

## Trying to have an impact: Some confessions of a live music researcher

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### *Abstract*

*This article offers the author's reflections on over fifteen years of researching the live music industry in the UK. It raises issues such as the role of academics, how to have impact and the meaning of value. Overall it suggests that impact can be found in various ways and that it needs to be built via establishing long term relationships while remaining impartial, to be collective and to involve some opportunism.*

**Keywords:** Live music, music industries, music policy, impact

## 1 Introduction

This article offers some reflections on the policy and other implications of researching live music. It draws upon six research projects: Mapping the Music Industry in Scotland (2002-3), the History of Live Music in the UK (2008-11), Live Music Exchange (2012-), two projects on Cultural Value (2013 and 2014) and the UK Live Music Census (2016-2018). Each is summarised and lessons drawn before a concluding section draws the findings together.

Before continuing it is necessary to note that the paper deals with live music, something which can be characterised in economic terms as an *experiential* good. What is essentially being sold is something which the audience can imagine in its heads beforehand, experience at the event and then remember afterwards (Cloonan 2012). But the gig itself *cannot* be taken home, even if audience members or others video record it. A major aspect of live music - and something which helps some artists to command high fees - is the aspect of *being there*, of being present and involved. The fact that there *is* a "there" has important implica-

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tions because it implies a *place*. This immediately brings up a series of questions. What is this place? Where is it? What are the conditions of access? What can go on inside that place? When? How? And so on. As will become more apparent as the paper progresses, all of those questions have *policy* implications, something to which I now turn.

## **2 Project 1: Mapping the Music Industry in Scotland (2002-03)**

This report was funded by Scotland's major public economic agency, Scottish Enterprise and was a result of perhaps unique political circumstances – viz the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, which raised expectations in many circles that the Parliament would be able to do something to help their needs. That included the Scottish music industries where leading figures appeared to be united in the view that *"we've got a parliament, it should do something for us"*.

One way to achieve that "something" was via lobbying. The focus for this came to be a Cross Party Group on the Contemporary Scottish Music Industry which was established in December 2000 and soon put pressure on the country's public bodies to "do something" for the country's music industries.<sup>2</sup> The main focus of the Group's lobbying was the country's main public economic agency, Scottish Enterprise. The response from that organisation, was to do what a lot of organisations do in such situations – commission a report. It did this in 2002 when it issued a tender to research the condition of the music industry in Scotland. I formed a team of three to bid for the work. The first addition to myself was Simon Frith, the world's leading popular music scholar who was then working at the University of Stirling. The second was John Williamson, who is very well known in Scotland's music industries within which he has performed a number of roles of which the highest public profile was that of managing the band Belle and Sebastian. Our tender was successful and the research we subsequently undertook was a clas-

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term music industries (plural) rather than music industry (singular) for reasons, which are fully explained in Williamson and Cloonan (2007).

sic combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, being a mixture of economic analysis culled from various sources and designed to get an overall value of the industry, combined with case studies of interesting companies and organisations.

We believed that our final report presented an accurate portrayal of the contemporary state of the Scottish music industries and so were rather bemused by the hostile response, which it elicited in some quarters. First the figure we arrived at for the overall value of the industries was seen in the press as indication that the Scottish music industry was in crisis.<sup>3</sup> In fact report did *not* suggest things and soon after the worldwide success of Franz Ferdinand countered at least some of this negativity. Next, the publicly-funded Scottish Music Centre which had promised to host the report on its website withdrew the offer following what appeared to be a whispering campaign against us. Others within the industries complained that we hadn't consulted them, when we had – albeit not to the extent that they wished. The funders then objected to one of the findings being highlighted in the executive summary, although they were happy to include it within the body of the report - a dispute delayed publication by at least a couple of months.

In retrospect it is clear that the political context was the determining factor here. In the early days of political devolution in Scotland every organisation and company was coming to terms with new political settlement – and trying to get something from it. In such a partisan context a report which was neutral and favoured no particular faction was unlikely to elicit support. Ultimately the main impact that report had was not on the funders - who ultimately ignored it - but within academia as it spurred both writings and further research. We wrote about the politics of the report in a number of places (Cloonan et al. 2004, Williamson et al. 2011) and it led to two articles, which bear highlighting.

