

6 A Lockdown Recording Project

Jazz Musicians and Metaphors for a Working Life

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Introduction

The general stimulus for this discussion of Jazz musicians in the UK was, and remains at the time of writing, the ongoing Corona Virus pandemic. With all live music performance suspended for a considerable length of time, musicians in jazz, a genre whose primary focus is performance rather than recording, have been particularly challenged. As one response to this challenge, a collection of jazz musicians of my acquaintance undertook a remote recording project, partly as a substitute for live performance and partly as a way of developing new skills in the absence of regular gigs and gig opportunities. I discussed their project as a way into understanding more generally how musicians exist as workers within an industry they do not control.

Essentially, for jazz to be jazz it must go on being played in live performance. From a music industry perspective, what concerns me is that, in their working lives, jazz musicians have become both the source and target for a range of metaphors that speak to profound economic change. For example, as Woodcock and Graham (2020) put it in their explanation of the rapid transformation in work security collected as the term ‘The gig economy’:

The ‘gig’ in the term ‘gig economy’ refers back to the short-term arrangements typical of a musical event. An aspiring musician might celebrate getting a gig or tell a friend that they have got a gig in the back room of a pub or other venue. This is of course no guarantee that they will get to perform regularly. There might be the chance of a repeat performance if they play particularly well or are particularly popular – or it may just be a one-off. They might get paid – either a fixed fee, a share of the ticket price, or payment in kind (some free drinks perhaps). Their expenses might get covered. But also, they might not.

(Woodcock and Graham, 2020: 9)

As they go on to argue, such uncertainty is characteristic of an emergent form of employment that involves an ‘estimated 1.1 million people in the

UK' (Woodcock and Graham, 2020: 8) for whom the experience of work is 'typically short, temporary, precarious and unpredictable' (Woodcock and Graham, 2020: 9). In response to irregular performance opportunities and uncertainty of re-booking and adequate remuneration, the typical advice to musicians is that they should build a 'portfolio career': private music industry trainers, the Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, offers '5 top tips on launching a successful music industry portfolio career' (ICMP, 2019) while Youth Music (allied to another private provider, Tileyard Music) introduce the idea of the 'slashy':

Portfolio careers or being a 'slashy': Musician-slash-Educator-slash-Songwriter-slash-Producer-slash-Marketing Specialist-slash-Entrepreneur is a way of life for many young people.

(Youth Music, 2020)

If we set aside the sheer complacency of this 'advice' (always presented by private providers in a matter-of-fact way and with great energy), we need to realise that 'portfolio career' is an unreliable metaphor, one that originated in the work of Charles Handy. Instructively, in his introduction of the concept, Handy begins with one metaphor, 'Some people make their work the whole of their life ... the job fills the whole doughnut' (1995: 70) and then casually transmutes this into another, 'If I adopted a "portfolio" approach to life ... I could get different things from different bits' (1995: 71). I will return to this observation, but, from the perspective of a working musician, this metaphor is about as robust as a doughnut.

The third in the triumvirate of problematic metaphors (in addition to 'gig economy' and 'portfolio career') that draw from and speak to the challenges faced by people who want to be musicians is another staple of music career guidance; for example, this from Berklee Music:

Making music and running an entrepreneurial career are dual roles now required of today's artists. Wearing both hats successfully is a challenge. But, as CD Baby founder Derek Sivers notes, '[t]he skills needed to make a living as a musician are the exact same skills required to be a successful entrepreneur.' According to Sivers, '[m]usicians don't realize that they are already entrepreneurs!'

(Jensen, 2013)

Replete as this is with its encouraging exclamation mark, the Berklee 'advice' accomplishes a feat of conjuring – not only is it necessary for musicians to be entrepreneurs, but this is also easily realised because, apparently, they already are. Whether 'entrepreneur' is a metaphor is open to debate. The term derives from the French 'entreprendre' (to undertake) – as in to 'undertake a challenge' – and its application in English has come to carry with it the positive connotations of 'modern day heroes' (Hyrsky, 1999: 13).

