Abstract

Bloomsbury Popular Music is a truly unique popular music resource that provides an easy-to-use interface along with valuable content for researchers. It would be an excellent supplement to academic libraries that support music and performing arts curriculum with uses ranging from introductory music survey courses on through graduate-level research. Larger public libraries with extensive research collections and a local interest in fine arts or cultural studies may find this resource suited to their needs as well.

Overview

This is a scholarly database with an innovative, intuitive design. As its name suggests, the content is predominantly popular music from Western traditions. The breadth of world music coverage is also notable, however, as the resource contains a wealth of information about genres of music that “are popular in countries and communities all over the world.” Easy to navigate and fun to use, this resource’s content could support students and researchers in a variety of fields related to popular music, such as communication, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. The content is academic, although not comprised of peer reviewed articles as so many databases. Instead, Bloomsbury Popular Music offers a satisfying mix of encyclopedia entries and e-books that is supported by interactive features, including a browsable world map and interactive popular music timeline.

User Interface

Users will be impressed by this database’s visual appeal. It is sleek and well-designed. Because of this, the user’s time is not wasted figuring out how to navigate the resource. The home page offers rotating content which is curated to pique the interest of a variety of users. Currently, features on this page include protest music, the link between music and sports, and a highlight of the 33 1/3 book Public Enemy’s It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back by Christopher R. Weingarten.

The clarity of design makes it easy to search and browse in a number of interesting ways (see Figure 1). Searching yields a well-curated list of content, and the algorithm is effective in suggesting the most relevant results first. For example, a search for The Beatles returns (at present) 424 items. The top results are scholarly e-books focused entirely on The Beatles as well as an artist page, which is a brief overview of the band, its members, and links to related content (see Figure 2). There is also an option to sign up for a free personal account in order to save your search. Newly added content related to saved search results will trigger an e-mail notification. It is very easy to find saved searches from your personal account and run them again.

Browsing options are rich and varied. The Explore tab leads the user to thorough indexes of places, artists, and music genres. Browse Contents allows users to focus on the Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, 33 1/3 series, scholarly books, a timeline of popular music, and world map. The timeline and world map are very impressive and dynamic, but unfortunately, these specific features are not compatible with screen reader software. The timeline features detailed content and images related to popular music in conjunction with important historical events for context (see Figure 3). The world map makes it easy for users to discover content by working through its visual interface (see Figure 4). Starting from seven broad regions, including North America, South America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Oceana, one can click and drill down to specific countries. Hovering over geographic areas gives the user an indication of how many database entries are related. For example, hovering over the Middle East reveals 88 items. After clicking on the region, one can view the full set of 88 entries or hover over countries to see how many items relate to each (see Figure 5).

In order to facilitate use in research, entries in this resource have buttons to help users save, print, share, or generate citations. APA, MLA, and Chicago citation styles are supported, and an RIS option is available to those who want integration with a citation manager.

Although the single search box is effective enough for most users’ needs, an advanced search option allows for greater specificity in field searching, date ranges, and content types to be searched. Results are sortable by relevance (default), title, and date, and can also be limited by artist, content type, genre, peer-reviewed status, period, place, and topic.

Critical Evaluation

Bloomsbury Popular Music is very good at what it does, which is provide authoritative information about significant popular music albums and genres worldwide. The content of these books and encyclopedia entries are written by experts in their respective areas of musical expertise. For example, if one were interested in the harp’s role in...
FIGURE 2 Image of The Beatles’ artist page. Includes photograph of The Beatles sitting on a doorstep, biographical information, and links to related content.

FIGURE 3 Timeline representing popular music events in 1941, 1942, 1943, and 1944. Circles on a horizontal line represent years. Color-coded markers below the year represent related musical and political events.

FIGURE 4 World Map indicating amount of content available by region (continent).

FIGURE 5 Map of Middle East indicating amount of content available by country.
popular music, a search for “harp” turns up a rather extensive encyclopedia entry from *Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World: Performance and Production* written by Mona-Lynn Courteau and Daniel Sheehy—both esteemed ethnomusicologists.

Content from the 33 1/3 series of short books about a particular album is excellent in both depth and insight. *The Pixies’ Doolittle* by Ben Sisario is informed by interviews with the band, as are many others. Although these are deep dives any fan would enjoy, the 33 1/3 books are valuable to researchers of popular music as well. DRM-free access to these works provides for a user-friendly e-book experience often lacking from other databases.

**Competitive Products**

Database contents (such as 33 1/3 book series and *Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*), while duplicative of books that might be available individually elsewhere, are made available through one online resource. There is great value in the online availability and curation of this content. Although a variety of other music databases provide coverage of popular and world music-related content, such as Oxford Music Online (<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>) and Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Online (<https://search.alexanderstreet.com/glnd>), none would be in direct competition with this resource. Music researchers would require access to more foundational databases such as these; Bloomsbury Popular Music would be an excellent supplement to round out offerings in this area.

**Purchase Contract**

This product’s Subscription and Perpetual Access License Agreement is fairly standard, however, specific agreements are confidential and will vary from library to library. Generally speaking, interlibrary loan is allowed in the case that a single copy of the material is being shared with an authorized user of the recipient library for non-commercial purposes. Regarding authorized users, public libraries may extend access to patrons, staff, and library visitors. At academic institutions,
affiliated students, faculty, staff, and contractors would all be included. On-site visitors to academic libraries are notably absent in the current agreement, however, this is slated to be remedied soon. The publisher is currently in the process of revising the standard licensing agreement.

**Pricing**
Access to this resource is available by one-time purchase (from $5,741 to $28,454) with an annual update fee ($957 to $4,742) or by annual subscription ($957 to $4,742). Pricing for both models is based on institution size and type. Discounts are available for consortia as well.

**Authentication**
Authentication to this resource is available by IP-authentication. This allows seamless access for an entire campus, for example. Shibboleth is also supported. The resource also supports unlimited concurrent users.

**Author’s References**


**About the Author**
Ginger H. Williams is the Associate Dean for Academic Engagement and Public Services at the Wichita State University Libraries. As a musician, she has performed with numerous ensembles, including professional orchestras (viola), world music ensembles (violin and voice), and bands (electric bass).