

CHAPTER I

Introduction: Special Objects, Special Subjects

‘Welcome to the Pleasuredome’
—Frankie Goes to Hollywood (1984)

What is life really like for a musician today? Back in 2014, this was a question that had been on our minds for some time. We were looking for ways in which to make sense of the musical world we and our students lived in. It felt to us as if we were existing in an all-absorbing atmosphere in which it felt difficult to find any space to breathe or be heard. We found ourselves approaching this question from our two different perspectives; one of us – George – with his background as an artist/rapper signed to both a major publisher and a record label, and the other – Sally – then as a music manager and head of business affairs for an independent record label, and both of us as lecturers on a Masters in Music Business Management. George’s previous research examined the behavioural and psychological impact of competition looking at the creative lives of UK rappers to understand this (Musgrave, 2014). Sally was interested in the impacts of digitalisation on the working conditions and power dynamics within the music industries and their effects on the musical object, the creative process, and the workforce, specifically music makers and music performers. For some time, both of us had been struck by the high levels of anxiety and other mental health issues that were being talked about or that we had witnessed in our immediate musical network and amongst our students.

The music industries and the wider entertainment industries that musicians inhabit are frequently characterised as a ‘pleasure dome’; a site of hedonism, enjoyment and self-actualisation, full of creativity and self-expression, excess

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and glamour. Yet, paradoxically, these industries are equally full of people struggling and suffering from a variety of overlapping economic, psychological and addiction issues. Then in October 2015, we read an interview in the *The Guardian* newspaper with the electronic musician Benga in which he revealed that he had been suffering from bipolar disorder and schizophrenia (Hutchinson, 2015). Adegbenga Adejumo's (Benga's real name) revelations caused considerable concern across the music industries as well as sparking further articles and discussions in both the mainstream and social media. In speaking out so publicly, Benga reignited a conversation that had been smouldering in the ashes of the UK music industries and in the popular media following the tragic loss of Amy Winehouse about the mental health and wellbeing of musicians.

The deterioration of Amy Winehouse's health and her subsequent death from alcohol poisoning in July 2011 was a significant moment in the consciousness of the London-based, 'major label' music industries. The award-winning documentary *Amy*, released in 2015, appeared to point the finger of blame at many of those involved in the management of her life and career, and caused much soul-searching and discomfort across the industry. Her loss was deeply felt. The potential for features of a musical career to be psychologically damaging continued in the background of discussions in the popular media in the years that followed, including Adele's revelations of the 'toxic' problems of touring (Bletchly, 2015), Birmingham-based R&B, soul and gospel singer Laura Mvula's disclosures regarding her struggles with panic attacks, anxiety and the trauma of 'being dropped' from her recording contract (Lamont, 2016), and high profile speculation around Kanye West's mental state (Preston, 2019). However, it was still not the reflective moment for the music industries that we would later witness sparked by #MeToo (Bennett, 2018c).

In August 2014, the charity Help Musicians UK¹ published a health survey based on responses from five hundred of their clients in which the respondents highlighted mental health issues as having a significant impact on their working lives. A chance conversation about our initial research into music and mental health led to a meeting between ourselves and Help Musicians UK, which led directly to the initial two-part report entitled 'Can Music Make You Sick?' which they commissioned and published in 2016 and 2017 (Gross and Musgrave, 2016, 2017). These early publications showed alarmingly high rates of self-reported anxiety (71.1% of respondents) and depression (68.5% of respondents) amongst musicians. We will unpack the details of these findings in much greater detail in the next chapter, but these numbers acted as a huge catalyst for the conversation we see taking place all around us today.

Yet even as our research continued, there followed several high-profile deaths by suicide – frontman of rock group Linkin Park, Chester Bennington, in 2017, Soundgarden's Chris Cornell and K-Pop star Kim Jong-hyun the same year, and in 2018 South African rapper HHP and EDM producer and DJ Avicii. Echoing the

narrative of Amy Winehouse's life and death in the earlier documentary, the now infamous film about Avicii (*Avicii: True Stories*, 2017) reveals him, too, as a musician openly suffering under the pressures of heavy touring commitments. Indeed, our own research informed much of the thinking in the GQ cover story published in 2018 entitled 'Who really killed Avicii?' (Ralston, 2018). Closer to home in Scotland at this time there was also the loss of Scott Hutchison of the alternative indie band Frightened Rabbit, coinciding with a sharp rise in articles about men's mental health problems. In 2018 there was a reported increase in male suicide in England, up 14% from the previous year (ONS, 2018a). Although it would be overly simplistic to try and draw conclusions from these statistics and individual cases alone, the rising number of cases involving public figures and celebrities combined with a willingness for medical professionals to speak out meant that issues around emotional distress, mental health and wellbeing were being aired across all forms of media. Indeed by the end of 2018, *Music Business Worldwide* suggested the music industry itself was facing a 'mental health crisis' (Dhillon, 2018).

1.1 What Makes You Think You're So Special?

Why should we care about this apparent mental health crisis amongst musicians? In the first instance, there is a dichotomy between musicians suffering and even dying, while producing something that so many people love and which is so special to them. Music is widely understood to be one of our most shared human experiences and is commonly described as being able to transcend barriers and bring people together no matter how different their backgrounds. It is within this understanding of the power of music, that music as an expressive art form is understood to be 'special'. Music's immaterial, affective and sensorial characteristics are widely believed to enable its fluidity, its ability to travel, its flexibility and, paradoxically amongst the expressive arts, its utility. Music through its affective power is useful, on an individual level, as an individualised mood regulator (North et al., 2004; Roth and Wisser, 2004), a source of pleasure, a tool for increasing stamina (Terry et al., 2012) or concentration (Firlík, 2006), and even as a protector. In a group or public place, music can set a mood or act to stimulate emotions. This was beautifully seen in a concert held in the wake of the terrorist attack at Manchester Arena in 2017 in which 22 innocent people died; the poignant vision of a crowd, united in grief and defiance, singing the track 'Don't Look Back in Anger' by the Manchester-based band Oasis. Music has more than just an economic and cultural value – it has a powerful ritual value too.

Music occupies both our psychic and physical space. Music literally creates environments. It is mood altering. It has the potential to make us move our bodies often in ways people describe as 'involuntary'. It can take us over, and we can see these reactions in everyday situations (DeNora, 2000). People tap

their feet as they sit on the bus or sing as they drive their cars. Music is distinctive in that way. Drawing on Nietzsche's idea that we 'listen to music with our muscles,' Sacks (2006: 2582) adds: 'we tap our feet, we "keep time", hum, sing along or "conduct music", our facial expressions mirroring the rises and falls, the melodic contours and feelings of what we are hearing'. It has been suggested that music can exaggerate our emotions (Juslin and Sloboda, 2011) – indeed, it has been described as the language of our emotions (Cooke, 1959), or by Plato as the memory of emotions (Stamou, 2002). It can be used to alleviate distress (Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham, 2007; Lin et al., 2011) but also as a weapon of torture (Goodman, 2012). We would argue that for these reasons music is special, and agree with Hesmondhalgh (2013a) that music matters.

