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Version: Accepted Version

Article:
Klein, B. (2024) What Can Popular Music and Library Music Learn from Each Other? Music, Sound and the Moving Image, 18 (2). pp. 137-155. ISSN: 1753-0768

https://doi.org/10.3828/msmi.2024.10

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What Can Popular Music and Library Music Learn from Each Other?

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Abstract

Because library music is made with the specific goal of future media use, it might seem incongruous with the broader history of popular music aimed at fans, or irrelevant to challenges facing the popular music industries. Yet both popular music and library music are defined against a shared set of cultural and commercial values, and have adapted to shifts in media production, circulation, and consumption. In this article, I consider how popular music and library music have engaged with notions of art; responded to digitalisation; and revealed assumptions about the cultural and economic value of music. A side-by-side comparison reveals similarities and differences between popular music and library music that help us to better understand changes affecting both, from how we listen to music to how musicians make money from music.

Introduction

How can a comparison of issues relevant to popular music and issues relevant to library music – usually treated in separate spaces by different scholars – increase our understanding of music-making more generally? Library music, also known as stock or production music, is 'off-the-shelf' background music selected to fit the intended mood of media settings and commercial spaces. Whereas popular music includes 'the diverse range of popular music genres produced in commodity form, largely, but no longer exclusively for a youth market' (Shuker, 2016, p.6), library music is composed and catalogued to be licensed for use by clients. On the surface, library music has such a specific process and purpose that it might

seem unnecessary to fit it into the history of popular music or connect it to the challenges faced in the popular music industries.

In fact, both popular music and library music are classified in relation to a shared set of cultural and commercial values, and musicians of all kinds have adapted to broader changes in media production, distribution, and consumption. In this article, I explore dimensions of culture and commerce that continue to influence choices available to and made by working musicians, and I look at how particular opportunities and challenges play out similarly and differently within the worlds of popular music and library music. I consider how popular music and library music have engaged with notions of art; responded to digitalisation; and revealed assumptions about the cultural and economic value of music. The commonalities and distinctions highlighted by a side-by-side consideration of popular music and library music help us to better understand shifts affecting both; to unpack key debates about music streaming and copyright; and to support the musicians behind the sounds that we choose and those that are chosen for us.

Music as art

The quick and dirty distinction between popular music and library music relies on an assumption that popular music is, or can be, art, while library music is simply commerce. I use the term ‘art’ not in the sense of Kantian aesthetics, which focuses on judgement and appreciation of artistic objects, but sociologically: what we understand to be ‘art’ is shaped in part by social context (Wolff, 1993) and the work of art worlds (Becker, 1984). The designation of ‘art’, in turn, shapes the experiences and expectations of musicians and listeners. It would be absurd to charge library music with being commercially driven, whereas such accusations have been levelled with regularity at popular music treated as art. At the same time, while it’s true that library music is produced with the explicit goal of

commercial placement, both popular music and library music have experienced complex relationships with artistic values and practices.

For starters, popular music wasn't born as art. While some sub-genres had been given artistic treatment in one way or another in earlier eras, in the 1960s certain forms of rock began to be treated as art as much as entertainment. During this period, the main factors that sociologists of culture have used to 'explain the public acceptance of a cultural product as art' (Baumann, 2001, p.405) converge around rock, propelled by the developing careers of artists like Bob Dylan and the Beatles. The external changes, emergence of organisations and networks, and validating ideology identified by Baumann as ushering in the artistic legitimation of film are similarly relevant to popular music from the 1960s. Examples include the growth of serious music journalism in dedicated magazines and popular periodicals; the emergence of popular music studies within cultural studies and the sociology of music; and the participation of musicians in recording choices and aesthetic decisions (Klein, 2020).

The case of the Beatles provides a useful example as a relatively rare instance of a group that began with one designation – as teen idols – and ended with another – as highly respected artists. Against the backdrop of popular music, and the Beatles in particular, being taken seriously by writers (see Sawyers, 2006, for early examples), the case of the Beatles demonstrates how the development of musicians as artists and albums as art resulted from a combination of musician demands and the response of record company marketing departments to successes. As Harvey (2016) traces, the demands that the Beatles made in terms of the artistry of their output shaped EMI's approach to the group and ultimately the approach of other labels and the experiences of other groups. Their early insistence on releasing one of their own compositions, rather than a song provided to them – and the success of this choice – gave them more subsequent creative control (Harvey, 2016, p.157). While slower to gain control in the US, manager Brian Epstein negotiated with Capitol in

