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Reluctant Entrepreneurs: Musicians and Entrepreneurship in the ‘New’ Music Industry

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Abstract

Changing labour conditions in the creative industries - with celebrations of autonomy and entrepreneurialism intertwined with increasing job insecurity, portfolio careers and short term, project-based contracts - are often interpreted as heralding changes to employment relations more broadly. The position of musicians’ labour in relation to these changes is unclear, however, given that these kind of conditions have defined musicians’ working practices over much longer periods of time (though they may have intensified due to well-documented changes to the music industry brought about by digitisation and disintermediation). Musicians may thus be something of a barometer of current trends, as implied in the way that the musically-derived label ‘gig economy’ is being used to describe the spread of precarious working conditions to broader sections of the population. This article, drawing on original qualitative research that investigated the working practices of musicians, explores one specific aspect of these conditions: whether musicians are self-consciously entrepreneurial towards their work and audience. We found that, while the musicians in our study are routinely involved in activities that could be construed as entrepreneurial, generally they were reluctant to label themselves as entrepreneurs. In part this reflected understandings of entrepreneurialism as driven by profit-seeking but it also reflected awareness that being a popular musician has always involved business and commercial dimensions. Drawing on theoretical conceptions of entrepreneurship developed by Joseph Schumpeter we highlight how the figure of the entrepreneur and the artist/musician share much in common and reflect various aspects of romantic individualism. Despite this, there are also some notable differences and we conclude that framing musicians’ labour as entrepreneurial misrepresents their activities through an overemphasis on the economic dimensions of their work at the expense of the cultural.

Keywords: Creative Labour, Entrepreneurialism, Popular Music, Creative Industries, Cultural Industries, Joseph Schumpeter, Work.

10415 words, including references

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Reluctant Entrepreneurs: Musicians and Entrepreneurship in the ‘New’ Music Industry

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Introduction

The transition from physical to digital media has resulted in profound reconfigurations of the cultural, social and economic dimensions of popular music production and consumption. Economically, the most notable implication is that global income from the sale of recorded music has declined dramatically, falling 43% between 1999 and 2013 (IFPI 2014:9). The decline has resulted in a significant contraction of the major-dominated recorded music industry, with the number of major labels falling from six to three, tens of thousands of job losses and a dramatic decline in the number of acts signed to major labels. While the implications of such changes can be exaggerated, and the interests of a few large companies often misinterpreted as the fortunes of the music industry as a whole, it is undeniable that the dominant discourse of the last fifteen years or so has been one of change, and the threats and opportunities change offers to different actors in the sector. One such threat/opportunity is a supposed greater possibility for artists to maintain self-sustaining careers without the need for record company backing; achieving this, however, requires high levels of drive and initiative and a supposedly more entrepreneurial mindset than was needed in the past.

In such circumstances, it is important to investigate how musicians understand their circumstances and their actions. This paper, emerging from recent research on musicians’ perceptions of their contemporary circumstances and working practices¹, focuses on one specific aspect: whether musicians consider their working practices to be *entrepreneurial* in any way. It is not about whether the practices *per se* are entrepreneurial or whether practices have changed significantly (in fact, we will argue the need for greater understanding of continuity rather than change) but, rather, how musicians *interpret* those practices: in a discursive context in which musicians are told that they can be successful independently, and when musicians are supposedly less hostile to advertising and merchandising than they were in the past (Lindvall 2011), it might be expected that musicians would more openly acknowledge/celebrate their practices as entrepreneurial. Our results, however, suggest that it is not the case and there remains strong resistance to notions of entrepreneurialism. In this paper we explore this tension and its implications for understandings of both entrepreneurship and being a musician.

The musicians interviewed as part of the project tended to come from an indie/folk background. Though not an intentional part of the sampling, it does mean that this paper complements recent research on the practices and attitudes of musicians working in classical music (Coulson 2012) and jazz (Umney and Kretsos 2014). There is not space for a

¹ *Digital entrepreneurs: negotiating commerce and creativity in the ‘new’ music industry* (funded by The British Academy small grants scheme, ref SG122392). Thanks to Ellen Kirkpatrick for research assistance on the project.

full elaboration here, but there are notable institutional and ideological differences between the classical and popular music artworlds (Frith 1996: 36-43), with jazz falling somewhere between the two. For the current study, perhaps the most notable difference is that there exists in the classical sector (and jazz to a lesser extent) a pool of potential employers (e.g. orchestras, theatres) with whom individual musicians can seek work whereas, in popular music, musicians have tended to be seen as free contractors rather than (potential) employees.² 'Popular musicians'³ might thus be expected to exhibit a different set of attitudes to those working in other musical spheres. We identified significant overlap in musicians' attitudes across the three studies, however. Although there will always be local and specific contingencies we believe that our findings are suggestive of wider social processes and see no *a priori* reason to think that our analysis applies only to one particular field of music. As such, in the final section of the paper we make some theoretical suggestions about the nature of 'the musician' in modernity more broadly.

The fact that popular musicians have traditionally been viewed as free contractors hints at why it is important to study them. 'Creative labour' has been of increasing interest to sociologists in recent years (a summary is provided in the third section of this paper) with work in creative industries treated as a harbinger of the increasingly precarious nature of *all* work in late capitalist economies (Ross 2009:2; McGuigan 2010). However, research in this area has tended to focus upon fields of cultural production which have experienced the most pronounced transformations from regular salaried employment to self-employed short-term freelance work, such as journalism and television. Less attention has been placed on musicians as creative workers (though see the papers mentioned earlier, as well as work by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011), Schlesinger and Waelde (2012) and Stahl (2013) as examples of the growing body of research in this area). Yet, as Stahl (2013: 8-10) points out, given the distinctive industrial organisation of popular music, popular musicians can be seen as something of a 'limit case' for the trends discerned in creative labour more broadly. To push the argument slightly, what we may be witnessing is creative labour (and thus, if the literature is correct, most labour) becoming more like musicians' labour. In our view, it is not coincidental that the popular term being used to describe the precarious working conditions of large sections of the population – the 'gig economy' – has its origins in musicians' working practices.