However, can we, or should we, extend this specialness of music to music creators? Why should we care about them, and why should we care about their mental health? This idea is far more problematic and for complex reasons. However, if we are to understand what is happening to musicians at this present juncture, we need to examine whether there is any evidence that those engaged in musical work might be special insofar as they may experience their work in ways that are particular and thus worth examining. We have developed our position from existing theories which argue that musical work is indeed 'special' for its ability to tell us something about patterns of work and the development of the economy. If we accept this position, then it is possible that by examining the specific characteristics of this type of work we might learn something useful about the development of labour relations in the knowledge economy. In his book *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, the French economist Jacques Attali (1977, 2014) identifies a correlation between the shape of capitalism's development and the transformation of the uses of music in Europe. At the end of the book, written in the late 1970s, he made a prophetic statement about how the development of electronic music would democratise music production and profoundly impact its economic value, suggesting that in the future only a very few people would earn money directly from music, and our uses of music would change. Attali's work highlights the centralisation of the place of music and the mode of music production within the development of capitalist economies and western liberal democracy. He suggested that the 'privatisation' of music foreshadowed the character of capitalist society by aligning music's commodification with the development of the figure of the individual entrepreneur. The musicians of today are, in many respects, an exemplar of the creative entrepreneur that Attali predicted despite many musicians being reluctant to use this label (Haynes and Marshall, 2017). This figure of the new music entrepreneur was acutely summed up over thirty years later in the title of the North American rapper 50 Cent's 2003 album 'Get Rich or Die Tryin', which so devastatingly crystallises the logic of competitive individualism.

Attali's theory reveals something interesting about both the use of music, and social and cultural development. The suggestion is that by trying to understand how musicians work, we might learn something about the wider,

changing world of work in the digital age. As Noone (2017) suggests: ‘Musicians are the canary in the coalmine.’ Attali’s position aligns well with liberal technopositivists’ accounts of democratising and participatory cultures, particularly those frequently espoused in magazines such as *Wired* and in the book *The Long Tail* by its then editor Chris Anderson (2007). However, one of the weaknesses of Attali’s analysis is that by focussing on economics it fails to recognise the wider social and personal implications of these changes in our relationship to music. That being said, his twin identification of the continued privatisation of our musical habits, coupled with the historical development and relationship with artistic entrepreneurial practice, highlights why musical work is such an interesting and special site of study for understanding the world of work more generally. If music is special – and we agree it is – we also want to propose that music makers’ activities need to be examined like other aspects of social reproduction and taken seriously because they have the potential to tell us all something about our lives, our futures, and our relationship to work.

The lives of musicians, and in particular their mental health, matter because we believe they can tell us something. But if, as we hear with predictable dismay, so many are apparently suffering, we need to understand why and interrogate this reality more deeply. The following three sections of this introductory chapter will develop the three central aims and objectives of this book as we try and better make sense of this ‘mental health crisis.’ In part one, we will examine the complex, ambiguous and messy historical relationship between art and ‘madness,’ suggesting that empirical work on the nature of contemporary musicianship and its impact on mental wellbeing is prescient and necessary. Part two will go further and suggest that if we are to understand the working lives of musicians, we must better understand the way that music itself has changed now that it has become abundant and ubiquitous, and that this has fundamentally changed not only consumers’ patterns of consumption, but also musicians’ relationship to music and music making. We therefore unpack work from the interdisciplinary fields of cultural economics, the psychology of creativity, and in particular the media theory of communicative capitalism to provide an analytical prism to interrogate our empirical work. Finally, our third aim in writing this book was based on our own position as music educators. If we are to make sense of this landscape for ourselves and our students, we need to understand the history and development of the expansion of popular music education in the UK, and how we can better prepare students for the changing world of music and of work.

1.2 You Don’t Have to Be Mad, But it Helps

The relationship between art and ‘madness’ has a long history in the Global North that is entangled with ideas of morality, religion, sexuality, pleasure,

power and control. The association is so familiar within the popular Western imagination that questions pertaining to artists and their mental health are frequently dismissed as ‘natural characteristics’ as if there is a biological explanation for an artistic personality – an already discovered genetic code. This viewpoint tends to pathologise, individualise and dismiss artists: they may well be ‘mad’ – it goes with the territory. Interestingly, this kind of thinking can be observed in sociocultural discourse both on the left and right. Arguments on the left tend to deny any specialness either of the artist or their work, insisting that artists are just another subset of the cultural workforce and should not as such be given any ‘special’ attention. Here, the resistance to labels such as ‘special’, and thus potentially by extension privileged, conflates to a position that serves to thwart further enquiry. Conversely, on the right, the idea of competitive individualism is extended: the artist’s ‘uniqueness’ is his or her own and is unaffected by any external factors. This approach puts all ‘artistic’ difficulties down to the nature of art and artists: it is their singular responsibility alone about which they cannot, and should not, complain. Artistic suffering is thereby converted into a form of competitive heroism. However, both of these positions serve in different ways to shut down the voices of artists themselves. Nonetheless, the trope of the ‘mad artist’ continues to be popular across a wide range of media, from music press, to music fans on social media flagging up their concern or defending their favourite artist’s seemingly strange or erratic behaviour, to the tabloid coverage that so haunted the final days of Amy Winehouse’s life.

Falling from grace is a compelling narrative. The harrowing personal experiences of celebrity musicians resonate with the public; they seem to mean something somehow. After all, here are a group of people who to all intents and purposes seem to be in a position of ‘living their best life’, and yet in full view of their public something is terribly wrong. Despite having everything, they are troubled. This tragic paradox of human life and suffering is not new. As Barrantes-Vidal (2004: 63) noted looking at this phenomenon historically: ‘... spontaneous and irrational imagination became the essence of genius, leading to a necessary connection between madness and creativity,’ an idea which has been described as a ‘musical temperament’ (Kemp, 1995). Some scientific fields of research, for example, suggest that creative individuals may be genetically more likely to suffer from bipolar disorder or schizophrenia (Power et al., 2015). Despite these ideas being contested within the scientific and psychological communities (Smail, 1996), they have taken hold of the popular imagination. It is as if in the internet age, the value of virtual experience needs to be grounded in the ‘real’ of analogue pain. The idea that art attracts individuals who are more emotionally expressive, vulnerable, or perhaps unstable depending on one’s perspective, is one that has stuck (Ahmed, 2014).