The first was called "Rethinking the music industry" (Williamson & Cloonan 2007). Here we noted that at the time of the 2002 report there was a tendency amongst journalists, academics and industry organisations to use the term "music industry" when more often than not what

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<sup>3</sup> See Cloonan et al. 2004 for examples

they were actually referring to was the record industry – and more particularly the major record companies. However while our research in Scotland had illustrated a great deal of musical and related business activity, it also showed that the country had few large record labels and certainly none of the multinational major record labels, whose UK bases were in London. In an effort to be more inclusive and to recognise the importance of other areas such as live music and publishing, John Williamson and I developed the notion of the music industries, plural, rather than singular. The article spelt out the implications of our approach. This has proved to be fairly influential and the term music industries is now widely used in academic circles (c/f Anderton et al. 2013, Hughes et al. 2016). Importantly the origins of this notion can be traced back to the *Mapping* report and the thinking, which emerged from it.

The second article was called "Having an Impact" (Williamson et al. 2011) and contained our reflections on that report, on some academic work which seemed to us to be pure advocacy on behalf of its record industry funders and on the music industries' attempt to discredit academic work which did not support their vested interests. We argued that academics should be public intellectuals carrying out research in the citizen interest and having the confidence to trust their expertise. Such lessons were again drawn from our experience of working on the report. Another lesson was that even if the funders and music industries personnel dislike your research findings and a report, which you have spent months on has no immediate impact on policy, the work undertaken can still inform your own thinking and produce some influential academic work which can influence policy in the longer term.

### **3 Project 2: The History of Live Music in the UK (2008-11)**

This project also emerged out of the *Mapping* report. It ran between 2008 and 2011 and was funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC). I was co-investigator on this with Simon Frith. Working on the *Mapping* report, had brought home to us not only how important the live music industry was, but also how under-researched it was. As

noted above, at this point for most academics "the music industry" meant the recording industry and the live music industry was either ignored or viewed simply as a means via which to sell records and so not researched it. Having spotted this gap, we applied for funding to research the history of the UK's live music industry and eventually secured funding for a three-year research project on the postwar history of the UK's live music sector.

This project entailed the hiring of two researchers. The first of these was Matt Brennan, whose job was to help build a historical account of the development of the industry, largely via trawling through the UK music press and other relevant sources. The second was Emma Webster, whose job was to provide an account of the contemporary industry through going to events and talking to everyone involved - promoters, musicians, fans, venue staff etc. Both researchers conducted interviews with various music industries personnel, with the focus being on concert promoters, from the local to the stadium level. We conducted numerous interviews with promoters, gathered solid historical data and combined these with contemporary accounts, thus developing a rounded picture of the postwar development of the UK's live music industry.

The wider music industries context for this work was that of the relative decline of the recording sector and the rise of the value of live music, which can all be seen as occurring around the time of Napster in 1999. In the UK the value of live music exceeded the value of recorded music for the first time in 2008 and this has continued ever since.<sup>4</sup> Our research had identified this phenomenon much earlier in Scotland and we felt ahead of the game. There were various outcomes from the live music history project including a three part history of the UK live music industry part one of which has been published (Frith et al. 2013) and parts two and three of which are forthcoming (Frith et al. 2019, 2020). Other work included a PhD (Webster 2001) and two special editions of journals.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See reports by Page and Carey: 2009, 2010 and 2011, PRS: 2012 and UK Music: 2014-2018.

<sup>5</sup> *Arts Marketing*, 1:2 (2011) and *Social Semiotics*. 22:5 (2012).

Thus, the project produced the customary academic outputs. However, in the longer term, it was to be the policy implications of the research that had perhaps the greatest impact. By the time the live music history project started, I had already written a book on popular music policy in the UK (Cloonan 2007b) and as a team we have all realised that live music was much more complex in policy terms than recorded music – and probably more interesting, especially areas such as regulation and funding. As I have noted elsewhere: *"the provision of live music automatically raises a set of issues which are not present with recorded music, prime amongst which are those of health and safety and the regulatory framework surrounding the selling of alcohol"* (Cloonan 2011: 406).

While in and of itself the Live Music History project had few direct policy implications, it informed our thinking in a number of areas. In addition, we were developing expertise and becoming the "go to" people for academic thinking around live music in the UK. One manifestation of this came when we were asked to give legal advice about a dispute involving a long running Scottish festival. Another was that we began to interact with Hamish Birchall of the Live Music Forum who was campaigning to reform the licensing regime for live music in England and Wales and to whom I shall return. Overall, the Live Music History project reinforced our sense that there were important policy areas around live music - and that history could help us to understand more about them.

