Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

"Exiled Music Herself, Pushed to the Edge of Existence": The Experience Of Musicians Who Perform Background Music

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In reconsidering music in the background, the authors look to what Adorno said seventy years ago about music as aural wallpaper, as the Muzak corporation put it: "music is there to be listened to but Muzak is there to be heard". Examining the history of listening, and in particular the influence of romanticism and bohemia, we explore through depth interviews the experiences of musicians who perform background music. This text is enlivened by an accompanying audio presentation which brings to centre stage the voices of the musicians on how they negotiate the romantic experience of music when the audience isn't interested.

Keywords: Background Music; Musicians; Romanticism; Listening; Adorno; Muzak

> The islands of house music are located rather close to the shimmering frozen lake of self-conscious artistic practice. But exiled Music herself, pushed to the edge of existence, holds out loyally there: music as background. (Adorno 2002, 506)

Seventy years ago Adorno used these words to describe the existence of music in German cafes. Then, as now background music was often intended as a form of inoffensive and aural wallpaper. Since Adorno, the provision of background music has increased tenfold due to organisations such as Muzak, the USA background music supplier, who described the purpose of background music; "music is there to be listened to but Muzak is there to be heard". This article considers the experiences of

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musicians who have worked playing live background music in bars, cafes or corporate entertainment. As Adorno points out in the above quotation, such an existence of music lies exiled from self-conscious artistic practice or, as Johnson (1996) describes it "the romantic experience of music". This paper and accompanying audio piece addresses the history of listening to music and investigates the experiences of musicians who perform in such contexts.

The History of Listening

The ethnomusicologist Gregory (1997) describes the traditional uses of music to be found in archaic societies noting that rather than existing as an independent art form to be enjoyed for its own sake, music is an integral part of culture accompanying every human activity including work, games, dancing, festivals, court and selling. For Gregory (1997, 137) this was distinct from the development of "art" music which is to be listened to (supposedly) for personal enjoyment. Indeed as this section shows, much of what we regard as being art music today was originally intended as background music. For example, Mozart was known to compose for the court, Telemann developed his own style of background music which he referred to as *Musique de Table* (Table Music), whilst the *Goldberg Variations* by Bach were composed in the hope of curing the insomnia of the patron, Count Kaiserling (Lanza 1995). Meanwhile sacred music, where some of the most significant advances in Western music were made, was typically composed as a background to religious practice (Raynor 1978). Therefore, we can see that in the history of Western culture, the practice of listening to music as an activity in its own right is a relatively new practice caused by a change in the conception of music and its role in society. This section considers the nature of that change.

By narrowing his focus to Parisian audiences from the early eighteenth century to nineteenth century, Johnson (1996) plots this social transformation. "In the Old Regime", Johnson writes, "attending the opera was more social event than aesthetic encounter. In fact, eighteenth century audiences considered music little more than an agreeable ornament to a magnificent spectacle, in which they themselves played the principal part" (1996, 10). Hence the traditional audience tended to talk continuously, visit one another in private boxes throughout the performance (often loudly banging doors behind them) whilst keeping an eye on one another through their lorgnette. Meanwhile the lower classes stood in the main stalls, observed the aristocracy above them, chatted, regularly hummed along with the music and, on occasions when the area was overcrowded, rioted. Mozart, identified by Elias (1993) as being an important figure in a time where the musician's role was radically changing in society, was described by Johnson as being one of the first visitors to Paris to become frustrated with the behaviour of his audience. In a letter to his father Mozart wrote:

> What vexed me most of all was that Madame and all her gentlemen never interrupted their drawings for a moment, but went on intently, so that I had to play to the chairs, tables and walls. Under these detestable conditions I lost my patience. I therefore began to play the Fischer variations and after playing half of them I stood up. Whereupon I received a shower of éloges. (cited in Johnson 1996, 76–77)

By the time of Beethoven, Parisian audiences had learnt to sit in reverential silence and were known to be moved to tears by music. The change from unruly to reverential audience, marked by changes in the style of composition of the music itself as well as the architecture of the theatres, is described by Johnson as consisting of the "musical experience of romanticism" (1996, 237).

In understanding why the romantic period afforded the musician and indeed music such a privileged role, it is important to note the central role that aesthetics played in romantic philosophy of that era. For example, Kant (2001) stressed the role of art in allowing people a glimpse of the sublime and thus allow the mind to develop an autonomy. Another early romantic writer, Jean Paul, described the need to develop a new language based on visuals and music in order to move away from defining the world by *tote Buchstabenschrift*—the language of dead letters—which illustrates the importance of music to the romantic movement (Donovan 2004). Schopenhaur (2001) also stressed the importance of music by arguing that music did not merely represent but rather would constitute an immediate objectification and essence of the *will*, which he took to be what the world is besides being a representation. Rosseau, regarded as a key figure in the romantic movement (Heath and Boreham 2002) not just wrote about the power of music as a means of self expression but also was a composer of music himself (Johnson 1996). During this aesthetic and philosophic movement, music was given an important role and the musician and composer became regarded as highly valued members of society (Heath and Boreham 2002).[1]

The change in social standing of the artist in society was accompanied by a so-called Bohemian ideology. As Schroeder and Borgerson (2002) identify, Italian renaissance artists were comfortable benefiting from the increased monetary value of their works. However, by the romantic period Griff describes a bohemian ideology as having attached itself to artists: "it is an ideology which not only expresses antinomianism—moral, aesthetic and social—which is central to its ethos, but also implies an active conflict, a war with civil society" (Griff 1960, 221). Part of this ideology represented a rejection of bourgeois and materialist values which lead to the stereotype of the artist as starving, deviant, alcoholic, suicidal undiscovered genius. Newly present during this romanticist era were discourses of the artist as genius, a new term which imbued supernatural qualities to the artist as well as special rights and privileges resulting in artists not being held liable to the same constraints imposed on other members of society, they should be allowed to violate rules of decorum, propriety and common sense (Becker 1982, 14). Rather than being something routed in the past, according to Griff, the bohemian ideology continues to attach itself to artistic production to this present day and this viewpoint has been shared by subsequent writers who have considered artists' self-perception (see Becker 1982; Frith and Horne 1987; Kubacki and Croft 2004). We can describe musicians who wish to reproduce this ideology through their own music and experience as carrying romantic musical intention.