1967 so that the label could not alter 'the content, sequence, or cover art on any Beatles album' (Harvey 2016, p.160). Greater control was joined by more frequent use of the terms 'artist' and 'genius' to describe rock musicians. From 1964 to 1967, 'rock'n'roll had gone from being cast as vulgar entertainment not even suitable for adults to being hailed as the most important musical break-through of the decade' (Gendron, 2002, p.1) with the release of *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. That shift helps us understand the internal and external qualities that confer artistic status on a cultural object, and that make relevant artistic notions like autonomy, authenticity, and genius. The sociological question is not how these notions can be judged aesthetically, but how such concepts shape experiences of making and listening to music. With access to such values, tensions between art and commerce began to inform the choices made by musicians determined to be taken seriously.

Through the conferral of artistic status on some forms of popular music, the boundary between art and commerce became a battleground for musicians and fans. Yet even genres that appear anti-commercial usually tell a more complicated story. As with other art worlds, anxiety about commercialism among popular musicians from the 1960s onward was a result of the inevitable entanglement of art and commerce. Many successful musicians of the 1960s and 1970s came out of UK art schools and drew on pop art ideas encountered through their studies. Budding popular musicians digested the role of consumerism and commerce within fine arts and applied it to their musical creations: the result 'was not art *vs* commerce, but commerce as art, as the canvas for the musician's creativity, individuality, style' (Frith and Horne, 1987, p.65). The idea of art vs commerce reflects not a stable division so much as a relationship: popular musicians must engage with commerce, and library musicians can engage with art.

Frith and Horne's (1987) description of 'commerce as art' likely rings true for many library music composers. Although their canvases may be delimited by the needs of clients,

library musicians can experience a creative process similar to popular musicians as they balance artistic expression with commercial demands. Some library composers have found freedom in their work that contrasts with pressures of the commercial popular music industries, where getting noticed as a songwriter likely means hewing closely to what's in the charts. Library music, on the other hand, encompasses all manner of genre and style. In *Unusual Sounds: The Hidden History of Library Music*, Hollander explains, 'Without the pressure to generate "hits," young library composers were free to play around and experiment', even if 'originality was not exactly encouraged' (2018, p.18) by the goals and limitations of creating source music. Many of the acclaimed composers of the late 1960s and 1970s moved between library music, film scoring, and commercial music, with library music celebrated for the freedom it offered: Alan Parker described library music as 'much more liberal and it's much more open than if you're scoring a film' (Hollander, 2018, p.49) and Keith Mansfield explained, 'the thing about library was I could be whoever I wanted to be' (Hollander, 2018, p.75). The commercial constraints of composing library music were viewed as more open to experimentation, a quality associated with artistic freedom, than the commercial constraints of popular music hitmaking. Current composers and publishers continue to emphasise artistic and creative freedom as a benefit of working in library music (Graham, 2017). As renowned KPM composer Alan Hawkshaw explained, 'Library music, per se, has kind of become an art form' whereas previously it was considered 'a second-class type of music' (Hollander, 2018, p.50).

Still, library music is, by artistic standards, a much more straightforward case: although its execution may exhibit creativity and skill, because it is produced to be sold, ideally multiple times, and to meet a future brief, it does not try to achieve the qualities often associated with music as art. Library music composers work to meet the briefs of others, and so autonomy is experienced only within the confines of client needs or future needs. Because

composers are generally not visible and not promoted as authors (Durand, 2020, p.41), they are unlikely to be known as artists or geniuses, if they are known at all. Library music companies do, however, use the notion of 'authenticity' to defend their own catalogues against stereotypes of library music as low quality and formulaic (Durand, 2020, p.41): 'Authenticity might be defined as sounding genuine and real, not fake, and could mean using live instruments (or at least exceptionally realistic and expressive samples), knowing your genre deeply and being emotionally involved in your music' (Graham, 2017). Yet within popular music, authenticity is often understood as exhibiting a distance from commercial influence, an impossibility for library music by its very nature. Indeed, among major players in the library music world, 'commercial' can be employed as high praise, as when a composer is complimented for his 'wonderful commerciality' (Hollander, 2018, p.79). Popularity with commercial clients is a sign of musical skill and achievement for library composers.

