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AIMS AND SCOPE

The International Journal of Music Business Research (IJMBR) as a double-blind reviewed academic journal provides a new platform to present articles of merit and to shed light on the current state of the art of music business research. Music business research is a scientific approach at the intersection of economic, artistic, especially musical, cultural, social, legal, technological developments that aims at a better understanding of the creation/production, dissemination/distribution and reception/consumption of the cultural good music. Thus, the IJMBR targets all academics, from students to professors, from around the world and from all disciplines with an interest in research on the music economy.

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International Journal of Music Business Research

Volume 5, Number 1, October 2016

CONTENTS

Editorial 4

Articles

Aesthetic preferences and aesthetic 'agnosticism' among managers in music organisations: is liking projects important?

Paul Saintilan 6

Constructing authentic identities: why narratives are better than chronicles of achievement in musicians' biographies

Peter Gilks 26

The psychology of streaming: exploring music listeners' motivations to favour access over ownership

Geoff Luck 46

Notes for contributors 62

Editorial

*Dennis Collopy*¹

This new issue of the International Journal of Music Business Research (IJMBR) is the latest published by the International Music Business Research Association (IMBRA) based at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. IMBRA's three current editors include Dennis Collopy, Peter Tschmuck and Carsten Winter along with Daniel Nordgård as our IJMBR book review editor. This issue features three unique papers that highlight novel insights into and fresh innovations in the modern music business particularly at a time when access-based models are superseding the old ownership model in most music markets. The three papers cover music streaming psychology, the relevance of aesthetic preferences in record labels and the importance of narrative as a tool in recording artist biographies.

"The Psychology of Music Streaming - Exploring Music Listeners' motivations To Favour Access over Ownership" focuses on streaming's radical impact on the way we now experience music. The change from ownership to on-demand access of a virtually unlimited amount of music challenges previous notions of how music is defined, experienced and consumed. The paper's psychological perspective highlights a range of factors that encourage music users to favour access over ownership, including enhanced discovery, nostalgia-fulfilment and augmented emotional engagement. This increase in access-based consumption is driven by, and has multiple positive effects on, listeners' psychological functioning. The conclusion notes the implications for each of the three pillars of the streaming industry (listeners, content-creators and service providers) for enhancing the musical experience, growing revenues, and maximising the overall potential for engagement with and through music.

"Aesthetic preferences and aesthetic 'agnosticism' among managers in music organisations: is liking projects important?" is pertinent to the

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predominately 'pull' nature of the modern streaming based market. The paper examines how senior managers within the large music organisations deal with their individual aesthetic preferences in their decision making when developing and marketing new work? Using an international and qualitative method involving 24 interviews with senior executives, the article notes substantial variations in opinion, with some managers very much committed to their own aesthetic preferences and others adopting a more 'agnostic' stance in which their personal preferences are ignored in favour of a more consumer oriented, marketing-led approach to their target market.

"Why narratives are better than chronicles of achievement in musicians' biographies" is relevant to better understanding modern music consumer behaviour including new music discovery and the reliance of many online music services such as Spotify on recording artist biographies. The paper draws on Simon Frith's theory that music appreciation involves identification with broader cultural narratives and Bruner's theory that identities are narratively constructed. It hypothesises that artist biographies containing narrative features are superior to those that merely chronicle the artists' achievements. The narrative based 'bios' enable perceptions of authenticity and can improve listeners' aesthetic experience of the music, increasing the likelihood of them becoming fans.

The IJMBR is aimed at all academics around the world, from students to professors, from all disciplines and with an interest in music business research. Interdisciplinary papers will be especially welcome if they address economic and business-related topics in the field of music. We look forward to receiving as many interesting papers as possible and request that you send paper proposals to:

music.business.research@gmail.com

Aesthetic preferences and aesthetic 'agnosticism' among managers in music organisations: is liking projects important?

*Paul Saintilan*²

Abstract

How do managers within large music organisations deal with their own aesthetic preferences when developing and marketing new work? In this qualitative, international study, data were collected through 24 interviews with senior managers. The study found strong differences of opinion, ranging from managers being strongly invested in their own aesthetic preferences, to bringing an 'agnostic' attitude that their personal preferences should be ignored in deference to those of the target audience.

Keywords: Music managers, managerial aesthetic preferences, aesthetic agnosticism, taste

1 Introduction and background

Senior managers within the music and creative industries commission and bring to the marketplace aesthetic products, mediating between aesthetic considerations and commercial imperatives (Caves 2000; Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011). Music is an aesthetic, hedonic product that stimulates affective reactions (Müller et al. 2010; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Conscious aesthetic preferences arise, in terms of what we personally 'like' (Halpern et al. 2008), as well as beauty judgements, tastes, (Nieminen et al. 2011) and affective responses such as feelings of pleasure or displeasure (Müller et al. 2010). Creative managers are not immune to these feelings (Childress 2012), and so it is reasonable to ask how do managers within music organisations deal with their own aes-

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thetic preferences and personal reactions when developing and marketing new creative work? In what circumstances do managers believe that their personal aesthetic preferences could legitimately enter into decision-making? Managers in the fashion, advertising, design, film, TV, arts, music and entertainment industries all face situations where they could allow their personal preferences to influence decisions (Caves 2000; Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011).

Academic writing on aesthetic preferences has been dominated by Bourdieu, who sees taste functioning as a marker of class (Bourdieu 1979, 1986). Cultural arbiters of taste use their elite status within the social hierarchy and their privileged education to enforce judgements of taste upon the less privileged. A study of US book publishing companies (Childress 2012) found that acquisition editors did indeed seek to entrench their position as arbiters of taste in selecting and supervising manuscripts for publication, did act in terms of their personal preferences, and used market research data to legitimise choices they had already made. Yet this research has not been extended into any broader study of managerial beliefs on the appropriateness of introducing personal aesthetic preferences into decision-making.

It should be noted that an aesthetic preference (i.e. 'liking' a piece of music) is quite distinct from the broader concepts of 'tacit knowledge' (Strati 2003), managerial 'intuition' and 'gut' decision making (Dane & Pratt 2007; Hayashi 2001; Lank & Lank 1995; Sadler-Smith & Shefy 2004). Managerial intuition may involve heuristics, expertise, and non-conscious information processing (Dane & Pratt 2007). A manager may like a pop song and want to see it receive extra promotional support, demonstrating an aesthetic preference. This is not the same as a manager who draws upon years of commercial experience to predict the success of a popular music single (Davis 2012). The latter draws on memory of a large volume of similar products and is seeking to make a predictive judgement based upon a comparative analysis.

If managers were to consider their own preferences to be less important than audience preferences, they would be following a consumer oriented approach which is customarily advocated by the marketing

discipline (Levitt 1960; Kotler & Levy 1969). There is evidence that the marketing function has been gaining in power and influence in the creative industries over the past 20 years (Hesmondhalgh 2013; Bennett & Kottasz 2001). Røyseng (2008) describes how theatre sales managers were traditionally recruited based on their dramaturgical education, but increasingly professional sales and marketing experience is sought. The growing professionalization of music organisation management (Watt 2014), and study of marketing and business subjects by music managers (Southall 2009) is of interest to this study, as it may influence the views of managers as to the appropriateness of introducing their own views. Too great a personal focus may result in indulgence and a failure to connect with audiences, which has been witnessed with twentieth century 'contemporary' music (Jacobson 1968; Caves 2000).

In this paper, 'aesthetic agnosticism' is proposed as a consumer-oriented belief that a creative manager's personal preferences are irrelevant, because the work is being created for others, not the manager. It is 'agnostic' because one is refusing to take a position on the aesthetic merits of a piece, in the same way that 'technological agnosticism' means a refusal to take a position on technology platforms, denoting openness (Wang et al. 2013) and neutrality (Sultan & Mooraj 2001).

A series of interviews conducted in 2012 with artistic leaders of non-profit theatre companies in the USA, demonstrated how aesthetic preferences among artistic managers could influence the artistic output of the company. David Dower, of Arena Stage, speaking of the company's Artistic Director commented "*she has to own something in her gut, it has to really belong to her as a choice in order for her to do it*" (Lord 2012: 343). Rachel Grossman, of the Woolly Mammoth Theatre Co. recounted a difficult and controversial production which had generated audience hostility: "*If we're going to keep pushing to the edge of theatrical style, as we're charged in the mission, we have to stay proud of the work, and learn from that place.*" (Lord 2012: 229).

The music industry is the research context for this study, as it is a creative, fashion driven industry where successful new product development is vital. In 2013, US \$4.3 billion was internationally invested in

developing and marketing artists, around 27 per cent of recorded music revenues, with a success ratio for major record company signed artists of between one in five and one in ten (IFPI 2014). In non-profit music organisations, such as presenters of opera, symphonic work, and chamber music, developing and commissioning new work is also seen as possessing significant risk and capacity for failure (Crealey 2003). Thus understanding how new product development decision-making is influenced by personal aesthetic preferences has potentially significant implications for the industry.

Researchers have encountered problems defining the 'music industry' due the diversity of stakeholders and types of business (Tschmuck 2012; Throsby 2002). Recent studies (Tschmuck 2012) have retained the term 'music industry' rather than 'industries' but pointed out that it has a number of sub-industries within it, with each possessing its own characteristics, such as the phonographic (recording) industry, music publishing, broadcasting, concert promotion, and music instrument manufacturing. This study focuses upon organisations in the recording industry and concert presentation sectors, which creatively commission, develop and market new work. This is because these companies provide the greatest opportunity for managers to impose their own aesthetic preferences on processes and outcomes. Identifying creative material, developing it and marketing it to consumers constitutes a core process of the music industry (Negus 1992). Other sub-industries such as recording studios, instrument manufacture, venue hire, ticket agents etc. are part of a broader network that supply ancillary products to the core creative agents as well as other industry actors.