Despite the romantic musical intention, in many cases music has retained its traditional role of accompaniment for human activity such as selling and dancing. With the advent of large scale department stores, music was quickly recognised as playing an important role in retail atmospherics, for example AT Stewart's "Cast Iron" Palace

which opened in New York in 1862 included continuous organ playing and by 1904 retail music was at such an advanced level that Richard Strauss conducted the world premiere performance of his "Symphonia Domestica" in Wanamaker's New York store (Schlereth 1991). Technological developments in the early twentieth century revolutionised the means in which background music could be played (North and Hargreaves 1997). In the 1920s General George Owen Squire of the US Army developed a wireless and telegraphy system that formed the basis of the Muzak Corporation; a name he coined himself that reflected the musical content of the organisation whilst deliberately sounding like Kodak (Lanza 1995). Thus it became possible for music to be piped into buildings, elevators, places of work, bus stations, and airplanes. The music played by Muzak was typically popular songs of the day rearranged to fit more easily into the background; heavy rhythmic parts of the piece were removed and vocals typically replaced by the melody line being played by lounge piano, guitar picking or vibraphone. The Muzak philosophy can perhaps best be summed up by an old slogan (since abandoned): "Boring Work is Made Less Boring by Boring Music" (Lanza 1995, 155).

This type of music came to be produced by other companies such as Audio Entertainment Incorporated (AEI) and was extensively supplied to retailers, becoming ubiquitous with the shopping experience (De Nora 2000; Lanza 1995; Waters 1991). It was also believed that such music could help to improve the productivity of workers. During the Second World War the BBC broadcast especially composed music to boost the productivity of the factory workers producing armament. By the end of the war, the programme *Music While You Work* was broadcast into nine thousand British factories and had a "listenership" of five million workers (BBC 2002).

In this sense the provision of music as accompaniment has become associated with a Taylorist-style social control. Marketing studies have been keen to explore the potential of music to influence consumer behaviour and emotions, such as Milliman's seminal study (1986) whereby the impact of musical tempo was observed on restaurant patron's buying behaviour (Milliman's research inspired a generation of subsequent studies, for a review of this research see Turley and Milliman 2000). For Bruner music was something for marketers to "control" and concluded that "appropriately structured music acts on the nervous system like a key on a lock, activating brain processes with corresponding emotional reactions" (Bruner II 1990, 94). It can be argued that this approach to music is the opposite of romantic musical intention as it is concerned with using music as a resource for social control rather than as an aesthetic object in its own right.

For sociology writers such as Bull (2000) or Cronin (2002), background music (or the use of Walkmans) is a form of antisocial barrier, as Cronin writes: "music is more and more a way of confining humans to individual, monadic worlds where communication runs the risk of being as worthless as it is wordless. It is almost as if automation empties the everyday life-world of human contact and thus generates more solitude, our public spaces are flooded with music to deal with the anxiety and fretfulness of the solitary consumer" (Cronin 2002, 6). The loneliness associated with the use of music as a barrier was perhaps most colourfully described by Adorno:

> In *forte* passages, the music climbs likes a rocket. Its arcs glisten over the listeners until they sit there, abandoned once more, in the grey of their cigarette puffs. They are not an audience. Scarcely will one of them comment on the quality of the music that is offered. Nor are they in a musical mood. The music scarcely touches their inner stirrings. Rather it is an objective event among them, above them. The coldness from table to table; the strangeness between the young gentleman and the unknown girl across from him, who waits for the looks that will give her permission to be offended. All of this is not, for the life of you, eliminated by the music, but instead caught up and bound together. (Adorno 2002, 507)

The concerns over the use of background music as a form of social control have been voiced in numerous contexts. For example in George Orwell's critique of authoritarianism, *Nineteen Eighty Four* (Orwell 1990), music is piped into people's homes by the ruling regime whilst Huxley's *Brave New World* carries the promise of "All the Latest Synthetic Music!" (Huxley 1994, 67). Perhaps less seminal in the world of literature, *Judge Dredd—Muzak Killer* (Ennis, Power, and Burns 2003) details the story of one man who became so obsessed with Muzak that he seeks to murder all musicians involved in the production. Resistance of background music has manifested itself in numerous ways. For example, the English organisation Pipedown have organised extensive campaigns and marches in order to achieve "freedom from Piped music" (Bradshaw, Sherlock, and McDonagh 2003). The heavy metal guitar player Ted Nugent sought to purchase the entire Muzak archive with a view to destroying it (Channel-4 1991) and in 1969 UNESCO's International Music Council passed a resolution with the support of the International Council of Women denouncing "unanimously the intolerable infringement of individual freedom and the right of everyone to silence, because of the abusive use, in private and public places of recorded or broadcast music" (Lanza 1995, 153). A key member of the UNESCO Council who championed the cause was the renowned musician Yehudi Menuhin, who in his book *The Music of Man*, condemns the use of piped music as follows:

> Our world has become a sounding board for manmade sounds, amplified to suffuse and suffocate us: urbanised populations are divorced more and more from the sounds of nature and the living performance of music. We may seek to cover up the artificial sound environment with Muzak, but I feel that man should object to the invasion of his sovereignty and privacy by the constant stream of music which pours out of amplifiers like gas warfare. It is but a short step from there to the infiltration of subliminal messages, influencing our choice of products and services, perhaps even our political and social views. (Menuhin and Davis 1979, 288–89)

Throughout history, the links between background music and authoritarianism has existed at more than the level of conspiracy theory. The Muzak corporation itself emerged through scientific research conducted in the US army and during the 1960s Muzak conducted several experiments through the US Army Human Engineering Laboratories masterminded by Dr William Wokoun (Lanza 1995). These studies included tests on personnel at a cordon of US nuclear missile sites in Alaska. During the 1970s, Muzak purchased the library of the Brno Radio Orchestra from Czechoslovakia who were formed to "sell the Stalinist party line". As then CEO of Muzak Baum said of the Orchestra: "Since Muzak merely replaced Red propaganda with propaganda from the Ford Motor Company or Budweiser, I figured they were ideal" (Lanza 1995, 159).

