

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

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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 <i>(Artist & Repertoire managers/VPs)</i>	4	48	Male 100%	1 US; 2 UK; 1 Australia	16
Artistic non-profit <i>(Artistic or musical directors)</i>	4	60	Male 75% Female 25%	1 US; 1 UK; 2 Australia	27
Marketing commercial <i>(Marketing VPs and directors)</i>	4	45	Male 100%	2 US; 1 UK; 1 Australia	10
Marketing non-profit <i>(Marketing directors)</i>	3	45	Female 100%	1 US; 1 UK; 1 Australia	12
CEO commercial <i>(ex presidents/CEOs)</i>	5	63	Male 100%	1 US; 2 UK; 2 Australia	28
CEO non-profit <i>(CEOs/general managers)</i>	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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