This framing leads to perceivable and often contradictory ways in which those working in music are both seen and treated. Firstly, they may be seen as

privileged, lucky and often even blessed – a double-edged sword. On the one hand, musicians are ‘special’ people with exceptional talents (amusingly, musicians seeking to obtain a visa for entering and performing in the US are categorised as an ‘Alien of Extraordinary Ability’). On the other hand is the idea that musicians are lucky to do the work they do, so they should have no cause to complain, about mental suffering for example. The second classic conceptualisation of musicians is often couched as a tension between ‘creativity and commerce.’ This idea is rooted in the widely held view that, as Austin and Devin (2009: 25) put it, ‘art often doesn’t get marketed effectively by artists for an understandable reason: Most artists want to do art, not business.’ This leads to a kind of invisible divide, a gap that, whether real or imaginary, can lead to misunderstandings or miscommunication. Finally, there is the idea that musicians are expected to be, and may therefore be seen to be, *acutely* emotional or *overly* sensitive – giving rise to associated traits such as being unreliable, irrational and ‘difficult.’ This is particularly evident in the popular media: a good example being Natalia Borecka’s article for *Lone Wolf Magazine* (2015) entitled ‘The 5 Types of Crazy Artists You Will Meet in Your Life.’

In the music industries this idea is powerful and circulates on a daily basis. Artists are expected to be unreasonable and irrational; it is what makes them ‘great’, as a leading UK music manager Chris Morrison elucidates in his foreword to the first edition of *The Music Management Bible* (2003):

The best music comes from the heart, from inside. It tells of every aspect of human joy and pain. The people who write and perform it feel those emotions more intensely than others. So don’t expect them to be easy to work with. They will on occasions be difficult, make bad decisions, blame you, be angry and even badly behaved. Without them, your job and those of everyone else do not exist. You are privileged. Try and remember this when nobody likes you and you’re trying to make a square peg fit into a round hole.

These ideas reinforce and reproduce the position that romantically sensationalises the relationship between artists and their emotional states. The image of ‘the tortured artist’ (Zara, 2012) continues to circulate, suggesting that suffering in one form or another is somehow central to the creation of authentic art. Examples of this exist everywhere. The fashion retailer ASOS, for instance, recently marketed a T-shirt with the slogan ‘What’s bad for your heart is good for your Art.’ Perhaps the best-known iteration can be seen in the idea of ‘The 27 Club’; a group of popular musicians who all, in the course of ‘suffering’ for their art, died at the age of 27, such as Kurt Cobain, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison and Amy Winehouse (Sussman, 2007; Salewicz, 2015). Indeed, Becker (2001: 52) suggests that this link is so culturally powerful that some artists ‘manifest’ mental suffering in order to boost both levels of creativity and acclaim: ‘It is not

at all unreasonable to assume that to the extent that these expectations continue to be part of a professional ideology of what it means to be truly creative, even contemporary writers and artists, far from disavowing the label of madness, may actually invite it. Indeed, they may even inadvertently volunteer evidence of madness in diagnostic and psychological examinations.⁷ It is interesting to note how uncomfortable this idea makes us feel, and yet in the discursive and reflective environment of musical production it is not difficult to imagine how these ideas become internalised and reproduced.

Few of the assertions regarding the relationship between artistic creativity and mental ill health are proven in any real scientific sense (Kennaway, 2012). However, until recently within the music industries the assumption that ‘all artists are a bit mad’ was common. In the music business the old joke that ‘you don’t have to be mad to work here, but it helps’ is greeted with knowing smiles. Initially, when we started our research, different music professionals and academic colleagues would refer to one of these jokes, even if in doing so they revealed their own discomfort about the value or validity of this stereotype. Nobody, it seemed, outside of the mental health industries really wanted to talk about the issue; after all, it was seen as ‘negative’ and negativity is the worst sin of all in creative enterprise and educational circles. Yet if one accepts that music making is a special activity, it follows that those involved in it are themselves special, and that this informs their world view in much the same way as a religious belief might to others. Indeed, there is a powerful rhetoric within the music industries themselves that musicians are special. A key instruction on all music and music business courses such as the one we run at the University of Westminster is to believe in yourself. Believing has become the operative imperative. Nothing is possible if you do not believe in your music and believe in yourself, and as John Berger famously noted in *Ways of Seeing*: ‘The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe’ (Berger, 1972). The meaning that belief gives to the believer’s experience cannot be so easily denied, and belief is a central part of what shapes human understanding. However, the measuring of belief and the degrees to which one might go to prove one’s beliefs have ancient historical roots that include sacrifice and martyrdom and are the core of all subjectivity. Committing to a musical career has long been understood as a ‘calling’ (Dobrow, 2007; Dobrow Riza and Heller, 2015) in which paying the ultimate price echoes the language of political, religious and philosophical fervour, where the ghosts of magical thinking still loom large and believing in yourself is a daily imperative.

1.2.1 Can Music Really Make You Sick?

The title of this book and the pivotal question behind the initial investigation – can music make you sick? – is usually greeted with a surprised smile or even laughter. The mere idea that music might make anyone sick seems, at first,

ridiculous – even absurd. In fact, we as authors disagreed about the title at first. After all, from an educational, economic and public policy perspective, creative work is extolled as economically valuable (Banks, 2014; UK Music, 2017; Bazalgette, 2017), socially meaningful (Hesmondhalgh, 2013a), as well as individually fulfilling and a privilege (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009). Indeed, the United Nations suggest that investments in the creative economy (including the music industries) are crucial in order to ‘contribute to the overall wellbeing of communities, individual self-esteem and quality of life’ (UNDP, 2013: 10). Furthermore, music’s therapeutic role in helping people to overcome trauma, and as a positive force in promoting health and wellbeing is almost universally acknowledged (Cohen et al., 1995; Hass-Cohen et al., 2015; Morrissey, 2013; APPG, 2017).

Music’s affective quality is undeniable and scholars across a wide range of disciplines from the humanities to the sciences have written about the importance and positive power of music. A famous example, albeit a rather classist one, known as ‘The Mozart Effect’ suggests that listening to Mozart may lead to short-term improvements in spatial temporal reasoning (Campbell, 1997) – although there is by no means scientific consensus on this. More recently, the emotional impact or affective quality of music can be seen to be at the heart of playlisting – a process which we might think of as the backgrounding of music to both soothe and stimulate. Indeed, Paul Anderson (2015: 811) suggests that platforms such as Spotify are today a form of ‘neo-muzak’ providing ‘algorithmic or curated musical moodscaapes and affective atmospheres.’ It doesn’t require a huge leap of the imagination to ask then if music is used in the same way as recreational drugs (Gomart and Hennion, 1999), and therefore if music has the power to affect us positively, might it not have negative impacts too? However, it might be that these negative impacts occur not in the simple sense of music as organised sound, but in a deeper way. After all, music quite literally does not occur in a vacuum: it is always part of something else. It exists as a form of media, a technology of communication, as part of social rituals and it is used both as a technology of the self to shape our individual identities (DeNora, 2000), as well as between and within nations to define cultural identities (Connell and Gibson, 2003). As Cloonan and Johnson (2002: 29) point out; ‘Sound is an ancient marker of physical and psychic territorial identity.’