This accretion of connotations may not be identical with the metaphors we have already encountered but ‘entrepreneur’ serves the same ideological function as ‘portfolio career’, which is simultaneously to reconcile musicians to their (seemingly ineluctable) market fate and to prepare them for forms of self-management that are closer to self-sacrifice and self-exploitation than career-building. They do this by offering strategies not so much for survival (though they pretend to this) but ones that accomplish the legitimization of music as a precarious calling. Within this, the risk of joint endeavours (almost always with gig promoters in the case of jazz) is borne predominantly by musicians. We encounter much of this logic in the testimony of the musicians in the Lockdown Recording Project (LRP), to which we now turn, where their self-reported experience can be used to confront this clutch of metaphors which do not so much describe them as bind them.

A Lockdown Recording Project

The ensemble involved in the recording project consisted of geographically scattered musicians connected either by friendship or gigging networks: two in Sheffield, two in London, one in Leeds. It consisted of a female vocalist, a female pianist, a male drummer, a male guitarist and a male bass player. As an ensemble they fit exactly Umney’s (2016) identification of characteristic jazz units:

The typical jazz ensemble features four to five instrumentalists, comprising a rhythm section (drums, bass and piano or guitar) and one to two ‘frontline’ players (most commonly saxophone or trumpet). While musicians may maintain particular bands for extended periods, they usually play in many different groups with a wide network of collaborators. They rarely make a living exclusively from playing jazz, normally diversifying into various settings, ranging from club gigs where they can showcase their own creations, to more prescriptive ‘function’ events. This diversification is possible because jazz musicians tend to be extremely highly skilled and versatile performers (Pinheiro and Dowd, 2009). Hence, their working lives are diverse and often unpredictable.

(Umney, 2016: 717)

Nothing here would be served by giving deeper, biographical accounts of the players, but they meet all of Umney’s criteria. The guitarist and singer are in part-time employment (one in music education, the other in local government) and support their jazz activities through, exactly, ‘function’ gigs (mostly as background music at weddings, and in restaurants and hotels). The bass player and pianist supplement their jazz playing through quite high-profile support slots across a range of genres and through offering instrumental teaching. The drummer was (until the pandemic) in strong demand for session work. All enjoy a degree of regional prominence with a varied

range of national and international touring experience among them. They have all been active for the past two decades. All have recorded but only ever as session players or in a DIY manner. None had recorded remotely before this occasion.

The recording sessions took place across the three ‘home’ cities using the Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) software programme, ‘Reaper’. Unusually, perhaps, the last instrument to be recorded was drums. All the musicians played to a click track and different musicians played to combinations of individual instruments – for example, once the piano had been recorded, the bass player played to that, the guitarist played to the click, the piano and the bass. This (as will be discussed) is already a long way from jazz (which is quintessentially a live performance music in which individual players, especially when in small ensembles, respond to each other in concert, in the moment). The DAW then allowed for the tracks, separately and collectively, to be ‘treated’ using the typical recording studio effects of equalisation, reverb, compression and so on; as the bass player who was also the recording engineer puts it:

I did a fair bit of mixing as I went along, so I would have cleaned up each take as we went, I did a few little edits, moving the odd chord or bass note which was wayward rhythmically perhaps. I also cut bits of the outro section from the guitar and piano.

My interviews with the participants took place after I had listened to the finished mix. These conversations were conducted by a range of means – face-to-face, telephone and email – with some respondents returned to on more than one occasion. The framework for the eclectic range of discussions was always that the recording project was a reaction to the dearth of performance opportunities wherein, in turn, this concern spoke to jazz as a genre and to the nature of the commitment demanded from its players. While much of what presented itself to be reflected upon is anticipated by existing literature (notably the pressures of self-maintenance experienced by jazz musicians – see, e.g., Pinheiro and Dowd, 2009; Dowd and Pinheiro, 2013; Umney and Krestos, 2014; Umney 2016), it remains productive to respond to the particular ways in which the individually internalised and habitual frameworks of jazz are exposed through the responses of its players to a total cessation in live performance practice essential to the genre.

All music takes dedication and comes with a lifestyle that can be problematic to manage, but jazz can be argued to involve a commitment of a different order from pop and from classical music. Essentially, there are very few dedicated jazz gigs and there are many people chasing them and, in jazz (as will be discussed), it is in live performance that the musicians involved realise themselves. Considered in this way, there is something that is ‘life and death’ about this chasing of gigs. Consequently, such ‘chasing’ is doubly pressurised, the musicians need gigs for self-realisation and such gigs are

few and far between. These twin negatives then lead such musicians to be exploited (Dowd and Pinheiro discuss ‘the jazz field’ in terms of ‘its inequities’, 2013: 459) and, worse still, to self-exploit. Ahead of any closer specification, it takes considerable, even extreme, self-management to stand a chance of making jazz the focus of one’s playing life. As the pandemic resolutely refused to retreat, what the LRP helped to surface was not just what is already known (that jazz musicians lead tough lives) but that the advice given to them, and the lessons taken from their duress, can be unhelpfully wide of the mark.

