregory 2009; Farrugia 2010; Madden 2011; Reitsamer 2011; Olszanowski 2012; Bhardwa 2013; Madden 2016) this is the first time a dedicated edition to the issue has emerged. Contemporary EDMC scholars are re-shifting the conversations and re-writing the limited histories to make room for more female role models, spaces and skill sharing practices to be established on a scale large enough to serve as inspiration for young girls to imagine being involved. We think 2017 is a particularly pertinent time for this issue for a number of reasons. EDMC’s popularity continues to expand and while popular press outlets are beginning to question gender imbalances there continues to be a lack of attention paid to the impact of intersectional identity markers and cultural production that does not necessarily conform to popular genres and spaces.

The popularity of EDMC has exploded in the 2010s with large-scale festivals in the US and Europe drawing hundreds of thousands of party-goers. EDM is now big business. In 2016, the International Music Summit claimed that the global EDM industry was worth \$7.1 billion and the largest growing music genre (Watson 2016). Yet, a 2016 *Vice* survey of 24 festivals that took place during the first half of 2016 found that the number of female-identifying DJs and producers at these events ranged from 3.2% to 28.9% (Friedlander 2016). These statistics reflect the reality that although the industry is growing the top income earners continue to be men. Not one woman made Forbes’ top 12 highest paid EDM artist list in 2016 or in any previous year. Such gender imbalances are no longer going unquestioned in the popular press. Rather, writers and publications are beginning to advocate for change. They are questioning gender disparities, compiling relevant data, and profiling more female artists. While we welcome this recent focus on gender disparity, coverage continues to obfuscate intersectional identity markers and often homogenizes “women in edmc” as if

“woman” is a singular category and as if all women face the same misogyny and experience it in only gendered ways. Gender as inflected by racial discrimination is a prevalent issue as exemplified by Maren Hancock’s article on Vancouver’s Lick Club, and Rucyl’s interview with Magdalena Olszanowski, in which Rucyl examines what it meant to see no one like her for many years.

This issue, in part, serves as a starting point for more research that analyzes and interrogates this potential shift; many spaces are still inaccessible and still not written about and we recognize are also missing from this issue. If we are to do rigorous scholarship we must examine popular culture and also look at alternative venues, spaces and formats beyond the nightclub or the DJ where electronic dance music resides. As such, rather than aiming to present a coherent scholarly narrative, we have compiled an issue with authors that span various contexts and geographic locations, pose manifold questions, and employ a range of methods, theories and perspectives in their analyses.

The overwhelming majority of historical accounts and ethnographies—as well as popular press coverage—of EDM scenes and participants have situated men at their center (Butler 2006; Kirn 2011; Holmes 2012). In part, this is because although women have been present and active since the beginning, it wasn’t until the 1990s and 2000s that it became more common for women to be involved in EDMC as DJs, producers, event planners and booking agents. Angela McRobbie was one of the first scholars to theorize young women’s relationships to rave culture and to question their marginalization in EDMC. In *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (1994: 168), McRobbie notes the possibilities rave culture offered young women because of the alternative, strong subjectivities that emerged from its collective meanings; and yet, she also observed that girls appeared “to be less involved in the cultural production of rave, from the flyers, to the events, to the DJing, than their male counterparts”. Building on McRobbie’s work, Maria Pini’s ethnography *Club Cultures and Female Subjectivity: The Move From Home to House* (2001) concludes that participation in dance culture has much to offer women with respect to how they negotiate their femininity and the opportunities for gender role transgression both on and off the dance floor—from their adoption of androgynous clothing, to their partaking in drug culture and comfort level with attending all night events alone.

By the mid to late 1990s, more women were engaging in the cultural production roles that McRobbie noted they were absent from in rave’s early years. Subsequently, corporations sought to capitalize on what they perceived to be the latest trend. Advertisers employed models and actors to mimic DJing in an effort to sell products and popular press sources like *Playboy* fetishized both women and EDM technology. *FutureMusic*, a music technology production magazine, repeatedly has had women’s body parts co-joined with gear and models in bikinis holding equipment on their covers. Concurrently, academic work began to focus more directly on women engaged with EDMC practices such as DJing and producing (Farrugia 2004; Farrugia & Swiss 2008; Rodgers 2010; Farrugia 2012; Olszanowski 2012; Rodgers 2010; Gadir 2016). Of concern have been the potential challenges that women may experience in music scenes and communities because of their sex and gender where

the taken-for-granted notion is that knowledgeable men produce the culture/industry that less informed women may participate in. Recently, even the heretofore taken for granted notion of the dance floor as a feminized space where women are welcome has been called into question. Christabel Stirling (2016) argues that it is not uncommon in some London dance music scenes, such as dubstep, for women to be confronted with a male-dominated and even misogynistic environment on the dance floor or else be excluded from it altogether.