#### **4 Project 3: Live Music Exchange (2012-)**

By the time the live music history project ended in 2011 the funders, the AHRC, had announced that successful projects could now apply for follow up funding for new projects which flowed from the original one but were not just a continuation of it, a scheme which still exists.<sup>6</sup> We responded by developing the idea of an online portal and consultancy service for anyone interested in live music - including music industries personnel, local authorities, campaigners, academics, musicians and

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<sup>6</sup> See <https://ahrc.ukri.org/funding/apply-for-funding/current-opportunities/followonfunding/>

fans. This project was named Live Music Exchange (LMX<sup>7</sup>). Our funding application explained that LMX would provide an accessible archive of reliable research, examine best practice, develop music business training and help promote better public understanding of the live music industry.

The funding was for twelve months and was used to employ researchers, develop the website and stage various events discussing the state of the UK's live music sector. This resulted in us making still more connections within that sector. By this point we pretty well known within live music industry circles, something which we further developed via having key industry people on the LMX Advisory Board.<sup>8</sup> In the longer term LMX has been maintained by through small pieces of funding from our host institutions and our own voluntary work. However, it remained – and remains - a key calling card and *nom de guerre*.

The bigger academic context here was an increasing interest in universities in what was first called knowledge transfer – implying that academics transfer their knowledge to industry and the public; then knowledge exchange - more of a meeting of equals, and is now called impact. We received AHRC funding for LMX because the AHRC follow up funds were designed to facilitate impact and our bid was built upon notions of knowledge exchange.

As ever, the wider political context was important. In this particular case one key development was a campaign about the licensing of venues in England and Wales. While this is a complicated story, in essence the 2003 Licensing Act had stipulated that any premises which were licenced to sell alcohol and which also wanted to stage live music had to have a separate licence to stage the musical performances. Both licences had to be paid for. Prior to this gigs of up to two performers on licenced premises did not need a licence under what was known as the "two in a bar" provisions of the 1964 Licensing Act (Cloonan 2007). The effect of the 2003 Act was therefore to make illegal a whole range of musical activities which had previously been entirely legal. Campaigners were soon claiming that the overall number of gigs was declining as venues did not

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<sup>7</sup> See [www.livemusicexchange.org](http://www.livemusicexchange.org)

<sup>8</sup> See <http://livemusicexchange.org/about/>

wish to pay a licence fee for something which had previously been free. In sum, a reform of alcohol licensing was reducing the amount of working opportunities for live musicians.

The legislation was eventually opposed by the Musicians' Union and other campaigners and we found ourselves allying with them and providing support. This led to us writing to the Statistics Authority to counter their claim the live music industry was "thriving".<sup>9</sup> This came as result of our developing relationship with Hamish Birchall and the Live Music Forum campaign and was based on our finding during and after the Live Music History project. In short, campaigners were saying there is a problem here, the government was denying it and we were suggesting that official interpretations and announcements were misleading.

This dispute became part of a broader campaign which continually sought to undermine government claims that the 2003 Act was not having a detrimental effect on live music. Our intervention helped to put the government on the defensive and to give legitimacy to the claims that the 2003 Act was causing problems for live music. This was eventually to lead to reform via the 2012 Live Music Act which permitted amplified gigs of up to 200 people and all acoustic gigs to take place without the need for a licence. Importantly this was not a government measure but came via a Private Members' Bill in the UK parliament. Such Bills are a means via which individual MPs and Lords can get their own legislation put forward for consideration. In this case it was promoted by a member of the House of Lords, the Liberal Democrat Tim Clement-Jones, with whom LMX had also liaised.

There was thus a change in the law, which LMX had helped to inform via working with Birchall and Clement-Jones. While part of a much broader campaign, which included the Musicians' Union (with which we also enjoyed a working relationship), we had actually contributed to the changing of the law which had been hindering live music. Indeed in its submission to the REF review of research in 2014 my then employer, the University of Glasgow, claimed that my research as part of LMX had 'in-

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.livemusicforum.co.uk/text/hbulletin310.htm>

formed policy changes', a rather modest, but legitimate claim.<sup>10</sup> LMX also featured as part of the University of Edinburgh's submission<sup>11</sup> where its work in influencing thinking within the industries and its political connections were highlighted.

One key policy lesson here was that there was a need for independent research in a complex policy area. Our strength was our *impartiality*. While we were obviously pro live music, we were also independent of the industry and not aligned to it. We endeavoured to speak for the citizen, rather than for any of the vested interests. Another lesson was that we also had good contacts with campaigners and the key politician working in the area, so some long-term work paid off. Finally, we were part of a broad campaign and that was a key to the passing of the Act. Thus, the main lessons from LMX are those of impartiality, building long term relationships and being part of wider campaigns.

