

Seeking “Success” in Popular Music

Gareth Smith

*Institute of Contemporary Music Performance—London, U.K.
Boston University—Boston, U.S.A.*

Abstract

From an autoethnographic perspective as a performer, educator and scholar, I consider constructions and presentations of success, what it means to be a popular musician in the 21st century, and how these issues are dealt with in the higher popular music performance education institution where I work. This position paper explores success as construed in music education and popular music studies in relation to changing contexts and practices in popular music. While popular music has a growing presence in music education and the literature of the field, institutions, scholarly publications, and mainstream media infrequently and inadequately address trends in popular music practice such as the widespread adoption of portfolio careers. Under- and mis-representation of popular music’s canon and practices, and ideas of success thus threaten to under-value the majority of popular music and popular musicians, a problem that should be addressed in higher popular music performance education and across the music education profession. Drawing also on literature from music business and economics, I call music educators to challenge traditional approaches and assumptions, engaging critically with the present in order to prepare for the future.

Introduction

This article was written in response to the call-for-papers for the 2013 Suncoast Music Education Research Symposium (SMERS IX), which had the theme of “navigating the future”—an inherently unknowable domain. In order to negotiate the unpredictable, it seems prudent to take time to reflect critically upon the present. To do this, I discuss three interrelated areas in which I work as a practitioner—popular music performance, popular music education, and scholarship in these related areas. This paper reflects my own perspective on, and experiences in, the fields about which I write and the issues that I discuss. It is a truism that an “invisible” authorial voice is present in most scholarly writing; by foregrounding my own voice I wish to highlight its centrality to my work. I could not write this paper without my discrete positionality, so I invite readers

to critique this in concert with the other subject matter. Any assumptions that I make in this text are, therefore, included as part of a consciously reflective autoethnographic approach (Chang, 2008). To exclude my subjective voice “would have been dishonest” (de Rond, 2008, p. xii).

I have been a drummer for 25 years, and have been self-employed as such part-time since 1999. I have mostly performed and recorded in musical theatre “pit” bands, punk, rock, folk, blues, and jazz bands, and with singer/song-writers of many a hue. I also began teaching in 1999. I taught mostly drum set, guitar, clarinet, and general music in elementary and secondary schools for a decade before I began working at a college of further and higher music education—the Institute of Contemporary Music Performance (hereafter, the Institute) in London, England. At the Institute I teach drum set performance to undergraduates in a range of styles such as Blues, Rock, and Jazz; I teach ensemble classes including Creative Ensemble, Rhythm Section Workshop, and Advanced Performance Workshop; I taught Harmony and Theory for two years, and increasingly I teach popular music studies courses including Music in Context, Music and Society, Cultural and Philosophical Studies, and History of Popular Music. I also teach Research Skills and supervise around fifteen students annually through undergraduate Dissertation courses, one of which I also lead. My work as a performer continues to inform my work as an educator, and vice-versa, in a symbiosis that breathed life to this article.

The Institute where I work could arguably be seen as an example of an extension of the northern European “fait accompli,” in which popular music is included and valued in the U.K.’s music education system (Hebert, 2011, p. 13; Mantie, 2013, p. 342). However, the Institute is a post-compulsory, higher education institution, broadly modelled at and since its inception almost 30 years ago on U.S. (Los Angeles) college, Musicians Institute. The pedagogical model has tended, perhaps out of a perceived need, to overtly and rigorously systemize and legitimize its provision, to “formalize the informal” learning practices (Smith & Shafighian

2013, p. 257) that are typically identified as being native to popular music (Green, 2001, 2008). As the Institute's full name implies, the primary focus for student activity is performance of popular music (I critique the conflation of terms "popular," "contemporary," and others in Smith, in press). Given that education programs in popular music are considered (even assumed) in this context to be worthwhile—they are the school's *raison d'être*—I turn my attention to assumptions that may underlie and inform educational practice, and the potential implications of these assumptions in and beyond higher popular music performance education (hereafter, HPMPE).

My emic perspective is a limiting factor in this paper, and also a strength. Bresler and Stake (2006) advise that "in music education, we have a need for ... experiential understandings of particular situations" (p. 278). Muncey (2010) adds that "subjectivity doesn't infect your work, it enhances it. Making links between your own experience and your [scholarly] work is healthy" (p. 8). Muncey's work comes from the field of health care studies, but it is clear that her observations regarding the value of reflexive, autoethnographic writing speak also to the ongoing experiences of those working in music education, and perhaps especially in the emerging, less-well-established domain of popular music education. I stand at the intersection of current directions in scholarly practice and music education and find, as Muncey affirms, "there is no distinction between doing research and living a life" (2012, p. 3).

