

<b>Section A</b>		
The fields in this section are mandatory.		
<b>Institution: Leeds Arts University</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: Unit of Assessment:</b> 33 Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Whose Blues?: From the Delta to the Download		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2016 to 31 July 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Dr Tom Attah	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Course Leader BMus Popular Music and Performance	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 3 <sup>rd</sup> October 2016 – current date
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016 to 31 July 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>Section B</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>The research, a performance practice-led participant-observation of popular music consumers, producers and cultural workers, explores the effects of digital technologies on the perpetuation, dissemination and development of blues music and blues culture.</p> <p>The impact led to a clearer public understanding of how the narratives and history of the blues have been constructed and told, and has contributed to an increased awareness of and interest in blues music as a lived experience and practice beyond imagined boundaries of race, geography and time.</p> <p>The beneficiaries of the research are UK national and international blues music consumers, arts cultural workers, practitioners and the Royal Musical Association.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>This body of research examines the effects of technological mediation and specifically, digital remediation, on blues music and blues culture since the proliferation of computer mediated communications (CMC) from 1996.</p> <p>It focuses on the effects of technology on popular music and society, such as how these relate to power, gender, media, history, race and discourse. It seeks to nuance public understanding of how the histories of blues music been told and received. Has it become formulaic? Or remained, like the music itself, open to outside influences? Who have been the genre's primary historians? What common frameworks or sets of assumptions have music history narratives shared? And, most importantly, what is the cost of failing to question such assumptions? (Sanjek, Attah, et al., 2018)</p> <p>The research is recontextualising and culturally historiographical through a lively practice-based component that "uses the blues" to rethink blues as a lived practice, and to afford readers, listeners and participants new perspectives on the field of cultural production. The research involved interviews with cultural producers, consumers and cultural workers in addition to surveys to gather data. 'Practice-led research' in this context refers specifically to the researcher's ability to access audiences and performers in the blues style both</p>		

nationally (United Kingdom) and internationally (mainland Europe & Russia) in the course of their work as a professional touring musician (Attah, 2017; 2018)

The findings offer new ways of thinking about, listening to, writing about, and participating in blues as a cultural practice, particularly for consumers, producers and cultural workers separated from the original performances and sites of blues music and blues culture by space, time, race, and/or gender (Attah, 2020).

Additionally, many narratives concerning the transatlantic cultural exchange which carried blues music and blues culture from the United States to the United Kingdom focus on the Southern cities of the UK, particularly London and the South East. The research has found that the music producers, consumers and cultural workers of the Northern United Kingdom, especially Manchester, but also Leeds, Newcastle and Liverpool, were equally significant as part of the cultural convection currents which precipitated and sustained the blues boom of the 1960s. Further, research has found that the construction of blackness undertaken by performers, cultural workers and consumers during the 1950s and 1960s in the North of England was a fundamental strand in the discourse of authenticity which surrounded African American music, such as it was presented in the United Kingdom during the beat era and blues boom (Attah, 2018).

The research explores the enculturative and acculturative musical practices and sociological contexts that placed young, white musicians in the society and influence of blues music's African American progenitors. The problematic issues of race and cultural dissonance are raised and contextualised against a system of demographic othering characterised as the North/South divide and a societal antipathy toward emerging youth culture, in order to illustrate diachronic processes of technological mediation and cultural development in both blues music and the emerging counterculture and blues revival of the 1960s (Attah, 2018).

In this way, the research engages with ongoing cultural discourse concerning the 'right' to produce, consume, and participate in the perpetuation, blues music and blues culture.

### **3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Attah, T. (2020). To make purple, you need blue: Prince as embodiment of the postmodern blues aesthetic. Book section. *Prince and Popular Music - Critical Perspectives on an Interdisciplinary Life*. M. Alleyne and K. Fairclough. London, Bloomsbury. <https://lau.repository.guildhe.ac.uk/17646/>.
2. Attah, T. (2017). Halls without walls: examining the development, dissemination and perpetuation of blues music and blues culture. *53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference of the Royal Musical Society*, University of Liverpool. 7 – 9 September 2017. <https://lau.repository.guildhe.ac.uk/16090/>.
3. Attah, T. (2018). 'I thought I heard that up north whistle blow': African American blues performance in the north of England. In: *Sounds Northern - Popular Music, Culture and Place in England's North*. Equinox Publishing, Sheffield, pp. 77-95. <https://lau.repository.guildhe.ac.uk/17280/>.
4. Sanjek, D., Attah, T., Halligan, B. and Duffett, M. (2018). *Stories we could tell: putting words to American popular music*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. <https://lau.repository.guildhe.ac.uk/17326/>.

Evidence of the quality of the research:

- All text-based outputs went through a rigorous peer-review process
- All broadcast outputs are subject to editorial review.
- Based on these research outputs, findings and research activity, BBC producers approached Attah looking for a musician and academic to talk about blues history on the Radio 2 show.
- Attah, T. (2014). All You Need is Lab: How Science and Technology Inspired Innovation in Music. T Dann. BBC Radio 4, BBC Radio: 30 minutes. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03v9np1> Show won Gold New York Festival Radio Award 2014 - <https://www.newyorkfestivals.com/radio/pop/dirwinner.php?order=category&CmptnID=196> Accessed 31st May 2020

#### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words).