The paper consists of seven sections. Following this introduction, a short section outlines how discourses of opportunism and entrepreneurialism have become prevalent in discussions about the contemporary music economy, which is followed by a discussion of how these discourses can be contextualised within broader social changes, especially as they relate to creative labour. The fourth section describes the research project including the sample and the fifth section outlines how, despite being routinely involved in activities that

² Though standard record industry practices can make this distinction dubious (Stahl 2013:143-182).

³ We are using the phrase 'popular musician' very broadly here, referring to institutional contexts (as contrasted with classical and folk music artworlds) rather than any implication of popularity. Within the popular music artworld, there would also be many different genres which generate distinctive practices and attitudes, though there are also many underlying similarities that may not be immediately apparent. We reflect on the significance of genre later in the paper.

could be categorised as entrepreneurial, musicians in our sample were reluctant to consider themselves as entrepreneurs. We then investigate the ways in which the participants understand their practices and their circumstances which we have organised under two headings, 'contexts' and 'concepts'. Focusing in particular on the respondents' conceptualisations of entrepreneurialism and the musician's role, and making use of Schumpeter's groundbreaking theories of entrepreneurialism, in the conclusion we develop a theoretical argument to capture the dual-natured position in which these musicians are situated. In it, we argue that 'musician' and 'entrepreneur' are two sides of the same coin, reflecting the same cultural root within capitalist modernity, but that to conceptualise musicians as entrepreneurs is to misrepresent their activities.

Discourses of entrepreneurship and opportunity in the digital music industry

Given the circumstances outlined in the opening paragraph, the dominant discourse within the transition to the digital music industry has been one of crisis, with those companies most affected blaming 'piracy' for their situation and seeking to re-establish their powerful positions through legal remedies and technological locks (Marshall 2012). Simultaneously, however, there has been a parallel, more optimistic, discourse regarding the potential opportunities afforded by the weakening of record industry power. According to this perspective, the internet and digital media offer unparalleled opportunities for musicians to become successful without the support of major record labels, able to access digital marketplaces such as the iTunes Store and benefit from 'long tail' economics which will sustain an infinite number of niche products (Anderson 2007). Furthermore, the emergence of social media and 'direct to fan' platforms are assumed to enable artists to communicate directly with, and sell directly to, their fans. According to this narrative, the means of promotion and distribution, as well as the means of production, have now been put into the hands of artists, and acts such as Ani DiFranco, Clap Your Hands Say Yeah and the Arctic Monkeys are presented as examples of artists who supposedly became successful without the support of traditional record labels.

Accounts of these early successes, and the social and economic conditions of the 'new' music industry, have contributed to an increased emphasis on the entrepreneurial dimensions of becoming a successful musician. For example, Bennett argues that 'building a successful [musical] career depends on entrepreneurial activities and carving out a niche market' (in Smith 2013:27) while industry commentator Dave Kusek (2014) advises musicians that 'today, your success is largely in your own hands. Forward thinking musicians are acting more and more like entrepreneurs. You are no longer a product... You are your own company—and you are the CEO!'. Independent musician Tommy Darker has gone further, promoting his concept of the 'musicpreneur', which he defines as 'an independent, polymath musician who takes care of both the artistic and entrepreneurial aspect of their music career, creating business models and revenue streams' (2013). In this discourse, the opportunities afforded by disintermediation require a particular set of skills in order to flourish, with success interpreted as dependent less on the inherent quality of the music than on the ability to develop a strong brand identity that generates multiple revenue

streams. A flourishing supplementary industry has emerged offering advice to aspiring musicians on how to be successful in the new industry: blogs such as *Music Think Tank* and books such as Frank's *Hack Your Hit* and Knab and Day's *Music is your Business* offer advice to aspiring independent musicians seeking to take charge of their careers and become successful. There is also no shortage of training courses that musicians can sign up to, such as Canada's Coalition Music's 'Artist entrepreneur program', and Kusek's own *New Artist Model*, an 'online music business school' promising a programme instructing how to:

Organiz[e] a successful musician business and [set] up multiple revenue streams like licensing, performing, sponsorships, merchandise and distribution... leverage social media to expand your audience, start your own record label, production company or publishing company, turn your fans into buyers, energize your super fans, find sponsors ... use free music to your advantage. ...build a unique brand, stay in creative control, make more money and live your dream.

Neither is it merely commercial enterprises seeking to capitalise on musicians' aspirations. In the UK higher education sector there has been a rapid expansion of music-industry focused courses, with a recent report suggesting that the number of music industry courses in the UK increased from 26 to 84 between 2002/03 and 2013/14 (Bennett 2015:23-27). This increase is in the context of a more general expansion of popular music degrees in which vocationalism is greatly emphasised (Cloonan and Hulstedt 2012:17), unsurprising given the broader changes to UK higher education in which there has been increased emphasis on vocationalism and, latterly, entrepreneurialism within the sector (QAA 2012). These changes also include private providers such as BIMM (British and Irish Modern Music Institute) entering the sector and offering degree-level qualifications.

Creative Labour and Entrepreneurship

The entrepreneurial emphasis in both higher education and music industry rhetoric reflect more general changes in cultural work and the creative economy. The shift from manufacturing to service sectors in Western economies and the role of cultural production in urban and economic regeneration has resulted in the 'creative industries' becoming a central focus of policy-makers and politicians, viewed as hubs of innovation that contribute to the economic growth and cultural vitality of cities, regions and nations. In the UK, such ideas became dominant in the 1990s under the New Labour government, and remain powerful tropes today (for example, DCMS 2014). Within such discourse, working in the creative industries is presented in a positive light, providing opportunities for autonomy, flexible working conditions and the potential for creative self-realisation. It is clear that the promise of these kinds of freedoms and creative opportunities are attractive, as securing work within these industries continues to be desirable to many individuals.