Around this time there were plans to install Muzak in a police station interrogation area, only to be nixed by the appointment of a new police chief. Meanwhile Muzak were trading under slogans such as "The New Muzak—A System of Security for the 70s" and "Muzak is a Total Communications System" (Lanza 1995, 152–53).

At this stage we can differentiate between music which was intended to satisfy the romantic desire for transcendence and heightened self-awareness through exposure to aesthetics and background music which is used with the intent of social control. Whilst Lanza (1995) challenges us to regard the output of Muzak as aesthetic, following a romantic conception of music and the musician it is perhaps less controversial to regard background music as de-aestheticised music. However, objectively declaring music intended to be played in the background as de-aestheticised is problematic; what are we to make of Bach's Goldberg Variations, Erik Satie's ironic *Furniture Music* or indeed the more contemporary ambient music of Brian Eno and Moby? Exploring the intent of the musicians helps us to understand if they carry romantic musical intention or if they intend their music to be used for social control.

Art Versus Commerce in a Community of Musicians

In Becker's (1991) study of jazz musicians, he noted how a sense of community and shared values existed. This resulted in the musicians seeing themselves as belonging to a particular deviant community. For Becker the central factor in this ontology was split between the large sense of self invested by musicians within their occupation and secondly, the degree of interference and pressures put on them to "go commercial": "to play in accord with the wishes of the non-musicians for whom he works; in doing so he sacrifices the respect of other musicians and thus, in most cases, his self-respect" (Becker 1991, 83). Becker concluded that the dance musicians he studied felt isolated from the larger society and this led to a conception of themselves as "cats" and of non-musicians as "squares". Drawing on romantic discourses Becker claims that "the musician is conceived of as an artist who possesses a mysterious gift setting him apart from all other people. Possessing this gift, he should be free from control from outsiders who lack it" (Becker 1991, 85–86).

The concept of "cats" moved beyond performing music and seeped into other parts of life. For example one musician Becker interviewed who was Jewish came to regard being a musician as the larger part of his identity, so much so that his religion was unimportant in his concept of self. Becker found that the jazz musicians emphasised their isolation from the standards and interests of conventional society and isolated their socialising to almost exclusively other musicians. Becker writes:
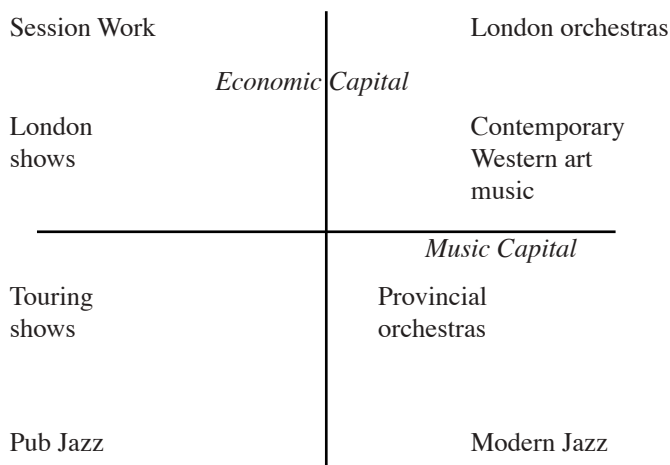
> They were unremittingly critical of both business and labour, disillusioned with the economic structure and cynical about the political process and contemporary political parties. Religion and marriage were rejected completely, as were American popular and serious culture and their reading was confined solely to the more esoteric *avant garde* writers and philosophers. In art and symphonic music they were interested in only the most esoteric developments. In every case they were quick to point out that their interests were not those of the conventional society and that they were thereby differentiated from it. It

is reasonable to assume that the primary function of these interests was to make this differentiation unmistakably clear. (Becker 1991, 98)

Indeed this unconventional behaviour amongst jazz musicians was also noted by Holbrook (2004, 14) who described the stereotypical jazz musician as a "socially maladroit, beret-wearing, zoot-suited ne'er-do-well who would indeed smoke pot and join the Communist Party except that he is too strung out on heroin, cocaine, or demon rum to care about such comparatively light-hearted pastimes".

A more recent study than Becker's was conducted by Cottrell (2002) who, in his study of London based professional musicians, noted a relationship between the economic potential of particular work and the associated artistic merit. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) notion of culture capital versus economic capital, Cottrell developed a schematic (see Figure 1) of the relationship between economic capital and musical capital (which he derived from Bourdieu's cultural capital).

The outcome was the development of a complex social network whereby musicians would substitute for one another, allowing work to be shared and giving musicians the opportunity to engage in more artistically rewarding yet financially moderate projects. For example whilst a musician may be grateful of regular work performing in an orchestra pit for a West End show, they may wish to perform at a low pay one-off art concert that could both raise their profile within the musician community and appeal to their artistic impulse. Again the notion of clash between music and money was noted with Cottrell concluding that: "the strategies these musicians adopt result, at least in part, from the antagonistic relationship between music as a cultural symbol and music as an economic process; and the manner in which they resolve this conflict creates and sustains both their self-conception and their individual identity in the wider social world" (Cottrell 2002, 78).