The beneficiaries of the research on the blues have been the UK national and international blues music consumers, arts cultural workers, practitioners and the Royal Musical Association.

The research has been disseminated through the *Cerys Matthews BBC Blues Show*, Radio 2 in 2018 and 2019. Each broadcast lasts for 60 minutes and Matthews' programmes typically receive half a million listeners [1].

The work has changed public perceptions about the blues. Matthews said, *"We enjoy hearing [Attah's] thoughts on music, particularly in the blues genre as befits the nature of the show. It's always wonderful to spend time with such a learned academic, shares his research and knowledge in such a generous, fun and learned manner"* [2].

Audience feedback was collected from Twitter showing that Attah's work led to a listener appreciating music in a new way, *"Incredible show. I'm not knowledgeable re: history of blues, but I know what I like... & acoustic blues hits that spot. Loved you're performance...a highlight of the broadcast! You once drew a continuum of blues between Hendrix & Prince, and the image made my heart sing"* [3].

A longer twitter conversation revealed that the research had changed a listener's perception of music, *"Yes brilliant stuff on last night's show and to hear Linton played next to the legends of the blues makes me realise Errol is as great and as relevant as they are. #blues #cerysshown"* [4].

Attah has disseminated his work through a series of public lectures:

- Whose in the Blues? Public lecture, 90 minutes – "Sitting at the Foot of the Blues", delivered 27th January 2019, Wapping, London.
- Whose is the Blues? Public lecture, 60 minutes – "Blues at the Ritzy", delivered 27th July 2018, Brixton, London.
- Blues, B.B. King (discussion and demonstration of playing style) Director: Sharpe, I. "The Decade The Music Died." The Decade The Music Died. Aired 27th December 2019. on Sky Arts [5].

The feedback from the audience indicates impact on a listener's practice, *"As a blues fusion, after learning with [Attah] I have a solid grounding in the roots and bones of blues which I can use to Keep my experimentation blues-centered"* [6].

The work has also changed the audience's appreciation of music, *"[Attah's] lecture has given me a very helpful and intuitive way of grasping what 'the blues' is and has been, and how it interrelates with jazz and gospel. As a result, I feel like really grasp the essence of the music in a way I never have before"* [6].

There also has been a change in understanding, “*After having the pleasure of listening to Dr Attah describe the overlapping history of the blues, gospel and jazz music, I have much greater understanding of these genres and the parts they played in African American social use*” [6] .

Attah’s proposal for a popular music study group at the Royal Musical Association was accepted. It is the first pop group the association has had in its 174 year history [7]. The impact of this is noted in the president’s report for the 146<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting: “*I am also very pleased to announce the recent foundation of a new Popular Music Study Group, led by Tom Attah. This represents an important acknowledgment of the RMA’s commitment to the study and practice of music of all kinds across the world, and we keenly look forward to new initiatives in this direction*” [8].

On the 6 November 2020 Attah disseminated his work at an online public lecture called Who’s Blues Lindy Fridays, a not-for-profit dance organisation [9]. 160 people registered for the event and 89 attended, half were from the UK the rest from Europe, US and Australia. Feedback from the audience included, “*I learned a lot from tonight’s talk and hope to attend others in the future*” and another attendee said “*I’d never heard of the different forms of cultural dynamics that he went back to: appropriation, enculturation, diffusion, (and I forget the last), but it was enlightening to highlight the distinctions.*” Attah’s work has changed how some people appreciate and understand music as implied by this feedback, “*I particularly appreciated all the music you played and your descriptions of what to listen for in those clips. Some of them I had heard many times before but will now listen to in a totally new way. I think it may help me hear lots of music of that era with fresh ears*” [10].

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of ten references)

[1] Screenshots from The Blues Show with Cerys Matthews, BBC Radio 2.

[2] Email from Cerys Matthews.

[3] Twitter feedback - 2.Giannini, N. @NikkiGiannini (2018):

<https://twitter.com/NikkiGiannini/status/1057071441278066690?s=20>.

[4] Twitter feedback from Leema Seven @leema\_seven (2018):

[https://twitter.com/leema\\_seven/status/1054727081958039553?s=20](https://twitter.com/leema_seven/status/1054727081958039553?s=20).

[5] Download of the programme.

<https://www.sky.com/watch/title/programme/b04243c6-afa9-4321-a9a9-cd5d57d3de28/the-decade-the-music-died>.

[6] Feedback from the Public Lecture & demonstration in Brixton January 2019: Comments are audience feedback sent via email.

[7] Proposal for Royal Musical Association Popular Music Study Group.

[8] President’s report 2020, Royal Musical Association, page 5.

[9] ‘Who’s Blues’ social media advert and attendance

[10] Feedback from event organiser, Lindy Fridays.