On all sides of the political spectrum there is a consensus vis-à-vis the potential value of music as a public good. At the same time however, we can begin to see how this relationship is not straightforward when we interrogate disagreements about what kind of music is ‘good.’ The idea of good music, aesthetically speaking and also morally, is neither universal nor neutral. This is often conflated into arguments around low and high culture that we are, by now, all familiar with but which are very much alive and central to the way in which, for instance, public and private funding is made available. For example, Arts Council funding in the UK is disproportionately weighted in favour of

classical music over popular music, which is in itself a statement of value and judgement. The picture is not simple. Oakley et al. (2013), for instance, helpfully unpack the idea that whilst some media are good for us, others, such as exposing children to certain kinds of advertising say, are not. Moving beyond this tone of implicit moral panic, Mould (2018) challenges us all to think more deeply about the idea that creativity is necessarily a good thing or what is actually meant by the term 'creativity'. Mould suggests that the appropriation or co-opting of creativity as a private individual action for the benefit of individual enrichment has been a central *modus operandi* in policy and academia, a process described as a 'festishisation of creativity' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011a: 3). Mould also makes the point that the term is now so widely used that it has practically lost all its conceptual meaning; if everything and everyone is creative, then what does it mean? The pervasiveness of the mobilisation of creativity that Mould highlights can equally be transferred to ideas of musical expression and personal expression. The possibility may exist in all this expressiveness, that any form of expression becomes neutralised, as suggested by Adorno and Horkheimer (1972). In this sense, music and its affects are both highly contingent and contested.

The idea that some music might have explicitly negative impacts ought not to be surprising, and indeed the idea has a long and rich history. Over the last two hundred years, particular types of music have often been treated as a genuine threat to the wellbeing of musicians and listeners, and even society at large. Kennaway (2012) traces the history of the idea of music as a cause of disease from the Greeks to Nazi Germany. He notes that most of the claims made about the adverse effects of music are in fact greatly exaggerated and unproven. However, he reveals how the idea that music might be harmful – if only to society's moral fibre – was common throughout history and at every level of society. One of the major fears in the nineteenth century was the potential for music to 'overexcite' the nerves and that such overexcitement might lead to promiscuity in women or even homosexuality in young men (Kennaway 2011, 2012), illustrating how closely sexual appetites, pleasure and music were thought to be. Many of these ideas about excitement, stimulation and nervousness were linked to the new technology of electricity, a source of great wonder but also terror, with its power to both illuminate as well as to potentially set things on fire and electrocute people. Fears over the loss of self-control led to advice that women should not be allowed to play the piano because it might induce hysteria or provoke other such unladylike behaviour. Across the history of music and medicine there are accounts that implicate music in the dramatic decline of one's mental stability (Kennaway, 2011) or physical state (Sacks, 2008).

Both the consumption and the production of music have frequently been linked to behaviours that are deemed morally questionable, degenerate and even dangerous. We have seen examples of this in recent years. When the London-based nightclub Fabric was closed down and its license revoked by Islington Borough Council following two drug-related deaths in 2016, a license committee

hearing when considering the reinstatement of the club's license wondered if clubbers might be better protected from harm if the beats per minute (BPM) of the music was controlled i.e. if listening to slower music would temper drug use.² This idea was ultimately rejected. The recent banning of drill music is another contemporary example, with rap group 1011 from Ladbroke Grove in West London being issued Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs) in 2018 to prevent the recording and releasing of drill music (BBC, 2018). The fact that some music is considered to be so powerful that it must be banned from being recorded perfectly illustrates the idea that music making might be dangerous.

In the context of this debate, there has been a growing concern in academic research about musicians' mental health. This focus was first brought to our attention in a 2012 paper by Bellis et al. entitled 'Dying to Be Famous' in the *British Medical Journal* which looked at the mortality rates of rock and pop stars and concluded that a combination of adverse early childhood experiences and the potential excesses and risk-taking which might accompany fame and wealth could lead to early mortality. The idea of a link between musical careers and life expectancy can also be seen in the work of Kenny and Asher (2016), who examined the death records of 13,295 popular musicians between 1950 and 2014. They suggested that on average across the whole age range, this workforce suffers from twice the mortality rates of the general population with 'excess deaths' (suicide, homicide, accidental death and drug overdose) being particularly high among those under the age of 25. However, neither of these studies concerned living musicians nor were they based on primary research.

In recent years there has been a relative explosion of research examining the links between musical work in the field of popular music and the negative impact this might have on the mental health and wellbeing of artists. In the pre-digital age, this literature was driven primarily by Geoff Wills and Cary Cooper in their 1988 book *Pressure Sensitive: Popular Musicians Under Stress* and in the ground-breaking work of Susan Raeburn (Raeburn, 1987a, 1987b). Today, much of the literature examining the links between the working lives of musicians and their mental or emotional wellbeing has done so in the context of examining precarity (Lorey, 2011: 87; Vaag, Giæver and Bjerkeset, 2014: 205; Long, 2015). Precarity, and the idea of precarious labour, forms part of widely circulating discussions about working conditions not only for musicians, but more widely in the ever-expanding knowledge economy and gig economy. Indeed, a helpful concept is that of 'the precariatized mind' (Standing, 2011:18); a psychological state brought about as a consequence of precarious work, such as musical work. This is linked to heightened levels of anger, anxiety, alienation, and draws on the work of Émile Durkheim and his notion of anomie.

However, there have recently been studies which, like ours, have taken health and wellbeing as their central focus. This work has been global in scale, with major studies emanating from Australia (Eynde, Fisher and Sonn, 2016), New Zealand (NZMF, 2016), France (GAM, 2019) and across North America (Berg,

2018; ECMA, 2018; MIRA, 2019). Indeed, ever since our own survey in 2016 which we will unpack in more detail in the next chapter, there have been an increasing number of similar studies. For example, one which focused primarily on Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland found that mental health problems were three times more likely in the creative sector. The most common mental disorders diagnosed were found to be anxiety (36%) and depression (32%) (Shorter, O’Neil and McElherron, 2018). More recently, the Stockholm-based organisation The Record Union produced ‘The 73% Report’ suggesting that 73% of independent music makers suffered from some kind of mental illness such as anxiety and/or depression. Other topics of research surrounding the deleterious impacts of musical careers have included performance anxiety and exhaustion (Kenny, 2011; Williamon, 2004 – although this has been a key topic of enquiry in the field of classical music more so than popular music), and the psychological strain of touring (Guptill, 2008) – including a focus on cultures of drinking (Forsyth, Lennox and Emslie, 2016), missing loved ones whilst travelling for extended periods and even the development of eating disorders and its links to perfectionism in musicians (Kapsetaki and Easmon, 2017). Recently the SIMS Foundation published its report which suggested that occupational and financial stress are independent risk factors for anxiety and depression in musicians (Berg et al., 2018).