The new product development literature contains examples that illustrate the dangers of becoming too personally and subjectively invested in projects (Tingling & Brydon 2010; Schmidt & Calantone 2002). Managers who develop a product are far less likely to terminate it if it is failing than another manager who joined later in the process (Schmidt & Calantone 2002). Thus personal investment in the project, while an important ingredient in fighting for the project in its early stages can result in poor decision-making later in the process.

New product development in the creative industries has been characterised as risky and uncertain because "nobody knows" (Caves 2000) the consumer reception. This is due not only to the capriciousness of consumer demand, but because managerial commitment is made prior to the full creative work being revealed, and the output is complex, variable and subjective. In an environment where "nobody knows", internal and external belief in the project may need to be built up and proselytised by the responsible manager. Becoming personally invested in projects, and personally advocating for projects, creates scope for aesthetic preferences and judgements to insinuate themselves. There has been no exploration in the literature (to the author's knowledge) of how managers view introducing their own personal preferences to the commissioning, developing and marketing of creative work.

2 Method

The qualitative approach of this study is considered appropriate because the research focus is exploratory, looking at how managers within music organisations deal with their own aesthetic preferences when making new product development decisions (Denzin & Lincoln 2011). Qualitative data captured through in-depth individual interviewing is considered appropriate because it allows the researchers to explore managerial perceptions and organisational processes that would be too subtle or complex for quantitative questionnaires. Qualitative research allows managers to self-reflect on the process of developing new work, and allows an exploration of managerial beliefs and attitudes to introducing personal preferences.

This study includes both commercial/for-profit, and non-profit music industry contexts. Major record labels are chosen as the commercial context as they have been cited in the academic literature as supreme examples of a commercial focus (Kubacki & Croft 2004). These managers, which comprised half the sample, were largely responsible for popular music genres seeking mainstream audience appeal. Managers were also drawn from a variety of large non-profit music organisations, en-

compassing opera, musical theatre, orchestral management and concert presentation. They were predominantly responsible for classical music programming, including new commissions and new productions of historical works. A 'large' music organisation was understood as a major record company in the commercial sector (or a division of a major company). In the non-profit sector it was a prestigious, government funded company, with functional departments and more than AUD \$10 million in turnover per annum.

This research is conducted in three geographical territories, Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA). These three highly developed music markets are interrelated and interdependent given their common language, similar audience tastes, and strong exchange of product (Garofalo 1999; Simpson & Munro 2012). It should be emphasised though that this is not a cross-cultural study. It does not seek to select participant groups in each geographical area that represent a nation, and then compare and contrast and relate this to cultural factors. It seeks to capture diverse insight from members of an increasingly globalised industry.

Three key managerial roles drive the creative development and marketing of artists and music in music organisations: the artistic leader, the marketing leader, and the CEO/President (Negus 1992; Ordanini et al. 2008; Butler 2000; Sorjonen 2011). The artistic managers, who are generally Artistic Directors in non-profit organisations, and Artist & Repertoire (A&R) Vice Presidents in major record companies, are responsible for selecting artists and repertoire, and providing overall supervision for the development of creative projects. Within commercial music organisations, members of the A&R department "*go out and find the talent, sign that talent, and then nurture it to its full potential*" (Priol 2006: 229). They are the interface with the artistic and creative talent. Within non-profit organisations, the artistic administration department that works under the Artistic Director is responsible for programming (selecting repertoire), contracting and liaising with artists, and working with other departments to facilitate the scheduling and marketing of performances. Of relevance to this study is that they may also see themselves

as artists in their own right, particularly non-profit Artistic Directors (Oxenbould 2005).

In both commercial and non-profit contexts, the marketing department could be a co-signatory on the business case for a project, and could drive discussions on sales estimates, budgeting, pricing, packaging, positioning and promotion. But in the commercial context alone, it is seen to possess a legitimate role in co-defining the product and attempting to influence creative decision making (Kaiser & Egan 2013; Ordanini et al. 2008).

Managerial experts with a depth of experience were chosen through purposeful sampling (Willemain 1994). Interviews were conducted in Sydney, London, Leeds and New York, and involved CEOs, marketing managers, and artistic directors. The profile of the managerial sample of 24 participants is summarised in table 1. It identifies the sectors in which the managers work. Their depth of experience is significant: the average length of time they spent working in the specific context they were representing was 20 years. Many of the executives had held very senior positions within the music industry, with one of the commercial CEOs having had 6,000 staff report to him at one point in his career, and another commercial CEO 3,000 staff. While the sample is skewed male (as in the overall music industry), a female voice is included in each of the three functional perspectives.

The educational and work experience background of the participants was varied, but it is noteworthy that the marketing executives were more likely to have formal business qualifications (particularly the commercial marketing executives). The vast majority of executives characterised themselves as having worked their way up, from junior or middle management positions, rather than having been transferred into a senior role from another industry.

The interview questions were designed to provide an open platform to allow managers to talk through their understanding of the general process, eliciting responses, which could be probed further. For example: *"Tell me the story of the development and launch of a new project (as recent as possible). What role did the needs of artists and audiences*

respectively play in the choice, development and marketing of the new project?"; "Have you ever experienced any tension between your own personal taste, and what you felt was the best decision for the organisation around programming?"; "As a general point, to what extent does the organisation attempt to integrate audience research and audience preferences into new product development/new work?"; "To what extent does being a great and successful artist involve 'audience leadership', rather than just 'giving people what they want'? By 'audience leadership' I mean being ahead of the audience, leading people on to new experiences." The responses to these questions, led managers to reflect on their attitude to their own preferences, as can be seen in the Findings section.

Position and industry sector	Number of managers	Age (mean)	Gender	Country manager is based	Years in large organisations (mean)
Artistic commercial (Artist & Repertoire managers/VPs)	4	48	Male 100%	1 US; 2 UK; 1 Australia	16
Artistic non-profit (Artistic or musical directors)	4	60	Male 75% Female 25%	1 US; 1 UK; 2 Australia	27
Marketing commercial (Marketing VPs and directors)	4	45	Male 100%	2 US; 1 UK; 1 Australia	10
Marketing non-profit (Marketing directors)	3	45	Female 100%	1 US; 1 UK; 1 Australia	12
CEO commercial (ex presidents/CEOs)	5	63	Male 100%	1 US; 2 UK; 2 Australia	28
CEO non-profit (CEOs/general managers)	4	55	Male 75% Female 25%	1 US; 1 UK; 2 Australia	25
Total	24	53	79% Male	33% USA 33% UK 33% AUS	20

Table 1: Demographic summary of research participants (n=24)

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 45 to 150 minutes, audio recorded and transcribed, then uploaded into NVIVO 10. Transcripts were initially coded into 'product oriented' and 'consumer oriented' passages, and then further coded into sub-concepts in an iterative process. The full analysis is part of a larger project, but this paper concentrates on analysis of passages coded as exhibiting 'Personal Preferences/Conviction' and 'Agnosticism'. Themes were identified within these two sub-concepts, the analysis and discussion of which forms the basis of this paper.

3 Findings and discussion

Managers took strikingly different positions on how they dealt with their own aesthetic preferences when developing, commissioning and marketing new work. Many believed that personal preferences could legitimately enter into their decision-making, and many did not. 'Liking' projects was seen by some as important, and as an unnecessary indulgence by others.

There was clear evidence that managers chose to 'sign' or commission projects based on their personal tastes and preferences. A commercial Artistic manager observed that; *"trying to push our taste on everybody else, and knowing or believing that you are right is part of a thing that drives you as an A&R person"* (Artistic/Commercial/USA – henceforth abbreviated as Art/Com/USA). He added: *"9 times out of 10 when an A&R manager signs a band it's because they liked them."* (Art/Com/USA). A marketing manager of an orchestra observed: *"the creative starting points are really not dissimilar to almost any concert, and almost any Artistic Director's thinking process, where he says 'I am going to obsess myself with Bartók this year'."* (Marketing/Not for Profit/UK – henceforth abbreviated as Mar/NFP/UK) One manager spoke derisively about managers who placed their belief in consumer insight. He considered this fruitless due to consumers' incapacity to envision and articulate imaginative future directions: *"every time the Romans were*

saying '*Vox populi, vox Dei*', 'the voice of the people is the voice of God', that's when they didn't know what to do!'" (CEO/Com/UK).

There was evidence that other managers adopted an 'agnostic' position. One manager (Art/Com/AUS) articulated very clearly an agnostic position on matters of aesthetic preference: "*I think the biggest mistake an A&R person can make, or a marketing person can make, is that they do a campaign or they sign an artist on what they like. Because you're not signing them for you. You're not doing the campaign for you. You're doing it for people, fans*". One artistic manager (Art/Com/UK1) took the view that their job was simply to "*sell records*" and "*take ourselves out of the equation, as judges of whether or not what we're creating is good*". Managerial taste judgements thus become irrelevant, indulgent distractions to the overarching (sales) objective of the organisation.