Aims of This Paper

Jorgensen (2009) advises us that "the field [of music education] is in need of robust conceptual theories of music education" derived from research that includes "systematically describing the field" (p. 415). I offer nothing here so bold as a conceptual theory of this broad field. Instead, this paper may be viewed as the type of descriptive work sought by Jorgensen, and as a response to Mantie's invitation in his remark that: "researchers may wish to document practices ... outside of the United States to more adequately determine the actual extent and forms of engagement with popular musics" in music education (Mantie, 2013, p. 347). Hopefully this paper may thus contribute to the valuable work of colleagues attempting to construct much-needed theories of our profession.

Williamson, Cloonan, and Frith (2011) describe a lack of trust between professional academics who value scholarly knowledge in or from academia, and professional musicians and others in

the music business who value music knowledge in or from the popular music industry. They state that "Academics have a vital role to play in keeping the public informed in ways that are not processed by PR companies or designed to serve corporate ends" (Williamson, Cloonan, & Frith 2010, p. 470). Equally important, of course, is that scholars in music and education are able to accommodate the knowledge of those "on the ground" in popular music performance. As I hope to illustrate, in order to navigate the future, scholars, performers, and educators need to share expertise in a broad dialogue that embraces the overlapping boundaries of music performance, scholarship and education. As is indicated by the literature on learning in popular music (e.g., Green 2002, 2008; Smith, 2013a), there is often little or no distinction between musician, educator, and learner—in popular music. Few writers appear to be directly involved with knowledge from these three domains; the world of HPMPE is at the crossroads. In such a broad and under-researched field as popular music education (Mantie, 2013; Smith, 2013a), it is especially vital that all proceed with open ears, eyes, and minds.

I seek in the following pages to describe and explore two related problems. The first of these is that HPMPE programs, courses and institutions may be in danger of de-valuing many popular musicians (including the overwhelming majority of their own students, faculty, and alumni) and those musicians' work through adherence to a tacit and under-interrogated epistemology of "success." Bennett explains how this situation exists across higher music education: "The learning cultures within music are unlikely ... to encourage broad purviews of career or broad definitions of what it is to be a successful musician" (Bennett, 2013, p. 236). As HPMPE programs proliferate, this situation is becoming untenable, and serves our students poorly, since "Building a successful career depends on entrepreneurial activities and carving out a niche market" (Bennett, 2013, p. 235). The second problem is that this potential epistemological deficit is accompanied and exacerbated by the adherence to similar, prohibitively exclusive assumptions regarding success in popular music, both by scholars in the field of popular music studies, and by commentators in the wider public consciousness and the mainstream media. The overall aim of this paper is, thus, to challenge, broaden, or re-contextualize perspectives of colleagues in HPMPE and beyond, by exploring what appear from my perspective and context to be salient issues regarding how the

HPMPE community and others construe success in popular music.

Popular Music in Education

Popular music performance has a steadily growing presence in education—from elementary school to Master’s programs—in many countries including the U.K., Argentina, Finland, Sweden, Australia, U.S.A. and South Korea (see for example, Abramo, 2010; Allsup, 2008; Feichas, 2010; Green, 2008; Krikun, 2009; Mantie, 2013; Partti, 2012; Randles & Smith, 2012; Smith, 2013a, 2013b; Westerlund, 2006). While in the U.K. and much of northern Europe popular music and education could arguably be seen as relatively comfortable companions, the music education system in the U.S.—the country that spawned many of the most commercially successful popular music artists and styles of the last century—has largely been reluctant to adopt curricula that include popular music of musics (Hebert, 2011).

In the U.S., however, the situation appears to be changing, albeit gradually and only at the margins of the mainstream. In 2007, John Kratus wrote provocatively that the country’s school music education was at a “tipping point” (Kratus, 2007, p. 42), about to undergo systemic change following a beginning trend toward new models of classroom music education. This shift looks set to include a greater incorporation of popular music in curricula (Allsup, 2008), as championed by the iconoclastic leadership of the Music Education area at the University of South Florida (Williams, 2007). In 2012/13, a handful of the advertisements for vacancies for music education faculty members at U.S. universities included mention of popular music among the specialisms welcome in applicants; while unprecedented, this is not (yet?) indicative of a broad national trend.