Session Work	London orchestras
Economic Capital	
London shows	Contemporary Western art music
	Music Capital
Touring shows	Provincial orchestras
Pub Jazz	Modern Jazz

Figure 1 Mapping performance opportunities with respect to economic capital and musical capital. (Source: Cottrell 2002, 71)

This conflict was further noted in Frith and Horne's (1987) study of British pop musicians, where they traced bohemian and romantic values into pop musicians self-identity. Paradoxically the pursuit of anti-commercialism often turned out to have excellent selling powers and this paradox came to be a point of obsession for many musicians as they tried to maintain an anti-commercial ideology within the reality of commercial success. Frith and Horne propose that the emergence of punk was an attempted solution to the continuing dilemma of Romantic art—how to be subversive in a culture of commodities (1987, 133).

A defining point in the above studies is a shared value of anti-materialism within a musician community. This can be attributed to the existence of a bohemian ideology. Rather than being attached just to certain musical genres, such as jazz, De Botton argues that the spirit of bohemia can be located across the aesthetic dimension: "from Romanticism to Surrealism, from the Beatniks to the Punks, from the Situationists to the Kibbutzniks" (2004, 278). De Botton identifies bohemia as holding a contrasting assessment of value which is pitted against the economic and meritocratic status system. Instead of valuing success according to typical conventions such as financial wealth, they (the bohemians) valued the ability to be "receptive to the world and to devote oneself, as a spectator or creator, to the primary repository of feeling: art" (De Botton 2004, 280).

However, as noted by the above studies, as much as musicians may wish to withdraw themselves from the commercial world, economic reality forces them to engage with that very world in order to survive. For Steinert this constitutes a "fundamental contradiction in art", the demand placed on artists to produce a form of art that is both autonomous and oppositional but will also sustain the career of the artist in a very difficult industry (Steiner 2003, 88). An example of this "fundamental contradiction" in action was provided by Smith's (1999) study of the rock musician Pete Townshend and how he spent his career negotiating it. Smith shows how Townshend's music can be deciphered as a negotiation between conflicting art and commercial pressures. For Frith and Horne this art/commerce dialogue is what gives meaning to not just pop music but also to the mass market itself, in as much as the mass market depends on each person's individual impulse to be different, so the triumph of consumption depends on the continuing romantic belief in creative market power and the individual voice. Rather than a study of co-optation (which itself has received a tour-de-force critique by Frank 1997), the discussion becomes moved towards one of how "truth" and "subjectivity" and "uniqueness" are registered in normal market relations themselves. For Frith and Horne, in order to grasp the dynamics of this tension it is important to pay proper attention to music-makers. This paper raises to Frith and Horn's call and contributes to the existing literature that pay attention to musicians (for example, see Becker 1991; Cottrell 2002; Kubacki and Croft 2004; Robinson, Buck, and Cuthbert 1991).

Research Design

As stated, the purpose of this paper is to explore the experiences of professional musicians who perform background music, or have done so in the past. In order to proceed

a series of interviews were sought with a cross-section of professional musicians. Drawing on contacts made from working within the music industry, open-ended interviews were sought and conducted in a range of locations. To avoid what Adorno and Horkheimer (1998) criticised as studies that fetishise the difference between what was held to be "high art" versus "low art", we took a cross-section of musicians from a range of musical backgrounds in order that the same methodological questions can be put to all forms and genres of music. The musical genres and professions include jazz, folk, Irish traditional, composers, theatre pit musicians, session musicians, heavy metal, electronic, pop, rock, and gypsy. The musicians ranged in their nationality and include musicians from France, Germany, Ireland, Lebanon, UK, and the USA; many of whom had experience of working all over the world. Owing to the difficulties of accessing travelling and sometimes famous musicians, the locations of the interviews varied from the musicians' homes, university facilities, parks, bars, cafes, hotel lobbies, recording studios, and telephone interviews.

All interviews were semi-structured, medium length lasting on average forty-five minutes yielding wide ranging conversations. The interview technique was selected because it was taken to be the most appropriate for seeking to interpret the musician's knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions which could give meaningful accounts of their experience (Mason 2002). As other studies into the practices of musicians and commercial artists also relied on depth-interviews (Becker 1991; Griff 1960; Kubacki and Croft 2004), embracing this method allows the findings to stand within an existing research framework.

In order to produce the accompanying audio presentation to the highest standard, this paper marks the collaboration of academics and a radio producer. Accordingly all interviews were conducted using a Minidisc recorder complete with a professional microphone in order to achieve quality sound levels. A consequence of this was that the microphone played a much more prominent role in interviews as it had to be held close to respondents' mouths for the required effect. However, given the nature of professional musicians it was found that this presented few problems for the respondents who tended to be well experienced at both interviews and indeed microphones. Also, advise was sought in radio interview techniques regarding how best to achieve sound quality whilst building a rapport with the interviewee. The recordings were remastered and edited using the computer programme ProTools and results in a very high standard of radio presentation.

For the purpose of this paper and accompanying audio presentation, the data has been divided into three over-lapping themes: musical integrity, pragmatics of background music performance and finally "people didn't listen". The comments of seven interviewees have been selected as being most relevant to the focus of this paper. Table 1 contains a short pen-picture of each of the seven musicians as well as links to their respective websites.