Lockdown and Industry

All professional, semi-professional and aspirant professional musicians were made vulnerable by the pandemic because lockdown closed venues. Clearly, the loss of live music performance opportunities would have also been registered negatively by amateur musicians, but on a genre-by-genre basis, established pop musicians now earn from touring more than from record sales and are the worst affected group, financially. Because, at least in the UK, orchestral musicians are directly employed, they were able to be ‘furloughed’ by their orchestras but they will have felt the loss of performance and live rehearsal, keenly. Pop musicians who are trying to make career headway are no longer so reliant on appearing in the lower tiers of the live performance circuit (with social media having become a conduit for exposure), but restrictions on rehearsal, music interactions and (where appropriate) public appearances will still have seemed like a brake on career progress. For jazz musicians, though, the loss of live performance is different, and arguably more severe, again.

Essentially, jazz as a music form, and especially for those who dedicate their lives to playing it, exists only in live, public performance and the conditions of such performances are at best precarious and at worst onerous. To illustrate this point, consider Riley and Laing’s (2006) research into the UK jazz economy. This is now quite dated but from personal experience and observation nothing has improved since Riley and Laing conducted their study. Typical figures show how marginal is the sector – for example, 67% of promoters reported average audiences of less than 100 people (with 22% reporting audiences of fewer than 50) (Riley and Laing, 2006: 5). The average audience size for tours by British Jazz groups was under 80. One bright spot was festivals (over 200 scattered across the UK) but, tellingly, 45% of festival promoters received grant aid in excess of £10,000 (Riley and Laing, 2006: 6/9). Taken as a whole, it is clear that Jazz, like classical music, relies on a combination of either hidden or direct subsidy to survive (‘hidden’ in the sense that pubs and restaurants hosted 36% of all Jazz gigs as a way of attracting customers and managing their brands); direct because the Arts Council (at least at the time that the report was compiled) supplied 71% of all funding to Jazz promoters (Riley and Laing, 2006: 10).

If we contrast this marginality with pop music, the contrast could not be more stark. UK Music (the lobbying body formed as an amalgam of UK music industry trade associations) constantly publicises the worth of music to the UK economy. From a music industry teaching perspective, I find their relentless declarations grating because they never drill down into the practices of music companies which, from the perspective of musicians, remain far from enabling and empowering. Even so, as the (pre-pandemic) 2019 ‘Music By Numbers’ report shows, the worth of music is greatly distorted by the income generated from the ownership of rights (whether as songs or recordings) and from the sales of tickets to concerts by major artists and to festivals featuring such artists as headline acts:

Successful British acts including Ed Sheeran, Dua Lipa and Sam Smith helped exports of UK music soar in 2018 to £2.7 billion. Millions of fans who poured into concerts ranging from festivals to grassroots music venues generated a contribution of live music to the UK’s economy of £1.1 billion – up 10% on 2017.

(UK Music, 2019)

Considered in this way, when UK Music declares the robust health of the UK music economy, what the umbrella organisation is really pointing to is how much money is made by the dominant music companies (whether record companies, music publishers or live agencies, promoters and venues). This concerns me as an analyst of music industry, but from the perspective of jazz as a music genre the picture is even more troubling.

As Riley and Laing’s (2006) research shows, jazz is a marginal genre, yet it is also one that is recognised globally and confers high status on a small handful of players. Outside of this charmed circle, the lived, grassroots experience of playing jazz and attempting to be a professional musician at the same time (when these are not identical states) is, at the very least, challenging. It is a challenge to find gigs, and when they come, they are almost always to small audiences. Further, with improvisation the core of jazz as a genre, its players depend for their very existence not so much on the poor earnings but on the ontological ‘blood transfusions’ afforded by playing, itself. Far removed from the gargantuan ticket prices of an Adele concert or the reported £7 million made by Ed Sheeran from streaming royalties from Spotify, alone, for his song ‘Shape of You’ (Skinner, 2020), a jazz player can only be a jazz player in a gig, with others, whatever the low fee and whatever the personal cost to them as individuals. Without seeking to over-dramatise, jazz players (can) compromise their life experience and even life chances for the ontological security on live performance because, as we will discuss, jazz performance is predicated on improvisation and the creativity this demands from its players – a gig is an assertion and validation of self-hood as much as it is a cultural event. When gigs are taken away, we can see (some of) the bones beneath the skin of jazz as a choice of affiliation for its players. On