This issue expands the aforementioned work to feature critically engaged research that problematizes the popular discourse on women and EDM. By doing so, it provides emerging analyses that expand “women and electronic music” as a complex and often incoherent landscape and not a homogenous essentialist category. We position the complexity and contradictions of doing an issue focused on women and EDMC as productive and generative. What is particular to a woman’s subjectivity, identity and experience in the scene? How are spaces for and by women produced and maintained? How do we enact inclusionary politics alongside the precarious position and emotional labour of participation? How can we account for and present women’s experiences without an obfuscation of each of their specificities? How can the seemingly problematic foregrounding of gender as a boundary marker be useful?

We realize that our introduction struggles and straddles an entangled tension. On one hand we refuse to yield to the “lack of women in EDMC” rhetoric to instead visibilize the women involved, yet on the other we understand that analyses of the marginalized position of women are vital. What we want is to be careful in taking up “woman” as an unquestioned category. Tara Rodgers in *Pink Noises* (2010) also stumbles upon this dilemma, suggesting that she frames her project with the unstable terms men and women, and does so because as the articles in this issue also illustrate: “these social categories significantly affect the organization of electronic music histories and the distribution of resources in related material realms” (4).

We end with a call-to-action for more deliberate and entangled research on the intersection of women and electronic dance music, both searching out new methods of research and new research that focuses on disability, age and race. We cannot simply think of women and electronic dance music without being intersectional or we fall back into the type of marginalizing discourse that popular press about women in EDMC is currently faced with. We realize that the issue has several spots missing—a journal issue could never be fully comprehensive. One intersectional identity not addressed here is the experience of women in EDMC with disabilities. Over the past decade, disability studies has gained traction as a subject of inquiry in musicology and popular music studies. Research has begun to explore the complex and varied stories that music has to tell about disability (Lerner and Straus 2006) and to draw attention to the ways in which musical works are products of cultural attitudes that view persons with disabilities as Other (McKay 2009). In the introduction to a special issue of *Popular Music* on disability, McKay noted that emerging work was addressing the intersection of “disabled musical forms and their related (sub)cultural practices (early jazz, punk rock)” (2009: 3). It was our hope that this issue

of *Dancecult* would bring electronic dance music into this conversation, and while it was unable to do so, we note the consideration of how much work needs to be done within our discipline and welcome readers to do so!

We welcome all feedback and comments on the issue. Please get in touch.

## SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

Frances Morgan's "Delian modes: Listening for Delia Derbyshire in histories of electronic dance music" article weaves a feminist media analysis of how different forms of media have produced the legacy of Delia Derbyshire, the composer, and Delia Derbyshire the persona as created by narratives of (mostly) men within the UK electronic music milieu. She asks "why the authors of these narratives have been eager to claim Derbyshire as a pioneer in a form with which she had no personal involvement, and consider the basis of these claims by drawing on selected works by the composer"? These narratives are tantamount to erasing Derbyshire and re-writing her history within their own power structures. Morgan challenges these narratives, and is much more aligned with Kara Blake's documentary *The Delian Mode* which accepts, in its content and presentation, the little Derbyshire wanted known about her reclusive life.

Robin James argues that resilient femininity is the new norm in early 21<sup>st</sup> century Western liberal democracies. In the context of pop music, women artists' performance of unrestrained, unrehearsed vocalizations fulfill an expectation and expression of rebellious, individualistic agency. In "Post-Feminism's 'New Sexual Contract' and EDMC's Queered Femme Voices", James considers three ways white women and femme musicians across EDMC use vocal and authorial voices to reimagine post-feminist practices of self-ownership and property-in-person in an effort to create alternative femininities. The essay considers how Brooklyn "gender-problematizing goth dance band" bottoms, Berlin EDM collective Decon/Recon and queer Top 40 dancepop singer-songwriter Sia each develop musical voices that are alternatives to post-feminist narratives of voice-as-agency.