## 5 Project 4: Cultural Value at the Queen's Hall (2013)

One purpose of LMX was to develop and enable further bids for funding. By 2013 another colleague, Adam Behr, had joined as a researcher and was developing - and included in - various bids for funding. Meanwhile the AHRC, had become concerned with questions of cultural value which became something of a policy preoccupation for a while as it had become widely felt that the creative industries were too often conceived of simply in terms of their economic value.<sup>12</sup> Within a prevailing neoliberal orthodoxy questions of whether art could be simply art's sake or produced for a market became debated again. If it *was* possible to have art's for art's sake, then questions remained about how express its *value* in non-economic terms. In response to such issues the AHRC devised a programme, which aimed to *"establish a framework that will advance the way in which we talk about the value of cultural engagement and the methods by which we evaluate that value ..., beginning with an examina-*

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<sup>10</sup> See [https://results.ref.ac.uk/\(S\(ttu0nhffu3o1vkk14wxldmzs\)\)/Submissions/Impact/588](https://results.ref.ac.uk/(S(ttu0nhffu3o1vkk14wxldmzs))/Submissions/Impact/588)

<sup>11</sup> See [https://results.ref.ac.uk/\(S\(ttu0nhffu3o1vkk14wxldmzs\)\)/Submissions/Impact/978](https://results.ref.ac.uk/(S(ttu0nhffu3o1vkk14wxldmzs))/Submissions/Impact/978)

<sup>12</sup> See Warwick Commission 2015

*tion of the cultural experience itself and its impact on individuals and benefit to society"* (cited Behr et al. 2014a: 407).

LMX successfully applied for funding for two research projects within this programme. The first involved working with a particular venue in Edinburgh, the Queen's Hall. This former church is a 900 capacity venue which is run as a charitable trust with a board of governors.<sup>13</sup> It hosts around 200 shows a year across a range of genres. While it puts on some of its own shows, it is primarily a venue for hire and thus needs to attract external promoters. This entails working with different types of people and organisations with different motivations for putting on shows.

As part of our work on live music we had developed models of promotional practice and were keen to do see how different promotional practices affected the audience's experience. In particular, we wanted to determine whether the type of person or organisation putting on a show affected how audiences *valued* their live music experience. In order to examine this, we looked at three different types of promoter – which we termed amateur/enthusiast, state-funded and commercial – and the different promotional practices they used. This involved looking closely at six different events at the Queen's Hall between September and December 2013 and getting audience members to keep diaries of what they thought about the gig, both before and after.

Our research covered a reasonable range of genres as the acts included Scottish folk stars Phil Cunningham and Aly Bain, the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra with Branford Marsalis, two concerts by the resident Scottish Chamber Orchestra, singer songwriter Heidi Talbot and cult indie band They Might Be Giants. Detailing all our findings lies beyond the scope of this article,<sup>14</sup> but they included the fact that, in contradistinction to some stereotypes, people tend to enjoy live music for similar reasons across different genres. In particular, regardless of genre, people go to live music events to break out of their daily routines and to enter into another world that is to have a transcendent experience.

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<sup>13</sup> See [www.thequeenshall.net/](http://www.thequeenshall.net/)

<sup>14</sup> For more see Behr et al. 2014

We also found various types of value and of competing values. One was intimacy versus spectacle. The Queen's Hall was valued for its intimacy, but obviously cannot host bigger shows and so can only stage particular artists.<sup>15</sup> Some people valued the unique atmosphere of the venue, with the age of the building adding to its gravitas. But others found the building's shape –as a former church - inconvenient. Some audience members valued surprise and the unexpected, while others valued confirmation of already held tastes.

Across the board people spoke of the value of becoming immersed in the event, although there were divisions about whether such immersion was better as inward or mental, or physical in the case of dancing. In fact, dancing could be the site of contestation with one respondent saying that they left a gig because others were dancing. But in all cases live music was valued for its *potentially* transcendent effect. Interestingly, few of our respondents put an economic value on this. Once an initial decision had been made to buy a ticket, value for money didn't really enter the equation. So, people might think that paying £20 for a ticket is a bargain or too much when they are considering buying, but after attending few would express the value of the gig in financial terms.