this basis, before expanding on some of these claims, or as way into such an expansion, let us encounter the musicians in the LRP and how they reported their motivation and interaction.

Working Together in a New Way

From the perspective of an inquiry into the defining experiences of Jazz musicians, the approach I took in interviewing those in question was comparatively 'light touch'. At the outset, I was interested only in evaluating the cogency of the recording (a song I had written called 'Freight Elevator', about an incident in the life of Billie Holiday). At the same time, I imagined, wrongly, that the pandemic would be a short-lived affair. The implicit force of the answers the LRP musicians gave to my questions only became apparent as lockdown (in all its variants) persisted through 2020 and into 2021. When re-examining those answers, in the months of the prolongation of the pandemic, the more revealing and, perhaps, more poignant, they appeared. The responses appeared to devolve onto five sets of considerations:

Working Conditions

In essence, the 'lockdown project' was simply something to do when gigs had ceased. How the change is characterised is instructive, though:

The main difference has been that all gigs were cancelled so that whole side of our work disappeared pretty much overnight. I'm in a couple of bands that work regularly and usually pick up other gigs along the way. Obviously, this meant all work-related travel stopped too which for me was actually a relief. I'd had a winter of gigs involving some quite intense journeys and needed a break from it.

What bleeds through this observation is a combination of the reactive and pragmatic nature of a Jazz player's life ('usually pick up gigs along the way') together with how onerous such a regime can be ('quite intense journeys'). Here the life of a musician is not entirely a musical life, and it is one mostly to be endured in order to be a jazz musician.

A further observation made by a different participant was:

Three gigs I had cancelled at good venues ... won't be replaced anytime soon. I have one wedding in the book ... and that's all.

Oddly, perhaps, it is the 'in the book' that catches the eye, here – this speaks to the self-managed and individualised nature of the pursuit. Further, the fact that 'three gigs ... at good venues' are unlikely to be replaced speaks to the piecemeal promotion of jazz and, regardless of any pandemic, its *ad hoc* uncertainty. With so few dedicated jazz venues in the UK, whether and how,

for example, the UK's leading jazz venue Ronnie Scott's club re-opens is irrelevant to the vast majority of the country's jazz players. The deeper note of despair in the observation is that this reality means that the individual in question is thrown back into the melting pot of market competition with no assurance that she will be remembered should any of these gigs be restored. Tellingly, though, this reality is endured stoically.

Practice

The issue of the musician's perpetual need to practice surfaced very readily in the responses of all the musicians involved, these are three examples:

Being at home should have meant that practice was more possible but somehow it was hard to find the time, maybe because the kids were home, and also hard to find the headspace sometimes...

Practice has been hard. I've been practicing every day but without the focus of a gig to practice for it's difficult to find motivation and discipline so one tends to end up practicing random and disconnected things with no real direction.

Whilst online is better than nothing, it's no substitute for being in the room with someone.

The need for active, 'in the same room' collaboration is arguably what drives this frustration – these are not classical musicians for whom stamina and absolute precision is of the essence. These are players who exist to play jazz. They accept the conditions of this life-choice: that jazz gigs are irregular and mostly low-paying, and that 'function' gigs and shows and tours as non-jazz players pay the bills. What this habitual form of existence means for these musicians is that they are all 'project'-focused – these particular musicians (as jazz musicians, generally) organise their time ultimately with the next gig in mind. This means that if they booked to play in an Abba tribute band for two weeks, they rehearse the repertoire, they do not 'practice', as such. Without a gig to prepare for, the musicians, here, find it hard to play in a vacuum. Further, jazz is not something that can be practiced for; as we will discuss, jazz playing is definitionally improvisatory, no musician knows what they will play until they play it, and this kind of creative spontaneity is not a direct outcome of practice (whatever the need to maintain strength, focus and dexterity).