Library music is, like stock photography, an ambient medium with a presence 'both pervasive and unremarkable' (Aiello, 2022, p.246). At the same time, some library music has, like some popular music, made the transition to being treated as art, as demonstrated by its status among record collectors. As Hollander describes, 'A small group of music lovers, DJs and producers have turned on to library music in a big way, making the extant LPs some of the most sought-after artifacts in the record-collecting universe. Although they were never commercially released, many library LPs have found new life in the hands of a dedicated legion of hardcore collectors' (2018, p.7). Some examples of library music in the 1960s and 70s became so popular they *were* released commercially, and the involvement of well-known musicians and producers, like Ennio Morricone and Brian Bennett of the Shadows, also blurred the line between library and popular music production.

Recent decades have seen nostalgic re-issues of library tracks on loving compilations, and digital availability has increased access for curious listeners, with music nerds (Patrin, 2014) and vinyl enthusiasts (May, 2015) offering starter and essential lists. Spotify users interested in library music can search for key labels like Music De Wolfe and KPM or key figures like Keith Mansfield and Delia Derbyshire. Music listeners who haven't heard the originals or reissued compilations themselves have no doubt heard samples in popular music, especially hip-hop, a common use that is outside the intended use of the tracks for media clients and positions library music as a component of artistic output.

The movement of music between commercial, entertainment, and art labels could lead us to simply dismiss the designation of art as arbitrary, but I argue for the validity of understanding both popular music and library music as, at least sometimes, art. To treat music as art is to acknowledge the important non-financial benefits both popular and library bring to our lives, filling the foreground and background with sounds that evoke emotion, bring us together, and complement visual and verbal language to produce a richer world. These are benefits that we must remember when we see the financial value of the work decrease, a point to which I will return.

Digitalisation and the role of music

The roles of library music and popular music have long demonstrated flexibility: just as library music has found fans outside its usual scope, popular music has been chosen as 'background' to non-musical experiences and media. Exploring the use of music in malls, Sterne declares that 'programmed music now encompasses both "easy listening" music and original recordings heard elsewhere. In other words, one cannot tell simply by listening to music whether it is "Muzak" or not – all recorded music is at least potentially Muzak' (1997, p.24). Separating popular music from commodified music is impossible: 'programmed music

presumes that music has already become a *thing*—a commodity' (Sterne, 1997, p.24). The use of music on television demonstrates a comparable flexibility in roles, with popular music performing a similar role to library music on popular television programmes. Donnelly writes of popular music's use on television in the 1990s, 'Pop music is now dominant as stock music on television, filling the expansion of continuity and advertising spaces, and indicating the degree of industrial integration and collaboration between the television and music industries' (2002, p.331). While stock music had been the traditional inexpensive option for television, television producers had learned that using pop music wasn't that expensive (Donnelly, 2002), a boon for television creators, if less so for artists, who would need to look to advertising placements for the big money available in sync rights, the licensing of music for use in visual media.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the search for revenue through sync licensing ramped up as labels and artists found themselves open to advertisement placements, a usage which had previously been considered by many to be an unsavoury breach of the art vs commerce divide (Klein, 2009; Meier, 2017). A renegotiation of licensing opportunities was driven by a number of related changes for the music industries: the shift from physical formats to digital music files; peer-to-peer downloading of music; fluctuating revenue streams (Klein, 2009). As revenue from music sales plummeted, copyright exploitation, and sync licensing in particular, took on greater importance.

The willingness of advertisers to pay significantly more to license a piece of pre-existing popular music than to use library music or commission custom music demonstrates the belief that popular music offers something different to the work of music placement. Whatever it does for the moving image, the use of popular music in advertising holds potential to attract detractors concerned with what the pairing does to the song. Consider the 2001 use of proto-punk Iggy Pop's 'Lust for Life' by Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines (Klein,

2009). The 1977 song about the singer's heroin addiction featured in a long-running series of the company's advertisements, where the track's bouncy beat and seemingly life-affirming chorus ('Got a lust for life, ooh') are set against scenes of wholesome family activities, from snorkelling to parasailing. Shots of smiling, sun-kissed holiday-makers naïve to the song's darker themes provoked a bemused response among music fans and journalists, who voted it the 'worst ad song ever' (Stevenson, 2005), and satirical newspaper *The Onion* lampooned the usage in an article headlined 'Song About Heroin Used to Advertise Bank' (*The Onion*, 2001). The campaign ran for nearly a decade, suggesting that, from the perspective of Royal Caribbean, the spots were effective and successful. The contrasting views on the ad point to a risk of licensing popular music: pre-existing popular music brings with it a life outside the placement, and even creatively effective pairings can rankle some viewers.

