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Music and wellbeing vs. musicians' wellbeing: examining the paradox of music-making positively impacting wellbeing, but musicians suffering from poor mental health

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ABSTRACT



This paper interrogates two different perspectives on music and wellbeing. The first positions musical *practice* as being beneficial for emotional wellbeing and mental health, whilst the second positions musical *work* – building a career as a musician – as potentially detrimental. This apparent paradox matters because the clinical findings which establish a causal link between music and wellbeing are being disembedded from the contexts in which those links are manifesting by charities, social enterprises, advocacy organisations, educational institutions, governments and international bodies, and fuelling normative sociological prescriptions which encourage participation in music making. For those who go on to develop career ambitions, wellbeing outcomes are far less clear. Therefore, a more sophisticated appreciation of the *uses* of music and its impact on wellbeing is required. This paper provides a more balanced view of the connections between music, wellbeing and health and reflects on how this paradox might be resolved.

KEYWORDS

Music; wellbeing; anxiety; depression; creative labour

Introduction

Researchers from fields of study conceptualised variously as “Arts and Health”, “Arts Psychology”, “Arts and Wellbeing” and “Health Humanities” amongst others have, using a variety of methodological approaches, demonstrated a connection between specific uses of music and the improvement of emotional wellbeing and mental health. Listening to music (Lin et al., 2011), playing music (Perkins et al., 2016), singing (Clift et al., 2017; Clift & Morrison, 2011; Coulton et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2018) and drumming (Fancourt et al., 2016a, 2016b; Perkins et al., 2016) have been seen to improve mental health outcomes, lowering levels of both anxiety and depression. However, studies such as these have not only been criticised vis-à-vis their methodological robustness (Belfiore, 2006; Clift, 2020; Clift et al., 2021; Mirza, 2006a, 2006b) but also sit somewhat uncomfortably alongside research from the past twenty years which has looked at how professional musicians

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experience building a career from their music-making. This work has suggested a link between the working conditions of musicians and high levels of mental ill-health in the form of conditions such as anxiety and/or depression (Detari et al., 2020; Gross & Musgrave, 2016, 2017, 2020; Jacukowicz, 2016; Loveday et al., *in press*; Vaag et al., 2016). In other words, there is an apparent paradox between research which explores the micro-dynamics of creative practice and that which examines the sociological realities and longer temporalities of constructing a career around the practice of music. This paradox has been identified both in academic work (Bonde et al., 2018) and in the popular music press (O'Connor, 2019), with the CEO of charitable organisation Help Musicians UK recently capturing it by saying: "The narrative at the moment is "Music is amazing for everybody's wellbeing," yet people who work in music seem to struggle more than most with their mental health" (Richter, 2021).

Why is understanding this "narrative" – this powerful and popular idea that music is good for wellbeing, but that musicians themselves have poor mental health – important? After all, from one perspective, this paradox between the micro-dimensions of creative practice and the macro-dimensions of career-building are different units of analysis, perhaps more simplistically delineated as one focussing on amateurs and one on professionals. However, in this paper, I will develop a methodological critique that this "narrative" which highlights any such link between music and wellbeing, including establishing causality, is being actively blurred and *disembedded* from the contexts in which those links are manifesting in clinical studies by those keen to encourage participation in musical practice. This well-meaning advocacy is subsequently (and problematically) fuelling normative sociological prescriptions that participating in music making and using music for broader purposes around identity formation and career construction, is beneficial for wellbeing. However, this ignores the contexts in which people centre musical practice in their lives and the *emotional harms* of musicianship for many. In other words, focusing on music and wellbeing instead of musicians' well-being insufficiently acknowledges the *risks* of musicianship for some, where the evidence points to high incidences of anxiety, depression and even suicide (Bellis et al., 2012; Kenny & Asher, 2016).