One CEO (CEO/Com/USA) who had worked his way up through the sales ranks, took professional pride in being able to successfully advocate for projects without believing in them: "*I was good at it, you know that's how I got ahead, going in and selling people something that you had a number on, that you didn't believe in, no big deal, you move onto the next thing, you know.*" So he was given a sales target by the organisation ('a number') and successfully secured the support of retailers. A subsequent comment he made confirmed a lack of belief in the artistic merits of what he was selling; "*I have also worked on projects just fine without any hesitation that I thought were just complete and total crap*". The latter comment is an expression of 'agnosticism' because he was pushing forward the company's commercial agenda without allowing it to be held hostage to his own personal enthusiasms. He did not need to believe in the artistic worth of a piece of music, to believe that the project was in the best commercial interests of the organisation. For example, it could have been targeted at an audience with which the manager had no empathy. Alternatively, the company may have guaranteed international distribution to a project, which would work well in some markets, and poorly in others, and so releasing and getting behind the project, despite his misgivings, was the price of being a good corporate citizen.

Only two non-profit managers made statements in the natural course of the interviews that indicated a belief in agnosticism. Even then, these two statements were more qualified than the most forthright commercial managers. One of the non-profit Artistic Directors commented:

"I've got a friend who's a programming director in a very big institution. And her view is that if she likes it, the audience would like it. So she programmes what she likes. I would like to think that I could do that, but I would honestly say I don't, because I think that I also have a duty to programme some things that I think people will like, even if I don't. Or I know they like even if I don't. So again, there's a certain amount of pragmatism in what I do. I'm not just going to say 'well I'm only going to programme what I like' because I don't think I have the right to do that."
(Art/NFP/UK)

The words *"programme some things"* indicate that it is not a guiding principle, but rather a balanced accommodation, where some pieces may indeed be chosen on the basis of his taste, but this shouldn't be extended to every aspect of programming.

One non-profit CEO (CEO/NFO/USA) believed that managers were often poor at identifying their own tastes and biases, and being more transparent would enable the organisation to better assign the right people to assess the right projects:

"I think it's important to recognise what your personal taste is ... I think a lot of people aren't great at doing that. They'll tell you 'Oh, I like everything'. But when you actually sit down and question them and try to work out what it is that they like they'll have a list a mile long of things they don't actually like ..."

He shared with the commercial managers an overriding commitment to doing what was in the best interests of the organisation:

"So I think recognising what your taste is is important, because it's the only way you can be bipartisan in recognising the things that might

be better for the business than you wish to admit, 'cause you're not a fan of them."

There was evidence of discomfort and tension within managers when discussing personal preferences. It was possible for one individual manager to simultaneously advocate for personal investment and agnosticism, as if they were two lenses through which a project could be viewed:

"I always have a joke that you've got to hate your artists, because you're always looking out, you don't have an emotional skin in the game. For me it's a trick of the mind because I obviously do, I love my artists ...". (Art/Com/AUS)

This manager had previously proselytised on the importance of building belief in projects, but he felt self-conscious about his 'emotional skin in the game' in such an accountable environment. He acknowledged the contradiction between passionately fighting for a project, and also being a detached, dispassionate observer, trying to bring objective guidance to the artists with whom he was working.

There is a dark side to pursuing one's own preferences, as a manager with a long, successful career will look back self-critically on many failures, where their personal investment and personal advocacy came back to bite them:

"And I can tell you I've been wrong millions of times and that's very frustrating because maybe I'm to blame because I pushed the record in that direction, I pushed the act in that direction, I pushed the producer in that direction, I pushed to get my vision across and maybe that was the wrong vision, and I also pushed the company to go in that direction too, and that was a mistake 'cause it never worked. Was it a mistake because I was wrong, or was it a mistake 'cause the act didn't do what it should have? Those questions I don't know if you can have the answers to, because you never really know what's going to happen until after you've made the commitment." (Art/Com/USA)

Another point of ambivalence around aesthetic preference in the commercial sector was that often the money was to be made in more mainstream acts, while the professional kudos and the personal preferences of A&R managers often lay in less mainstream music. Artistic managers in the study had acknowledged that there is an A&R tradition of wanting to be "*ahead of the curve*", "*cool and cred*", and into "*cutting edge*" work. Such work would appeal to tastemakers in the industry such as music critics and peers, but was not necessarily going to generate short-term profits and mainstream acceptance. This is also the elitist, taste-maker position which Bourdieu (1979, 1986) examines, and it conflicts with an agnostic position. This did not go unnoticed in this study:

"And so I think if you were a music elitist you would have a bit of trouble being happy with your job marketing within a record company, because the most successful music is the music that the A&R man doesn't actually like. A&R never liked Abba, they never liked Bucks Fizz, they hate Celine Dion, you know the list goes on and on of the most successful acts in the world an A&R man spits on, because there's ... they're commercially crass or whatever ...". (CEO/Com/UK)

Commercial managers across all functional specialisations observed that what might be useful and acceptable in a specialist niche record label, does not necessarily work in a major record company. A specialist label devoted to 'death metal', hip hop, reggae or Puerto Rican salsa music, would develop strengths and expertise in a specific genre targeted at a specific audience, and potentially attract employees devoted to that genre. Major record companies on the other hand need to serve diverse audiences and genres to maximise their economic potential and obtain the maximum return on the large marketing and distribution infrastructure they have built. An artistic manager (Art/Com/AUS) commented that this meant, "*I don't have the luxury of my personal tastes, in music.*" Tastes are thus an indulgence the company can ill afford if it is attempting to maximise sales across many artists and genres. A Marketing Manager (Mar/Com/USA) pointed out that any aspiration to like all

the music one worked on was frankly impossible in a large entertainment organisation:

"It's not everything you're going to put out you're going to like, and I don't care ... I mean that's going to happen if you work at a record company, if you work at a film company, you know if you work for a television station you're not going to like every program that you put out."

From a CEO perspective, CEO/Com/AUS saw it as being potentially marginalising and damaging if a label president attempted to restrict the creative output to personal enthusiasms:

"I think it's the undoing often of senior executives, CEOs, when they try and put their own imprimatur, their own taste, their own particular style. It narrows the scope too much for a major company. Great for an indie label, but not for a major company." (CEO/Com/AUS)

Non-profit Artistic Directors were less self-conscious about integrating their personal preferences. They argued they had been chosen on the basis of their artistic credentials, they believed it was impossible for them not to program without introducing their personal preferences, and it was part of their own distinctive imprimatur and artistic signature, which then became that of the organisation.

This personal investment makes any rejection by the public not just a rejection of the program, but also a rejection of the Artistic manager as a tastemaker and curator. Having taken a strong aesthetic position, it is hard for them to retreat without it being seen to lack artistic integrity. Thus the solution in the event of a perceived failure of artistic choices is not compromising it or reformulating it, it is finding another Artistic Director. So job insecurity and accountability existed in the non-profit as well as commercial sector among artistic managers, and they understood they would pay with their job if audiences did not respond positively to their preferences on a systematic basis:

"If an Artistic Director makes consecutively bad choices, about what is or is not good, then they get booted. That's fine." (Art/NFP/AUS); "I think that at a certain point you have to say we have chosen Miss X or

Mr Y to be our artistic leader ... And then if it doesn't work you can get rid of the person you know, and it's a big crisis for a while, but it ... life goes on." (Art/NFP/AUS)

A belief in agnosticism existed within the non-profit sector data, but was less prevalent than in the commercial sector. This may be due to the importance of 'artistic leadership' in the non-profit sector, another concept that all managers embraced warmly in the research. Artistic leadership is a belief in the importance of pushing the boundaries, 'making taste', leading fashion trends, standing behind controversial positions, and presenting the consumer with work that they could not have imagined. Managers provided many examples from classical and popular music where some of the most revered and currently performed works were premiered to audience apathy, hostility or confusion. Within Western music, innovation has often been generated from within the art form itself, against prevailing audience taste. All managers revered artists that pushed the boundaries and provided artistic leadership: *"I think every artist, every great artist wants to lead their audience"* (Com/CEO/UK).

In the non-profit sector, managers seek to guide, educate and shape taste in a more muscular way than the commercial sector. They rarely seek to passively respond to audiences in a value-neutral way. Thus Bourdieu's (1979, 1986) thesis is far more relevant to non-profit managers. Contemporary classical music is promoted as sophisticated artistic expression; implicitly superior to popular music, yet significant educational investment is required to appreciate this genre.

It should be acknowledged that highly sophisticated analysis was introduced by most music organisations into their new product development planning, but it was in sales and promotional planning, rather than creative product development. One CEO saw the attempt to integrate audience preferences by slavishly monitoring consumer data as a misguided and ultimately pathetic abnegation of managerial responsibility to make decisions and show leadership:

"All of these people have so many sources of information they don't know what is going on. It's coming from everywhere. [You want to say] 'Stop! Stop, stop, stop, stop, stop' ... 'Stop with your books and research. Do you have an opinion?' ... Of course I think it's a joke, but when people use it as a shelter to cover their own incapacities, or their own lack of decision, or their own lack of vision, and they use everybody else's opinion to forge their own opinion. That's bad. Have a view. Have a vision. Have an angle. But have something." (CEO/Com/UK)

Previous new product development research illustrated the dangers of becoming too personally and subjectively invested in projects (Tingling & Brydon 2010; Schmidt & Calantone 2002). In the creative industries becoming personally invested is even more complex and hazardous for some managers, due to an industry expectation that artistic managers should become personally invested in projects.

4 Conclusion and managerial implications

In conclusion, there was clear evidence that artistic managers, both commercial and non-profit, commissioned projects on the basis of personal preferences. However, there was evidence that managers could also take an 'agnostic' position, largely on the basis of a consumer-oriented approach, and there was evidence of discomfort and tension arising between and within managers with regards to how they dealt with incorporating their own preferences.