There has been a notable increase in scholarly activity around popular music in education in recent years (Mantie, 2013), including conferences in 2010 and 2012 at London’s Institute of Contemporary Music Performance: “The Place and Purpose of Popular Music Education” and “Sociology and Philosophy of Popular Music Education,” the 2011 Suncoast Music Education Research Symposium on “Popular Music Pedagogy,” and the 2011 formation of the Association for Popular Music Education (A.P.M.E.) in the U.S., led by Christopher Sampson at University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music (as I finish this article, A.P.M.E.’s second quarterly Newsletter has just been published). With the fast pace at which (inherently trend-based) popular music moves, and with the desire that music educators often feel—

perhaps necessarily—to write and publish curricula and “methods” text books that can be of some use at and beyond their publication date, I am keen that this paper be viewed as the product of a very particular set of experiences at a specific point in time. As Allsup (2008) underlines, there is a danger of approaches or perspectives becoming reified or overstated. Restlessly evolving, genre-defying contemporary musician Robert Glasper says: “Some people say, ‘You’re the future of jazz.’ I’m not the future—I’m just now. Jazz is so far behind that the present actually looks like the future” (Glasper, cited in Aveling, 2012, p. 112). Substituting the words “music education” for “jazz,” I would re-phrase Glasper’s assertion thus: “I’m not the future—I’m just now. [Music education] is so far behind that the present actually looks like the future.” We in the music education professions, whether already heavily invested in the paradigm of HPMPE or edging towards of popular music/s in compulsory school settings, cannot afford to stand still.

Popular Music Studies and Popular Music Performance

The fields of popular music performance and popular music studies have infrequently collided in the extant literature. In discussing “popular music studies,” I refer to that wide branch of scholarship championed by the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) that investigates popular music textually, contextually, historically, culturally, and sociologically, having no explicit concern with music education. Popular music studies (as it thus defined for this paper) also tends largely to exclude popular music performance as an area of interest. Indeed, when I have, at various IASPM conferences over the last five years, presented papers on learning and identity in popular music education, and on the embodied experience of performing popular music, I have found my studies to be somewhat anomalous (although of sufficient interest to be accepted for presentation).

In late summer 2012, I received a call-for-papers from @IASPM, IASPM’s online peer-reviewed journal, for a special edition that would explore popular music performance. Isolating performance in this way underlined for me the “orthodox” assumption that when one studies popular music one is not studying performance. A week later, as if to underscore this dichotomy, an editorial piece in the newly reinstated IASPM U.K. and Ireland newsletter declared that “every issue now we intend to let the other side of the fence have their say—in each edition we will be asking a practicing musician for their perspective and opinion on popular music

studies” (McLaughlin, 2012, p. 12). In that edition of the newsletter, Rod Jones of Scottish rock band Idlewild gives a 245-word response to this invitation, in which he talks only about the pros and cons of popular music *performance* programs in the U.K.; he clearly appears to misunderstand the question, believing “popular music studies” to refer to the study of popular music performance, in the sense of working hard at being a performer. This is quite an understandable error, and underlines the centrality of performance in popular music to those who perform it—this does look like the most obvious way to study popular music. However, to bifurcate the two fields of “performance” and “studies” creates a false duality that is misleading because it is at odds with the experiences of popular musicians.

I have always found difficulty in conceptually separating “popular music” from “popular music performance,” since to me the former implies the latter. Without the performance there would be very little popular music (and historically, most popular music has been performed). While this is a gross over-simplification and could engender volumes of discussion, it is from this perspective that I write; being a professional drummer, I have always approached the teaching of music and writing about music and musicians as a drummer, first and foremost. I have not, as it were, left my musicianship at the door when entering the office to write or the performance classroom to teach.

Attending the inaugural meeting of the U.K. Punk Scholars Network in late 2012, it struck me that those of us who straddle McLaughlin’s “fence” are growing in number. We are reaching a point where it is no longer healthy or tenable—if it ever was—to maintain the epistemological barrier between performers and scholars. This is not to say that scholars need to be performers; but rather that academia could consider using a less divisive lens. Berger (2002) observes “a huge gap between the experience of living a normal life at this moment on the planet and the public narratives being offered to give a sense to that life” (p. 176). Musicians increasingly lead protean or portfolio careers (Bennett, 2008, 2013; Hallam & Gaunt 2012; Partti, 2012) that Burnard (2013) identifies as “boundary-less careers”; those of us working in HPMPE need to recognize this as soon as possible, or else risk holding the frame up quite a long way from the picture. Our institutions need to recognize diverse manifestations of success for musicians, and to reflect these back, through curriculum and pedagogy, to our students so that they are all the better prepared for navigating the future. Bennett (2013) asserts that students across higher music education “need to form

themselves for entrepreneurship even while they are studying. This requires a future-oriented epistemology developed within a safe study environment that rewards leading as well as learning, such that the ‘future self’ is self-defined as one who combines knowledge and action in the creation of the new” (p. 238).