Theme 1: Musical Integrity

Muireann NicAmhlaoibh described her form of musical integrity as follows:

Table 1   Table of Interviewed Respondents

Muireann NicAmhlaoibh	Young Irish traditional singer and whistle player who is leading singer with the group Danú who are signed to an international record label. The group have received international awards and have toured world-wide. www.danu.net
Rossa Ó Snodaigh	Performer and composer with folk rock ensemble Kíla who have an international profile and have recorded numerous albums. www.kila.ie
Hugh Buckley	Jazz guitar player who has released two solo albums and has played across the world. www.hughbuckley.com
Mick Moloney	Extremely experienced musician who has worked professionally in Ireland, England, and the USA. Has recorded with numerous renowned groups, recorded solo albums and currently works as a producer and ethnomusicologist. He is the second person to hold the position of Global Distinguished Visiting Professor at the New York University, in which he has succeeded Adorno. www.mickmoloney.com
Patrick Collins	Jazz and gypsy-style violin player who has worked professionally in Ireland, France, and England. Has recorded numerous albums and now plays with the group, the Café Orchestra who perform mostly corporate concerts. www.cafeorchestra.com
Christy Moore	Hugely famous and experienced popular folk singer-songwriter in Ireland who has played all over the world and released a large number of albums, both as member of numerous groups and solo. www.christymoore.com
Greg Boland	Guitar player and record producer who has played with numerous groups (including the cult group Scullion) and campaigns for musicians' rights in the Musicians Union of Ireland. www.gregboland.net

> People should realise that a lot of groups out there who work really hard and the music is the be all and end all for them and that is why we're doing this because we're not rich, we're not rich at all and I would be making a lot more money if I had any other kind of job, if I was in a bar or anything. We're not doing it to make money, we're doing it because we love it so much and we don't compromise, we really don't. That's all important to us, is the integrity of the music.

For this musician, musical integrity is closely associated with a lack of financial success. The lack of money at the musician's disposal is established, through her discourse, as a badge of musical integrity. For Rossa Ó Snodaigh, the idea of musical integrity and financial hardship was a source of scepticism:

> There's this sense that an artist should have integrity for his whole life and integrity means being poor and that you're not a true artist until two hundred years later people go "wasn't he amazing, that person, y'know, he did it all for art, great!" He has no money, he's not healthy, he has no way of surviving. As they say you can't live off integrity alone and as

much integrity as I like to have, if someone offers me ten grand to use a piece of music, fucking brilliant, about time because nobody else is. People might live off your integrity in the pub saying "oh yeah, they're great lads". That doesn't pay the bills.

Once again the bohemian identity is tied to discourses of money versus art thereby reproducing the art/commerce dialogue—in both cases the cost of integrity is financial hardship. Achieving a degree of musical integrity against material gain is therefore a balancing act. As much as the musician might aspire to an anti-materialist ideology, economic reality must be addressed. The balance between the two is nicely summarised by Hugh Buckley:

I'm not really driven by money, really, but obviously I do like to have a nice holiday away with the family and I wouldn't like to be without a car and stuff like that so in that sense I probably am driven to a certain degree.

Hugh Buckley described his attitude towards bohemia as changing following his experiences in New York:

I mean my attitude actually changed when I went to New York, y'know, and I was going out regularly and there was great players doing all sorts of gigs and why not? Really, I mean that. Once you're doing the thing that you believe in, why not do other gigs and make money out of it and have a more comfortable lifestyle? I think this thing of the struggling artist is a load of bullshit really, I mean who wants that really, y'know, you can fall into that trap.

In this instance Buckley changed his perception of bohemia having witnessed musicians that he admired taking corporate concerts in the prestigious jazz network of New York. This is an example of a musician taking his cue regarding behaviour and attitude by observing respected peers and shows the trend towards seeking shared values within a wider community. Another factor which was repeatedly mentioned as a barrier against achieving bohemia was family, with all its inherent financial responsibilities. Mick Moloney quite succinctly described the dilemma and subsequent balancing act:

You can't ignore the whole question of the life-cycle here. I try not to be too critical of musicians who do that, I mean, they have to make a living. Sometimes they have very few other options. A lot of Irish musicians who work in the bar scene in America, for instance, y'know, it's a hard old slog doing four forty-five minute sets of singing fairly popular material to people who are not even listening to you for the most part. They have families they have to bring up, they have responsibilities and I think if you were to meet those same people back in their early twenties, they wouldn't even thought of that and maybe they would have espoused that philosophy of "we don't care about the cash". But I think it depends on what stage of your life you're at. A lot of professional musicians or artists in general who make their living on music, they have to make compromises. It's a question then of how far are you going to go.

This data illustrates that bohemian values of anti-materialism still penetrate beliefs of what constitutes "musical integrity". The ultimate bohemian form is realised by Muireann NicAmhlaoibh who describes a life of integrity and the resulting poverty. However for the most part poverty, of course, is not a sustainable career aspiration and ultimately, as Rossa Ó Snodaigh stated, cash has to be generated by compromising this

integrity. What emerges, as evidenced by the comments of Hugh Buckley and Mick Moloney, is a balancing act; "it's a question then of how far are you going to go?" Another important factor is the degree to which musicians are a community constantly striving to gain insights into appropriate behaviour from observing each other.

A second issue of integrity and how it manifests itself in art/commerce dialogue relates to how musicians define their success and quality. For some musicians the measure of success was the ability to provide a profound aesthetic experience for the audience. For example Christy Moore said the following:

> The things that matter to me with regards to my work are small things: meeting somebody who was affected by a song or meeting somebody whose day was made easier by listening to a song. That might sound a bit corny, but to me they are the successes in my life as a singer is encountering people whose lives have been enhanced in some small way by the work I do. The other stuff is fine and it's grand in it's own way but, to me, they are the awards that count, y'know. I meet that in my everyday life, I have people who come and talk to me quietly about hearing a certain song in 1982 or the night I sang such-and-such a song in Galway or the night they heard it on the radio. I know of cases where the songs have helped people in their grieving, that's where I would consider my success to lie.

