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# Barclay, Michael. 2022. Hearts on Fire: Six Years that Changed Canadian Music, 2000–2005

Bruno Coulombe

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qui s'occupent de la presse ou de la programmation internationale.

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Barclay, Michael. 2022. *Hearts on Fire: Six Years that Changed Canadian Music, 2000–2005*. Toronto: ECW Press. 603 pp.

BRUNO COULOMBE  
McGill University

Canada has produced chart-topping stars since the 1970s, including Anne Murray, Bryan Adams, and Céline Dion, all of whom achieved worldwide success. But something unique happened in the first half of the 2000s when Canadian artists appeared to be dictating some of the new directions in music rather than following trends already popular elsewhere. This music — which spanned many genres from folk to country to indie rock to

punk to hip-hop to electronic music — captured the world's attention through its creative and fresh take on the sonic profile of popular music in the twenty-first century.

In *Hearts on Fire: Six Years that Changed Canadian Music, 2000–2005*, music journalist Michael Barclay chronicles the emergence of artists as diverse as Arcade Fire, Godspeed You! Black Emperor, the New Pornographers, Tegan and Sara, Feist, Caribou, and others — musicians who changed the way the rest of the world perceived Canadian music. Featuring more than one hundred interviews and two decades of research, *Hearts on Fire* is focused on the musicians' personal stories, from their first gigs in small-town local pubs to their no. 1 hit singles. Rather than trying to develop a rational explanation for the explosion in Canadian music from 2000 to 2005, Barclay highlights the many paths and approaches the artists took, some of whom stuck to old-school DIY methods throughout their careers at the risk of jeopardizing their commercial appeal, while others consciously reached for the stars, aiming for the top of the charts and signing major label deals.

Each chapter focuses on three or four artists (and the occasional label) grouped together by geographical location or because they crossed paths in one way or another. Barclay's approach purposefully highlights the importance of local independent scenes in the development of Canadian music in the early 2000s while also drawing attention to the networks in which these musicians participated; many of them played in the same side projects, toured together, or were even roommates (and sometimes lovers). In terms of scope, Barclay notes how applying an interna-

tional filter to his thesis allowed him to narrow his focus, even though it meant he had to exclude many of his favourite artists. Indeed, any project focused on names and individuals runs the risk of leaving somebody out, but *Hearts on Fire* shows how this Canadian wave stretched from coast to coast, sweeping not just over the big cities of Toronto (the “industry town,” as Barclay calls it), Montréal, and Vancouver, but also reached smaller scenes like Winnipeg (home of the Weakerthans), Halifax (with ex-Thrush Hermit Joel Plaskett), and Guelph (where the Constantines formed).

Although each chapter tells a story of its own, a few constants run through *Hearts on Fire*. One of those is the importance of cheap rents as a key factor in the rise of Canadian music in the early 2000s, which allowed musicians to concentrate on their art without having to worry about getting a full-time job. Barclay also notes how Canadian bands benefited from the rise of file sharing on the Internet, which provided them with an alternative to the traditional label route as physical album sales were plummeting worldwide. Another theme that becomes clear as the book progresses is how many of these artists first found success internationally before the Canadian industry took interest. As Barclay notes, Godspeed You! Black Emperor’s success owes much to Britain, where the band made the *NME* cover in 1999—before Montréal media paid them any attention. Meanwhile, the gender-bending performance artist Peaches played packed gigs in Berlin and scored a collaboration with Iggy Pop while Toronto media struggled to make sense of her. Peaches’ friend Chilly Gonzalez (Jason Beck) also went to Europe in 1998, enjoying suc-

cess in Germany and France. Doing so gave him permission to take artistic risks he could never have at home, leading him to develop his signature piano act. Singer-songwriter Kathleen Edwards’s career also changed after she was booked on the *Letterman* late show in early 2003 in what Barclay defines as “the most typical Canadian turn of events” (325).

In the introduction, Barclay warns the reader that any attempt to tell the story of Canadian music is doomed to fail because every province and metropolis will always feel underrepresented. In the case of Montréal, for example, while *Hearts on Fire* offers a comprehensive study of how bands like Arcade Fire and Wolf Parade took the world by storm in 2004–2005, it reduces the Francophone scene to a footnote. Some of this omission has to do with the book’s timeline: the most prominent Francophone acts of the period peaked after 2005. But Malajube released their first album in 2004 and made the inaugural Polaris Prize shortlist in 2006 with their sophomore effort *Trompe-l’œil* while earning an 8.2 rating on *Pitchfork* (a rare feat for a French-singing artist) and getting the nod from the *New York Times*, *Spin*, *Wired*, and even *Vanity Fair*. As for Karkwa, the band had already released two albums by the end of 2005 and eventually became the first (and still only) Francophone act to win the Polaris Prize in 2010. Singer-songwriter Pierre Lapointe was also starting to enjoy some success overseas at the time, having won the jury prize at the Festival Pully-Lavaux in Switzerland in 2004 and another award from France’s Académie Charles Cros the next year. Of course, the Québec music industry has its own ecosystem; and while it is true that Francophone music does not travel

as well in the largely English-speaking world, acknowledging the contribution of Francophone bands and musicians would have broadened the book's perspective on Canadian music from that era.