Just what is going on? Emerging studies of the working conditions of musicians undertaking creative labour suggest that their experiences are potentially emotionally and physically damaging. These findings sit uncomfortably alongside political rhetoric and holistic accounts of the benefits of music. This creates a tension surrounding the relationship between music making or working in the music industries, and mental health. Creative work is important: few people dispute this. However, it is important that we better understand the nature of this work and its impact on workers given these apparently conflicting accounts regarding the potential emotional impacts of music and music making. This, then, is the first objective of this book: **to provide an empirical understanding of how contemporary musical artists and professional musicians experience the aspiration to build a musical career, and how these musicians feel about their emotional wellbeing and mental health.**

1.3 Abundant Music, Excessive Music?

Sociologists have written extensively about the new world of work characterised by risk, uncertainty and temporary contracts. But their attention so far has not been focused upon creative work. For this reason, nobody has posed the question of how much art, music and fashion the culture society can actually accommodate. **How many cultural workers can there be?**

—McRobbie (1999: 9)

It has been two decades since Angela McRobbie asked this important and challenging question, during which time we have seen the amplification and acceleration of many of the processes which led her to ask it. Until recently she got little response. Although many have addressed the question in terms of the impact on the art object, it seems few had the appetite to ask what would become of the workers. What happens when everyone is making art and art is everywhere? There has never been a point in human history where we thought that everyone could make art. It was in special places and made by special subjects. Art in secular modernity however has come to replace the space previously occupied by spirituality and belief systems. As the *New York Times* proclaimed in 2015: ‘We are all artists now’ (Holson, 2015). Sure, but what does this actually mean? Attali (1977, 2014) has been revisited by Drott (2015) and others, as it has been argued that he predicted the new position of music within the digital media market, where music is both abundant and free. In writing this book we want to understand how musicians today emotionally experience their work and working lives, and the theme of abundance is central to that analysis. Today, music is paradoxically both special and everywhere; unique and abundant. How can we make sense of this, and what impact is this having on music makers?

Back in 2002 everyone’s favourite spaceman David Bowie predicted that music would become like running water or electricity (Pareles, 2002). This watery trope spawned a whole new set of water-based analogies the most common of which is ‘streaming’. It was never meant to be about any shared characteristic these two things might have, as if they were somehow both elements in the physical world like the humours and passions of old. Rather the water comparison was about infrastructures, delivery and economics; a linguistic sleight of hand that slipped into common parlance and in doing so further muddied the waters of the politics of musical practices and reproduction, where sinking or swimming has long been a crucial distinction. This concept was first brought to the public’s attention by Kusek and Leonhard (2005) who predicted that disruptions caused by the new technologies of digital music would herald a new era in which the established power structures of the centralised major music companies, and specifically the recorded music industry, would come to an end. Although much of what they predicted has come to pass, the upending of the power structures they so enthusiastically predicted has not yet materialised. What they greatly underestimated, or failed to anticipate, was not only how large corporations were able to reorganise and consolidate their power base, but also how musical production – much like water – relies on existing infrastructures that are much harder to transform. However, the water metaphor stuck and from it we acquired a new language to talk about music in terms of streaming and pipelines. This has reduced and simplified musical practices and products in ways that both conceal and blur the complex issues that these new technologies entail. Unlike water, which is an essential resource that is now under threat, music is everywhere, and this

abundance of music has brought with it a whole new set of problems (see Mazierska et al., 2019).

As predicted, the economic value per unit of music has plummeted. Simple economic theory tells us that (relative) oversupply or (relative) overproduction generally leads to a collapse in the price of the product or service being produced. This process is exacerbated by digital technological communication given the high levels of competition it can create, which leads to ‘rapid imitation, the acceleration of technological innovation processes, global dissemination of innovations and falling selling prices’ (Brondoni, 2005). This is precisely what has happened in musical production, and in the ensuing chaos and disruption caused by the expansion of digital technology, music’s ubiquity began to transform our relationship to music on many different levels. However, there was a disavowal amongst techno-positivists – from both left and right – regarding the impact of this on the humans, the subjects, carrying out this work.

Abundance emerges as a key term when thinking about overproduction. Outside the sphere of economics we might think of abundance as a good thing: an abundance of fruit, an abundance of vegetation or wildlife, or more conceptually, an abundance of opportunities. The word abundance has a normative implication – that it is ‘good’. However, abundance also implies excess, and excess has the potential to create waste, to reduce value and give rise to new problems. By extension, abundance suggests the absence of scarcity, and in economic terms, scarcity is central in creating value. Neoclassical economics, which until perhaps ten years ago had been the dominant voice within the field (Davis, 2006; Lawson, 2013) and which still dominates the teaching of the subject (certainly at undergraduate level), demonstrates clearly how an increase in productive abundance causes a diminishment in profitability and results in suboptimal outcomes in resource allocation. The focus of the discipline is often on consumers and consumer welfare. However, we need to move beyond the restrictive parameters of economics and ask which *psychological suboptimal outcomes* – such as those related to wellbeing – are experienced by the producers, as opposed to consumers, in this environment of hypercompetitive oversupply and abundance, and why. Understanding musicians’ emotional experiences of an age of abundance is a central driver of this book. That is, what happens when music and music making is *everywhere*?

1.4 Communicating when Music is Media Content

In order to understand the impacts of abundance, we need to move beyond (cultural) economics alone. In writing this book, we want to examine how the changes brought about by digitalisation impact the lives of musicians and those striving to build a musical career. We want to know what musical work actually ‘feels like’ today in an environment where it struck us that our relationship

with music itself was evolving as it was becoming ubiquitous. Whilst there have been volumes written about musicians and their working lives (both in the analogue age and the digital age) and even though some have argued that much of the music industry's infrastructure has remained unchanged (Hesmondhalgh, 2013b), it seemed evident to us as educators and researchers that the working lives of musicians and those young people who wished to embark on musical careers (many enrolled on courses in higher education such as ours), were being impacted by changes in the digital media and entertainment landscape. The questions we began to ask concerned what music makers' 'relationship status' with music making and building a career in the music industries might be. Did the role that music played in their lives tell us something about what it means to be a musician today? That is, could looking at music as an object and the role this object plays in our lives, offer us a conceptual architecture to try and make sense of the tensions and the contradictions outlined above?