Construing “Success” in Parliament¹

In April 2012 I attended a debate in a committee room at the House of Commons in London, where the question under discussion was “Where are the musicians of tomorrow coming from?” Present at this 90-minute debate, along with several elected Members of Parliament, were representatives of the Music Industries Association, the Youth Music charity, British Phonographic Industry, and the Institute. I attended with four students and our Managing Director. The representatives of these various institutions (including the Institute’s Managing Director) had each prepared a response of five-to-ten minutes that they read aloud, prior to the general debate. I was surprised that each response, without exception, was only addressing the same tiny part of the tabled question; presenters appeared to be answering the related—but wholly different—question: “Where are the *professional* musicians of tomorrow coming from?” This is an important question, and worthy of debate at the House of Commons. However, it is not the question that I was expecting to hear discussed.

As debate followed the prepared speeches, the tone of the session took on a still narrower focus. Attendees were trading answers to the yet-further-removed question, “Where are the *famous* musicians of tomorrow coming from?” The Right Honourable Member of Parliament chairing the session allowed the debate to proceed for almost its full term before I interjected to express my concern that we appeared to have been distracted by a different matter from the one that we had been asked to discuss. My remarks failed to alter the course of the dialogue. I wonder if the apparent underlying assumptions of this debate

¹ The Houses of Parliament (often referred to as just “Parliament”) are the two debating houses of the U.K. government. In the House of Commons, democratically elected representatives “Members of Parliament” (or “MPs”) debate and pass laws on behalf of the populace. The House of Commons functions in conjunction with the House of Lords, whose members (“Peers”) are not democratically elected. MPs in the House of Commons refer to one another in the third person as “the Right Honourable Member.”

are indicative of those of a majority of people across the education and music sectors. In our commercialized, media-rich world, have we become enculturated to equate “musician” with “celebrity performer”? My answer to the question initially posed (“Where are the musicians of the future coming from?”) is this: the musicians of the future are coming from a *substantially changed cultural understanding of what it means to be a musician*.

Construing “Success” in Music Education

Popular public mythologies are aggressively perpetuated with regard to musicianship and musical “ability” and “talent” via the celebrity-saturated charade of television shows like *The X-Factor* and *The Voice* touting a false and transparent made-for-television meritocracy. These myths are compounded by the work of scholars in education who espouse a different notion of what it is to be musical than is mostly prevalent in the contemporary literature. Narrow and potentially misleading views of what it is to be “naturally” musically able can be found in such constraining models as Gagné’s “Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent” (Gagné, 1998, p. 39). I discuss the problems inherent such models in Smith and Durrant (2006).

Welch (2001) writes that “the limiting concept of humankind as either musical or unmusical is untenable. The neuropsychobiological research evidence indicates that everyone is musical (assuming normal anatomy and physiology)” (p. 22). This being the case, the science is very much at odds with the tone of (and undertones of) the debate in the English Houses of Parliament. Durrant (2003), echoing Welch, explains that it is up to society—including but not exclusive to the formal education system—to realize each person’s inherent musicality:

Although we have capabilities, this does not necessarily mean that abilities will be learned. Abilities are learned and elaborated only if the people, places, things, and events in our surroundings support that learning. Our experiences, therefore, determine the extent to which our human capabilities will be converted into increasingly refined abilities. (p. 13)

While the job of the music educator may be construed broadly (or maybe narrowly) as to actualize the musical abilities of those in his or her care, these abilities may not necessarily fit into the existing categories prescribed by, for instance, extant curricula or the criteria for assessing excellence in performance at a wind band, chamber string, or punk rock performance.