The main policy issues to emerge here were for the venue itself. The research provided some audience quotes which could be used in publicity. In addition, our findings were also potentially helpful for the venue when it was negotiating funding with benefactors such as the City Council and Creative Scotland (the successor to the Scottish Arts Council). We thus helped the venue articulate value to potential funders. We also had academic input here as we suggested In order to work with the venue in an informed way, the City Council needed to understand the venue's role within the wider live music ecology of Edinburgh. This was a key point, that venues cannot be judged in isolation, but as part of a wider music ecology, key to which is a sense of interdependency.<sup>16</sup> One aspect

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<sup>15</sup> The venue's website currently proclaims it to be "intimate, memorable, unique" - [www.thequeenshall.net/](http://www.thequeenshall.net/)

<sup>16</sup> For more see Brenan and Webster 2011, Behr et al. 2014a, 2014b and <http://livemusicexchange.org/blog/the-ecology-of-live-music-the-evolution-of-an-idea-live-music-exchange-editorial-team/>

of this is that if a venue closes, then other people - audiences, musicians, promoters, other venues, local businesses etc. - also suffer.

We also noted that the research we did could influence the Queen's Hall's relationship with Creative Scotland. As a result of research on the state of the Scottish music industries which this body had commissioned (EKOS 2014), it was considering supporting the building of a new 500 capacity venue in Edinburgh in order to fill a gap in provision which the report had identified. Our research suggested that while this might be a good idea, the effect on existing venues had to be taken into account. So again, we stressed the idea of ecology.

We also noted that the Hall had been unsuccessful in some applications for UK wide national lottery funding and so its future was bound up with policies pertaining elsewhere.

Above all we suggested that the transcendence which audience members routinely spoke of doesn't necessarily have a market value and that engaging with art is something which makes us human. Any policy which did not recognize this, we suggested, was doomed to failure. So art is not for art's sake but humanity's – and this has policy implications.

## **6 Cultural Value 2: From the pub to the stadium (2014)**

Between March and June 2014, we ran another cultural value project called *From the pub to the stadium: Getting behind the numbers* (Behr et al. 2014b). While the previous project had concentrated on one venue, this one was about localities. As live music has to happen somewhere, in terms of towns and cities, there are questions about how that somewhere affects the provision of live music within the jurisdiction. Thus, it is possible to ask why live music provision within any given location is the way it is. While much previous work on live music had concentrated on the figures,<sup>17</sup> we again wanted to get behind that and look at cultural value, this time by looking at the lived reality of those working in live music on a daily basis or - in our words – *"to provide an account of the*

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, UK (2017b)

*broader value of live music, the range of ways in which it is expressed and the variety of people who produce it"* (Behr et al. 2014b: 1).

We focused on three locations – Camden, Glasgow and Leeds. In each place we spoke to venue operators and then provided both overviews of the cities and case studies of three venues, covering a range of venue sizes – i.e. from the pub to the stadium. We tried to speak to a broad range of venues and to key policymakers in each city, as well as industry bodies such as the Musicians' Union and PRS for Music, the songwriters' organization, which collects fees for the use of its members' music in live performances and so monitors the UK's venues. In sum we wanted to get beyond the numbers and look at the reality of running a venue.

This time the bigger context was that as the value of live music continued to exceed that of recorded music there was talk in the press of a boom in live music,<sup>18</sup> whereas we our own experience as musicians, fans and activists suggested that things were not so rosy at the lower end. Once again, a key idea here was the notion of a live music ecology – *"whereby different venues – of all sizes – display interdependence, alongside different promotional practices"* (ibid: 3). We wanted to examine various issues including: What all venues have in common; the relationships between the public and private sectors and how venues interacted to produce value for both audiences and artists.

Our main findings were that:

- the weakest point of the live music ecology at present is the small to medium independent venues;
- policymakers need to pay more heed to the economic and cultural contribution of smaller venues as local political regimes often focus their attention on major developments whose key beneficiaries are larger businesses. For example, local policy makers favour big new projects rather than

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Grenburg 2013

helping small existing ones. The public funding of the SSE Hydro in Glasgow and Leeds Arena provide examples of this;

- greater harmonisation of regulatory regimes and their implementation across the UK will benefit independent and major operators alike;
- there was a need for a more "joined up" approach across council services is widely acknowledged but not always fully implemented.

For example, we noted that cultural policy within a local authority might conflict with planning policy in the same jurisdiction (Behr et al. 2014b).