Despite such promises, the challenging nature of creative labour has been extensively critiqued within social science literature (see for example Banks 2006; Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; McRobbie 1998; Menger 2001; Ross 2008). An important tranche of this critique highlights the 'atypical forms of employment'

associated with the cultural sector and its defining features such as 'flexibility, mobility, project work, short-term contracts and voluntary or very low-paid activities' (Ellmeier 2003:10). In order to gain access to the industry, workers have to endure high levels of insecurity and little or no pay, with no guarantee of an on-going contract of employment and where any longer term career prospects are uncertain. Creative workers also tend to work long hours and often have to take multiple jobs, including 'non-creative' jobs, to supplement and support their creative careers (Schlesinger and Waelde 2012). The creative sector is regarded as having limited health and pension benefits, a surplus pool of labour and where self-exploitation is inevitable (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Ellmeier 2003).

In overlooking the critical concerns about creative labour – job insecurity and little or no pay – and any notion of the miserable and poverty-stricken artist, the contemporary political discourse on creative labour presents the cultural worker as intrinsically progressive and, very clearly, entrepreneurial (Ellmeier 2003:11). Those working within these industries are themselves celebrated, presented as psychologically resilient, flexible, efficient and innovative, prepared to seek out new opportunities and to take risks, creative at finding solutions to problems (for example: DCMS 1998; 2008). Not only are these entrepreneurs constructed as individuals with a comprehensive set of artistic/creative and business skills and qualifications (McRobbie 1998:188), they are also portrayed as those who do not follow 'prescribed standards' in their creative labour and are instead compelled to 'assert themselves on the market and society' (Ellmeier 2003:3). In so doing, they are considered to be driving the economy, delivering innovation and economic success. As a result, 'the creatives' and their products – whether it is music, film, an app or a game – have become the 'apple of the policymaker's eye' (Ross 2008:32). One reason for such valorisation is that these workers are seen to sustain themselves and thrive with little capital or infrastructural support and thus are more likely to prevail within the current formation of the economy and labour market (Ellmeier 2003; Ross 2008; Scott 2012). The cultural entrepreneur is thus not simply assumed to be the figurehead driving innovation and delivering economic success to the creative industries; instead, the combination of a 'coping mentality' and a 'production code of aesthetic perfectability' characterises the 'new model worker', ideal for *any* sector of work (Ross 2008: 34; see also Menger 2001).

Negotiating commerce and creativity in the 'new' music industry

How should musicians' labour be understood within the discourses of creative labour and entrepreneurialism? As already noted, the structural conditions of work in the music industry have traditionally been different from that of many other creative industries. Whereas structural changes in the television industry, for example, have led to creative labourers losing what were considered 'jobs for life', resulting in the need to develop a portfolio career and move from one short-term project to the next, the majority of popular musical production has always happened 'beyond the supervision of the firm' and tended to involve greater levels of autonomy (Toynbee 2003:39- 40; see also Stahl 2013). Individual musicians have, therefore, always been involved in what may be considered entrepreneurial practices, such as promoting gigs and selling records. Thus, on the one hand, it is possible

that the working conditions of musicians have changed less than in other industries. On the other hand, however, the structural changes in the music industry in the last two decades have clearly affected the circumstances in which all musicians find themselves and, at the very least, echo the working conditions portrayed in analyses of other creative industries. Furthermore, as outlined above, the entrepreneurial discourse surrounding musicians' activities has undoubtedly intensified.

Given these complexities, it is important to discover how contemporary musicians understand their working practices and their circumstances. By drawing on original qualitative data from a recent pilot project this article will examine musicians' views on entrepreneurship, specifically the extent to which, if at all, they view themselves as entrepreneurs.

Research Sample and Data Collection

The research sample incorporated musicians signed to record labels in the South West of England. The geographical restriction to the South West of England was to make the pilot project manageable given time and resources available⁴. However, the criteria reflected the geographical location of the label rather than individual musicians, and thus the sample of musicians was geographically dispersed, though it was non-representative of any specific criteria (e.g. genre or location). The research included an online survey of 43 musicians followed by in-depth interviews with a sub-sample of ten of the survey respondents at a later date. The survey was conducted through an online survey tool. Twenty three of the 43 survey respondents agreed to a follow-up interview and the ten selected as the sub-sample were included on the basis of gender, income and genre, as well as demonstrating a range of attitudes towards entrepreneurialism. The follow-up qualitative interviews were in-depth and semi-structured and nine out of ten interviews were conducted face to face, the other was conducted via Skype. All of the interviews lasted approximately 45-90 minutes and were fully transcribed.

In selecting a sample, we sought a particular strata of musician that was not necessarily financially successful or secure in their careers but who at least had the potential for financially sustaining themselves through music. While there are numerous amateur/enthusiast musicians who play music regularly in local scenes and/or distribute music online, and while these musicians collectively can be a significant part of local music economies, institutionally they remain peripheral to many music industry practices whereas we were seeking a sample that would be routinely engaged in the business processes involved in maintaining a career in music.⁵ Furthermore, this strata of musicians is perhaps

⁴ We used the Arts Council England's definition of the counties comprising the South West Region to set the geographical boundaries of the survey. See <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/who-we-are/your-arts-council-area/south-west/> [last accessed 07.07.2015]

⁵ Given the structure of music production, in both the classical and popular spheres, it is impossible to draw clear distinctions between terms such as amateur and professional (see Finnegan 1989/2007: 12-18 and Frith *et al* 2013: 66-68 for fuller discussion). In this paper, we are using amateur/enthusiast to refer to those making music in their spare time and generally for their own pleasure (or for very small amounts of money) rather than those seeking to achieve a sustainable income from music.

the group most likely to be affected by both the opportunities and threats assumed to be characteristic of the digital music industry. Although not a perfect correlation, we used being signed to a label as a proxy for accessing this kind of musician.⁶ It could perhaps be argued that we are using 'old industry' categorisations (labels, albums) to investigate 'new industry' dynamics and it would be more appropriate to research the musicians 'outside' the system, who exist as 'amateur producers' creating, producing and distributing music online and side-stepping 'mediating chains' of the established industry (Prior 2010:403). However, while it is certainly important to study such musicians, we should also be cautious of claims that the old structures have become obsolete. The roles of record labels (including independents and local labels) may be changing but they remain an important part of the music industry ecosystem, and 'being signed' and having 'a record' remain important factors of status and legitimation within popular music, even for many of those musicians 'on the outside' (e.g. Reverbnation 2011). Being signed to a label also means being involved to a greater degree with the business structures of the music industry, such as involvement with managers, booking agents, media industries, sponsors etc. Once any musician achieves even a small level of success at a local level they will, by necessity, become entwined with the institutional practices of the established music industry and, despite the widespread rhetoric about the disruptions within the industry, many of the economic and legal structural relations continue to operate in the same way (Rogers 2013; see also Hesmondhalgh 2009; Jones 2012).