Unlike library music, which aims from the start to be placed in screen media for commercial ends, the use of popular music in advertising has sparked 'selling out' debates. 'Selling out' is an accusation wielded against individuals perceived to have compromised previously held values for money, fame or power. In popular music culture, the phrase has had cachet for genres that prize those artistic notions mentioned earlier, especially autonomy and authenticity (Klein, 2020). Musicians seen to be making decisions to achieve commercial rather than artistic objectives may invite the charge that they have sold out. Transgressions can range from releasing music intended to reach a wider, more mainstream audience, to allowing music to be associated with a consumer brand through commercial partnership, including licensing (Klein, 2020). The stigma associated with licensing to advertising translated into big paydays for some artists willing to take the risk when debates about selling out raged on: it was not unusual in the late 1990s and early 2000s for indie bands to earn six figures for a placement, and for iconic rock bands to earn in the millions. However, as the use

of popular music in advertising became more commonplace, the stigma decreased. And so too did the fees.

Claims that selling out is no longer relevant or doesn't exist anymore (see, for example, McCourt, 2005; Berkmann, 2010; Molotkow, 2012; Snapes, 2021) suggest a worrying decline of anti-commercial sentiments that we can see not only in popular music culture, but in areas of life with potentially more serious ramifications, including education and journalism (Klein, 2020). While consequences of a relaxed stance towards commercialism may be much further reaching than musician partnerships with consumer brands, the existing and important consequence for popular music is clear: less money for musicians at a time when other sources of revenue are also unstable and insufficient. In a nutshell, popular music has moved into library music spaces and, for many musicians, placement will not earn significantly more than library music money.

Increasingly shared spaces are evident too in listening practices. In recent years, changes to how we access and listen to popular music have opened a new space for sounds which would have previously been categorised as production, stock, or library music. The change of dominant music format from physical to digital, and from purchase to streaming, is cultural as well as technological, shaping our experiences of collecting and listening, as well as the sound of music itself (Morris, 2015). A key part of the cultural change to streaming is the centrality of mood, which Anderson links to the history and purpose of Muzak (the brand name standing in as a generic term for background music):

> While Muzak reigned (and operates still) as a workplace tool rather than a personal care product, neo-Muzak successors like Pandora, Spotify, and other digital streaming services have arrived to close the gap as personal care products for affect management and mood elevation. Welcome to the age of neo-Muzak. Whether at work, home, the

> mall, the gym, on the bus or in the car, web-connected subjects live and weave among an array of streaming platforms for algorithmic or curated musical moodscapes and affective atmospheres. (Anderson, 2015, p.811)

The depiction of popular music as Muzak risks implying 'that contemporary audiences no longer listen attentively, positing dualistic notions of engagement and distraction which are at odds with evidence about people's actual musical practices' (Hesmondhalgh, 2022, p.18). It is, however, also a characterisation that draws library and popular music closer to one another in practice, allowing us to question critiques of the centrality of mood to the streaming experience. While library music and popular music have always played an affective role for listeners, the 'individualized microspheres' created by streaming services (Anderson, 2015, p.816) challenge the collective function music has often provided. Mood-based playlists act as a tool for 'quantifying and deploying a listener's affective relationship to music in the presentation and curation of that music', and for differentiating services that largely share a catalogue (Morris and Powers, 2015, p.117). Categorising by mood is a key component of library music, whereas popular music has typically been categorised by genre: with streaming, mood and activity are replacing genre as structuring the (lean back) listening experience (Goldschmitt, 2020).

The dominance of mood in structuring streaming experiences aids to blur the distinction between background and foreground music: platforms offer a perpetual experience, where artist and genre cede importance to vibe. This shift could be seen to devalue individual popular musicians, experienced interchangeably with other musicians intended to serve a similar affective purpose. In his analysis of 'how digital music has become valued as data, rather than a (commodified) form of artistic expression' (2019, p.369), Negus argues, 'In an age of abundance the curator becomes more significant than the

creator' (Negus, 2019, p.371). If its reduction to data or content devalues the artistic and economic worth of popular music, the mood-based listening of streaming platforms offers an ideal home for library music. Here again we witness something like the packaging of library music on nostalgic compilations in the 1990s, where it is chosen as media rather than experienced within media, but with a twist: there is an assumption that all music has increasingly become background music.