As listeners, our relationship to music in the digital era has been transformed. Not only is music seemingly everywhere, but the way we interact with music is also changing. This change is not specific to streaming but started with music becoming mobile. From a historical and cultural perspective, once music became mobile and one could close oneself off from the world via music, the way we used music shifted profoundly. The mobility of music in playback form can be traced to the advent of the Sony Walkman, which allowed the owner to seal themselves off from the public space in their own sonic environment and, for example, go jogging or travel to work listening to Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, or create their own mixtapes. But if the uses of music have changed, has music itself changed too? And if so, is the position, form and function in the way that music is used being accelerated, amplified and hyper-fragmented by digital realities?

The question which seemed to be everywhere, as music's use in that singular sense grew and evolved, was 'what can we use music for?' Music, of course, has always had specific 'uses' in spiritual and social contexts (Pinto, 2016) and as a way in which individuals construct their own sense of identity through aesthetic choices (DeNora, 2000). In this context, Oscar Wilde's quip that 'all art is quite useless' is no longer true nor a laughing matter. Today, instead, 'music for new generations is not about reflecting their unique personas, but a mirror of the activity he or she is performing' (Pinto, 2016). In an age where music consumption has become private and individualised with passive uses – playlists to study to, playlists to sleep to, playlists to do yoga to and so on – the utility of music is changing. This suggests that a listener's relationship to music – to the musical object – has shifted and changed (Pelly, 2017). But if this shift has taken place for consumers, as many seem to suggest, it must have happened for producers too; the musical subjects. What does it mean to be a music maker when music itself is everywhere and being used and consumed in such different

ways? In trying to answer these questions we want to make sense of what is happening to the value of music in this new ecology.

These changes in musical utility highlight how insufficient music business theory alone (such as it exists as a specific discipline) is in helping to understand our new musical world. Under these new conditions, whereby music has become more akin to any other type of media, it is more fruitful to look instead at new *media theories* to help make sense of what is going on. As a student of ours astutely noted in a lecture, 'It feels like music can sell everything apart from itself.' Music has changed so that now, according to Negus (2019: 370), a musician has changed 'from the creator of product to the curator of content' in an era typified by a shift 'from music as art to music as data' (ibid: 376). If music is now media – networked, abundant media content (Ng, 2014: 3) – we need a theory of media to understand it and to act as a conceptual prism to interrogate the empirical work in this book. In seeking to understand how musicians today are trying to communicate with their audiences, the work of Dean (2005, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013), which is primarily interested in political discourse, has important insights for musical practices. In her theory of communicative capitalism, she details the ideological unification of media, neo-liberalism and democracy. Her suggestion that the networked infrastructure of participatory democracy, epitomised by online social media and communication technology, which encouraged 'getting connected', 'taking part' and 'participating', has many parallels with what musicians – artistic communicators – are told.

For Dean, communicative capitalism today is based primarily on the exploitation of communication as well as labour (as per the capitalism of old). This process is the commercialisation of our sociality which Terranova (2015) has labelled as 'capture all' whereby the lines between work and non-work evaporate. There are three formal properties of this new form of capitalism. Firstly, messages are today reconfigured as *contributions* – similar to Negus' (2019) suggestion that music has been reconstituted as 'content'. Classically, Dean explains – as per Shannon (1948) as well as Habermas (1984) – that communication is understood as a message sent by a sender to elicit a response i.e. it has a use-value. Today however, messages have an exchange-value i.e. how many shares, retweets, likes or engagements does it have. The messages we send are now part of a data-flow with an indiscriminate slew of jokes, questions, comments, satire, thoughts etc. What matters is what she calls 'the logic of the count' – the communicative equivalence of messages in which everyone is free to take part and should take part. The second feature is 'the decline of symbolic efficiency'. If a symbol is effective at symbolising something, it can be understood in various contexts: we know what a crucifix, for example, means whether we see it in a church or on heavy metal artwork. Today, in an environment of abundant fractured messages and content, we have an absence of commonality and therefore need the most powerful images and message to latch on to. After all, how

can we speak to each other when everyone is speaking in many different ways all at the same time, a reframing of the Babel objection: ‘If everyone speaks at once how can anyone be heard’ (Benkler, 2006)? Thirdly, communicative capitalism is defined by a reflexive loop and trap of perpetually turning inwards, whereby every opinion and idea can continually be challenged and questioned in an environment of electronically mediated subjectivity (Dean, 2013). For Dean, this undermines political action as it is reconstituted as data to be captured and sold by companies such as Facebook or Twitter, and indeed these digital conglomerates are becoming increasingly powerful in the music eco-sphere (Negus, 2019) – a broader conceptual term which encompasses more than just the music industries to include wider areas of production in which music is embedded, notably technology companies.

In an argument similar to that of Negus (2019), Dean suggests that digital communication is no longer simply about communicating. More than this, digital media have transformed the production of messages. Linguistically evocative, as well as conceptually useful, Dean describes communicative capitalism as being defined by fantasies (Dean, 2005). A fantasy of abundance holds that this deluge of communication is a good thing for democracy. Dean suggests the opposite is true insofar as it reproduces capitalist inequality and in fact creates even sharper distinctions of inequality rather than challenging it. The second fantasy she identifies is one of participation in which everybody gets to partake equally and that this process is socially desirable. This second fantasy is driven by a technology fetishism rooted in the belief that new forms of technology might be the source of our political liberation and the answer to all society’s problems: the automatic response to any problem being, ‘there will be an app for that’ (Dean, 2005).

Throughout the three features of communicative capitalism, and in the language of these fantasies, there are striking parallels with the music industries. Dean’s work is about how communication has become a primary commodity in digital capitalism, and music, as a communicative art form in its new media setting, is an exemplar of this. In this sense, we use Dean’s work in this book as an analytical device to allow us to oscillate between the two shifts of scale which our subsequent analysis aims to straddle: the practices and experiences of music makers aspiring to build a career on the one hand, and the general trends and transformations in the culture and political economy of the commercial/popular (recorded) music industry on the other. This, therefore, is the second objective of this book: **to understand the nature of contemporary conditions of creativity and their impact on musicians and their mental wellbeing by drawing on interdisciplinary insights from critical media theory, the psychology of creativity and work, and cultural economics. In doing so, we want to bring empirical sociology and critical theory together to interrogate the impact of changes in the wider digital economy on the working lives and emotional wellbeing of musicians.**

1.5 Music Education and the Pipeline

The impact of musical abundance and the digital transformation of music are central to our analysis in this book. However, given our position as music business educators, we also want to examine how the coupling of music with more recent policy decisions, and the emphasis on technological developments, has impacted changes in music education and in policies relating to widening participation. The industry trade body UK Music designates this area as the music ‘pipeline’ (UK Music, 2018a); a place where music and its related industries should be seen as productive and viable labour markets, with a clear emphasis on the economic value of music. The pipeline metaphor may well prove to be an unfortunate choice given all we already know about sustainability and the current climate crisis. Anecdotally, we have been struck over the past five years by the changing composition of students on our MA Music Business Management course. Our cohort used to be made up of students who had a ‘business’ background of one kind or another (either studying business at undergraduate level or working in ‘the music business’ in some capacity); now, however, up to eighty per cent of our students are aspiring musicians with undergraduate degrees that reflect their aspirations, and they mainly come from music, and specifically popular music or music technology, courses. Generally, they say they want to learn more about the industry in order to help themselves develop their careers or to increase their music industry contacts.