Yet one of the great qualities of *Hearts on Fire* is how Barclay finds his own tone and approach through rich storytelling, in a style reminiscent of Simon Reynolds's *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978–1984* or Jeanette Leech's *Fearless: The Making of Post-Rock*. This is by no means an academic book, despite offering valuable insight to understand the dynamics at play in the emergence of “scenes.” Of course, the term is taken here in its colloquial sense, but could prove complementary to Will Straw's (1991) work on “scenes,” or to locally oriented studies on Liverpool (Cohen 1991), Austin (Shank 1994), Motown (Galster 2012), or Nashville (Hill 2016). Barclay's chapter on Broken Social Scene, Stars, and Metric is particularly fascinating, showing how the three bands became intertwined since most of their members were friends, which eventually generated tensions and jealousy as lovers became ex-lovers and both Metric and Stars were typically considered second fiddle to Broken Social Scene, who got most of the media exposure. Barclay also challenges some of the widely accepted narratives about Canadian music. Contrary to the widespread notion that the history of Canadian hip-hop essentially starts with Drake, Barclay beautifully explores the work of underground Black Canadian artists Kardinal Offishall, k-os, interracial group Swollen Members, and Saukrates, all of whom built up the musical infrastructure that later benefited Drake, even though they were marginalized by the media.

Michael Barclay, who worked at CBC's iconic radio program *Brave New Waves* and music magazine *Exclaim!*, possesses an encyclopedic knowledge of Canadian music. His authorial voice shines through *Hearts on Fire* as he seamlessly shifts from the anecdotal to larger narrative while incorporating relevant musical detail without shying away from editorial comments. The abundance of detail and names can be daunting for a reader not already familiar with this music, as Barclay highlights the many threads tying these artists together, whether through their common collaborators or because they played the same gig on a particular January night in some club in Calgary. These connections are crucial, fostering a sense of continuity from one chapter to the other as characters recur and personal stories intertwine, revealing the relative smallness of the Canadian music scene despite the country's vastness. Overall, the book is a worthy follow-up to *Have Not Been the Same: The Can-Rock Renaissance, 1985–1995* (written with Ian A. D. Jack and Jason Schneider), in which Barclay chronicled the development of alternative rock in Canada between 1985 and 1995. *Hearts on Fire* adequately captures the richness and originality of Canadian artists and their music at this pivotal moment in the history of Canadian music. 🍁

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Goldin-Perschbacher, Shana. 2022. *Queer Country*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 288 pp.

JAMES BARKER  
Newcastle University

*Queer Country* by Shana Goldin-Perschbacher is a long overdue intervention in queer studies, country music scholarship, and popular musicology. She describes queer country as a “socioaesthetic phenomenon” rather than its own genre or category (199). Within the contemporary

political and media contexts around country music and the emergence of critical voices in journalism and scholarship, now is an important time to re-evaluate the genre, especially by interrogating whose voices and narratives are represented. *Queer Country* achieves several objectives. Perhaps most important is the centring of queer, and especially transgender, artists in (re)interpreting country music (3, 71). She explores how queer and trans country and folk artists navigate country’s discourses around authenticity and sincerity, constructs an alternative historiography of country music that includes LGBTQ+ artists, and adopts a queer theoretical framework that understands “identity and genre as cogenerative” (23).

Goldin-Perschbacher uses a range of methodologies: analysis (of text, music, and image), historiography, and ethnography, all underpinned by a critical queer theoretical approach. Her use of ethnographic methods grounds the book’s more abstract theoretical arguments, ensuring that queer and trans artists’ perspectives are valued as necessary scholarly and theoretical contributions. She outlines her own engagement with country music and artists, demonstrating the twenty years of labour she put into writing *Queer Country*.

In addition to prioritizing artists who have yet to receive their due (such as Rae Spoon, Lavender Country, Amythyst Kiah, Mya Byrne, and Jake Blount), *Queer Country*’s overarching thread explores the tension between genre and authenticity. Drawing on the work of Robin James (2017), Goldin-Perschbacher discusses this tension within the context of discourses around essentialism and “post-identity” or “post-genre.” Essentialist identity categories have a racialized history