The opportunity to be included on streaming platforms is great news for library music composers and fans of library music. As Deborah Fisher, APM's Key Account Director of Advertising, told me back in 2005, 'People have called us wanting to buy our music. They want to know why it's not in Tower Records or in Virgin Megastore. They want to know where they can purchase it because they love it so much, they want to use it for personal reasons. And we can't give it to them for that, because it's just not created [for personal use]' (Fisher, 2005, personal communication). The growth of fan-based income for library music has been supported by video and audio streaming platforms: as library music composer and publisher Dan Graham notes, 'we should not forget that "epic music" has lots of fans in its own right, who generate about 15 percent of our revenue through YouTube, Spotify, Apple and other sources' (Graham, 2017).

The sudden visibility of library music on streaming platforms, and the tendency of some of its composers to go by multiple names, resulted in the so-called 'fake artist' Spotify scandal in 2017. The appearance of artists with no online presence and seeming prominence on Spotify playlists led to a furore among listeners convinced this was evidence of Spotify's ultimate plan to push out 'real' musicians in favour of those commissioned by the platform with buyout fees. The use of aliases, not unusual in library music, increased suspicion among Spotify users. Goldschmitt (2020) sets the 'fake artist' scandal against various historical moments relating to the value of musical labour, including that of library music, the

composers of which tend to be invisible while receiving a guaranteed income, in an inverse of the struggling popular musician trope. According to Swedish production music company Epidemic Sound, one of the companies accused of partnering with Spotify, no such deal occurred: the company placed its tracks on Spotify with musicians receiving half the rightsholder share of the royalties, in addition to the usual upfront fee paid by Epidemic (Dredge, 2017). Either way, in terms of remuneration, 'given the paltry royalty rates most musicians on Spotify receive for plays of their music, they likely receive less money for their labor than if they had been contracted to produce music on a work-for-hire basis' (Goldschmitt, 2020, p.137).

Although the 'fake artists' controversy led to tensions between the platform and its major label partners (Gensler and Christman, 2017), Spotify has room for popular musicians and library musicians. Certainly there are fans of publicly available library music, and situations for which library music (as mood music) is better suited, yet there is no evidence that such music is displacing popular music on the platforms. Ultimately, in order to improve profit margins, Spotify is likely to bypass intermediaries by developing direct relationships with artists, a strategy which, like the 'fake artists' controversy, will increase tensions with current content providers (Prey, 2020). Rather than pitching a competition between library music and popular music, we might consider the consequences of both vying for an audience alongside all other content on the internet: for the big digital conglomerates, 'Music is a means to another end rather than an end in itself' (Negus, 2019, p.376). The value of content is tied to metrics, rather than to the work required to produce it or to the meaning it brings to our lives.

How do we value music?

Even prior to digitalisation, the growth in 'background' and 'inattentive' musical experiences might have influenced how people understand the value of music (and what they're willing to pay for it): Marshall argues, 'Perhaps digitisation merely revealed the underlying sociological phenomena that imply that music is less valued by most individuals than has often been assumed' (2019, p.148). Conversely, we could also view the pervasiveness of music as demonstrating how greatly we do value music: we want it everywhere all the time!

The notion that background music is less culturally valuable is open to challenge: there are reasons to value attentive listening for the powerful musical experiences it can bring, but the distinction between passive and active listening is overstated (music listeners engage in both, sometimes for the same piece of music, and both approaches can bring positive qualities to our lives) (Hesmondhalgh, 2022). At the same time, the premise that background music is perceived to be less *economically* valuable than music in the foreground can be tested by looking more closely at library and popular music contracts. One dimension where the distinction between popular music and library music has been traditionally upheld is the copyright system. While individual contracts vary, library music is often associated with receipt of an upfront fee (the work-for-hire model), whereas popular musicians have relied on copyright royalties, from sales (not relevant for library), to sync, to performance. Nardi (2012) suggests that library musicians in receipt of an upfront fee, or buyout, represent a return to something closer to the pre-copyright system of commissions. He raises concerns about a work-for-hire model where the creator has little control over the music and is alienated from the product of their labour (Nardi, 2012). Many other accounts, including that of the UK-based Musicians Union (Sutherland, 2022), have similarly favoured the royalties system as rewarding musicians for the success of their compositions and cast the work-for-hire model as potentially exploitative. The current dominance of streaming and the relatively miniscule royalties making it into the pockets of musicians muddles matters. Given how