For Patrick Collins musical success was to be measured in the quality of the music he was playing:

> I did a concerto, a violin and piano concerto with Peter Reeves and I think that that was one of the best pieces of work I've ever done. It's a full three movement romantic concerto for piano and violin. I was very pleased with that, I thought it was a very good piece of work. I mean you wouldn't sell it if your life depended on it because again it's like a minority thing. I did a jazz album last year with Drazen Derek which I thought was a good album, I thought I actually played well on it, y'know, I thought it was a good piece of work. And they're probably the two recordings that I've done to date that are closest to my heart in terms of quality and standard that I'd like to achieve consistently. They are the records that are closer to what I would want to be than anything else I've ever done.

In this we can understand Patrick Collins and Christy Moore as occupying two separate realities, one where music is a performance designed to make a connection with the audience and the other where the act of making music is an end in itself. As this ties in with concepts noted in latter themes, the significance of this shall be further explored in the analysis section.

Theme 2: The Pragmatics of Background Performance

For many of the musicians interviewed, they have often been faced with offers to perform to a non-listening audience in return for financial reward. One form of such an offer can be to perform corporate entertainment for clients where musicians are often laid on as a means of developing image. Rossa Ó Snodaigh describes performing corporate entertainment for a large corporation who were engaged in a direct marketing event where consumers were brought to a concert to enhance the brand profile:

> You're having a Guinness experience basically. I mean it's a load of bollocks really but that's what they're doing. They're bringing people out to races and they're a patron for a

day and it managed to pull us out a financial slump we were in. It meant more people who had never heard our music got to hear it. It's all, in a way, your doing ripples all the time, little ripples and throwing stone pebbles into the water. And if it's someone paying us to throw a stone pebble into the water, bloody great, ha ha.

In this case the group accept being the subject of a brand development project on the basis that financially they needed the money and secondly because it was an opportunity to promote the group. For Hugh Buckley the task of contributing to a corporate image can be more soul-destroying:

The corporate gigs are a funny thing, I mean just to do with the image, y'know, someone might ring up and say they want a trio for this function or something like that and they ask what instruments, y'know. He'll usually ask you for a saxophone, like y'know. I mean if I say I want to do guitar, piano and a bass and they say they want a saxophone because the saxophone is the image of jazz, y'know, it's cool. All they want is corporate gigs is something to look like it's the business really.

Again the issue of pragmatics is central, given the choice of performing corporate entertainment, musicians would most likely reject it. For example, Christy Moore, after years of performing background music is now suitably established so that he can choose which concerts he wishes to perform and describes how he constantly rejects corporate work:

There are things I do turn down. I refuse to play to people who are eating and I refuse to do corporate work and I refuse to do advertising.

This demonstrates that there may be a degree of career life-cycle in playing background music; at the beginning the musician has to take whatever is available and build up his profile until he is ready to perform concerts. However, this is not always the case. For example, Patrick Collins's group, the Café Orchestra, have built up a following sufficient for performing normal concerts, however, the costs, risk, and time involved in organising a concert are such that corporate concerts are a far more realistic and convenient venture:

Working concerts would be very nice but it wouldn't be terribly realistic, you know what I mean, we wouldn't make a living if we were just doing that. Corporate theatre pays as well as it does to fill a small three hundred seat theatre, I mean with far less effort on your own part where you don't have to promote the show and sell the tickets. You don't have to be doing that all the time.

Therefore for some musicians playing corporate events is a necessary evil which the musician must progress his career beyond and for others it is not a problem at all.

Theme 3: "People Didn't Listen"

For certain musicians interviewed disconcertment (in every sense of the word) arises when they move from listening audiences to non-listening audiences which can challenge the musician's sense of identity. For example, Greg Boland said the following:

It's very difficult particularly if you've been in a situation where that's not happening. I mean if that's all you've experienced all your life then you'd say "well OK, that's just where I'm at, I just don't really get through to people or whatever". I've seen situations where I've

seen musicians who have played on stages to 40,000 people who listened to them, not being able to get anybody to listen to them in a pub.

However, for Patrick Collins the idea of his sense of musicianship being challenged by a non-listening audience is rejected:

> There's no point saying "oh God I'm an artist and nobody is listening to me!" That's bullshit, y'know, the whole world is full of people who are talented. You have to keep the whole thing in perspective because irrespective of what you do in life, there are always other people who are equally good if not better, y'know, in any field. So you never lose you're sense of worth is. I don't find that regrettable, its just life, I mean you work like everybody else you know.

The opposite of this experience was described by Mick Moloney who felt unnerved by the experience of audiences listening to him having moved from supporting show bands where the audience ignored him to playing the folk circuit in England where the music was listened to reverentially. Similarly Christy Moore shared the same experience and found that the change made possible new musical opportunities:

> It was a complete revelation to me when I went to England in 1966 to discover that there were clubs there that people went to just to listen. It's a very attractive ambience for a singer to perform a song when people are listening intently. It makes it very easy to really to perform with emotion and to give everything whereas if you're playing to a room full of fucking yobs who don't give a shite really I mean how can you give it your all?

Indeed the belief that the musician can "give it your all" is increased where the audience is more receptive, is shared by Patrick Collins:

> If you are playing in a crowded room that's full of people talking, you loose that dynamic control over music. It just becomes that your pounding it out there, you become more heavy handed whereas in a quiet situation, you can actually pull back on things and have much more subtlety on things you play and have a much bigger dynamic range because it's quiet. But the vast majority of gigs aren't like that.

An example of a musician reacting to an audience who didn't listen is provided by Hugh Buckley:

> It doesn't matter how it sounds because we've tried actually playing stuff that's not musical at those gigs and nobody notices. Just hit the instruments anywhere, y'know and you get no response. And someone at the end will come up and say "thank you", ha, ha!

