

2013 IASPM Book Prize, Jury's Report

As announced at the beginning of last April, a public award is about to be given by IASPM for **two** outstanding **first** books **by a single author** on popular music, **one in English, the other in any other language**.

Nominations were invited from IASPM members of books they considered to be possible contenders for such an award. Authors could either self-nominate, or other members could nominate authors and books they regarded worth considering for the award.

Books nominated had to be already published and be on the market since January 1st 2011, until December 31st 2012.

The jurors for the 2013 IASPM Book Prize were: Adriano Fenerich, Olivier Julien, Barbara Lebrun, Toru Mitsui, Goffredo Plastino, Eduardo Vicente, Steve Waksman, and Franco Fabbri (Chair).

Five nominations were received for books in English, and two for other languages. Unfortunately the publishers of two of the English language contenders failed to comply with the deadlines and specifications indicated by the jury. Each of the jurors (chosen according to linguistic competence) had to write a report on one or two of the received books, and a general critical overview on all contenders.

All reports were received by the Chair before the beginning of the Gijón conference. According to their contents, it was decided **not** to award the prize for languages other than English. The jury recommends that the next prize be announced earlier, and especially that branches circulate the relevant information more effectively, in order to have a larger participation both in the 'other languages' category, and in the English category.

As for the prize for first book in English, the jury agreed to award a Special Mention as well as the main Prize.

The Special Mention was awarded to:

Richard Osborne, for his *Vinyl: A History of the Analogue Record* (Ashgate, 2012).

Detailing the history of the vinyl record, outlining the format's entwined relationship with music, and accounting for vinyl's continued popularity in recent years in UK and the US, this book is appealingly written and well-researched with meticulous reference to significant historical details (the technological development, accompanying statistics, the views and assessments by the persons concerned, etc.).

Considering its clever and inviting form, considering it helps organise an argument that is particularly well documented and researched, it can be said say this book is actually one of the best and most engaging books on phonography and/or recording formats in recent years.

This text is bound to become a reference work due to its reader-friendly, personal writing style and 'anatomical' chapter structure that conveniently showcases, in turn, the various components of the vinyl record: format (flat disc, 7" and 12"), speed (45 or 33 rpm), sleeve-types, and changing uses and values.

The main 2013 IASPM Prize for first book in English was awarded to:

Matt Stahl, for his *Unfree Masters: Recording Artists and the Politics of Work* (Duke University Press, 2013)

It is a wonderful, useful, necessary and ethical study of the great paradox of the musician as creative worker. Stahl's analysis of the contradictions between contractual bondage and the perception of creative autonomy is both highly serious, indeed rather depressing in what it reveals of our democratic, 'neo-liberal' societies, but also immensely fun and informative, eventually shaping a 'committed', political study of the erosion of job security for musicians and others alike (the parallels with academia are glaring!).

Matt Stahl's *Unfree Masters* is an important and even groundbreaking book in popular music studies. It is one of the few books to address in depth the nature of work and labor in connection with the popular music industry and it does so with great sophistication and a unique interdisciplinary approach.

Stahl's study goes beyond the existing scholarship on the subject of music and labor in important ways and should encourage scholars in the field toward a deeper engagement with such issues.

The first and perhaps most significant achievement of *Unfree Masters* is the rigor with which Stahl takes apart this romantic construct, showing its ideological deficiencies and the ways in which it does not adequately account for the material circumstances that characterize the work of professional musicians.

Existing studies of musical work have tended to treat the subject ethnographically, and to treat small subcultures or locally based groups of musicians. While such treatments share with Stahl's research a critique of the romantic character of musical work, they do not typically engage with the macro level structures that shape said work with anything like the sophistication that he brings. Stahl's engagement with branches of political theory that examine the status of the worker as political subject, combined with his impressive empirical research into specific cases and hearings that have elaborated upon the rights that musicians have in their capacity as laborers, sets his work apart, and should serve to open new scholarly conversations about why work matters in the context of popular music studies and in the creative industries more broadly.

Franco Fabbri, Chair of the 2013 IASPM Book Prize Jury