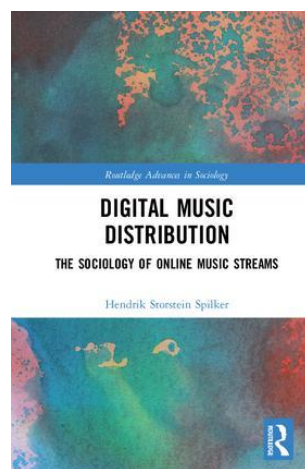## Digital Music Distribution: The sociology of online music streams by Hendrik Storstein Spilker Routledge Advances in Sociology, ISBN 9781138673908 (hardback), ISBN 9781315561639 (e-book)

Book review by Daniel Nordgård

We are beginning to see a broader, more thorough and critical approach to assessing digital change in the music industry. A number of works over the last couple of years have offered more nuanced pictures of digital developments, richer accounts and more interesting assessments, building on a broader set of academic fields and differing methodological approaches. Spilker's book is a welcomed contribution in this sense, organised over ten chapters, 185 pages and a broad set of approaches to a difficult and complex topic.

At the outset this has been a long-awaited book. Ever since first reading Hendrik Storstein Spilker's article *The network studio revisited: Becoming an artist in the age of 'piracy cultures'* (2012), I have become interested in his critical approach to digitalisation and the music busi-

ness. His new book includes the work of the aforementioned article and expands on some of the features found in that initial work such as the ambition to critically assess the processes of digitalisation, the discourses describing digital change and the aim to highlight some of the paradoxes following digital change and the academic discourses surrounding it. In fact, a central and very appealing feature of Spilker's work, is his focus on the many paradoxes following digitalisation and the academic discourses running parallel to assess these developments. This becomes evident in chapter 5, where he describes how the flourishing of home-based studios has not driven people away from the professional studios and the professional music industry. On the contrary, Spilker demonstrates how the network-studios may work as supplements, but not necessarily as substitutes, to the traditional music industry. He thus provides good evidence against widespread claims of disintermediation in the digital music.

Similar paradoxes can be found in other chapters too, such as in chapter 7, where Spilker addresses internal differences in what is usually and universally addressed as piracy, but where there are significant differences in motivations and business models, as exemplified by references to Pirate Bay and Megaupload. These are very different indeed, yet tend to be designated under the same definition of piracy, in academic as well as public debates.

As Spilker describes himself in the Introduction, his aim with this book is to contribute to the understanding of the forces and the outcomes of the drama of digital music distribution. And he does so by thoroughly describing the critical developments leading up to today's streaming economy , a journey that has been rocky, to say the least. The book provides an interesting and very thorough historical backdrop to digital distribution, drawing on early initiatives in digital music, early encounters with piracy cultures, the record labels' responses and the aftermaths of such responses. See for example chapter 8, which deals with the "Piracy Kills Music" campaign and how it was covered in Norwegian media. Or, chapter 6; *The Irony of Virtuality*, which is a very interesting analysis of digital strategy, comparing the music industry with

the newspaper industry, concluding that neither was very successful, even given their different approaches.

One criticism is that the book sometimes feels a little dated, in particular with its heavy focus on piracy and the music labels' anti-piracy efforts, or hacker culture (chapter 5), or attitudes towards file-sharing (chapter 3). After all, one of the fruits of on-demand subscription-based streaming, is the near-evaporation of piracy debates, at least in markets that embraced Spotify and the like. Whilst aware this is not the case in the majority of markets, the book nevertheless builds on Norwegian data and Norway is a leading market in the adoption of streaming; from which perspective, a thorough piracy debate may seem a little passé.

That said, this book deals with debates that are heavily entangled with, or relate directly to piracy and digital disruption and thus draws on these debates and accounts in relationship to current issues. It covers important and interesting debates on digital music distribution, thoroughly describing processes that have led to current situations. The final two chapters (9 and 10), in particular, tie this together well, arguing that today's debates and studies on music streaming must be seen in relationship to, or as extensions of, the discussions around piracy. This becomes very clear in chapter 10, and the subsection *The triumph of piracy* (Spilker 2018: 177). Here, Spilker argues that music streaming must also be read within the framework of a battle over interpretations. The success of music streaming is commonly heralded as the victory over Internet piracy and the merits of the music industry. It is a familiar argument and ties in well with Spilker's backdrop of the piracy wars. However, as he notes, the success of music streaming can also be seen as the victory *of* piracy, arguing that music streaming would have not happened had it not been for pirate-pressure. Or, as Per Sunding, CEO of Universal Music Sweden admits: *"without The Pirate Bay, Spotify would never have seen the light of day"* (Spilker 2018: 177).

As Spilker concludes himself: it's difficult to understand today's situation without seeing it as an outcome of the conflicts and turbulences of the past decade. Spilker's new book provides a very good framework for better understanding these issues.