Hugh Buckley's experience is the absolute example of exiled music, the content of the music has become so irrelevant to the audience that they do not even notice that the musicians are not performing music but instead are banging their instruments. Continuing his pragmatic stance Patrick Collins argues that resenting the audience is a mistake:

> The thing I believe about this is that there's no necessity for you to get upset in your head about whether people are listening or not. If you are doing something that is really interesting, people will listen. You don't have to stand up and say "oh I'm amazing, listen to me, its really important", if it's that fucking good they'll hear it, you know what I mean, people are not stupid y'know. If there's something decent you will always hit the level of people who have that level of consciousness. If you're working in a room where

people don't have that level of consciousness, where for example everybody wants ABBA or something, you're in the wrong room and you have the wrong type of audience well then that's the way it is, you're in the wrong and you can't blame them. You go to where it works for you and you will always find the people who have the consciousness to appreciate what you are doing, they will hear it y'know, so you don't have to worry about that, y'know. If you do your job well, it comes back to you, y'know, its just life, y'know.

An important point that Patrick makes is that the context must be appropriate for the type of music. Greg Boland accounts the lack of listening in certain audiences as having everything to do with the context:

It's more to do with the environment and the context more than anything else. I mean a pub is not a great place to go and make or listen to music, it's a noisy environment which has other functions in the sense that people are there to drink, they're there to talk, they're there to socialise in a sense. What happens then is that the music becomes oriented towards that environment; lots of music that everybody knows and lots of people can sing along with and it doesn't particularly matter how well or how badly it's played.

For Greg Boland the task is then to organise an alternative to this context. One solution, he believes, is to charge people to listen to music:

Music is about the only free thing in Ireland. Why when people are prepared to pay silly prices for cups of coffee, a lot of people get their backs up when they are charged into pubs to watch a band. Now what that does is that when you have paid into a pub to watch a band, it both empowers you as a customer to ask for a bit of quiet because you've paid in to see something and it empowers the act on stage to say "keep it down a bit". Y'know going into a gig in the seventies say, like the Meeting Place or some venues around the place, em, the audience was able to make a kind of qualitative judgement. In other words you went into a bar and whether you knew who was playing or not, if they were playing something really there was enough people usually to say "there's something really good going on here, y'know, aren't we lucky, y'know, could you please keep it down a bit". That doesn't exist any more and the pubs are the ones dictating the fees and all that kind of stuff. That has gone, that control has gone.

Greg has also become President of the Musicians Union of Ireland and campaigns for better rights for musicians. Part of their lobbying includes trying to encourage the state to provide more space for musicians to perform in sympathetic contexts. In other words rather than accept the occupation as background musician, it becomes a matter which ought to be lobbied against. This contrasts with Patrick Collins who is far more reconciled with his faith as performing background music. In terms of understanding Patrick Collins's response, it is interesting to note how he uses such performances as a means of practising and developing his technique:

You know you can always be working on something when you are playing, you're always refining something or something is wrong and there's always something to be worked on. So you get your head around that, you work on the things that you are working on if there isn't a big audience there.

In a similar vain to this, Hugh Buckley describes using background music gigs as a means of testing new material:

> Say for instance now at the moment, I'm putting a new group together so I can get together with one of the guys in the group and do a corporate gig and play some of the stuff that we've been rehearsing, y'know.

In these two examples the musicians are not engaged in making a performance for the audience but rather it is a performance for themselves. The fact that the audience is not listening then becomes a matter of indifference for the musicians.

Analysis

We suggest that background music does not provide a "romantic experience of music" but rather is there to provide non-aesthetic purposes, i.e. Hugh Buckley is requested to bring a saxophone player because this is the image of jazz though the actual music they perform is irrelevant to the audience. This is the ultimate in Muzak's slogan; "music is there to be listened to, but Muzak is there to be heard". We divide the responses of the musicians into two camps; either the musicians succeed in gaining the attention of the audience, in which case the romantic intention can be realised (inasmuch as any romantic ideal can be realised as a central tenant of romanticism is endless longing and desire; Donovan 2004) as both Christy Moore and Mick Moloney have achieved *or* the musician must accept the career of a background musician, as Patrick Collins and Hugh Buckley have done. In the latter cases the musicians turn their performance inward; Collins develops his craft by practising and improving his technique whilst Buckley uses corporate concerts as a means of practising with musicians he wishes to play with.

Arguably the latter response is a lived example of what Attali calls *composition*, which he outlined in his text *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1985) where music is "performed for the musician's own enjoyment, as self-communication, with no other goal than his own pleasure, as something fundamentally outside all communication, as self-transcendence, a solitary, egotistical, non-commercial act" (Attali 1985, 32), simply put it is "doing solely for the sake of doing" (ibid., 134). For Attali this is a sign of a new political economy whereby the musician is not alienated from his own music as he no longer produces with his audience in mind; "composition thus appears as a negation of the division of roles and labour as constructed by the old codes" (ibid., 135). This form of composition collapses the division between production and consumption as they merge into the same process.

For Attali as music is harbinger of social change, the emergence of *composition* marks the beginning of a new form of engagement. Just as he argues that the development of harmony in the seventeenth century marked the rise of exchange, *composition* prophesises a new social order based on the reappropriation of labour; "not the recuperation of the product, but of his labour itself" (Attali 1983, 142):

> The goal of labour is no longer necessarily communication with an audience, usage by a consumer, even if they remain a possibility in the musical act of composition. The nature of production changes; the music a person likes to hear is not necessarily the same music he likes to play, much less improvise. In composition—the absence of exchange, self-communication, self-knowledge, non-exchange, self-valorisation—labour is not confined

within a preset programme. There is a collective questioning of the goal of labour. (Attila 1985, 142)

A good example of how this difference between music as performance or composition manifests itself was provided in theme one in the contrast between how Patrick Collins and Christy Moore evaluate their own success. For Christy Moore, success was tied to the romantic ideal of making a profound aesthetic connection with the audience. As opposed to this, Patrick Collins was not concerned about audience response at all but rather with the quality of his own performance. For Christy Moore it is essential that his music be performed in the appropriate context in order to achieve this aspiration and for Patrick Collins, the audience is far less important except that it can subsidise his career as a musician. Rather than try to tie the world to the music he creates, he rather regards the act of making music is an end in itself.