Attempts are being made to incorporate a broad range of musics and musical experiences into the world’s music classrooms (e.g., Burton, ed. 2012; Green, 2008) that are meaningful to the students involved. As Jorgensen (2009) and Mantie (2013) advise, above, a key challenge is for music educators in institutions to remain responsive to what we see around us. Partti (2012) challenges the status quo, thus:

Formal music education, if operating from a place of fear and defensiveness, turns inward by advancing the development of a compartmentalised musicianship that is firmly rooted in particular genres, styles and communities, and conforms to a reactive role in the midst of the supercomplex cultural landscape. ... this stance seems not only unsustainable as a way forward for 21st century music education, but also utterly irresponsible.” (p. 90)

Partti’s words are as salient to compulsory education as they are in HPMPE. Following Burnard’s (2012) acknowledgement of humans’ numerous and varied musical “creativities” (pp. 17-18), I contend that it is incumbent upon music educators to embrace a pluralistic view of multiple (perhaps infinite) potential “musicalities.” We should be asking our students and ourselves, “How can my musicality help you more fully to realize (in both senses of the word) yours?” We must commit to what Partti (2012) describes as “the school (or college) as an institution that guides students towards increasing agency” (p. 88), including musically.

In the music education community there is broad agreement with the view that all people are musical, that musical experiences should be available to all and that, by extension, all should therefore have access to meaningful music education. The website of the International Society for Music Education (ISME) states: “We believe that lived experiences of music, in all their aspects, are a vital part of the life of all people” (International Society for Music Education, 2012). Similarly, the mission of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) in the U.S. is: “To advance music education by encouraging the study and making of music by all” (National Association for Music Education, 2012). Wright (2012) suggests, “We can surmise that many children and young people who fail and drop out of formal education, far from being either uninterested (or unmusical) simply do not respond to the kind of music instruction it offers,” bringing to bear upon music educators a weight of social responsibility,

engaging young people with music so that they can develop into empowered and actualized members of the society. This does not need to have anything to do with winning high school band competitions or getting through to the final round of a made-for-television “reality” talent contest. These should not be taken off the table either, but a broader vision is required of *what being a musician is*—from the first years of music education, through college or university, and beyond (Mantie, in press).

Construing “Success” at the Institute

Students beginning programs at the Institute usually want music to play a significant role in their futures. For the vast majority this means seeking careers in music. A browse through the promotional literature of the Institute reveals that, “At the Institute, we are constantly focused on the needs of our students ... our goal is their success!” (Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, 2012a, p.33). Laudable though this sentiment is, defining success for all current and potential students is no straightforward task. Success may reasonably be construed in terms of making a career and a living from and/or in performing music; the Institute emphasizes this view throughout its publicity materials (Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, 2012b, 2012c). I have written elsewhere (Smith, 2013b) about the “pedagogy for employability” (p. 1) that is a pervasive theme at the Institute, in current literature and at recent conferences (such as the College Music Society’s Annual Conferences in the U.S.).

In the music education literature there is currently a strong focus on the employability of music college graduates (e.g., Bennett, 2013; Cartwright, Gillett, & Smith, 2013; Hallam & Gaunt, 2013; Smith, 2013b; Smith & Shafighian, 2013). In the U.K. this has been especially heightened recently in the face of the economic recession and the concomitant huge rise in tuition fees for higher education; customers (students and their parents) want more “bang for their buck,” including a job at the other end. Bennett (2013) tells us that music educators (particularly in higher education) face “an ethical and moral imperative” to adopt creative practices, affording “pedagogies that encourage students to redefine the term ‘musician’ for themselves ... (enabling) creative learners who explore individual strengths and talents, and the intrinsic and extrinsic influences driving their passion for music” (p. 240).

Curricula at the Institute embody broadly two pedagogies for employability in respective undergraduate study programs (Smith, 2013b; Smith

& Shafighian, 2013). The Bachelor of Music in Popular Music Performance program aims to equip students with a sort of tool-kit of skills useful to the jobbing, craftsperson musician. The Bachelor of Arts in Creative Musicianship program seeks to develop the unique creative, collaborative skills of individual artist musicians, with a particular focus on the importance of collaboration for the entrepreneurial musician (Burnard, 2012; Smith, 2013b); and the Bachelor of Arts in Songwriting combines these approaches (Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, 2012d, 2012e, 2012f). These latter two programs are new, and have yet to gather data on graduate employment; Bachelor of Music alumni are working in a wide variety of full-time and portfolio occupations, from beauty therapy, marketing, and teaching, to working full-time in a well-known pop-punk band. Which of these has achieved “success,” and to what degree? Perhaps, as Partti (2012) suggests, any student is successful who has been guided towards increasing agency.