Despite government institutions' official efforts to ensure equal male and female representation as prescribed by "The Gender Equality Act", women DJs continue to be underrepresented at high profile EDMC events in Norway. Tami Gadir investigates this ongoing problem in her essay "Forty-Seven DJs, Four Women: Meritocracy, Talent and Postfeminist Politics". Drawing on focus group research with Musikkfest participants she argues that many participants continue to believe in a meritocratic industry driven by "hard work" that supersedes identity categories. The genderedness of "talent" and Romantic conceptions of DJ work complicate the situation, as does Norway's contemporary "postfeminist", neoliberal climate. Gadir concludes that as a result, men's domination in the realms of DJing, production and event promotion continue to go unquestioned and gender barriers remain unacknowledged. Consequently, both utopian and "postfeminist" perspectives of dance music cultures ultimately avoid and deny the hostility and violence that takes place because of gender—behind DJ booths, on dance floors and in-between gigs.



In “Lick My Legacy: Are Women-Identified Spaces Still Needed to Nurture Women-Identified DJs?”, Maren Hancock takes a close look at the impact of Lick Club, a lesbian bar in Vancouver, BC, that operated from 2003–11 and employed predominantly female DJs. Hancock herself had a long-running and intimate relationship with Lick as a DJ and promoter for the club from 2003 to 2009 and credits it with propelling her DJ career. In addition to her own experiences, the arguments made here also draw on interviews Hancock conducted with key players in Lick’s local DJ network as well as quantitative survey data collected from female DJs across Canada. Based on her research findings, Hancock argues that although female DJs are becoming more common in Canadian nightclubs and festivals, networks comprised of queer, female and non-binary people are still of significant importance to the careers of professional female and non-binary DJs. Moreover, the presence of a physical space such as the Lick Club that provides access to mentors, DJ equipment and performance opportunities can be integral to developing professional female and non-binary DJs who are generally shut out of DJ culture’s predominantly male networks.

This issue’s From the Floor section consists of five articles from Magdalena Olszanowski, Kaitlyne A. Motl, Lisa Busby, Jennifer Rebbetoy and Donna Bentley that span conversations with artists, reflections on time “in the field” and relationships with event planners.

Magdalena Olszanowski interviews Rucyl Mills, an electronic music composer and multi-format artist about her history, her road to becoming an artist, staying an artist without compromise, the importance of community and other women, not giving up, being taken seriously as a female artist, the negotiations that artists have to make with others, themselves and their equipment, and how she managed to flip her father’s assertion for her benefit, and follow her own motto: “Why would I want to put my art in your museum if I have my own house?”

In “Fear in the Festival Field: Threat, Apprehension and Apathy”, Kaitlyne A. Motl provides a first-hand account on the necessity of re-working Ethics Guidelines for University Research. Her violent gendered experience points to the unequivocal need for Ethics to account for the vulnerabilities of researchers, especially those who are doing field work and are already marginalized. She also provides some pointers on how to follow up with problems that occur.

Artist and Lecturer in Music at Goldsmiths, Lisa Busby’s “Like so many things I both know and don’t know” takes us on a loopy journey of her process detailing two projects—her own *I begin alone in this action: a series of sounding zones* and her collaboration as part of The Nomadic Female DJ Troupe. The reflection’s non-linear form works to highlight the non-linear ways of her music making, performance and collaborative ethos. The piece weaves interviews, conversations, personal reflection, journaling and a philosophical critical analysis to expose the complexity of making and performing electronic music through a feminist lens that aims to resist power, hegemonic ideals and definitions within the field. These modes of analysis are also questioned by Busby as they are being employed, such as the position of “the feminine” and improvisation within EDMC. She asks questions—both in theory and practice—and the answers follow, but not in the way we expect; they find

their ways into other sections or transmute into other questions. As a result, the reader is left with several points of feminist action to pursue within their own networks.

Jennifer Rebbetoy details the stories of six event producers—Corrine Bundschuh, Sara Spicer, Liz Thomson, Andrea Graham, Zan Comerford and Ruhamah Buchanan—in “Mapping a Lineage of Female Event Producers Living in British Columbia”. The piece weaves their various obstacles and challenges as women in the field with a focus on all they have been able to accomplish. It is an inspirational narrative that puts women center stage within EDMC and challenges notions of women’s invisibility.

Donna Bentley, a self-proclaimed DJing hobbyist, provides a first-hand account of her history with getting into DJing and why she’s not pursued the craft to be, as she points out, “a big name DJ”. Unsurprisingly, she details the kind of “unspoken barriers” in place for women, such as the commonplace hetero and cis-normative phrases, “you must be the DJs girlfriend” and ignored while setting up to play, or the ways that female DJs are expected to pay their dues and play for free more than men while others make money from their production. However, without having so much at stake of “making it” in the scene, she has been able to find and nurture a community of support with other women in her hometown.

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