There was consensus among the commercial managers that introducing one's own aesthetic preferences may be appropriate in a niche, independent label, but does not necessarily work in a major record company. A major company needs to serve multiple genres, tastes and audiences, and it marginalises the company to become too invested in any one aesthetic. Niche organisations built around a narrower repertoire focus could more comfortably employ enthusiasts with narrower and more committed tastes.

Artistic Directors of non-profit organisations proudly deployed their aesthetic preferences as their imprimatur and artistic signature. Agnos-

ticism was less powerful in a non-profit context potentially due to a belief in 'artistic leadership'. Instead of a value-neutral approach, they believed that they had a duty to educate, mould and extend audience tastes in a more muscular way than is attempted in the commercial sector.

This is the first study to the author's knowledge to explore how managers within music organisations deal with their own aesthetic preferences and personal reactions when making decisions. In terms of the limitations of this study, the geographic focus on the US, UK and Australia may limit the generalizability of results for other international markets. The sample was also skewed male, and while this is the case in the industry, it may create a gender bias. One other limitation that should be borne in mind is that it is a study of managerial beliefs and attitudes, rather than actual behaviour. The applicability of these findings to other creative industries such as visual art, design and fashion, while promising, has also yet to be determined.

In terms of managerial implications, the emergence of such differing positions may cause managers within the creative industries to reflect on their own views, and the positives and negatives of each position. Managers should also consider whether disclosing one's tastes and biases more transparently might enable the organisation to better assign the right people to assess the right projects.

In terms of implications for further research, this initial exploratory study has identified sufficient divergence of opinion to warrant further quantitative research to determine the representativeness of the views. 'Agnosticism' has been advanced in this study as a consumer-oriented managerial belief that a manager's personal aesthetic preferences should be considered subservient to the needs of the marketplace. Research is encouraged to determine how broadly, and in what areas this belief prevails, both within music and within other creative industries. Research attention could also be placed on the effectiveness or business outcomes of these different approaches (personally invested versus agnostic). Care should be taken to include and differentiate between the

commercial and non-profit contexts, given their distinctive characteristics.

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Why narratives are better than chronicles of achievement in musicians' biographies

Peter Gilks³

Abstract

Drawing on Frith's theory that music appreciation involves identification with broader cultural narratives and Bruner's theory that identities are narratively constructed, a hypothesis is developed to argue that band bios containing narrative features are superior to those that merely chronicle bands' achievements. Such bios can facilitate perceptions of authenticity and thereby improve listeners' aesthetic experience of the music and increase the likelihood of them becoming fans.

Keywords: Music marketing, narrative, biography, authenticity identity, fandom

1 Introduction

Short band biographies, or 'bios', can be found in many places, including official band websites, unofficial fan websites, Facebook pages, press kits etc. To some extent, the bio has become the successor to the liner notes that used to appear on the sleeves of 12-inch vinyl records and CDs. However, unlike liner notes, which traditionally took the form of thoughtfully penned essays and were not necessarily oriented towards marketing a band (Biron 2011), bios have become a key component in marketing strategies for bands and individual musicians⁴ alike. Despite its importance, the band bio remains an un-researched literary genre. To begin to address this gap, in this article two contrasting bios are analysed with particular attention given to their narrative qualities. It is argued that due to their capacity to create perceptions of authenticity among listeners, bios that report the intentions of their protagonists are superior to those that do not.

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⁴ Henceforth, for the sake of convenience, I will mainly refer to 'band' bios. Nevertheless, everything I say applies equally to the bios of individual artists.

The basis on which certain bios are judged to be better than others is ultimately a utilitarian one, meaning good bios are those that perform the function of a bio effectively; but what is that function? According to two professional publicists interviewed by McGee (2013), its chief function is to convert new listeners into fans by giving them more to like about a band than just their music. From a marketing perspective, it may therefore be said that a good bio is one that increases new listeners' liking for a band to the extent that they become fans. Contained within this seemingly straightforward criterion, however, are two constructs that require some explication: namely, the condition of 'fandom' and what it means to 'like' a band.

A useful cue for understanding both these ideas comes from the world of cult television programs, where fans are distinguished from mere followers on the basis of the larger social identity that they claim when they consume such programs (Tulloch & Jenkins 1995). We find a similar idea applied in the world of music by Frith (1996: 121), who, in an explanation of how popular music is enjoyed, writes:

"The experience of pop music is an experience of identity: in responding to a song, we are drawn, haphazardly, into emotional alliances with the performers and with the performers' other fans."

In fact, Frith goes so far as to assert that all experiences of liking music involve the assumption of both a subjective and collective identity. This idea of taking on identities is one that will be revisited in more detail below, but the pertinent point to note here is that, by Tulloch and Jenkins' distinction, Frith's aesthetic theory would imply that anyone who likes a given piece is also in some sense a fan.

Fortunately, some clarification can be achieved by recognising two aspects. The first is that a popular music fan's object of attention typically includes not just the music but the performer as well. That is, a single act of liking a piece of music can involve being a fan of two or more different things at the same time. Just as a one can be a football fan, for example, whilst simultaneously being the fan of certain players or a particular club, one might also be a fan of K-pop while simultaneously being

a fan of the band Big Bang and its lead singer G-Dragon. This distinction between liking a band and liking a piece of music highlights the fact that the identities into which we are drawn as we listen to music may be quite diverse.

The second aspect is that we need not limit ourselves to a psychological perspective, where the distinctions between liking music as a casual listener and liking it as a fan can be unclear. It is also possible, and often useful, to adopt a commercial point of view, whereby fans play a more participatory role than casual listeners. For example, they may contribute directly to a band's income when they attend concerts, buy music and merchandise, or support crowdfunding campaigns. Alternatively, they may add cultural value to a band's music in their role as 'prosumers', i.e., listeners who do more than merely consume music passively—they become 'value creation partners' through activities such as compiling playlists on streaming services, sharing them on social media, commenting about the music on blogs, and so on (Winter 2012). In other words, fans' liking for a band goes beyond the emotional solidarity that they, and even casual listeners, experience when they enjoy the band's music. From a commercial standpoint, fans' liking for a band is also something that is manifest through activities that support the band financially, both directly and indirectly.

In short, the argument that some bios are better than others rests on the premise that good bios are those that help draw casual listeners into an experience that involves identification with broader narratives associated with both the band and their music. In addition, fans may also be identified as those listeners who participate in activities that generate revenue for a band and/or add value to their music.

So far, the term 'identity', a familiar, yet multivalent concept that psychologists, philosophers and sociologists often define in different ways, has been used without much explanation. Whichever way the term is used, it is essentially the idea of different things sharing some kind of underlying unity. In the case of a band, this underlying unity might encompass a diverse range of elements: the band's origins, their musical style, the instruments they play, their distinctive sound, their

influences, lyrics, stage performances, album art, fashion sense, public statements, collaborative works, and just about every choice they make as a band. Ideally, what we think of as their identity will bring a certain coherence and unity to these aspects, even though they may not be obviously related. Yet, just as an individual's diverse behaviours may appear senseless to some observers, to friends who know the individual well, his or her seemingly random behaviour can be easily understood and explained. Similarly, perceiving coherence in a band's diverse creative outputs activities can be thought of in terms of knowing the answer to the question of whom they are. Notably, this very question of 'who someone is' is the point of departure in Vignoles et al. (2011) project of integrating several definitions of identity.

Conceiving identity in this way means that a band's identity becomes more than a distinctive name and logo. While such signs do, in a sense, serve to identify a band, they only do so in a contextual way, for they have no intrinsic relationship with their referents. Names and logos ultimately can only tell us what something is not; by themselves, they do not tell us what something is. To illustrate, take my own band 'Gray Day' as an example, which I am sure most readers of this article will not have heard of. Merely knowing our name tells you almost nothing about who we are. It reveals little about our vision, values, or music. All you can be sure of is that we are not any other band that you know of.

Given then, that names and logos cannot by themselves identify a band, I would like now to consider a quite different approach to identity; one does not see words and symbols as representative of any distinguishing property or quality, but instead sees identity as something to be constructed. *Narrative* identity is an idea that has its roots in the philosophy of Ricoeur (1980) and later became popular among psychologists, most notably Bruner (1991, 1987) who saw it as important for bringing coherence, unity, and sense to events in a single human life. McAdams (2011: 100) expresses the idea succinctly when he writes: "*If one were able to 'see' [a person's] identity ... it would look like a story*".

If we take this idea of a narratively constructed personal identity and apply it to band, it may initially appear to some that a band's story

exists naturally, just waiting, as it were, to be told. Indeed, one popular blogger seems to take this view when he advises up-and-coming musicians that "*everyone has a great story*" and that there is nothing more to do than simply tell it (Herstand 2014). However, a closer analysis reveals that a band's story does not exist naturally. While bands do of course have many experiences and things that have happened to them, they are not in themselves a story. They are what the philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe would call 'brute facts' (Anscombe 1958) that stand in need of human interpretation to make sense of them so that they become meaningful events that are related to other meaningful events. In other words, stories do not exist naturally; they are the result of the human interpretation of events and experiences. For this reason narratives should not be thought of as *representing* identities (in the way that names and logos may be thought of), but as *constructing* them.

Narrative is not, however, the only basis on which identity may be constructed. For example, Belk's (1988) theory of material identity has proven useful in understanding how fans get to know a performer through visiting museums that exhibit his or her personal possessions (Gilks 2016). Bamberg et al. (2011) theory of an interactively constructed identity is also useful when studying how speakers variously position themselves according to different situations. For the present investigation into band bios, however, the theory of the narratively constructed identity is deemed to be the most appropriate.