A further factor to consider is whether focusing on albums and labels might prioritise musicians in certain genres. Specifically, it could be suggested that a genre like EDM (Electronic Dance Music), which is more structured around tracks rather than albums, is likely to be ignored even though it is understood by some to incorporate a more entrepreneurial outlook (e.g. McRobbie 2002). Reflecting on our sampling and data, there was, in fact, diversity among the survey respondents, with most affiliating with several genres. Of the 43 survey respondents, approximately 33% were associated with EDM genres. When constructing a sub-sample for interview, genre identification was one of the factors considered; unfortunately, however, two of the three interviews scheduled with EDM musicians did not take place due to circumstances beyond our control. The interview subsample thus comprised mostly of a mixture of indie, rock, alt-folk and lo-fi genres, and although the responses of the EDM musician interviewed did not differ noticeably from other respondents, this genre distribution should be borne in mind when considering the data analysis. It would certainly be important to study musicians from EDM in more detail in order to develop a complete picture of popular musicians' attitudes and practices. However,

⁶ There is wide variation in what constitutes a 'label'; when referring to 'labels' in our discussion we do not mean large corporate entities such as Sony or their subsidiaries. Our research targeted smaller-scale labels, though ones with rosters and catalogues that demonstrated they were established organisations and not vanity projects or virtual labels created by a single artist. As such, the musicians included in our project are unlikely to receive significant financial advances for their creative output but are less likely to be subject to the same legal restrictions and forms of control as artists signed to bigger labels. However, on the whole, being signed to a label of this kind means that they exist within the same institutional frameworks as artists in the major-dominated industry.

even genres once thought to have been constructed around oppositional sets of practices and significations have, in reality, mirrored many of the practices they were once assumed to undermine (Hesmondhalgh 1997). Genre differences exist but can be overstated. Nor should we assume that there is no innovative practice in supposedly traditional genres like folk or rock.

The next section draws on original qualitative data from the interviews and examines the ways in which musicians understand their labour and the degree to which they see themselves as entrepreneurs.⁷ Although this is a pilot project with a relatively small sample of data, the analytical insights obtained raise a number of critical questions about the manner in which these musicians understand the nature of their work which, we believe, are suggestive of broader social processes related to the position of the musician within capitalism more generally. As such, in the final section, we develop some theoretical reflections concerning how concepts of 'entrepreneur' and 'musician' are ideologically connected.

Perceptions of business practices: the reluctant entrepreneurs

As outlined above, changes within the music industry specifically, and the creative industries more broadly, are often interpreted as generating increasing levels of entrepreneurial consciousness among creative practitioners. And, in discussing their working lives, it became clear that the musicians in this study are routinely involved in what could be considered as entrepreneurial activity: networking and developing contact books; strategising about future revenue generation; securing funding for projects; organising major undertakings such as tours in other continents; chasing down promoters and booking agents; negotiating with lawyers and publishers; contacting press agents to promote material; promoting events; selling things, thinking of new ways to sell things and inventing new things to sell. All of these, and more, suggest that business and entrepreneurial skills are a normal part of a working musician's arsenal. Such activities were also evident within Coulson's study of classical musicians (2012) and Umney and Kretsos' study of jazz musicians, with one musician in the latter study suggesting that 'as a musician you've got to be an accountant, you've got to be a salesman, you've got to have a marketing qualification, you've got to be able to do funding applications, you've got to be articulate, you've got to have a good phone voice ...' (2014:584).

More than routine organisational skills and tenacity, however, what was evident among the interviews was the creativity involved in the musicians' business practices. In a situation in which it is difficult to gain attention due to saturation in the marketplace, and lacking the economic capital required to employ press agents and fund major media campaigns, musicians at this level need to come up with innovative ways to gain attention. For example, one musician described his project of writing a new song every week for a year, while

⁷ Within the remainder of the paper, data from each musician's interview is referred to by individual case number (e.g. [8], [9]).

another outlined an (ultimately unsuccessful) strategy his band had used to generate interest in their new album:

We sold ten thousand records of [our second album] and we spent a tirelessly long time, lots of hours, trying to promote the [idea] that ‘everyone who[’s going to buy the album] everyone please pre-order the album, help us get in the charts’. If everyone [who was going to buy it preordered] this new album then we would have been a top ten artist, y’know, and the exposure that comes from that is massive, a real game-changer. So, it’s frustrating to know that there’s ten thousand people out there that will want to buy our album and we’ve still used all of our capabilities, mailout, Facebook, Twitter, everything, telling everyone, but still only twenty percent of that audience actually gets round to pre-ordering or [even] just ordering the album during the week. [44]

From the interviews, it is clear that the musicians demonstrate exactly the kind of traits characterising the entrepreneurial mindset celebrated in the policy literature: flexible, resilient, creatively solving problems and able to get by on very little capital. However, despite the routine involvement in business administration and the creativity exhibited in finding ways to market themselves and their music, there was strong reluctance among our sample to consider themselves as entrepreneurs. When asked explicitly if they considered themselves to be entrepreneurs, all of the musicians in the study rejected the label, some of them categorically:

I’m definitely not an entrepreneur. [8]

No. Not at all... my interest is absolutely, one hundred percent purely creative. I’m not at all interested in chasing a business model or... streamlining my business model for the internet age, I literally couldn’t care less. My interest is in musical matters, completely, absolutely. [23]