Arguably the most common way to construe success in music today, in HPMPE and the media, is in terms of fame or commercial success. Rhetoric from the Institute and other similar institutions, such as the Academy of Contemporary Music Performance in the U.K. (Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, 2012b, Academy of Contemporary Music, 2012), mentions “connectivity” to the “the industry” as though the music industry is a separate entity that exists beyond the walls of the college—an esoteric arena to which the colleges can help students gain access. The Institute lists alumni in its publicity materials, but only those who are in or affiliated with bands and artists who have achieved a degree of fame in performance or music production. Around 300 students graduate annually from the Institute, and most of these do not go on to become headline news or, therefore, to make the list of selected alumni that ignores the vast majority of possibilities for construing success. Wherefore this endemic resistance to acknowledging a wider conception of success?

Construing “Success” in Popular Music Studies

Rodriguez (2004) observes that popular music benefits from “a rich history that is tied to our social political, cultural, and economic history. What it lacks, in comparison to, say, Western European music, is the passage of sufficient time to determine which practices, structures, persons, and places have most influenced the genre” (p. 17). Rodriguez’s denial of a canon in popular music, however, runs contrary to my experience as an educator and scholar

working in HPMPE. Students at the Institute are required to take a course in the history of popular music, part of “popular music studies” misunderstood above by Rod Jones (McLaughlin, 2012). Literature in popular music studies has tended to focus on the work of famous and commercially successful musicians, with few exceptions. This is not unreasonable, as bands or artists that have sold millions of albums and become recognized internationally are, by definition, very popular. Popular music scholars have thus arguably (although perhaps inadvertently) established a canon of Great Works and Great Masters in popular music to parallel those of the Western Classical and (more recently) Jazz traditions (e.g., Frith, 1996; Gracyck, 1996, 2007; McLaughlin & McLoone, 2012; Moore, 2001, 2012). Those of us in popular music education risk embedding this view as an orthodoxy which ignores the 21st-century “reemergence of grassroots creativity” that continues increasingly to characterize artists’ and musicians’ modes of production and distribution of their creative products (Jenkins, 2006, p. 136). Indeed, Reynolds (2011) argues compellingly that the obsession with its past threatens popular music’s very survival as a paradigm; this is threat is perhaps nowhere in more urgent need of consideration than at institutions such as the Institute, whose students, alumni, and faculty can only ever hope to have careers in the present and the future.

One of the key foci in creation and distribution of popular music has always been the “new,” the current, music that has changed sometimes by revolution, at others by evolution, with artists and craftspeople striving to be novel and exciting by assimilating, synthesizing, replacing, and displacing various gestures—musical, corporeal, attitudinal, social—of preceding styles or movements that have spawned today’s plethora of musics in the “popular” realm. Those creating and producing the music may wish for high-profile commercial longevity, but that is not the prevalent model in popular music, although the media have a habit of wheeling out and reifying, even deifying, popular music iconic heritage acts of a former age such as Paul McCartney and the Rolling Stones; the mind boggles at the thought of what fate might today have befallen a withering Elvis Presley, had he survived to the present day. There is not much room on the tiny pedestal at the top of the media industry “tree” for musicians and bands. However, in the “creative revolution” taking place around us and amongst us, the dialogue and boundaries between “participatory culture and commercial culture” (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 136-137) are becoming ever more blurred. The tacit overarching epistemology in popular music studies

needs to change and to acknowledge this or else, as Hoskyns (2012) warns, “the most authentic scenes will be those we know nothing about.”

Messages from mainstream media are often reductive and sometimes wholly misleading, such as when the *New Musical Express* in 2002 announced the “New Rock Revolution” (*New Musical Express*/Ignite! 2002). I recall my disbelief at the allegation that a handful of bands selected for coverage by a high-profile publication were suddenly re-discovering and re-inventing a genre that had been alive and well since its inception. As far as I (along with the scores of people I frequently encountered on London’s less-well-publicized rock scene) was concerned, there was no revolution, just a shift in the attention of mainstream media to a style that had been ignored for a season while indie bands, divas and (in the U.K.) Welsh musicians were the flavor of the day. Similarly, “the most important acts who are shaping music today” (Q,² 2011) include hip-hop and alternative rock artists, with a particularly high level of attention paid to folk music musicians Laura Marling and Mumford & Sons. These artists are not unworthy of attention, but then neither are dozens, scores or hundreds of comparably “good” acts. I and many of my peers have been playing folk music for over twenty years, and will continue to do so after the cameras have turned elsewhere for the next “new” style that will likely have long pre-existed and will long out-last the fickle media hype. Instances such as these are typical of what Hoskyns (2012) describes as the mainstream media’s propensity for “deification and demolition—build ‘em up and knock ‘em down.”