revenue tends to be divided, and the realities of having power versus being financially secure enough to exercise it, the current system of copyright, which privileges powerful companies and superstar artists, is hardly ideal for most creators trying to make a living (Klein, 2015). The assumption that music produced outside a work-for-hire context is somehow free from market pressures does not reflect the experiences of the many musicians stymied by the various routes to copyright revenue available. Unfair and restrictive recording contracts of various configurations have been the rule, rather than the exception, in the music industries, a truth at odds with the imagined autonomy of popular musicians (Stahl, 2013).

In fact, library music contracts in the UK are often similar to or the same as commercial contracts: composers receive 50% of sync royalties, and the writer's share of broadcast royalties through PRS for Music, the UK performance rights organisation. In the US, it's more common to be offered a buyout and thus no share of sync revenue. Newer business models also tend towards a buyout approach. For example, Epidemic Sound, that Swedish production music company associated with the Spotify 'fake artists' controversy, was established in 2009 with a model

> of only taking music from composers who weren't members of performing rights societies like PRS, and offering them a variable buyout fee. This is decided on a track-by-track basis by Epidemic, and is reportedly not a huge amount on average. This meant they could offer attractive annual blanket (subscription) deals to broadcasters where the broadcasters don't have to pay any performance or sync royalties. That's nice for broadcasters, but only good for writers who are short of money, write quickly or live in low-income countries. (Graham, 2017)

Even within the buyout model, there are 'varying degrees of buyout' (Barr et al., 2021, p.20), and more and less attractive contracts, which must be evaluated against the circumstances of the musician and the likelihood of a song making more upfront (with a fee) or over time (through royalties).

On the popular music side, sales have become less significant to commercial music revenue, and streaming revenue is a small proportion of what sales once earned. As a result, sync licensing has become a more important revenue stream, and one way in which popular music has become more like library music. As noted earlier, big sync fees associated with advertising placements have decreased in tandem with the stigma of selling out. What's more, recent developments in recording contracts have made it nigh impossible for artists to make up for dwindling revenue streams with other activities: 360 deals, or multiple rights contracts, which entitle record labels to a portion of all an artist's activities (Marshall, 2013), have widened the gap that already existed between the few elite artists and the many others (Stahl and Meier, 2012). Even when recording artist contracts are not as all-encompassing as the '360' name implies, deals in the streaming era continue to follow a pattern of increasing label control and shifting risk to artists (Kjus, 2021).

There is lots of evidence that copyright doesn't work as intended for popular musicians, or equally for musicians. Many cultural creators see the value of promotion as worth receiving minimal or no copyright royalties (Klein, 2015), and musicians who do not make a living from music 'have many different relationships to copyright', not necessarily aligned with the law or focused on monetary terms (Street and Phillips, 2017, p.431). Yet, while there are historical and international examples of alternatives to copyright (Towse, 2006), the shift from sales to licensing in the digital era means 'the management of musical rights will continue to be the main source of revenue for composers and publishers' (Towse, 2017, p.418).

Even some exceptionally successful composers have chosen to shift the gamble to publishers by selling their rights. Musicians including Bruce Springsteen, Stevie Nicks, Paul Simon, and John Legend are among those who have recently sold their catalogue to purchasers banking on the value of future uses, including in screen media (Andrews, 2022). The trend is almost like work-for-hire after the fact: it involves 'an attempt to value the benefit of immediate money over long term money, and an attempt to value the risk of income being higher or lower than expected' (Graham, 2022, personal communication). The seller is gambling that the amount they get for the catalogue will be worth more (at least in their and their children's lifetimes) than the buyer has paid. The buyer is gambling that they can make more than what they've paid, in part by dedicating time and effort to high payoff sync placements. In a way, this brings popular music more in line with library music, where the price paid for the product may or may not reflect the income it ultimately generates, and the artist no longer owns the copyright. Although we're not at the point of an 'up-front fee' – paid before songs or albums have been evaluated by listeners – sales of catalogues reflect the movement of traditional revenue routes and predictions about the future. Further dissolving the distinction between popular and library music, some musicians who have lost their live music income through the COVID-19 pandemic have explored library music composition to make ends meet (Vert, 2021).