2 Narrative in marketing

The flow of human experience is unstructured, yet to make sense of it and to communicate our sense making to others we need to impose order and organisation onto our experiences. One of the oldest ways, if not the oldest, is through stories. It also appears to be one of the most basic; young children are able to understand stories before they can follow logical arguments, which led Polkinghorne (1988) to speculate that the human brain is hard-wired to 'realise' (in both the senses of 'to understand' and 'to cause to become real') the world narratively in much

the same way as we are hard-wired to learn grammar. Turner (1996) similarly argued that narratives are the central principle of our experience and knowledge, while Bruner (1985) saw narrative thought as but one of two powerful ways of structuring experiences; the other being logico-scientific, or 'paradigmatic' thought. Notably, however, since narrative thought and paradigmatic thought are so fundamentally different, neither one, he argues, can be reduced to the other.

More recently, marketers and popular writers have also developed an interest in narrative. Pink (2006), for example, proclaimed that we are on the cusp of a new era (he calls it the 'Conceptual Age') that will favour storytellers. The reason for this was that information had become a commodity whose value had dropped significantly and what mattered more was "*the ability to place facts into context and to deliver them with emotional impact*" (Pink 2006: 103). This highlights the value of stories; since they can have an emotional impact, the messages they convey are said to be more memorable. Jensen (1999) cited research suggesting that a major part of the growth in consumption in the future will be non-material in nature, and that stories will be particularly effective in adding value to everyday material products. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in an experiment undertaken by Walker & Glenn (2016). These two researchers spent \$128.74 on a collection of yard-sale junk and then hired professional writers to write interesting stories about each item. By posting the items together with the interesting stories on eBay, they were able to sell the junk for a total of \$3,613.

It is also claimed that storytelling is a means for conferring authenticity on products and organisations. Denning (2005), for example, provides practical guidance to business leaders on how to craft a story in order to effectively convey messages of a company's brand and values. Strong empirical evidence to support such an approach comes from a study of 12,000 people in key markets around the world that found that "*having an engaging and authentic story*" was one of seven key concepts associated with brand authenticity (Beattie 2014). Elsewhere, in a mainly theoretical article, Lounsbury & Glynn (2001) explained how entrepreneurial stories facilitate not just the creation of a business's identi-

ty, but also a *"touchstone upon which legitimacy may be conferred by investors, competitors, and consumers"*, while Boje & Khan (2009) similarly claimed that storytelling is the primary way entrepreneurs maintain the currency of their reputation. In addition, Lewis & Bridger (2000) explained how stories could add value to products through investing authenticity into those products.

Given the importance attached to narrative in the social sciences and marketing, it is not surprising to find a number of books and blogs offering DIY indie musicians advice on how to write a bio in a story format, e.g., Cannon & Thomas (2015), Gallant (2014), James (2011), Rankin (2013) and Robley (2014a, 2014b). One particular blog worth mentioning provided the initial impetus for this article. In 2014, the popular blogger Ari Herstand posted a short piece provocatively titled "Why no one cares about your music", in which he boldly told artists that their music *"doesn't matter"*. What they must understand is that *"people need a story"* (Herstand 2014). True to his claim, Herstand's own bio, which appears on his website and was presumably written by Herstand himself, is virtually free of any descriptions of his music and is almost entirely devoted to the story of his artistic journey. Here is an extract:

"After nearly three non-stop years on the road, Herstand needed a change. 'I think it was loading into the Varsity in February during a blizzard that I officially made up my mind. No more winter,' he remembers. The song "Minnie and Me" on the new album, "Brave Enough", is about falling out of love with Minneapolis.

Herstand moved to Los Angeles in the summer of 2010 to begin the next phase of his artistic journey (and get away from the cold). He quickly found a home at the popular Hollywood music venue, The Hotel Cafe. He continued touring extensively, but after returning from an extended run in the summer of 2012, he realized he needed to take some time off the road and explore what LA had to offer.

On a whim, he sent out headshots to acting agents. He hadn't actually acted since he played Peter in Jesus Christ Superstar in a Madison,

Wisconsin community theatre production the summer after high school. The day after the headshots went out, he got 7 calls. He took some meetings and signed with an agent ... ". (Herstand n.d.).

Is it a good story? Is it a narrative? Is it a good bio? Is it likely to turn casual listeners into fans? To help answer these questions we may begin by comparing Herstand's bio against some of the professionally written bios that are reproduced all over the internet on fan sites, music download sites and streaming sites.

An informal survey of such bios reveals that one of their functions appears to be providing readers with evidence of a band's success. In fact, it is not uncommon to find a large portion of many bios devoted to lists of achievements—album releases, hit singles, awards, world tours, and so on. Clearly, Herstand's bio is quite different in this respect. While it does record his album releases, such news occupies only a small part of the bio. Whether this difference is attributable the editorial policies that professional writers must follow or has something to do with the level of success that has already been achieved by the time their bio is written by a professional publicist is perhaps the subject of a separate study.

What the comparison does reveal, however, is that many professionally written bios are little more than chronicles of achievement. While they may count as 'stories' in a rudimentary sense, but they are not, I contend, true narratives. This is because they merely describe a series of *events* rather than *actions* performed by protagonists with intentions and responsibilities. As a result, capacity to establish a rich and coherent identity for a band is limited. To illustrate this point further, the bios of two well-known stars, Justin Bieber and Iggy Pop, will now be contrasted. Both come from the All Music website, a site with a policy that all bios must be written by in-house staff in accordance with certain editorial guidelines and which services such as iTunes and Spotify source as bios for their own sites (Stenhouse 2013).

3 Chronicles of achievement

Collar's (2016) Justin Bieber bio can be summarised as follows:

Overview (1st paragraph)

His first album, "My World", was a huge international success, particularly for someone of such a young age. Over the next couple of years, his popularity grew with the release of more material. Then his musical activity decreased while public interest in his personal life increased. Eventually, however, he rebounded from this situation with the release of a popular new album.

Chronology (remainder of the bio)

- 2007** Bieber is placed second in a singing contest.
- 2008** Videos posted on YouTube catch the attention of recording industry professionals, who sign him up, even though he is just 15 years old.
- 2009** His first single is released; it goes platinum.

His first album is released; it reaches no. 6 on Billboard.

Part two of his first album is released; it tops Billboard album charts.
- 2010** An acoustic version of previously released material is released.

A documentary is released.

An album featuring collaborations with famous artists is released

- 2011** A holiday-themed album is released
- 2012** His new album, "Believe", is released.
A series of hit singles is released.
- 2013** An acoustic version of Believe is released.
More hit singles are released.
Another documentary released, but it performs poorly at the box office.
- 2014** There is only one successful single for the year
Bieber is arrested and charged with vandalism, assault, and reckless driving.
- 2015** Two hit singles are released.
A third album is released; it debuts at the top of the Bill-board charts.

Clearly, Bieber's bio seems more like a discography in prose form than a narrative, though it does contain a simple plot in its first paragraph that is then fleshed out in the subsequent paragraphs. A plot, which is one of the ingredients of a narrative, has been defined as "*the passage from initial state of equilibrium through a state of disequilibrium to a new state of equilibrium*" (Todorov 1971/1977, cit. in Czarniawska 2004: 19). Using less technical terminology, we may speak of a plot's 'beginning' (initial equilibrium), 'middle' (disequilibrium) and 'end' (second equilibrium). In the Bieber bio, these three stages may refer respectively to his initial popularity, a period when his musical output was low, finally and his renewed success; though other interpretations are also possible.

4 Intentional states

Since the Bieber bio does contain a basic plot, it may be seen as conforming to the aforementioned advice prevalent in the music blogosphere that bios should tell a story. But Bieber's bio is not a narrative, for narratives also require the existence of actors that have intentional states. This is made explicit in Fludernik's (2006: 6) definition of narrative, which she characterises as:

"A representation of a possible world in a linguistic and/or visual medium, at whose centre there are one or several protagonists of an anthropomorphic nature who are existentially anchored in a temporal and spatial sense [and who (mostly) perform goal-directed actions]."

The presence of anthropomorphic protagonists who perform "goal-directed actions" is what would exclude, say, a description of a chemical reaction or biological process from being a narrative, though it may have a 'plot' in the sense of there being an initial equilibrium, disequilibrium, and second equilibrium. Several other leading scholars of narrative also emphasise the importance of goal-directed actions and intentional states. Bruner (1991: 7), for example, writes:

"Narratives are about people acting in a setting, and the happenings that befall them must be relevant to their intentional states while so engaged—to their beliefs, desires, theories, values, and so on."

Similarly, McAdams (2001: 103) states:

"In virtually, all intelligible stories, humans or humanlike characters act to accomplish intentions ... Human intentionality is at the heart of narrative, and therefore the development of intentionality in humans is of prime importance in establishing the mental conditions necessary for storytelling and story comprehension."

While band bios obviously deal with anthropomorphic protagonists who possess human intentions, readers will often search in vain for any explicit articulation of those intentions. There is no mention in the Bieber bio of verbs that express its subject's hopes, wants, or thoughts.

When one reads the bios of other well-known musicians on the All Music website such as US pop artists like Miley Cyrus and Beyoncé, or K-pop bands like Girls Generation, Super Junior and Big Bang, one discovers that the absence of such verbs is common. In this regard, there is in fact little to distinguish their bios from that of the non-human (though admittedly anthropomorphic) Japanese hologram pop star, Hatsune Miku.