We also noted that competition between cities can drive investment in infrastructural projects, but also that one of the side effects of such regeneration can be a more difficult environment for venues without the commercial or political wherewithal to adapt quickly to processes of "gentrification". For example, some people move to a place because it is "cool" and has a lot of cultural activity, but then complain about - and try to close - a noisy local venue, which others think is cool and which is part of the local music ecology. In countries such as Australia and the UK this has led to the adoption of regulatory regimes of the Agent of Change principle which stipulates that where there is a dispute about the sound emanating from a venue, then it is the agent of change who is responsible. Thus, if a new venue opens next to existing premises, then they are responsible for the sound, but if someone moves in next to an existing, then they are the agent of change and so have to take responsibility for remedying any noise problems.<sup>19</sup>

We found that while it is often the smaller venues which experience problems with noise complaints from newly arrived neighbours, but it is such spaces that provide both performance and socialising opportunities for emergent acts. Such venues feed into an area's 'local character' – its

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<sup>19</sup> For more see <http://musicvenue trust.com/2014/09/what-is-agent-of-change-and-why-is-it-important/>

musical history and reputation – in a way that makes them difficult to replace. Overall, our report suggested, the main point here was that any policy for live music had to discover the lived reality of the people working in the industry, to recognise the great diversity of music venues and, once again, to see live music as an interdependent *ecology* (ibid: 10). We have explored the latter notion in other places (Behr et al. 2016) and it has been picked up in other places including in New York (Creative Footprint 2018).

Meanwhile this project had benefitted from the support of three important partners within the music industries who wrote letters of support for the project and provided personnel for the advisory board. These were UK Music, the representative and lobbying body for the commercial sector; PRS for Music, which, as noted earlier, is the songwriters' association and gathers fees for the public performance of its members' songs and the Musicians' Union, which represents performers. Such support did not appear overnight and was the result of years of building up working relationships with key people in the UK's music industries and overcoming mistrust of academic research. The seeds of that mistrust can be seen as being in the debates around the campaign to extend the period for which sound recordings remained in copyright. This is another complex story but in short, the record industry and rights organisations were campaigning for the period during which recordings stay in copyright to be extended and many academics were campaigning against it. The business won and in 2011, the term was extended from 50 to 70 years. But the battle had been quite vicious and included generally dismissing academic work.<sup>20</sup> However, as part of our work to develop a Music Manifesto for Scotland (Cloonan & Frith 2011) Simon Frith and I had consulted various music industries personnel across the UK and held joint meetings with them under Chatham House rules. So the lines of communication were still open, something which was to help with the next project.

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<sup>20</sup> See Williamson et al. 2011

## 7 Project 6: The UK live Music Census (2016-18)

By 2014 we had industry support in the UK and were also getting international interest in our work. In particular Australia was the forefront of a number of issues concerning live music and a number of links developed there. For example, I first come across the agent of change principle there (Cloonan 2007, 2008). We had also been very impressed by a census which took place in Melbourne in 2012 which tried to assess the value of live music in the city (Music Victoria/City of Melbourne 2012). As so often is the case this came in response to a crisis – this time around rules for security at gigs and a massive campaign to save live music in the city.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile in Edinburgh there were concerns that too many venues were being closing and that it was too easy for residents to make complaints that led to venue closure. Once again, there was a need to find out the real situation. So my colleagues in Edinburgh, Adam, Matt and Emma, did a census of Edinburgh's live music scene in 2015, essentially refining the work done in Melbourne (Behr et al. 2015). The results of this were published and eventually played a part in Edinburgh liberalising its regulations around noise emanating from venues (Behr 2017).

Emboldened by this we decided to role the model out to the UK. Again, we wanted to get the reality and to think through the policy implications, this time on a UK basis. So we applied to the AHRC for funding to undertake the UK's first nationwide live music census. This was to be a mixture of online surveys of musicians, venues, promoters and fans, combined with snapshot censuses carried out over a 24 hour period in our three case study cities of Glasgow, Newcastle and Oxford. In these cities on 9 March 2017 we sought to go to every public live music event in the city in a 24-hour period. We trained volunteers and sent them to venues to get as much information as we could on the event – attendance and demographics, admission price, performers etc.