We want here to briefly examine some key moments in the recent history of these developments to see how this has played out in the field of music education. Music has had a significant role in the reinvention or reimagining of post-war Britain (Cloonan, 2007), including the modernisation of state education (Guthrie, 2015). Acknowledging the crucial importance of this longer history in laying the groundwork for the present day, we want to highlight the centrality of higher education to government policy targeted at building and promoting the creative industries since the mid-1990s. Here, the continued expansion of the university sector, coupled with an emphasis on technology rooted in creativity and innovation, were central to the vision of establishing a post-industrial future. The growth in the recording industry and the wider creative industries, and access to music education, played a crucial part in this process. We want here to sketch out one approach towards better making sense of musical abundance and its impact on workers, by looking at the explosion of music in higher education and unpacking what this tells us about what has driven the expansion of aspiration to participate in the music industries (both as music makers and music workers), and to assess whether or not this has been a positive development.

Music education entered into secondary and higher education (HE) from the late 1960s and early 1970s, yet it was the shift in musical practices and experiences in the popular music genres of the 1980s that heralded the enthusiastic

expansion of what Born and Devine (2015) call non-traditional music education ('traditional' being classical music) into secondary education in the late 1990s. It is important to acknowledge the different tiers of music education and their hierarchical relationship to one another, and indeed Attali (1977, 2014) suggests that music plays an important part in social ordering. For example, the Classical Music Institute which demands and requires classical music training from a young age with grades, homework and orchestra practice, and by extension necessitates a 'supportive' family background, can be seen as diametrically opposed to the kind of youth training schemes that were and are available through various different providers from charities to private training companies to local authorities working in the field of popular music. Today, there are essentially three kinds of musical training available: classical, jazz and then contemporary or popular music. Alongside this there is also audio technology or 'music tech' as well as the growing area of 'music business' and/or 'music industry studies', the latter of which tended to emanate as commercial music offerings at undergraduate level. The adoption of the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992 put the brakes on the increasing numbers of music-based courses outside of the classical music education environment, which remains in a sense separate.

Higher education underwent a transformation in 1992 when polytechnics that had previously focused on vocational subjects, and including significantly the British art schools, became 'independent degree-granting' universities (Born and Devine, 2015). As McRobbie (2018) notes, the expansion and development of these music courses in higher education was central to the positioning of the creative industries in the popular imagination as a valid career path. Here, McRobbie was expanding on her 1999 essay 'In the Culture Society' – a quote from which began an earlier section – in which she notes that the idea of an artistic career for everyone is extolled without any thought of what that might mean for either art or the art workers themselves, and with no evidence of how many artists society might need. It was difficult in 1999 to imagine what participatory music culture might look like, let alone imagine how it might feel.

The aligning of digital industry developments and the increasing focus on building digital infrastructures was a key element for the New Labour government under Tony Blair, that also aligned with ideas of how music technology might enable a new workforce. This new form of music education, and the expansion of popular music courses in general – as well as commercial and music business courses – were therefore at least partly articulated in terms of policy demands, wherein they were 'conceived from the late 1990s as key repositories of entrepreneurial values, allied to expectations of economic growth and of boosting employment' (Born and Devine, 2015: 9). Significantly, these types of music courses appear to revise the tension of the 'creativity versus commerce' debate. They do this by positioning the entrepreneurial DIY model into practice,

conveniently bypassing the need for employment with a new command for students to ‘make their own work’ and ‘be their own bosses’. This responsibility for one’s own career path spreads outward from the vocational courses of the new universities and is now the norm across all arts-based or creative industry courses across the sector. There is no more room for ‘art for art’s sake’ as all culture is reduced to its economic potential alone. As Born and Devine (2015) suggest, these developments in music technology and their concomitant music business or entrepreneurship courses might be seen as the ‘face of such neoliberalisation in music in Higher Education’ (ibid: 146).

Behind all of this there is yet another layer to the use of music technology in higher education which brings together the shift to de-industrialisation and the fear of mass unemployment that is seen to have specific implications for white, working-class boys (Hillman and Robinson/HEPI, 2016). This group persistently remain the most underachieving category in higher education statistics, for which music technology courses were seen to present a possible solution. The primary question in the rationale for music educational provision is: what does it contribute to the economy and how can it meet the needs of employers (APPG et al. 2019)? As such, the expansion of courses such as ours has been driven by a social, economic and policy agenda which has helpfully been dressed up in the language of musical participation. After all: ‘Music also enables young children to develop the sheer love of expressing themselves through music, discovering their own inner self and being able to develop emotional intelligence and empathy through music’ (ibid). Music education – the academic, the vocational and the technical – is underpinned by the idea of music’s intrinsic value as an enhancer of personal and social engagement and enjoyment. Music is good for us and using music to enhance people’s futures is both useful and important – a value greater than its economic imperative. Music for children and young people is seen to have progressive cultural impacts of social cohesion, inclusion and confidence building for individual children (Hallam, 2015), and as an enriching activity with myriad, positive knock-on effects. However, as we travel through the ‘pipeline’ and children become teenagers, the selective nature of education begins to see music and different musical styles and audio technologies fragment these holistic potentials and focus them further into career paths, producing a new set of divisions and hierarchies, and the social ordering of music is taken to another level.

It was noted early on within the music industries, and later specifically within organisations such as UK Music, that these courses might be too numerous and producing too many graduates. However, recent anecdotal commentary from human resources providers and amongst people working in the music industries appears to tell us that music business graduates applying for internships are highly skilled, and that the industry itself has therefore benefitted insofar as such courses have raised the level of applicants applying for the most junior roles. Yet, there is an ongoing debate vis-à-vis the

potential oversupply of graduates at all levels (Bowers-Brown and Harvey, 2004; Wadsworth, 2016), and indeed it is so in popular music subjects. Within the music industries themselves organisations such as the Music Managers Forum (MMF) and the Musicians' Union (MU), who are offering courses on specific topics, tell us that both the educational environment and the skills and training environment are already extremely competitive, and there is no sign – despite the more positive talk around the music industries – that there are really any more jobs available.