But not all bios lack references to their protagonists' intentional states. A paragraph-by-paragraph analysis of Prato's (2016) bio of Iggy Pop, also on the All Music website, reveals many verbs that express intentional states. For example, we read about him 'deciding', 'trying', 'taking inspiration', 'hoping', 'wanting', being 'intrigued', being 'convinced', 'discovering', 'experimenting', 'sharing his musical vision', 'striking out on his own', 'planning', 'pursuing', 'pledging', 'looking back', 'trying his hand', and 'setting out'.

While verbs such as these may give readers some insight into Pop's thoughts, their other important function is to drive the narrative forward. Instead of a simple chronicle like the Bieber bio, the events of which could be assigned different dates and re-ordered without impacting significantly on the coherence of the story, we see in Iggy Pop's bio a series of actions that he and other actors perform as a result of certain stated intentions. This by no means applies to every event recounted in the narrative, but it is fair to say that the plot is sufficiently intention-driven that its events could not be easily re-ordered without affecting the coherence of the story. Consider, for example, the following extract:

"Born on April 21, 1947, in Muskegon, Michigan, James Newell Osterberg was raised by his parents in a trailer park close to Ann Arbor, in nearby Ypsilanti. Intrigued by rock & roll (as well as such non-musical, monotonous, and mechanical sounds as his father's electric razor and the local automobile assembly plants in Detroit), Osterberg began playing drums and formed his first band, the Iguanas, in the early '60s. Via the Rolling Stones, Osterberg discovered the blues and formed a similarly styled outfit, called the Prime Movers, upon graduating from high school in 1965. When a brief stint at the University of Michigan didn't work out,

he moved to Chicago instead, where he played drums alongside the city's bluesmen."

"His heart remained with rock & roll, however, and shortly after returning to Ann Arbor, Osterberg decided to form a rock band. This time, he would leave the drums behind and be the frontman, taking inspiration from the likes of the Velvet Underground's Lou Reed and the Doors' Jim Morrison. He tried to find musicians who shared his musical vision: to create a band whose music would be primordial, sexually charged, aggressive, and repetitive (using his early electric razor/car plant memories for reference) ... ". (Prato 2016).

Why did Pop start out playing blues? Because he had discovered the blues via the Rolling Stones. Why did he turn to rock? Because he had been intrigued by rock and roll from a young age. Why did he become a frontman instead of playing the drums? Because he took inspiration from Jim Morrison and others. Why did he desire to create music that was primordial and repetitive? Because of his early memories of the sounds of automobile plants. Clearly, there is a degree of causal coherence here that connects events and determines their order in a way that mere list of achievements does not.

There is also a sense in which the events of Pop's life are unified by the bio's broader cultural narrative involving changes in American popular music tastes. From a state of initial equilibrium in the 1960s when there was a somewhat narrow definition of what is acceptable in American popular music, a state of disequilibrium occurs when Iggy Pop tries to expand this definition in various ways. The second equilibrium occurs in the 1990s when he becomes a model for many new bands. Thus, the bigger picture shows that although Pop experienced many failures in his career, his story is ultimately a tale of success, or as McAdams would say, a sequence of redemption. More importantly, however, his story constructs his identity and provides readers with a sense of who he is. That said it would be an overstatement to claim Pop's bio contains a clear narrative that relates every episode to every other episode or that it articulates a coherent vision throughout. Nevertheless, unlike the

Bieber bio, there is an attempt to weave together the complex world of Pop's intentions so as to give meaning to his actions.

5 Authenticity

Up to this point, it has been argued that narrative properties in a bio are important on account of their capacity to construct an identity for their subject. But the role that identity plays in converting casual listeners into fans has not yet been spelled out. An explanation of the process begins by recognising that, as a commodity, music is nothing if not an experience. The importance of this fact is highlighted by the advent of what Pine and Gilmore (1999) term 'The Experience Economy', in which experiences are considered as important to consumers as goods and services. Pine and Gilmore argue that the dominant consumer sensibility with respect to experiences is authenticity, and that it has overtaken quality as a prevailing purchasing criterion (Gilmore & Pine 2007).

Of course, authenticity is not a particularly new purchasing criterion in the world of popular music. In their history of authenticity (or lack thereof) in 20th century American popular music, Barker & Taylor (2012) distinguish several different ways in which music was perceived as authentic. Crucially the rise of singer/songwriters such as the Beatles and Bob Dylan in the 1960s led to 'personal authenticity' becoming particularly important. This form of authenticity, in which singers are seen as expressing their inner feelings in songs about their own lives, is often equated by Barker & Taylor with 'sincerity'. Yet it is worth noting that this is not quite the same thing as Trilling's (1972: 2) description of sincerity as "*a congruence between avowal and actual feeling*" since the musician is not necessarily fulfilling any public role. That is to say, for musicians perceived as authentic in the personal sense, the gap between public and private personas is often seen as closed.

While much has been written about the concept of authenticity in popular music, particularly with regard to the difference between genres such as pop on the one hand and rock and folk on the other, which are often seen as 'commercial' and 'authentic' respectively, it is a distinction

that scholars now generally consider illusory (Moore 2000). In fact, many among the post-modern school may be reluctant to apply the term to music and performers without enclosing it in quotation marks, yet it is also an inescapable concept when dealing with popular music (Pattie 2007).

Moore (2002) has provided a framework for the scholarly discussion of authenticity in music by shifting the focus of attention to how the *experience* of listening to music can *authenticate* three different things. The first is when the emotions expressed by a performer are perceived by the listener to sincerely be the performer's own. The second is when the listener perceives that his or her own experiences are shared and validated through the music. And the third occurs when the ideas of a third party are perceived to be accurately represented. Moore labels these the first, second and third person authenticities respectively.

We are now in a position to see how narrative bios like those of Iggy Pop and Ari Herstand offer something that bios like Justin Bieber's do not. Intuitively, the first and second of Moore's authenticative experiences, the perceptions that a performer is sincerely expressing their own feelings through music and that the listener and performer share certain feelings, rely on a degree of knowledge of the performer's identity by the listener. Clearly, a narrative bio would be an excellent source of such knowledge. Additionally, according to Frith's (1996) aesthetic theory, since music listening experiences also involve the listener identifying themselves with broader narratives, having such narratives provided for them (e.g. Iggy Pop's redemption story) would be an advantage. Finally, since, according to Gilmore and Pine, listeners will place high value on experiences of authenticity, it is hypothesized that their aesthetic experiences will cause them to like the music to the extent that they become fans of the performer.

Much of the above argument, however, depends on listeners accepting the veracity of a bio. As Frith (1996: 121) points out, quests for authenticity can involve listeners getting "*bogged down in the search for the 'real' artist*" when forming a judgement regarding the truth of the feelings that he or she expresses. Admittedly, the veracity of an identity

is only as true as the narrative through which it is constructed, but it is worth recalling here Bruner's (1985) aforementioned classification of two distinct modes of thought: paradigmatic and narrative. The former is concerned with logical arguments that rely on objective truths and categorizations of the world. The latter, on the other hand, is concerned with ascribing meaning to experiences through stories whose power to persuade and convince derives from their verisimilitude of certain interpretations of experience. The problem of getting 'bogged down' in searches for an artist's true identity is more characteristic of paradigmatic modes of thinking that value objectivity. Within narrative modes of thought, however, an artist's identity may be seen as more or less real depending on how they are perceived in the light of the viewer's own individual experiences.

6 Conclusion

It was claimed in the introduction that effective bios convert new listeners into fans by giving them more to like about a band than just their music. In addition, the opinions of several marketing experts and even some results from empirical research were cited to show that a good story is important for adding value to brands. By substituting 'identity' for 'brand', it has been argued that bands can increase their appeal, and as a result, their fan-base by means of a bio that contains some of the key properties of narrative such as intentional states and causal connectedness. The way this works is based on Frith's (1996) aesthetic theory, in which liking, or even being a fan of something or someone involves taking on a broader identity associated with the object of one's liking. Drawing on Moore (2002), a listener's experience can also feel authentic or inauthentic depending on whether the performer is seen as expressing a genuine sentiment. The problem of getting bogged down in determining what is or is not a genuine sentiment can to some extent be avoided through adopting a narrative, rather than paradigmatic, mode of thinking in which the verisimilitude of a story is the main criterion for being convincing.

Although it is common to see music marketers stress the importance of stories in band bios, few really explain what makes a good story. Some speak as if a band's story already exists, just waiting to be told, e.g., "*Everyone has a great story, but most just don't realize it yet*" (Herstand 2014). However, it would be more accurate to say that everyone has *material* for a great *narrative* though they may not realise it. In the case of musicians, they have written songs, exerted influence and been influenced, experimented, envisaged a future, made good choices, committed mistakes, and learned from those mistakes. Every musician has experiences like these that can be woven into a narrative that gives structure and unity to their identity.

There is still much more research that can be undertaken into the short band bio. The idea that the narrative properties of bios are effective in converting casual listeners into fans is long on theory and short on empirical evidence, and the next step would be to conduct an experiment to determine whether different types of bios have any impact on levels of liking for a band. Additionally, research that has already been conducted on how young people socialise themselves through their consumption of popular music (Arnett 1995, Schwartz & Fouts 2003) could be extended to include their consumption of band narratives.