Teaching

All of the musicians interviewed teach or have taught (in fact one was employed full-time in a Music College and that person scaled back to part-time in order to spend more time on their own playing). Teaching was represented affirmatively but also (and with no pun intended) instrumentally:

Teaching mercifully did continue, though online. This has had its challenges but getting on board with the tech involved (zoom, webcams etc.) has created flexibility in terms of being able to teach/learn anywhere in the world. It has made the job of teaching more challenging, though not impossible.

Teaching has continued and adapted to changing practices, but it is enough to keep us going financially as we're not going out or spending any money.

Here we encounter (practical and intellectual) compartmentalisation – as instrumental teachers, they teach students to learn and develop skills on a musical instrument, they do not teach 'jazz' as such. Given the rote and regularised nature of such teaching, the teaching musician does not realise her- or himself through this medium but they 'live with it' as a source of income and one that is in no way compromising (in fact, if anything, tuition is a source of dignity and self-determination). The obverse of this positivity is, arguably, that musicians who are used to compartmentalising what they do are perhaps less aware of the negatives of *dividing* what they do (into onerous and fulfilling gigs). This is a dimension of the self-exploitation referred to previously. When self-management becomes self-sacrifice in the management not just of an individual career but of a genre then we need to look more closely at how the industrial dynamics of jazz bear on the life experiences of its players.

Careers

Like many musicians and artists, I started to think about the impact this [the pandemic] would have longer-term on my work, and I found myself thinking more and more about expanding into writing more music rather than the focus being on live performance.

It's also produced some tangible end products that we can release/promote on social media and generally help to feel like we still have a viable life/career as musicians.

The notion of musical activity accumulating as 'career' needs further reflection, but there is a sense of 'yearning' here rather than an identification of measured progress towards realisable goals. In turn, this cannot help but suggest that, where developmental issues are concerned, being a jazz musician is not something that is convincingly under the control of individual players. In these, almost poignant musings, we encounter 'musicians', more than jazz players. These are the musicians who progress by the 'classical' route of home tuition on orchestral instruments, grade exams and entry into Higher Education, even conservatoires. Three of the players followed this route and two of them are featured here. It is almost as if these two have been lured by a music that, simultaneously, demands their allegiance, at the

expense of themselves, yet at the same time, almost feverishly fulfils their desire to perform in demanding and creative ways – until they are forced to wake from the dream and go searching for their ‘work’ and ‘a career’.

The Recording Project

Recording was represented unanimously as a positive experience, across a revealing range of responses:

It was an organic development of the first lockdown. There was time to work out techniques and it was one thing we could collaborate with others on despite the distance and the restrictions on meeting.

I found having a few home recording projects to be a good way to connect with other musicians and feel like I was doing something worthwhile. ... Mainly it’s great to have a creative focus of any kind.

Negatives, the vibe.... It’s really hard to make something sound spontaneous (because it can’t be) and as someone who’s mostly recorded ‘live’ with the whole band playing at once and bits of separation where possible, it was a different bag altogether.

If we all set up together in a room and recorded live then it would be closer, particularly if people were watching.

Didn’t get to comment in real time as instruments were laid down – so not enough ideas input from whole band. Didn’t have same sense of camaraderie and experimentation that you would normally have.

Can’t play/practice/rehearse with others due to restrictions and this is where a lot of collaboration and creative exchange takes place and ideas for new sets etc.

Consider the terminology here: these interviews were all conducted separately and yet the responses read almost as a single, collective one. In the face of the insufficiencies of the LRP, all of the following are dramatised as positive aspects of making jazz music: jazz is distinguished by its being ‘collaborative’ and relying on ‘collaboration’; it allows one to ‘connect’; it facilitates one to be ‘creative’; it enables players to become ‘closer’; it drives ‘camaraderie’; it demands ‘experimentation’ and ‘exchange’, and it is always ‘spontaneous’. This is a lengthy list of positives and, at the very least, it shows that jazz needs to be played live to *be* jazz; despite the novelty of the LRP for all the players, no-one on any occasion compared the experience of recording to making a record in emulation of a jazz *recording*.