Another key issue surrounding the music industry pipeline is that of diversity. As Keith Harris OBE, ex-chairman of UK Music's Diversity Taskforce, points out in his foreword to their 2018 report, diversity issues are not just limited to sex, race and disability but also, importantly, 'socioeconomic background' (UK Music, 2018b). He avoids using the word 'class' and does not extend his statement to how these elements might combine and intersect, even when he concludes that progress is slow. What is clear from the report however is the message which the UK music industries wants to emphasise: that they are striving to be at the vanguard of the diversity and inclusion agenda and are intending to be a shining example of an inclusive, profitable workplace that values its workers equally and is sensitive to the issues and challenges that any quest for equality might face. As such, the UK music industries seek to present themselves and their values as supporting the meritocratic vision that is so pervasive within the creative industries. However, they have been found to be sadly falling short in these matters not only by academic researchers (Banks, 2017; Bennett, 2018c; McRobbie, 2018; Oakley and Ward, 2018), and social media activism such as #BritsSoWhite (Newsinger and Eikhof, 2020), #MeToo and #BlackOutTuesday (Moreland, 2020) in response to the increasing public prominence of 'Black Lives Matter', but also by music charities, pressure groups such as the Featured Artists Coalition, as well as mainstream media. As Banks (2017) notes, the widening participation agenda attached to much of the creative arts has not delivered.

Therefore it is here, in the field of music in higher education, that we find a particularly perspicacious representation of the tensions, contradictions and dichotomies which so riddle participation in music today. The continuing rise of courses and students is emblematic of the experience of musical abundance: the push to take part, the justification of meritocratic participation in the language of wellbeing (driven by economics and policy), the tension between these two things, and the potentially negative impacts on those in the system. Certainly, the analysis here encompasses a wide range of agents and not everyone taking part in these courses are music makers per se. Additionally, and reflecting the contradictions of the environment itself, educational institutions and their staff are often highly dedicated and committed to both their work and their students and have invested themselves in these ideas, even when they are critical of them. However, what this analysis demonstrates is that 'music', defined in the widest possible sense of creating,

performing, enjoying, and working in music – a concept played with under the definition of music as a verb instead of a noun in Christopher Small’s (2006) famous lecture on ‘musicking’ – has been sold to everyone as a good thing. What we ask in this book is: is this too simplistic an approach? Here, then, is our third and final objective: **to critically consider how the reality of contemporary musical production and its impact on wellbeing relates to education and (professional) training, embedded in our own experiences of teaching and managing in a university environment. We seek to do this both to better understand our own pedagogy as academics, researchers and teachers, but also to help our students understand the world of work they tell us they want to enter.**

1.6 What Are We Seeking to Do in this Book?

Those of us living and working in the UK music industries see the elation of an artist when a performance goes well, the surge of creativity when a beat plays in the studio and music moves through musicians like a demonic phantom, or the joy when a song deeply and meaningfully connects with an audience. At the same time however, stories of psychological and emotional turmoil experienced by musicians as well as other members of the music workforce are commonplace. We hear the cries of artists crushed as their songs are rejected by mainstream radio (Forde, 2015), struggling with the challenges presented by touring (Reilly, 2019a), or ‘humiliated’ as they have to move home to live with their parents (Levine, 2020). The pain is heard daily; in the lyrics of the songs they write, and in the screams of their public tweets; from social media to BBC Radio 1, the news of the struggles and frustrations of working in the music industries are getting louder. Of course, in a sense none of this is new; the history of music is the history of these struggles. However, in the new knowledge economy it would appear these struggles are taking on a new dimension as the numbers of aspiring creatives has increased unimaginably and the economic value per unit of music (if there ever was such a thing) has crashed. It is difficult to imagine that one could ever measure the emotional experience of creative work. However, advances in biological and neurological sciences are increasingly able to demonstrate the negative impacts of stress on the body. This, coupled with the increasing awareness of emotional and psychological distress, suggests that musical work comes with health implications. We therefore propose that it is important to examine what the negative impacts might be because if we do not, we will never be able to change them.

This book emerged out of a joint research project that developed from our individual research areas and our professional practice. We had become concerned with the non-stop activity, the 24/7 work routines and what appeared

to be – and in this we included ourselves – the impossibility of slowing down or taking any kind of meaningful break. We are constantly inundated with messages across all media platforms telling us all to keep going, to follow our dreams, to believe in ourselves. We wanted to develop a research project that asked challenging questions about what happens when you do all of the above and still your dream turns into a nightmare. Under neoliberalism, creative entrepreneurs, and musicians in particular, can be seen as ‘keepers of the faith’: they embody the creative work they do. However, if they – the dreamers, the risk takers – were in fact falling sick, as research appeared to suggest (and which our professional lives indicated) this was indeed a dystopian vision. In this atmosphere of hyper-mediation and amplification of the self as a site of all meaning and production, what does it mean to those actively engaged with music, an inherently reflexive art form?

This book then is a study of how musicians (defined as those who describe themselves as such – a position we will deal with later when we look at the labour/work paradox) feel they experience their working conditions. We set out to listen to musicians and hear what they had to say about how they felt their working conditions impacted their mental wellbeing. Listening to what these workers say is an important way to understanding this area of cultural work. The idea that examining musical practices can reveal interesting and complex information about the societies and individuals that produce them is a long held one and is shared across many disciplines. We seek to question how the problems caused by the changes of digital media challenge the idea of democratisation, and in doing so look at the complexities caused by the unimaginable increase of musical products. If democratisation holds within it an ideal of growing inclusion and participation, how have these essential characteristics played out in terms of equity and social justice, as reflected in new media practices, and what are the implications for the wellbeing of individuals and the health of society as a whole?

To summarise our central ambitions, as set out in the course of this opening chapter, this book aims:

1. To provide an empirical understanding of how contemporary musical artists and professional musicians experience aspiring to build a musical career, and how these musicians feel about their emotional wellbeing and mental health.
2. To understand the nature of contemporary conditions of creativity and their impact on musicians and their mental wellbeing by drawing on interdisciplinary insights from critical media theory, the psychology of creativity and work, and cultural economics. In doing so, we want to bring empirical sociology and critical theory together to interrogate the impact of changes in the wider digital economy on the working lives and emotional wellbeing of musicians.

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3. To critically consider how the reality of contemporary musical production and its impact on wellbeing relates to education and (professional) training, embedded in our own experiences of teaching and managing in a university environment. We seek to do this both to better understand our own pedagogy as academics, researchers and teachers, but also to help our students understand the world of work they tell us they want to enter.