7 References

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The psychology of streaming: exploring music listeners' motivations to favour access over ownership

Geoff Luck⁵

Abstract

Digital streaming represents the most radical development in the way we experience music since the invention of automatic playback technologies two centuries ago. From zero ownership and on-demand access to a virtually limitless library of music via a disconnected financial transaction, streaming services challenge previous conceptions of how music is defined, experienced and consumed. This paper explores streaming from a psychological perspective, and highlights a range of factors that motivate users to favour access over ownership. From removal of responsibilities of ownership to enhanced discovery, nostalgia-fulfilment to augmented emotional engagement, adoption of access-based consumption is shown to be both driven by, and have multiple positive effects on listeners' psychological functioning. The paper concludes by examining some implications of the issues discussed for each of the three pillars of the streaming industry — listeners, content-creators and service providers — for enhancing the musical experience, growing revenues, and maximising overall potential for engagement with and through music.

Keywords: Access-based music consumption, listener experience, emotional engagement, long-term success.

1 Introduction

Music is a ubiquitous human activity, present in daily life and important social contexts across all historical eras, and found in every known human culture, present and past (Wallin et al. 2001). Over the past 200 years, however, the ways in which we conceptualise, experience and engage with it on a daily basis have changed beyond all recognition in many parts of the world. With the introduction of recording and play-

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back technologies at the turn of the nineteenth century, music transitioned from a purely live, shared and participatory phenomenon to a predominantly recorded and increasingly detached experience. As a consequence, music has become something we principally experience as passive *listeners*. Indeed, music listening has become one of the most valued and prevalent of *all* our daily activities, with recent studies indicating that the average person spends around four hours each day, or an incredible thirteen and a half years over their lifetime, listening to music (Peoples 2016; Luck 2016a).

Throughout this period of change, physical playback formats have come and gone, and in recent years have been substantially supplanted by digital formats. In particular, the recent introduction of access-based streaming technologies, pioneered by the likes of Pandora and Spotify, has redefined key characteristics of the musical experience. From zero ownership and on-demand access to a virtually unlimited library of music via a disconnected financial transaction, typical streaming services challenge previous conceptions of how music is defined, experienced and consumed.⁶

The aims of this paper are threefold. First, to explore some of the psychological issues that drive adoption of access-based music streaming services. Second, to show how use of such services can help enhance psychological and emotional wellbeing. Third, to examine some of the implications of the issues discussed for the three pillars of the music streaming industry — listeners, content creators and service providers.

2 Freedom from responsibility

The recorded music industry has historically focused on ownership as the dominant consumption mode. A record (or other physical media) was released, and consumers bought a copy if they wished to listen to

⁶ These services certainly do not include all music ever recorded, but, given that Spotify's 30 million tracks would take 200 years to listen to assuming four hours listening per day, their libraries are indeed virtually unlimited compared to a traditional music collection.

it.⁷ Ownership, however, is just one of multiple possible consumption modes, and with the arrival in 2004 of Pandora, followed in 2008 by Spotify, access-based streaming services became the new black. With Spotify (and hundreds of other similar on-demand streaming music services that have appeared since), for example, users can listen to a virtually unlimited library of music whenever the urge takes them. No massive collections to build, no time limitations, in fact no actual ownership of anything. As David Bowie had predicted at the turn of the millennium, music was on the cusp of becoming omnipresent, like running water or electricity (Pareles 2002).

As such, these services offer listeners incredible value. No longer limited to a (perhaps sizeable) collection of LPs, cassettes or CDs, one is liberated into a world of infinite choice, opening the door to a whole new way of experiencing music. Crucially, the so-called "burdens of ownership", i.e., the risks and responsibilities that accompany ownership of a good, are lifted, and music transitions from something we possess into something we access. And research suggests that a desire to be emancipated from ownership is a major motivating factor behind people's desire for access-based services (Moeller & Wittkowski 2010; Schaefers et al. 2016; Watkins et al. 2016). The risks and responsibilities of ownership include those related to storage, maintenance, and disposal of items at the end of their lifecycle, but they can also be considered within a tripartite framework comprised of financial-, performance- and social-based risks (DeVecchio 2005).

2.1 Financial risks

Financial risks relate to uncertainty concerning the financial loss a decision to purchase may incur. Access-based music subscription fees are perceived as lower than those related to ownership since we are only paying to listen to a track when we need it, not for the privilege of owning something to do with as we please. The added disconnection of the financial transaction further blurs the relationship between payment

⁷ Radio offers an access-based service paid for in most cases by listeners' willingness to sit through ads.

and consumption. As such, access may be perceived as being less financially risky, even free, even for paying subscribers.

2.2 Performance risks

Performance risks concern doubts about whether a purchased product will perform as expected (Bauer 1960). The major worry here is if something goes wrong, such as a CD refusing to play, or an LP becoming unlistenable because of excessive scratching. Any performance failures bring with them increased psychological costs related to responsibility for repair and maintenance, a time cost, and a high probability of additional purchase costs. Access-based streaming services carry none of these risks. Performance-based risks are borne solely by the service provider, and it's entirely their responsibility to solve any issues that may arise.

2.3 Social risks

Social risks concern how others consider purchase decisions. The ways we choose to spend our money can signal our degree of long-term commitment to goods we consume, and, in the case of music, our long-term commitment to the artist or composer. Accessing instead of buying the same content sends a weaker message of commitment, which is in many ways optimal from the user's perspective. Unless you are a super-fan of a given genre, song, or performer, you may perceive it as more socially desirable not to commit too deeply when listening to a track if you do not wish to be labelled as having particular tastes in music.

Overall, the higher the perceived financial, performance and social risks associated with ownership, the more a consumer will likely avoid such risks by utilising an access-based service.

3 Enhanced discovery potential

With a virtually unlimited library of music to choose from, the desire to discover new tracks, artists or genres is another primary motivator to

access rather than own music. But there's a problem. Actually, there are 30 million of them.

A typical music streaming service contains in the region of 30 million tracks.⁸ If we assume an average track length of 3.5 minutes, it would take 200 years to listen to every track each of these services offer. To put it another way, given that we listen to music for around 4 hours per day, or thirteen-odd years across our lifetimes, it would take fifteen lifetimes to listen to an entire service provider's catalogue. In effect, access-based modes of consumption allow us to listen to a significantly larger collection of music, by orders of magnitude, than we could ever amass even across a single lifetime.

On the one hand, this represents a considerable benefit of access over ownership; but it also presents listeners with a "paradox of choice" (Schwartz 2004). How on earth do we decide what to listen to? This is a critical question for access-based services because, even when faced with limited options, listeners demonstrate a clear preference for listening to familiar music regardless of what their self-reported attitudes may suggest (Ward et al. 2014). When faced with a large number of options, people will often choose to simplify the process by engaging with the familiar, listening to a track they already know, or turning to an alternate activity that doesn't require such decision-making effort. One approach to reducing this psychological burden and helping guide listeners through the decision-making process is to group music into genres, moods, and other such high-level concepts. A far more elegant approach is targeted recommendation.

Based on user-generated data and both human- and algorithmic-curation, unique playlists comprised of tracks selected especially for each individual listener (can) provide a bespoke solution to the paradox of choice. Ever-evolving, predictive technologies can serve up endless selections of music tailored to our individual music preferences, mood and current activity, as well as a whole host of other factors. Thus, if you are willing to let an algorithm or even another person decide what you

⁸ Four of the most prominent music streaming services, Spotify, Apple, Deezer and Tidal offer 30 m, 30m, 40m and 25m tracks, respectively.

should listen to, and it seems many people are, the psychological energy (and even time) required to decide what to listen to is effectively eliminated.

The benefits of targeted playlists can also be seen in their continuing surge in popularity. As of May 2016, playlists accounted for almost one-third of total listening time. That's almost one and a half times greater than the time spent listening to albums (Savage 2016). And with singles accounting for less than 46 per cent of total listening time, down 6 per cent since last year, it seems at least possible, if not likely that playlists will become the dominant listening format in the age of access-based music consumption.

4 Nostalgia-fulfilment

One of the benefits of on-demand streaming is not simply the fact that we can listen to any track whenever we feel like it, but that in so doing we can psychologically revisit times long since past more easily than ever before. Extra-musical associations exemplified by the classic "*Darling, they're playing our tune*" phenomenon (Davies 1978), run deep within us. Significant life events, loved ones, times and places are each associated with their own individual soundtrack. Just hearing a particular piece of music can instantly transport us back to the associated situation. And the desire to revisit times long since past is a fundamental part of being human. We are hardwired to evoke nostalgia in ourselves.

For most people, nostalgia is an everyday sensation characterised by a bittersweet combination of happiness and loss. The word itself is a combination of two Greek words, *Nostos*, meaning to return to one's native land, and *Algos*, meaning pain or suffering. Literally, nostalgia means suffering caused by a longing to return home. According to a recent study, eighty per cent of people claim to experience nostalgia at least once per week, and, perhaps contrary to popular belief, it is an emotion we experience to a somewhat similar degree regardless of our age (Hepper et al. 2012).

Over the years, nostalgia has been considered everything from a medical disease to a brain affliction to a psychiatric disorder. These days, we tend to consider nostalgia as a pleasant, if bittersweet, rose-tinted experience of the 'good old days', a time when, at least in the way we recollect it, the world was a better, simpler, happier place free from responsibility. In fact, nostalgia is much more than that, and has been shown to serve at least four critical psychological functions (Zhou et al. 2012).