To help us understand this commitment to live performance and to the centrality of this to the *raison d’être* of such musicians, (to those times when ‘people (are) watching’), the work of Hargreaves (2012) is instructive. She observes that ‘idea generation’ (2012: 363) is the source of jazz improvising. Hargreaves cites an extensive literature that attempts to identify how jazz

improvising is creativity in action. In this, she identifies three forms of idea generation derived from ‘two seminal works’ (2012: 356), those of Pressing (1988) and Sudnow (2001) referring firstly to Pressing she argues,

‘Improvisation: Methods and Models’ made a notable contribution to jazz research as one of the earliest published cognitive models of improvising. His extensive cross disciplinary reading melds facets of physiology, neuropsychology, motor programming, and skill development with a discussion of intuition and creativity.

(Hargreaves 2012: 357)

From there, and inspired by Sudnow, Hargreaves works through the various creative centres and strategies deployed in improvisation, at one point quoting ‘jazz musician and educator Bob Stoloff’ (cited in Wadsworth Walker, 2005):

I don’t improvise anything original, as far as I know. I think it’s all pieces of stuff that I’ve heard throughout the years. Sometimes I can even identify it as it’s coming out of my mouth, and say ‘oh my gosh – there’s Dizzy Gillespie, there’s Oscar Peterson, there’s Joe Morello’.

(Wadsworth Walker, 2005: 118)

If ‘idea generation’ is a synergy of different physical, mental and cultural resources drawn into play in the performing jazz ensemble, then to be a jazz player is to be in that creative and unrepeatable moment, experiencing the autonomy and individuality of the routes taken by strong and distinct impulses to the music in train. And all this happening within an on-stage, in the moment, shared and yet still individually idiosyncratic identification with a history of jazz performance, one that manifests in playing in and through unpredictable inflections of performance. Considered in these terms, it should be little wonder that the LRP seemed so tepid by comparison. Even so, the ‘yearning’ and ‘poignancy’ that is also present in the testimony of the musicians speaks to the strictures imposed by the genre. ‘Self-management’ seems a benign, affirmative state of self-determination until we recognise it as the management of self-sacrifice. Once we are alert to the permanent and painful conflict between the two states, we confront the jazz musician as someone whose energy is always at the ‘red line’ because they are forced permanently to balance the effort it takes to play jazz against the reward of the playing, and vice versa.

If this is the reality of jazz for the musicians we have encountered, and if it is reasonable to extrapolate from them across all of the jazz musicians in the UK who are not in the ‘charmed circle’ (which is always a small one), then how well or how badly are they served by the metaphors that encourage them to sharpen their behaviour to survive on this ‘red line’?

The Valences of Metaphor

The competition between musicians in what we can broadly identify as ‘popular music’ is now more intense than it has ever been. The Reaper DAW referred to previously is free to download, and free downloads of limited packages (with more features released on subscription) is not a formula that everyone need comply with, as Strachan (2017: 23–25) identifies, a musician with a little tech savvy can download a ‘cracked’ (pirated) copy of one of the leading DAWs, quite readily. One result of this is that at, as reported by ‘Music Business Worldwide’ (Ingham, 2021), its ‘Stream On’ event in February 2021, Spotify announced that, every day, it processes 60,000 new track uploads. At a rate of 22 million new tracks a year (and this only to Spotify) then, even if this means that single musicians (or groups of them) each upload ten tracks a year, the idea that 2.2 million musicians will go on to enjoy music careers is patently absurd. This, though, does not prevent the widest range of providers offering services to musicians predicated on the idea that, should they (at a price) follow the guidance on offer, they will go on to do exactly this.

Intense competition between pop musicians is nothing new, it is just that digitisation allows anyone with an iPhone and Garageband or an Android phone with BandLab to make their own album. In pre-internet, pre-DAW days, aspirant pop musicians did what they could to bring themselves to the attention of record companies and other intermediaries who might be persuaded to take them to market and support them there, the rest went back to their ‘day jobs’. What music intermediaries represented to aspirant musicians was the potential of competitive advantage inside intense and volatile markets for music-symbolic goods. The problem then was that this gave almost all the power in the relationship to the intermediary – the music company (of whatever kind) decided which musicians looked most likely to become market successes and they adopted risk strategies (at the expense of the aspirant musician) to protect and to help maximise any investment they chose to make (Jones, 2012).