Others offered a more nuanced response but were still unwilling to categorise themselves as entrepreneurs. For example, another musician responded that he was:

An extremely reluctant one! Yeah. An extremely reluctant entrepreneur, that’s a good way of putting it. I never wanted to be... for the first few years of wanting to be a musician I tried wherever possible to ignore anything to do with financial or organisational concerns. [43]

There thus exists an evocative tension between, on the one hand, the musicians in this study routinely engaging in seemingly entrepreneurial activities while, on the other, being resistant to seeing these activities, or themselves, as in any way entrepreneurial. In her study of classical musicians, Coulson makes a similar point, describing them as “‘accidental entrepreneurs”, since most of them did not set out to start a business’ (2012:251). However, whereas Coulson focuses on the significance of collaboration and friendship in their musical networking activities, in this paper we wish to further pursue the notion of reluctance as it opens up opportunities to reflect upon how the idea of ‘the musician’ is conceptualised (as well as that of ‘the entrepreneur’). One way of interpreting this

reluctance would be to invoke the art/commerce distinction that became prominent during the romantic era and has long been a central theme in the analysis of popular music (Marshall 2005). While not fundamentally disagreeing with such a position, we have taken a different approach in this paper. The art/commerce perspective often results in a static binarism whereas practices are more fluid and musicians have always tended to hold a more prosaic view of the relationship between art and commerce than fans and commentators (there was little evidence of a clichéd art/commerce binary in our data). Thus, rather than begin our investigation from the art side of the dichotomy (as analyses from the romanticism perspective often do), we have instead focused more on the commerce side, given that a main focus of the project was discourses of entrepreneurialism. To help analyse our musicians' responses we have, therefore, utilised Joseph Schumpeter's groundbreaking accounts of entrepreneurialism which, as we will show, can shed light on the relationship between artistry and entrepreneurialism in new and interesting ways.

Making sense of the musicians' responses

In investigating why these musicians did not consider themselves to be entrepreneurs, several issues arose which we have organised under two themes. The first concerns the *contexts* of their actions, which here refers to their experiences in the contemporary music economy. As part of this theme, the central tropes in the literature on creative labour – the inherent rewards of creative production and autonomy combined with the difficulties of self-exploitation and job insecurity – were certainly present, as was the discourse about the challenges posed by the digitalisation of the music industry. However, as the musicians in our sample had minimal or no experience of the pre-digital industry, it is not possible to ascertain whether this reflected actual changes or merely the omnipresence of the discourse of change. Instead, in this paper, we will focus more on the second theme to emerge, which relates to the *concepts* that the musicians used to interpret their actions. In particular, we focus on what they understood an entrepreneur to be and also the fact that, rather than being entrepreneurs, the musicians saw themselves as following quite conventional pathways in their roles as musicians. In the final section of the paper, we develop a theoretical position grounded in the understandings of 'entrepreneur' and 'musician' that these musicians adopted.

Contexts

When questioned about their potentially entrepreneurial practices, several of our musicians contrasted being entrepreneurial with having a 'do it yourself' (DIY) attitude, with responses such as 'I'd call it DIY rather than entrepreneurial' [15] being common. The notion of DIY has particular connotations within popular music: emerging as part of the UK punk scene in the late 1970s (Reynolds 2006:92-109), but continuing in other non-mainstream genres such as Riot Grrrl in the early 1990s, the DIY ethic utilises independent methods of production and distribution as a form of hegemonic challenge to a mainstream industry traditionally dominated by multi-national corporations. However, although one respondent referred to 'doing it in that sort of more punk kind of way' [15] and another stated that 'I don't hold on to this [idea] of [the] pathetic little artist that gets managed by people' [44], generally

speaking the musicians in the study took a pragmatic rather than ideological approach to being DIY. This was partly driven by a general attitude of 'going out of my way to sort things out myself' [10] but, more notably, stemmed from a recognition that, if one wanted a sustainable career in music, taking care of business was a necessity:

So, if you want to have longevity from your music you need to at least have some, you know, either conscious or intuitive grasp of how much money you're spending on your musical projects, whether that's a sustainable amount of money and, if you do want to get money back to keep funding those projects you need to have some idea and some strategy for how to recover it because, one thing's for sure: if you just make your music and just post your music up online it's incredibly rare that revenue will sort of magically flow back to you. [8]

The musicians thus took for granted that competence in creative and routine business tasks is a necessary requirement for anyone wanting to sustain a musical career. The discourse of necessity was frequently connected to the changing nature of the music industry, involving a suggestion that there was no one else to do these tasks for them:

Because there are ways to get hold of music that don't cost anything, or don't generate money, the companies aren't interested [and] with that disappears the entrepreneurial expertise, that business acumen, so all that's left is that musicians have to fill that gap if they want to continue. [43]

A lot of musicians are, yeah, like acting like, yeah, they've taken [on] the marketing that maybe record labels would have done back in the day. [42]

Statements about the routine entrepreneurialism expected of musicians today were often juxtaposed with suggestions of what things were like for musicians in the past when there was still optimism about being signed by a 'man in a golden suit with a chequebook' [43] – though, given their lack of experience of the pre-digital music industry, they are perhaps portraying an idealised image of how much support musicians received in the past, a fact which some of them recognised. But, regardless of whether things are different from how they used to be, there was certainly a perception that, in the contemporary industry, were they to have any chance of moving up to the 'next level' of the music industry, managers and bigger labels now *expected* artists to have a level of entrepreneurial consciousness:

There's a lot of pressure on the industry and, I think, labels aren't as willing to invest money just because you're good. I think they want to see that you have an established fan-base, you have an established following, that you can promote and market yourself. [7]

Certainly you get the most interest when you appear to be doing it already, yourself... People want the finished article, they want a band with an identity, and a sound, and the knowledge of how to go on tour and how to run, y'know, at least Facebook, Twitter. [15]

Further reflecting on the nature of the contemporary music industry, it was also suggested that maintaining a career in the contemporary music industry required specific technical/technological competences to manage the variety of different tools available to contemporary musicians:

People thrive in the music industry by understanding it, by being on top of it, y'know what I mean, that's the new model, I think anyway, and that's how digital music works, y'know the people who are having success, the people who are making it work for them are people who fully understand it on a very technical level. [23]

On the surface, it may seem surprising that the musicians quoted here seem to be reinforcing a dominant discourse about musicians becoming more entrepreneurial in the twenty-first century while simultaneously rejecting ideas of their own entrepreneurialism. Indeed, the point directly contradicts the more prominent theme (outlined below) that musicians have always been involved in these kind of business practices. However, it was clear that elaboration of new industry dynamics was a discursive means through which the musicians could emphasise that their 'entrepreneurialism' was forced upon them and was thus a way of distancing themselves from the label of 'entrepreneur'.