However, if musicians are not practising *composition*, then the spirit of the romantic experience of music lives on and does so in the spirit of the musicians who strive against music in the background. For musicians like Christy Moore who turn down the opportunity to make large amounts of money from performing corporate concerts and advertisements, discourses of integrity are important. In this regard music retains its bohemian ideology of anti-materialism and its striving to create transcendent moments that can be shared with an audience.

Therefore, background music is divided into two themes, firstly as *performance* which is an earnest attempt to engage with the audience despite the context. A performance retains music's romantic conception as the audience is expected to treat music as an object worthy of reverence. Performing background music therefore challenges the importance they place on their music, and by extension the self-identity of the musician. Secondly, music exists as *composition* which is a non-performance whereby the professional musician simply uses the background music as a mechanism for earning money and developing his craft. In this case the musician's self-identity is not threatened by audience apathy.

Can we conclude from this data that the romantic experience lives on and will continue to do so in the future, or is the emergence of *composition* evidence of a start in a gradual decline in romantic values as the musician as romantic hero now appears slightly anachronistic? Johnson argues that the romantic musical experience lives on, but in an unexpected and perhaps false way. The opera audience still demands silence, but, for Johnson it is not the same phenomenon that took place during romantisicm:

> Alongside genuine musical absorption is a package of reflexes set on a trip-wire to protect the aesthetic moment, nudging the dozers, discouraging applause between movements, glaring at the coughers. It almost seems that profound engagement has passed from aesthetic consequence to social imperative. Like the eighteenth-century listener observed weeping during a comic opera, we consider it our duty to be moved every time we listen. Of course the prevailing patterns of behaviour are a boon to listening, and I suppose we should be grateful: the climate-controlled, soundproofed halls with their comfortable seats and unobstructed views permit utter, undistracted communion as never before. But ever since romanticism made a religion of art and raised worship to a social virtue, it's not always been possible to tell true belief from mere fascination with the sacraments. (Johnson 1996, 285)

According to Goodall (2001) the ability of audiences to appreciate music is threatened by both the decline in musical education allowing people to understand the form of the music and also because the nature of the visual landscape results in people finding it difficult to sit through long passages of music. Indeed De Nora's (2000) research suggests that younger generations have greater difficulties listening to music as an activity in its own right and instead are more used to using it as a resource for implying agency, mood, and constructing their self-identity. This process may go beyond listening to music, for example Schroeder (2004) shows us that we live in an image economy replete with "zapping" and where advertising depends on repeated exposure which often function without the full awareness or attention of consumers. All of this suggests that non-listening audiences will continue to increase into the future. If we are to accept Attali's conception of music as prophesising future social conditions, then the experience of musicians in dealing with non-listening audiences and their different responses may signify existence whereby divisions between production and consumption collapse.

Rather than taking an either/or response to the question, can we instead claim that background music contains elements of both composition *and* performance? Perhaps the answer to the question can be found in what Adorno wrote seventy years ago, long before Attali came to theorise composition. In the quotation at the very start of this piece, Adorno reminds us that music *loyally holds out* despite its marginalised existence; in other words it still holds the *potential* of an aesthetic response. This adds a twist to Attali's notion of composition explored in this paper; does such music, at some level, still carry the romantic longing to be heard from its lonely exile which an audience can tap into at any time? Despite his apparently nonplus attitude towards his audience, Patrick Collins still had faith in his audience to do this, "if it's that fucking good they'll hear it". We conclude our piece as did Adorno who, quoting the expressionist poet Georg Heym, describes what happens when the background music does succeed in stirring at least one member of the audience:

> Anyone who, moved, is startled out of his conversation or thoughts after all, and who looks in that direction, is transformed into Georg Heym's suburban dwarf: "he looks up to the great green bell of heaven, where silent meteors cross far away". (Adorno 2002, 509)

Comment on the Audio Programme

As stated this written submission is accompanied by an audio presentation prepared in the form of a radio programme. Both the written and audio presentations are intended as autonomous yet complimentary works in their own right. The challenge facing the audio production was to maintain listener attention throughout the presentation and therefore analysis and theory were kept to a minimum. Instead, the emphasis on the radio programme was to allow the respondents a greater deal of space to articulate their points in their own way. This was achieved by editing the data clips in such a way as to have the various musicians seemingly debating each other as they respectively presented both point and counter-point with the minimum intrusion from the

presenter. In a study of romanticism with its inherent dislike of defining the world by *tote Buchstabenschrift* (language of dead letters), we are satisfied that the audio format enlivens the debate allowing the power of the musicians' personalities to enrich the reader's and listener's perception of the issues at hand—the degree of conviction, irony, and often disgust evident in the speakers' voices illustrate how much the issues really *matter* to the respondents.

Finally, given that most qualitative research is now recorded on an audio format and the development of reasonably priced editing software—thus allowing producers the possibility to bypass a recording studio—we believe that the auditory format provides a far more realistic opportunity for researchers to experiment in multimedia than other forms. We encourage researchers to spend more time improving the auditory quality of their interviews so to allow future programmes and multimedia lectures to be developed.

Acknowledgements

Note

[1]   An important factor in the changing regard for the musician in society around this period was the break of the patronage system as composers such as Mozart broke their reliance from the court system and redirected their output towards a market system. Whilst this transition is treated in other texts (see Attali 1985; Elias 1993; Steinert 2003) it is considered beyond the scope of this review.

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