When I teach undergraduate popular music history I begin by telling the students that I will not be giving them an accurate or complete history. Notions of “popular,” “music,” and “history” are so complex that to attempt to fool students that I could comprehensively fill them in on all the details would be arrogant, at best. I am always very nervous to canonize and to reify the songs, albums, artists, genres, movements, and events that we discuss, although I realize that by discussing them I risk canonizing them all the more, in the minds one class of undergraduate students at a time. At best, I can aim to augment students’ existing—usually substantial—knowledge of music that has gone before, and, my main task, perhaps to encourage them to question the histories and messages that they encounter. I discuss with the class our inevitable ignorance of the majority of music being made in the

² Q is a monthly U.K.-based journalistic publication advertising and discussing current “popular” music.

world or even just in London at present, and, by extension, the futility of trying to identify a definitive history of popular music.

I like to try the following exercise with my classes: I ask how many of the students in the class are in bands making original popular music, and every hand in the room goes up. I then ask students to keep their hands up if their band is “any good.” Most hands remain up. Finally I ask who is in a band of which I would have heard. Hands then all go down (apart from the occasional hand belonging to someone who sings back-up vocals or plays drums for a high-profile pop artist on tour). These young musicians are just beginning to find their niches in the “long tail” of the music business (Anderson, 2006), where the traditional music industry model of selling as much as possible of as little as possible (Cartwright & Smith, in press) is incompatible with a now-normative, more flexible, portfolio career model. As Cartwright and Smith (in press) point out, “Whereas once upon time such an existence would have been construed as a paying one’s dues *en route* to success, for a considerable majority of excellent, professional musicians in the contemporary socio-musical business environment, *this is success*. It is just not widely recognized and valued as such.” Popular music studies’ prevailing focus on musicians who have been afforded (and in the very rarest of cases may themselves have achieved) significant mainstream and commercial success risks misconstrual by educators, students and the public as reflective of popular music in the present, when it is distinctly at odds with the perspectives of musicians making the vast majority of the world’s popular music today, that is, the very ways in which popular music *is popular* in a 21st-century paradigm.

Conclusions and Implications: Constructing and Construing Career “Success”

I and my fellow tutors at the Institute play music that, although in similar styles, and using virtually all of the same gestures as more commercially successful artists is, by contrast (if we take traditional indicators like album sales and fame as the yardsticks of success), wholly *unpopular*. However, the ways that it sounds and is created are entirely consistent with notions of popular music (e.g., Frith, 1996; Green, 2002; Hoskyns, 2012). We all have portfolio careers, pieced together from a mixture of high-profile performances, low-profile gigs, teaching, journalism, composition, and all manner of music-related and non-music-related work. Similar work patterns are described in detail in the work of Cottrell (2004), who studies the working lives of musicians in London, Bennett (2008), who

explores the practices of musicians in Australia, and Smith (2013a) where I describe the identities and practices of drummers in and around London. This is the *modus operandi* of many a successful musician.

I consider myself to be a successful musician. I have accomplished things of which I am proud and for which I have received praise from respected peers; I have a secure job in HPMPE, and many “irons in the fire” for current and future projects. This being said, I am not famous, and my income derives largely from things other than performing. Most of the music that I make and that I would consider truly successful in artistic and technical terms, pays me very little. Indeed, the music that I have been paid the most to play has frequently (although not always) been what I consider to have been some of the least successful music, musically. In terms of the aspirations of ISME and NAFME, my life would probably be judged to be an ongoing story of success. In the tacit, unwritten terms of the discussion in the House of Commons, I would probably be barely recognized as a “musician.” My performance and recording career to date will certainly be ignored by the overwhelming majority of IASPM-ites (as the Association’s popular music scholars affectionately refer to ourselves).

Successful musicians today occupy unique niches as multifaceted entrepreneurs, operating in numerous intra- and inter-disciplinary networks of contacts with artists, writers, and colleagues from all over the world—what Gloor (2006) in his book *Swarm Creativity* terms “COINs ... collaborative innovation networks” (p. 3). Work patterns like this are increasingly common and increasingly encouraged across creative industries and other domains—including the academia—with members of COINs collaborating for individual as well as mutual benefit toward outcomes only achievable with collaborative, group efforts. Gloor (2006) writes that, “In a COIN, knowledge workers collaborate and share in internal transparency. They communicate directly rather than through hierarchies. And they innovate and work toward common goals in self-organization instead of being ordered to do so” (p. 4). While this type of career is not new, the literature indicates a general shift toward a significantly higher level of people’s experiences of work happening in these ways (Gloor, 2006; Partti, 2012; Sennett, 2012; Netto, 2012; Smith & Shafighian, 2013). It is in collaborative networks that most musicians in popular and other musics construct their continued success, through a process that Cartwright, Gillett and Smith (in press) identify as “orchestration ... defined in terms of efforts to achieve success by

finding and managing creative combinations for value.”