The views expressed by the musicians that they are entrepreneurial by necessity rather than choice echo the arguments found in existing critical accounts of creative labour. In these accounts, the positive virtues associated with both creative labour and entrepreneurialism are masks that disguise precarious and insecure existences and what is commonly described as cultural entrepreneurialism is driven by material necessity and not a result of an aspiration to overturn market orthodoxy or some heroic urge to overcome the passive behaviour of waged labour. The individual enterprise that McRobbie's (1998:83) young fashion designers deployed in the early 1990s – a combination of 'entrepreneurial values' and faith in the 'creative self' – derived from necessity and experience of unemployment, rather than familiarity with and a desire to redefine the logic of the marketplace. Coulson, too, argues that, even though the musicians in her study may seem to reflect the 'young, innovative highly individualistic' entrepreneur celebrated elsewhere, their supposedly 'enterprising' activities are, in reality, a way of dealing with a hostile labour market (2012:259). Likewise, for the musicians in this study, entrepreneurialism was not a value to which they aspired but, in their view, was thrust upon them because of the conditions of the contemporary music industry.

Concepts

Accepting that the business activity required to sustain their music could be interpreted as entrepreneurial while rejecting the label of entrepreneur provided a provocative line of enquiry and in our interviews we explicitly asked the musicians about their understandings of the concept of entrepreneurship. When asked to elaborate on what they understood an entrepreneur to be, several musicians in our sample referred to entrepreneurs as being successful and powerful. For example, one replied 'entrepreneur for me, I mean if you asked, I was thinking of like Alan Sugar or someone like that' [10], while another referred to

the TV show *Dragons' Den* [15]. In such examples, a particular kind of power emanating from wealth is intuited which contrasts with the musicians' own social positions. Indeed, one musician explicitly defined entrepreneurialism by success, stating 'if I am an entrepreneur, I'm not a very good one. I'm a failed entrepreneur' [15].

A more prominent characterisation in the musicians' understandings of entrepreneurialism associated it with money and, especially, profit-seeking. For our musicians, entrepreneurs put profit ahead of all considerations whereas they viewed themselves as driven by creative rather than financial concerns, as can be seen in the remark, 'I've not really thought of myself in that term just because I think of an entrepreneur as someone driven more by money' [42]. Coulson (2012:253) makes a similar observation about the musicians in her study, where dealing with their routine music-related business activities is driven purely by 'satisfactions of music-making and maintaining co-operative relationships' rather than 'business plans, competitiveness, growth or profits'. Thus, even in cases where a respondent recognised that some of the activities in which they are involved could be interpreted as entrepreneurial, they were clear that they were not 'proper' entrepreneurs because they did not put profit first:

Sometimes you have to make very illogical decisions on a financial side as well. I think if I was an entrepreneur I would be thinking about profit margins and how to get the most profit out of what I'm doing, and I can't always think about it that way because some of the things I've had to do have cost me a lot of money. They've been totally worth it from my point of view, but from an entrepreneur's point of view I think they might have thought 'that's the most ridiculous thing you've ever done'. [7]

It is important to note that the rejection of profit-seeking did not mean there was *no* consideration of money among the respondents. Indeed, money (and/or its absence) was consistently present in the discussions, given that sustaining a viable musical career requires continual awareness of potential income and costs. The ability to financially sustain oneself was also important in whether the musicians considered themselves as 'professional' or not (see also Coulson 2012), and financial recognition was viewed as an important reflection of being valued as an artist, with several commenting about 'knowing what you are worth' and not getting 'ripped off'. Among the interview sample there was little evidence of the clichéd view of art and commerce being incompatible that is often assumed to exist within popular music, although there was a clear elaboration of priorities.

This can be further illustrated in the second key conceptualisation to emerge during the interviews. Whereas we explicitly asked our musicians about their understandings of the concept 'entrepreneur', it was notable that without any further prompting several of them produced their own alternative label for the business tasks in which they were involved: 'musician'. Several respondents discussed how they saw the tasks they were involved with simply as part and parcel of the job of being a musician and that, rather than seeing themselves as breaking new ground, they were, in reality, quite traditional:

I am just treading a path that has been trod[den] by countless people over thousands of years, trying to play music and get other people to listen to it. [15]

However, underpinning this position was a broader conceptual challenge that being an entrepreneur and being a musician were mutually exclusive roles:

Being in a band is different: you can't be an entrepreneur and your product is a band because that's just being [in] a band. [15]

I don't think that simply promoting yourself as an artist is inherently entrepreneurial in nature. [8]

Once more, what we have in these comments is an implicit acknowledgement that some of the activities in which they are involved *could* be interpreted as entrepreneurial mixed with an explicit rejection of that label. In this instance, the rejection is based on the belief that an alternative label for their activities already exists, that of 'musician'. It is clear the musicians in this study treated business and organisational activities as a routine part of being a musician, and they frequently downplayed the activities they were involved in because they viewed them as normal (for example: 'I think I'm more just keeping people aware of what's going on ... just basic stuff really' [10]). From their perspective there is no need for any kind of special label to be attached to such activities, not merely because they are for different ends, but also because they are so routine.