In a new environment, when most of the vast over-supply of pop musicians can now make itself heard by uploading tracks into streaming services, it makes a limited sense to advise these people that they should individually become more ‘entrepreneurial’ and that they should prepare to enjoy ‘Portfolio careers’ while they wait for attention to reach critical mass and fame to come knocking. This ‘advice’ is then made apparently the more persuasive because ‘Day Jobs’ continuously disappear to be replaced by jobs that seem to look a lot like music ones, only without the lure of ‘celebrity’ as a reward for the uncertainty, the long hours, the enforced self-reliance and the low pay.

If we map all of this onto our LRP musicians, and onto jazz more specifically, then a range of conclusions can be drawn, both about the musicians themselves and the metaphors that pervade their music-making.

Entrepreneurialism

Umney (2016: 726) has already pointed out that, in fact, when used opportunistically at the expense of fellow musicians, an entrepreneurial approach is usually perceived negatively within a given community of musicians. Even so, what, from the LRP, can be perceived as ‘stoicism’ (in the loss of ‘three gigs ... at good venues’) can also be read as passivity. If, individually, jazz musicians becoming ‘entrepreneurial’ offends jazz at its core – by denying the creatively competitive mutuality that defines improvisation – then perhaps jazz musicians could become entrepreneurial, *collectively*. Should jazz adopt a communal, collectivist approach among its musicians then the self-promotion of gigs could begin to fill diaries and the honing of marketing and promotional skills could increase audience sizes. This in turn could raise rates across the board – from dedicated jazz concerts to function events – as branded goods manufacturers demonstrate consistently, market price is as much a function of perceived value as it is the availability of cheaper substitutes.

Portfolio Careers

All the musicians involved in the LRP evince ‘portfolio careers’, but clearly these come at a continuous and varied cost: ‘quite intense journeys’, ‘hard to find the headspace sometimes’. The lie to the ‘Portfolio career’ is to be found in its apostle, Charles Handy. What completes Handy’s earlier quoted observation is that the guarantee that he could ‘(see his) life as a collection of different groups and activities’ was that ‘a part of that portfolio would be “core”, providing the essential wherewithal for life’ (Handy, 1995: 71). The point here is that *all* of the LRP musicians, and tens of thousands more besides, lack that core and are forced to self-exploit to provide ‘the essential wherewithal for life’. Handy’s career trajectory was public school to Oxford to an executive position at Shell Oil to a Professorship at London Business School, of all people he is the last person who should be used as a source of advice to musicians.

The Gig Economy

Where the gig economy is concerned, it is appropriate to return to Billie Holiday:

One day, we were so hungry we could barely breathe. ... It was cold as all hell and I (went)... in every joint trying to find work. Finally, I got so desperate I stopped in the Log Cabin Club, run by Jerry Preston ... I asked Preston for a job ... told him I was a dancer. He said to dance. I tried it. He said I stunk. I told him I could sing. He said sing. Over in the corner was an old guy playing a piano. He struck ‘Travelin’ and I sang.

The customers stopped drinking. They turned around and watched. The pianist, Dick Wilson, swung into ‘Body and Soul.’ Jeez, you should have seen those people – all of them started crying. Preston came over, shook his head and said, ‘Kid, you win.’ That’s how I got my start.

(Dexter, 1939)

Jazz history is a tapestry of powerful narratives. The trouble with narrativising a music genre is that vivid stories distract us from what is uninteresting to encounter and yet vital to day-to-day survival. ‘Survival’ has long been the watchword, both for jazz musicians and ‘freelance’ musicians more generally. The ‘gig economy’ is the latest and deepest twist of the knife in the Neoliberal evisceration of the Labour Movement. The trouble with using the lives of jazz musicians as a metaphor for Amazon delivery drivers and Deliveroo meal transporters is that, unlike the participants in the LRP, for those unfortunate enough to be caught in that (expanding) web, there is nothing ‘collaborative’, ‘creative’ or ‘spontaneous’ about work that is policed by digital platforms which are ‘characterized by a core architecture that governs the interaction possibilities’ (Srnicek, 2017: 48).

In making this final observation there is no sub-textual ‘consolation’ intended, either for the LRP participants or their like. Jazz musicians tend to be ones without power within their specific economy and industry. One way of speaking ‘truth to power’ is to dismantle the metaphors through which these inequalities work their quiet but insistent spell in the discursive construction of the ‘place of music’ (and therefore the value of musicians) in daily life.

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