Many in higher music education are tuning in to the changing shape of success in music (e.g., Hallam & Gaunt 2012). Parti (2012) advocates integration of networks akin to Gloor’s COINs into the music education experience at and across every level, to the mutual benefit of all stakeholders:

Institutions of formal education could and *should* (emphasis in original) actively construct various kinds of inter-generational (and even international and inter-institutional) communities and networks of communities between students, between teachers, and between students and teacher(s), cooperating within systems of exchange based on generalized reciprocity at the junction of generosity and self-interest. (p. 98)

The challenge for those of us working in music education is to recognize and incorporate contemporary understandings of the work patterns of successful music professionals and, where necessary, to alter discourses accordingly. As teachers, the personal narratives that we offer our students about life as musicians are thus essential, reflecting success for the majority of musicians in our culture and supportively guiding students towards realistic expectations of how they will likely work (Bennett 2013).

Echoing Burnard’s construal of musicians’ multifaceted careers as “boundary-less,” Netto (2012) finds normative discourse in terms of the “core industries” of the music business and “related industries” to be outmoded, seeking a re-construal of stakeholders’ roles and practices. An emerging trend in cross-disciplinary research between Management, Economics, and Music fields reflects and underpins a need to recognize the centrality of these “other” industries and domains to our own work in Music Education and HPMPE. Groups such as the Centre for the Study of Working Lives (Gillett & Smith 2013) and the Art of Management and Organization

(2013), whose biennial conferences bring together current thinking and practices in and across arts, management, and organizational behavior, are taking a keen interest in how musicians construct careers. Similar critical engagement with the “business of doing business” as musicians (Cartwright & Smith, in press) is necessary in HPMPE.

“Success” for most musicians has yet to be determined; what seems certain is that it will not follow the patterns of the first 100 years of commercially available recorded music or the stories offered up by the mainstream media and many scholarly studies to describe it. Success will be based upon involvement in COINs of all shapes and sizes. Institutions and organizations need to embrace a new, flexible, dynamic epistemology of popular music that incorporates real-life scenarios for multiple musicalities, careers, and notions of success. This will include recognition that musicians and music practices in popular idioms beneath the fickle radar of the mainstream media are, at the very least, relevant and important, and that recognition and understanding of them as central to the popular “canon” will prove vital to successful navigation of the future in music education. I call upon scholars in higher education institutions to utilize their influence to begin to effect empowering social-cultural change: If asked “Where are the musicians of the future coming from?” those in the music and music education professions need to have answers that reflect a critical and reflexive engagement with the diverse and changing present. To alter (again) Gasper’s observation, we in the music education professions should aspire to a future where we can say:

Some people say, “you’re the future of music education.” We’re not the future—we’re just now, but, because of our relentless critical interrogation of our culture, our practices and the needs of our students, the present actually looks like the future.

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CHINESE ABSTRACT

中文摘要

在流行音樂中尋找「成功」

Gareth Smith

Institute of Contemporary Music Performance—London, U.K.

Boston University—Boston, U.S.A.

作為一名音樂家、教師和學者，我從自傳體人種志的角度來審視成功以及如何表現成功，及其對 21 世紀的流行音樂家們有怎樣的意義。我進一步探討在我所工作的高等流行音樂學府中這些問題是被怎樣看待的。在不斷變化的流行音樂背景之下，這篇觀點型論文探討了成功在音樂教育和流行音樂研究領域中的意義。雖然流行音樂在音樂教育領域中逐漸佔領了一席之地，專業音樂院校、研究型出版物和主流媒體對於流行音樂的趨向普遍缺乏足夠的關注。這些趨向包括廣泛採用的組合型職業，不足或者錯誤地詮釋流行音樂經典作品和表演，以及對成功的評價和看法。由於缺乏相關的關注，大部分的流行音樂和流行音樂家的價值被過低的估計。這個問題應該在高等流行音樂學府以及整個音樂教育界中引起重視。從音樂商業和經濟的角度來看，我號召音樂教育工作者們挑戰傳統的觀念，用批判性的眼光來審視當今，迎接未來。