These respondents are undoubtedly correct that engaging in business and promotional activities are a normal part of being a working musician, and, as alluded to earlier, popular musicians have traditionally been more market oriented than many other cultural workers. In contrast to film and television, for example, the structural organisation of popular music has always involved what Toynbee (2000:27) refers to as 'proto-markets', a site of combined musical production/consumption such as a local rock scene or network of dance musicians. Such sites have significant autonomy but remain peripherally connected to the networks of the mainstream, capital-intensive, music industry. Proto-markets are more organic entities than mass markets, and are thus where musical innovation is more likely to occur, but they should not be assumed to be spheres of non-commercialism; actually, they are a hive of economic activity. Toynbee's key characteristic of proto-markets is that, although they involve commercial imperatives, the activity within them 'cannot be explained solely by economic factors' (2003:52). This will be returned to in the next section but it is also important to recognise the reverse: although activity in proto-markets cannot solely be explained by commercial imperatives, they *are* sites of commercial activity, with musicians (and other small-time entrepreneurs such as local promoters) assuming a variety of petty-capitalist positions. Respondents seeing themselves as 'treading the path' taken by previous musicians thus makes sense: sustaining oneself as a popular musician has always required involvement in commercial elements such as selling one's wares, organising tours and financing recordings. Being a popular musician has always involved being in the popular music business.

There is not space in this paper to elaborate the point in great detail but, given the long history of musicians' business practices, it is worth questioning whether the changes of the 'new music industry' have resulted in as radical a transformation of musicians' circumstances as is often assumed. Perhaps, on investigation, we find at least as much continuity as change. As Mike Jones points out, 'whatever the impact on musicians of digital instruments and social networking, the paths to market success still lie through music-industrial practices' (2014:58). What would also warrant further investigation is an analysis of musicians' practices in relation to key themes within critical analyses of creative labour. While musicians' contemporary experiences undoubtedly reflect many of the issues raised in that body of work (insecurity, low pay, self-exploitation), an important theme within the literature focuses on the *transformation* of creative working conditions resulting from neo-liberalisation and the structural changes in the creative industries from the 1980s onwards (for example, McGuigan's (2010) account about the disappearance of 'jobs for life' in the television industry and the need for creative workers to develop portfolio careers and move from one short-term project to the next). However, as outlined, the majority of musical economic activity has always occurred outside of large institutions, in semi-autonomous proto-markets, in which the vast majority of working musicians have tended to live insecure existences, having to support their music through other (creative and non-creative) jobs, to identify new opportunities to create, produce, perform, promote and sell their musical labour in order to sustain their music careers.⁸ Looking at it this way, rather than a transformation of working conditions within (popular) music, it could be argued that labour in other industries is simply becoming more akin to the traditional economic structures and working practices of the popular music industry, with more and more people working in a 'gig economy' (Osborne and Butler 2016).

Conclusion: musicians' labour and entrepreneurship

The routine manner in which musicians in this study seek to sustain themselves by engaging in entrepreneurial activities is thus not simply something 'caused' by the transformations affecting the popular music industry but, rather, represents a continuation of the 'autonomous and entrepreneurial modes that have come to define popular musicians' patterns of working' (Stahl 2013:9). More than this, however, we would suggest that it is characteristic of musicians within modernity more generally.⁹ In an historical analysis of the emergence of the modern musician, William Weber highlights that, to be a successful musician in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, 'it was insufficient just to be a good performer or composer' (2004:5). Rather, he portrays successful musicians as opportunists, identifying and creating markets for their music (and their personalities). Indeed, he suggests that the newly-emerging role of musician '*must* be seen as entrepreneurial... Musicians had

⁸ Of the musicians interviewed for this project, five made a living solely from music (though this included various types of 'odd-jobbing' for other musicians), two worked part time in unskilled service jobs to supplement their income, and three had full time jobs in other sectors.

⁹ As outlined earlier, we are focusing on (semi-)professional musicians seeking to sustain musical careers to varying degrees rather than amateur/enthusiasts. The porous boundaries between amateur and professional in music production certainly makes the issues discussed here more complex, but there is not space to elaborate further in this paper.

to advance themselves with the kind of self-promotion and manipulation of a market through social networks that is essential to entrepreneurial activity' (2004:11, emphasis added). Similarly, DeNora argues that Beethoven's reception as a composer of undoubted genius was not a spontaneous reaction to his compositions but, rather, required active social development, not least from the composer himself. In DeNora's words, 'Beethoven's initial and subsequent status during the early nineteenth century was inextricably linked to his own entrepreneurial contributions, both musical and social' (1995:142).

In other words, musicians in modernity are, and always were, simultaneously both cultural and economic figures. While there are undoubted specificities about the contemporary music industry, the fundamental question facing our musicians remains the same as it has for over two centuries: how does one sustain oneself from cultural production in capitalism? As the exemplar of the romantic genius composer, it is highly appropriate to refer to Beethoven above, for it was the artists (including musicians) of the romantic era who first had to deal with this question and whose answers still exert influence today. In particular, the argument that art must be judged by its own standards (established by the musician/artist) rather than those of the market (set by the public) as well as the position that great art is ahead of its time and will only be appreciated in later eras can both be seen as reactions against the commercialisation of cultural production (Marshall 2005). However, while the figure of the ignored artist starving in a garret retains its ideological power (especially in popular music) these ideas emerge only because of the increased opportunities for individuals to become cultural producers inherent within the onset of capitalism.