Our main findings were that live music has significant economic and cultural value that smaller venues are a vital part of the live music eco-

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<sup>21</sup> See Homan et al. 2015

gy, and that despite all this live music is also facing a number of problems – particularly at the smaller end. While none of this came as a big surprise to us, we now had confirmation of long held hunches. We also brought a great deal of media attention to the plight of live music<sup>22</sup> at a time when there was growing concern about a decline in the number of venues in the UK.<sup>23</sup>

Research methodology had been a key concern in the designing of the research. Following reading various reports from within the music industries, I noted that the methodology was often less than transparent.<sup>24</sup> It seemed that some people within the music industries were somewhat indifferent to questions of methodology, simply wanting the right results. However, as academics we know that "rubbish in = rubbish out" and so we *cannot* be indifferent to methodology. In the process of designing the Census we had to convince the industries' people to take an interest in our methodology. We also began to think of developing a method which anyone could use to conduct a census in their town and which had the support of the industries. So we consulted our partners - here UK Music, the Musicians' Union and the Music Venues Trust (MVT, which represents grassroots venues) - and other stakeholders in a series of meetings and got their agreement to our methodology. We then produced a toolkit based on that methodology which is now freely available on the project website for use by any person or organisation interested in assessing the value of live music in a given place.<sup>25</sup> The development of the toolkit and its endorsement from leading industry organisations again built on long term relationships. This suggested that a key lesson is to nurture relationships over the long term - and then be prepared to seize the moment.

The report contained several policy recommendations for the various levels of UK government: local, the devolved "national" governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the UK government.

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<sup>22</sup> See <http://uklivemusiccensus.org/>

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Greater London Authority (2015) The formation of the Music Venue Trust ([www.musicvenuetrust.com](http://www.musicvenuetrust.com)) was one response to this perceived crisis.

<sup>24</sup> See Cloonan 2007 for some examples

<sup>25</sup> The toolkit is available via <http://uklivemusiccensus.org/>

These included pushing forward the agent of change principle and taking action on the secondary market for concert tickets. Having made these recommendations, we rather withdrew from the fray, as we felt it was up to others to use our evidence in their own lobbying and campaigns. As academics we need to be wary of lobbying ourselves but can provide evidence for other lobbyists to pick up and we can encourage them to do so (as we had done in the campaign to reform the 2003 Licensing Act).

Meanwhile the partners who had previously supported our work proved to be more problematic this time. As noted, one partner was UK Music, the industries' lobbying and representative group. It runs what it calls a Music Academic Partnerships wherein universities pay £10,000 a year for access to industry people.<sup>26</sup> The MAP scheme currently has 17 members and when we approached UK Music to support the Census, they suggested that they would only do this if we involved some of the MAP members in the work. So one of our partners made working with *their* partners a precondition of remaining a partner. We eventually agreed to this and some MAP partners undertook their own censuses using our methodology, with some of their findings wrapped in to the final report. But the involvement of MAP partners compromised our independence, suggesting that one problem with building long term relationships is that partners might suddenly change the rules and that can have big policy implications.

The second issue was reporting the findings. In terms of outputs, in addition to the toolkit designed with the partners, the main public document we committed to was to be "*a report outlining best practice for policy makers, industry personnel, musicians and venues in engaging with one another to sustain live music provision*" (Brennan et al. 2015). But when writing report up we found that we had far too material so it was agreed internally that we would now produce two things - a *full* report which would only be online and an executive summary, for the partners and stakeholders, which we would make available at the report's launch and which was the sort of output we had originally envis-

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<sup>26</sup> See <https://www.ukmusic.org/skills-academy/music-academic-partnership/>

aged. However, when we made the draft Executive Summary and full report available to our partners some problems emerged. Both the Musicians Union and the MVT objected to one particular finding being in the Executive Summary. This concerned the fact that: *"48% of all respondents to the venue survey, 60% of those identifying as small music venues and 68% of those identifying as bars/pubs said that the cost of paying bands had a negative impact"* (Webster et al. 2018: 63).

Here the MU seemed concerned about giving the impression that employing musicians was too costly, while the MVT seemed to want to avoid the idea that venues are mean. So these two partners lobbied for us to exclude that finding from the Executive Summary. Ultimately the messy compromise was that the finding stayed in the full report but was not, one of the bullet points in the Executive Summary. Here the MU and MVT's *private* interests – in protecting the images of their members – came into conflict with the *public* interest, which I have argued elsewhere that academics should protect (Williamson et al. 2011).