As popular musicians and library musicians enter spaces previously reserved for the other, it's natural that fears about competition will arise, whether that's the fear of 'fake artists' taking over streaming platforms – a tale that rumbles on (Stassen, 2022) – or the fear of new composers willing to accept lower fees and poorer contracts (Barr et al., 2021). The latest focus for such fears has been prompted by developments in artificial intelligence. A powerful spectre in music circles is music produced through algorithm-based artificial intelligence programming, which challenges traditional systems of authorship and

remuneration. The AI industry involves two major types of company: ‘companies that harness machine learning to create what is variously referred to as production or library music’ (Drott, 2021, p.193) and companies marketing AI for use in personalising music in response to mood, environment or activity. Drott (2021) argues that both types can be considered production music given that music is used as an input.

As with other platform models, users pay for access rather than the music itself, a distinction which helps to avoid ongoing debates about ‘whether works generated primarily by means of AI should be copyrighted and, if so, who or what should be granted these rights’ (Drott, 2021, p.196). While the work generated is ‘original’, it is not produced by humans (alone), an assumption of copyright applicability regarding rewards and incentives. In terms of human contributors (programmers, owners, users), there is no agreement on distribution of copyright and there are a lot of humans involved. Although AI music has relatively limited scope at the moment – and largely in the library music realm – Drott connects the growth of the industry to mood-based playlists and recognises that lots of musicians make a living through library music: ‘The question, then, is what can be done to ensure that the development of machine learning applications for music creation will advance not just the cause of music or music technology, but the equally if not more important goal of creating a just and equitable musical economy’ (2021, p.205). Investment in AI technology and experts by digital platforms like Spotify continues to stoke fears about what the future might hold for music production and repercussions for its economic value (Ingham, 2017). As increasingly sophisticated AI music generators are released, musicians are forced to reckon with the technology as both opportunity and threat.

Influential sociologists like Bourdieu have disputed the notion of intrinsic value (sometimes for good reason, such as highlighting the role of social power in determining value), with the consequence of limiting discussion of objective and aesthetic value, even as

such value remains a driving force for those who make and engage with culture (Banks, 2017). Given that the movement away from objective value has occurred alongside the tendency to locate the value of culture as commodity, Banks proposes, 'we need to hang on to the idea that there is more to cultural objects than the commercial values they can expediently generate – evidenced not least in their capacities to objectively shape peoples' efforts to understand and live their own lives, and to live with others' (2017, p.23). The value music brings to our lives should inform the economic value that musicians derive from their work. There is a contradiction between how much music matters to us and how much we feel willing to pay for it. Possible solutions do not necessarily rely on raising price points for individual consumers or offering premium services. Improvements may be found through a combination of revising systems of royalty distribution to be more equitable; revisiting the value for musicians of copyright and alternatives like blank media levies and basic income schemes; and increasing the negotiating power of musicians through collective action.

Conclusion

In this article, I've highlighted moments where popular music has been treated more like library music, and where library music has been treated more like popular music. Although popular music is more likely to be considered through the lens of artistic values, some examples of library music have also been affirmed as art by collectors and listeners: in both cases, the description as art serves as a reminder of the role that music plays in bringing meaning to our lives – worth remembering as we recognise the difficulties musicians of all kinds can face in trying to make a living. Digitalisation, and the introduction of streaming platforms in particular, has presented challenges to traditional revenue streams in the popular music industries, while offering a new and welcome fan-based space for library music, complicating how we often think and talk about the impact of streaming for working

musicians. Copyright revenue continues to propel the major music companies, but its value for most working popular musicians is, between low streaming rates and 360 degree contracts, hardly reliable. Approaches to improving the fairness of streaming revenue distribution – through a user-centric model or adjusting the algorithms, for example – may help to redistribute income (Hesmondhalgh, 2021). At a time when major artists are selling their catalogues outright, it is also worth reassessing the old hierarchy that placed work-for-hire or re-assigned copyright below royalties agreements. A system similar to the buyout agreements typical of library music in the US might actually be attractive to popular musicians who don't benefit from the 'winner-takes-all' shape of industries that tease with the possibility of future success.

Where the stories of popular music and library music converge is how we ensure musicians are properly valued and fairly compensated. Whether we consider library music art, or dismiss popular music as merely commercial, we can no doubt agree that creative producers deserve to be paid fairly for their work, which is woven into our everyday lives. For this reason, we must continue to monitor the forces – cultural, technological, financial – that shape the conditions of that work.

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