The role of the musician in modernity is thus inherently dual-natured, for the opportunities to be a successful independent musician are only produced within the context of a market environment. However, just as the idea of 'the musician' is more complex than commonly perceived, the concept of 'the entrepreneur' is similarly multi-dimensional and requires further unpacking. While conventional understandings of entrepreneurialism (as invoked by the musicians in our study) associate it with profit seeking, early development of the concept, most notably by the economist Joseph Schumpeter (1911; 1934), was not defined by the pursuit of profit. It was instead used to frame innovative behaviour that may result in economic growth but which was driven by the creative pleasure inherent in problem-solving. Schumpeter (1934/2011:50) explained entrepreneurial activity as 'carrying out... new combinations' or innovations through producing new goods, new methods of production, opening new markets, finding new sources of materials or bringing about a new organisation of an industry. Particularly in his earlier writings there was emphasis on the entrepreneur's willingness to take creative risks and cope with uncertainty, to put things into practice rather than just having innovative ideas *per se*. In other words, the entrepreneur was a 'man of action' who did not accept reality as it was. This type of economic behaviour – referred to as creative construction – forces reality to one's will and overcomes resistance in order to drive innovation and change throughout the economic system. The entrepreneur is thus quite a heroic figure in Schumpeter's presentation: the driving force of economic progress but personally driven by a desire to solve problems and make things better rather than by economic gain. Although Schumpeter's conceptualisations have been mainly overlooked

within academic analyses of entrepreneurialism (Te Velde 2012:103), his portrayal remains culturally significant as can be seen, for example, in the public presentation of individuals like Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg (Streeter 2015) and such ideas clearly influenced our musicians' interpretations of whom they consider to be entrepreneurs, such as Alan Sugar, Richard Branson and the *Dragons' Den* persona.

Comparing the Schumpeterian idea of the entrepreneur with the romantic conception of the artist, we thus find a striking number of similarities. Most obviously, both exhibit creativity in their respective fields, generating new ideas and practices. Both have a visionary quality, an ability to see beyond what is and bring about new states (thus being 'ahead of their time'). As a result, both are agents of the perpetual change/progress inherent in modernity and both perform socially vital functions – Schumpeter argues that the entrepreneur is responsible for capitalism's dynamic nature while romantic artists saw themselves as 'agents of the "revolution for life"' (Williams 1958/1990:42). In taking action to change the world, both are willing to accept risks (of failure, of reputational damage) and able to deal with the uncertainty of not knowing what the outcomes of their actions will be. Both have a certain maverick quality, as challenging norms and risking criticism emphasises their individuality against the conventional and the routine.

Considered this way, it is possible to see the entrepreneur and the artist/musician not as opposites but as doubles (Lindqvist 2011:10). Both are reflections of the same underlying dynamics of possessive individualism within modernity; both are ideological figures which enable us to make sense of our selves within social systems dominated by utilitarianism, exchange value and impersonal structures. It is thus unsurprising to see entrepreneurial traits within those working within the cultural sphere, such as the musicians in this study. Indeed, returning to Schumpeter, some interpretations of his work argue that his account forged explicit links between art and entrepreneurship. Swedberg, for instance, suggests that, for Schumpeter, 'the essence of entrepreneurship... is a form of art' and concludes that 'the true artist... should presumably be conceptualized as an entrepreneur' (2006:248-9; see also Harvey 1991:16-17). From this perspective, the entrepreneur is inherently artistic and the artist inherently entrepreneurial. Schumpeter's portrayal of the entrepreneur – as someone who does not accept reality as it is and who shapes reality to one's will – could serve as an excellent depiction of the modernist artist heroically seeking to exert his will in producing a Work of Art that captured the eternal essence of humanity out of the fragmentation and ephemerality of modern life (Harvey 1991:20). The similarity is perhaps unsurprising given that the initial version of Schumpeter's essay was written during the apex of modernism, in 1911.

As ideological figures, however, both 'the entrepreneur' and 'the musician' risk overstating the heroic dimensions of their activities at the expense of the more routine. Schumpeter has been accused of initially placing too much emphasis on the entrepreneur as an individual heroic figure whereas, as Te Velde (2012: 109) observes, once entrepreneurial innovations become successful the activity can no longer be entrepreneurial and thus 'constant replenishment of entrepreneurial cannon fodder' is required. The entrepreneur, therefore,

is not actually the Dragon in *Dragons' Den* (actually more of a venture capitalist) but, rather, is better understood as one of the parade of numerous participants (the 'cannon fodder') that present their innovations in the desperate hope of investment. And, as the TV series illustrates, entrepreneurial activity more often results in failure than success. Whereas contemporary celebrations of entrepreneurialism, both within government policy and music industry discourse more broadly, reinforce the Schumpeterian myth of the entrepreneur as successful and powerful, the reality for most is more likely to consist of routine failure and invisibility. Thus, when the musicians in this study demonstrated self-consciousness about their entrepreneurial abilities or successes they were, in reality, simply reflecting the circumstances of most entrepreneurs.

However, while 'musician' and 'entrepreneur' may be two sides of the same coin that does not mean that one can be collapsed into the other. While all musicians may be entrepreneurial by necessity, not all entrepreneurs are artistic. There remain significant differences between the two figures, most notably regarding the issue of utility. Utility is an essential component of entrepreneurialism – creating something is never for its own sake but always to solve a problem or improve an existing situation. This also means that the entrepreneur's activities ultimately depend on extrinsic validation, via the public adoption of their products/processes or through generating investment and/or profit. Failure for the entrepreneur ultimately can only be determined by the market. By contrast, the romantic notion of the artist is explicitly anti-utilitarian, with creativity pursued for its own sake and not for any other purpose. This means that the artist's work can be deemed successful in intrinsic terms, without reference to external validators like the market at all. As was clear from the respondents in this study, the market is the context in which music is made and not the determinant of its value.

To frame musicians as 'multifaceted entrepreneurs' (Smith 2013:33), developing their 'brands' (Carah 2011) and 'converting capitals' (Scott 2012) is thus to impose alien categorisations upon them, ones that overemphasise the economic dimensions of their actions and misrepresent 'the meaning and purpose of the kind of work musicians do' (Coulson 2012:260). The activities that go on within popular music's proto-markets may have economic significance but they are not economically focused. Indeed, as Toynbee states, while musicians may be 'implicated in the production of musical commodities... at the same time they are also creative agents who gladly give the products of their labour for free. In this sense they resist capital by refusing the calculus of equivalence' (2003:52). Over-emphasising the economic dimensions of musicians' behaviour buys into an ideological framing of creative labour that highlights positive associations of autonomy and creativity as a mask for lack of infrastructural support, uncertainty and continuous job insecurity. The musicians in our pilot project are aware of this and understandably are reluctant to acquiesce.

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