But partnership with industry is a key part of the educational landscape in terms of impact. Here the AHRC is clear that partnerships can play a key role in determining whether a grant application gets funding: *"we want to encourage applicants to consider, in ways that are appropriate given the nature of the research they are proposing to conduct, potential pathways to impact, for example through engagement or collaboration with partners, and to help the research councils support them in these activities"*.<sup>27</sup> Applicants have to submit Pathways to Impact statements as part of the application process, with the application form including a space for partners to be listed. The AHRC is explicit that: *"Hopefully, it will also encourage (applicants) to make new connections and partnerships with relevant organisations"* (ibid.). It is also explained that: *"The impact sections are intended to allow applicants to highlight, as appropriate for their research, potential pathways to impact, for example through collaboration with partners, and to help the Research Councils support them in these activities"* (ibid., emphasis Cloonan).

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<sup>27</sup> See (<http://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/faq/impact-summary-and-pathways-to-impact-frequently-asked-questions-ahrc/>, emphasis Cloonan)

Thus impact plans are a key criterion in the assessment of funding applications and one key way to produce impact is to involve partners. Our bid had stated that it was "*founded on principles of impact and knowledge exchange*" (Brennan et al. 2015) and we spoke of the Census being "*designed to facilitate knowledge exchange with the music industries*" (ibid.). We could evidence the likelihood of this happening as we had worked with music industries bodies on previous research and were able to say that the Census would be "*a collaboration between music industry organisations ... and leading academic live music researchers*" (ibid.). The problem for academics comes when partners disagree with or want to play down findings and the lesson is that academics need to know in advance what their response to such situations will be. Unfortunately, we had not done this. But hindsight is always a wonderful thing and something which informs the next section.

## 8 Conclusion

In order to draw some conclusions, it is necessary to return to the wider academic, industrial and political context. Within this the impact agenda is likely to remain a key consideration in applications for research funding, including research on the music industries. While this is something of a mixed blessing, it cannot be ignored as impact statements increasingly form part of application processes. Based on my experiences, the good news here - and perhaps the headline figure - is that *policy makers do value academic research*. This means that academics *can* influence music (and other) policy. However, the caveat is that that value depends on myriad contextual factors. In particular my experience suggests that independently-minded academic research is often called for in times of crisis/disruption. The Scottish Enterprise research was commissioned because that organisation was being criticised and needed to do be seen to be doing something. So it commissioned some experts to tell it what to do. While our advice was largely ignored, the Scottish report ultimately led to the Live Music History project, because Simon Frith and I had spotted a gap in the market - a neglected research topic - and then be-

came the experts in it. In the longer term that was to lead us back into policy.

Meanwhile the LMX project live music research was picked up by campaigners and used by a senior politician in a context where it was becoming apparent in high political circles that the 2003 Licensing Act and this was causing considerable problems. The sole point of the AHRC's cultural value programme was to address criticisms that the value of culture was too often seen in economic terms and the projects we undertook were part of a bigger programme designed to find different ways to talk about value. Finally, the UK Live Music Census was an important and unique piece of work, which took place at a time of perceived crisis in venues. It also illustrated potential tensions, raising questions about how far academics should go to keep partners happy, especially if we want their support for other projects in the future – something which they need in these times of impact statements. Overall the evidence suggests that in times of crisis independent, non-aligned, research can help to inform policy.

It is also apparent that academic research into the music industries can be useful for lobbying and campaigning purposes, but also that this should not involve advocacy on behalf of the industry. This is precisely because the key value of academic research is that of its impartiality. Thus it is important not to do advocacy work as that undermines the very thing which sometimes makes academic research valuable – its non-aligned nature. In the projects in which I've been involved even if music industries people dismissed the work, they could not accuse us of partiality. We were not in anybody's pocket – not even those of our funders.

Many of the benefits, which I have accrued while researching live music have come via the development of long-term relationships. These are essential but can also be vulnerable if there are disagreements about how to present research findings and even more so if the disagreement is over *what* to present. However, it should again be noted that even if policy-based research from academics does not directly lead to changes of policy, it can increase the broader understanding of the relevant in-

dustries. In my case the development of notions of the music industries plural (Williamson & Cloonan 2007) and of a live music ecology (Behr et al. 2016) are ideas which have gone on to have wider currency and both were the results of thinking which emerged from policy based research.

I have also problematised the notion of impact as it applies to the music industries (Williamson et al. 2011) and this article is a further contribution to that problematisation. In all our academic endeavours, we hope to make a difference. The evidence gathered here suggests that that is best achieved as part of collective actions and of collaborations of the sort that those assessing impact do not always recognise. This may be a battle for the future, and it is hoped that the lessons suggested here can help to equip colleagues involved in such battles.

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