For example, evoking nostalgia increases feelings of positive affect, helping to alleviate negative feelings or mood. Nostalgia also enhances self-regard, bolstering our feelings of self-esteem, and helping us bring to mind more positive attributes about ourselves. In addition, nostalgia fosters feelings of existential meaning, increasing our perception of life itself as being more meaningful. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, nostalgia promotes feelings of social connectedness. This last aspect is significant because a desire to connect with others, to forge meaningful relationships, is one of the most fundamental of human desires. We are social beings, we crave connection with other people, and we devote much of our lives to achieving this goal. And we are apparently aware, albeit implicitly, that evoking nostalgia can help us do so.

When asked to list desirable and undesirable features of nostalgia, for example, people rank the capacity to strengthen social connectedness very highly. In one such study, nostalgia was evoked in volunteers by asking them to think of a nostalgic (as compared to an ordinary) event from their lives, write down four words that related to that experience, and then reflect upon the event and the feelings it evoked (Wildschut 2006). Subsequently, compared to a control group who followed the same procedure but for an ordinary event, those who felt more nostalgic revealed signs of increased social connectedness: They reported feeling more loved and protected, demonstrated less attachment anxiety and avoidance, and exhibited greater interpersonal competence. This same study was later repeated on Chinese volunteers with similar results, suggesting that the feelings of social connectedness that nostalgia induces are universal (Zhou et al. 2008).

Moreover, if we look at people's descriptions of nostalgic experiences, it becomes even clearer that nostalgia is a social emotion. When we wax nostalgic, we bring to mind interactions with people who are, or who have been, close to us, including friends, romantic partners, and family members. Nostalgia affords a symbolic reconnection with significant others, and these imagined interactions often take place in the context of important life events that, in many ways, come to define particular time periods of our lives, such as child-births, vacations, anniversaries, graduations, weddings and reunions.

Thus, music that evokes nostalgia is likely to have a range of powerful, positive effects on us. It will help lift us out of a bad mood and make us feel better about ourselves; it will enhance our perceived meaningfulness of life; and it will strengthen our interpersonal relationships and feelings of connectedness with others, reconnecting us with loved ones and epoch-defining events.

By providing access to virtually any track anytime, anyplace anywhere, on-demand streaming services are not just great music discovery tools, but exceptional nostalgia-inducing and life-enhancing devices. Whenever a song from the past comes to mind, the opportunity to revisit old times and significant others is but a few clicks, taps or swipes away. It works the other way around, too: Remembering a person or an event from long ago inspires us to travel back in time via the associated music. Music has always been a great time-travel medium. On-demand, access-based streaming technology simply gives us the perfect vehicle through which to deploy that medium to ultimate effect (Luck 2016b).

5 Emotional engagement

Finally, it is worth considering why we engage with music in the first place. Research has shown that one of the main attractions of listening to music is its many and varied affect- or emotion-related qualities (Laiho 2004; Zillmann 2008). Music comforts us when we are sad (ter Bogt et al. 2016), bonds us together (Koelsch 2014), and helps us release tension (Juslin & Västfjäll 2009). We use music to modify and regulate our

moods and emotions (Knobloch & Zillmann 2002), utilising a range of strategies to do so (Saarikallio & Erkkilä 2006). We listen to music to accompany and enhance sports activity (Karageorghis & Priest 2012), to keep us company on long drives (Sloboda & O'Neill 2001), to create atmosphere when alone or when entertaining (Pink & Mackley 2013). And this deeply emotional connection with music is supported by a wealth of empirical evidence concerning the neurological, physiological and behavioural responses it can evoke.

Emotion and reward circuits of the brain are activated, for example, when we listen to pleasurable music (Blood & Zatorre 2001), evoking highly rewarding experiences neurologically comparable to those induced by food, sex and drugs (Salimpoor et al. 2001). Systematic relationships exist between pleasurable music and physiological indicators of emotional arousal such as heart rate, respiration rate and blood pressure (Lundqvist et al. 2009). And listeners frequently report intense emotional experiences in response to music, especially music they know well (Gabrielsson 2011). What's more, rhythmic, emotionally rewarding music activates motor-related regions of the brain, encouraging us to synchronise our body motion with it (Kornysheva 2010), further enhancing our level of affective engagement (Janata et al. 2012).

On-demand music streaming services allow us to access these profound, emotionally charged experiences more readily than ever before. In fact, it's not overstating the case to say that access-based music services afford virtually unlimited opportunities for emotional connection with and through music.

6 Summary

The ways in which we conceptualise, experience and engage with music on a daily basis have changed beyond all recognition over the past two centuries. In fact, developments in digital streaming and mobile technologies now render access to recorded music as effortless and ubiquitous as David Bowie predicted at the turn of the millennium. This free-flowing nature of music brings with it many positive features, including

freedom from the responsibilities of ownership and enhanced and automated selection and discovery possibilities. In addition, the ease with which nostalgia can be evoked significantly elevates our level of psychological wellbeing, and the potential for emotional engagement with and through music is perhaps greater now than at any time in history.

7 Implications for the industry

In light of these various motivations to access instead of own music, as well as the underlying psychological and emotional effects and benefits of doing so, what are some of the implications for the three pillars of the streaming industry; the listeners, content creators and service providers? Should listeners adopt access-based modes of consumption, and if so, why? How might songwriters, composers, artists and producers take advantage of the growing demand for access over ownership of music? And how could music streaming companies maximise their user experience and entice still more listeners away from ownership?

7.1 Listeners

From casual listeners to superfans, access-based music streaming services appear to offer those who use them a whole host of psychological and emotional advantages. Whether you listen to music as an accompaniment to your daily routines or sports activities, to help you regulate your moods and emotions, or to create atmosphere when driving, studying or socialising, music streaming services offer unprecedented opportunities to connect with the soundtrack to your life. As such, and in light of the psychological benefits and motivations discussed above, listeners driven by a desire for emotionally engaging musical experiences free from the responsibilities of ownership, with the possibility to discover new music as well as access a virtual musical time machine would be well-advised to leave the ownership model behind and embrace access-based streaming.

There are undoubtedly less positive aspects to access-based models of music consumption, including a diminished multi-sensory experience

and a less tangible connection with artists and other content creators. Certainly, access-based streaming music services are not for everyone. But with our busy, globetrotting lifestyles, they surely make listening to music considerably more convenient, cheaper, less risky, and bring with them a whole host of psychological and emotional rewards for those willing to embrace them.

7.2 Content creators

It used to be enough to sell a track once, the only competition being whatever other tracks were released around the same time. With streaming services, each track must be 'sold' repeatedly, all the while constantly competing with millions of other tracks. So how can a content creator go about winning this battle? The answer is to create music with longevity. And the way to do that is to write music that creates an experience listeners feel compelled to return to again and again.

A significant body of work in fields including musicology, neuroscience, physiology and psychology has examined relationships between various music-related phenomena and their effects on listeners. From lyrical features (Fiveash & Luck 2015; Ali & Peynircioglu 2006; Brattico 2011) to emotional characteristics, (Juslin & Sloboda 2001; Koelsch et al. 2006; Van Zijl et al. 2014) expectation-related features (Meyer 1956; Huron 2006; Sloboda 1991) to timing manipulations, (Friberg & Sundberg 1999; Moelants 2002; MacDougall & Moore 2005) this work has revealed a whole host of systematic relationships between particular musical characteristics and listeners' neurological, physiological and behavioural engagement. In combination, this work offers compelling evidence that there exist techniques to deliberately enhance the listening experience by manipulating one or more features or performance characteristics of a track. In so doing, content creators can deliberately engineer a track to create a more positive, more rewarding experience that listeners will want to repeat again and again.

Given the mechanics of streaming services, one would expect tracks that focus on creating such an experience to perform better in the long run compared to those that do not. Content creators willing to invest the

time to understand these principles, therefore, could expect to sustain greater long-term success and gain a considerable financial advantage over their peers.

7.3 Streaming music service providers

In a similar vein, streaming service providers should focus on creating the most engaging experience possible to keep existing listeners listening for longer, as well as to convince those who currently prefer ownership to switch to access-based consumption. Given the enormous libraries of music typically offered by streaming services, efforts to enhance its benefits and diminish its weaknesses should be paramount. The most obvious way to maximise the former and minimise the latter is, of course, to simplify the process of selecting what to listen to (or even remove it altogether) by developing hyper-targeted recommendation and discovery tools to further reduce analysis paralysis and the so-called paradox of choice. There are some major initiatives moving forward with this, and a whole host of music tech companies have emerged in recent years hungry to take advantage of the mass of data generated by the digital revolution. From song features to play counts, social tags to user profiles, there's a phenomenal amount of data available for those who know where and how to look.

However, there is still a lot of work to be done. It is my view that streaming companies are missing a key piece of the puzzle by not focusing on how listeners perceive, understand or respond to music in a more tangible fashion. We do not just listen to music; we experience it on a range of levels. Quantifying that experience, and using it to refine music selection and discovery tools will add a further, valuable dimension to on-going work in this area.

8 Conclusion

From a financial point of view, streaming has not (yet) paid great dividends to most content creators and owners. But then again, is the old model based around a record deal and physical sales any better, unless

one does actually make it? Data certainly suggests that large-scale adoption of streaming by the listening public, as well as alternate pay-out methods, could reap larger (and fairer) rewards for many more players in the game. In a sense, the price of admission into the streaming club might be conceptualised as a devaluation of some physical aspect of the music itself but an increase in the value we place upon the experience. Given the many psychological benefits streaming services offer, the increased potential for emotional connection, and research suggesting we'll be happier if we spend our hard-earned cash on experiences rather than material goods, it is my view that access-based streaming services' dominance over ownership-based consumption is all but guaranteed.

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