This methodological disembedding occurs on various levels. We see it take place by charities, social enterprises and advocacy organisations, often drawing on research from the field of music and wellbeing in order to highlight the benefits of music. For example, in the United Kingdom, organisations including (but certainly not limited to) the Cultural Health and Wellbeing Alliance, Live Music Now, the Leeds Arts Health and Wellbeing Network, the National Centre for Creative Health, London Arts and Health, the MARCH Network, and others all cite the positive emotional role of music-making in the lives of individuals. More broadly, this relationship between music and positive mental health is politically influential too, with governments keen to promote engagement with the arts as a means of improving wellbeing amongst various populations. This engagement is reflected in initiatives to encourage music-making amongst younger people not least for the role that engagement in music has been suggested to have on emotion regulation and wellbeing (Papinczak et al., 2015), as well as the expansion of music and music business education courses in UK Higher Education occurring alongside the concurrent expansion of the "creative economy". Furthermore, at the beginning of 2021, Public Health England published a methodological framework

developed by Daykins and Joss (2016) to help arts and culture organisations better demonstrate their 'value', with health and wellbeing being a central element. Finally, we see it occur on an international level too, with The World Health Organisation (Fancourt & Finn, 2019) and the United Nations (UNDP, 2013, p. 10) drawing links in cultural policy terms between music-making and the wellbeing of individuals and societies. In other words, many advocate participation in music-making, but as Roger (1926) noted almost a century ago, musicians can experience both the positive benefits of music-making *as well as the negative*. It is the methodological disembedding of this advocacy I wish to interrogate herein and how the wellbeing effects of music are often much more unevenly experienced by those who, having taking up the invitations to participate in music-making, develop musical ambition and go on to seek to develop musical careers.

It will be proposed that it is an oversimplification to conceptualise participation in music-making as a good thing, and thus undertake the kind of methodological disembedding proposed above, without due consideration of the potential negative impacts on some musicians who subsequently develop professional ambitions. To explore this, this paper seeks to bring together and interrogate two different perspectives across three sections. Part one will explore the relationship between music and wellbeing, broadly informed by contributions from psychology (and the subdiscipline of music psychology) and clinical and/or therapeutic models which position engagement with music as being beneficial for emotional wellbeing and mental health, principally amongst amateur musicians. Part two will draw on discussions emanating predominantly from the fields of sociology of work, psychosocial studies and the professional music industries which positions musical *work* – more specifically the unique characteristics of building a career as a professional musician, generally using Western musical careers in Europe and the United States as their focus – as being detrimental for emotional wellbeing and mental health. Finally, in part three it will be demonstrated how these two different methodological and disciplinary approaches are brought together by those who seek to promote and encourage music-making, and why doing so without considering both sides of the paradoxical relationship between “music” and “musicians” is both problematic and, potentially, dangerous. Overall, this paper calls for a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the relationship between music and wellbeing, and musicians' wellbeing.

Music is good for us, right?

The ability of music to positively impact health and wellbeing is a well-established field of enquiry (MacDonald et al., 2012). This first section will cite some key reviews and research to illustrate a prevailing narrative which emerges from studies on music and wellbeing. It is worth briefly interrogating the use of the term “wellbeing” here and how it is utilised and operationalised differently in different studies and disciplines. Much of the literature cited in the first part of this paper tends to adopt a clinical, quantitative perspective on wellbeing and conditions such as anxiety and depression. This can take a variety of forms depending on the disciplinary methodology, ranging from the measurement of specific hormones such as ACTH¹, or other chemical measures such glucocorticoids, to the use of standardised medical questionnaires such as the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS). The studies in part two of this paper tend to encompass slightly

broader methodological approaches, often using self-reporting by musicians alongside quantitative approaches. As such, it can be difficult to make direct comparisons between studies which, whilst sharing common interests, often straddle large disciplinary differences and are adopting different approaches to measurement.

With respect to mental health, it has been suggested that listening to music can reduce depressive symptoms (Lin et al., 2011), particularly amongst older adults (Chan et al., 2009; Chan et al., 2012; Leubner & Hinterberger, 2017). Work has also suggested, for example, that listening to music might reduce perceptions of pain amongst hospitalised patients (Xue et al., 2018). However, work by Mirands and Claes (2009) and Garrido and Schubert (2015) highlights the importance of context in their work amongst adolescents, suggesting that *how* music is listened to and used matters. Listening to music as a method of problem-oriented coping may decrease depressive symptoms but listening to music as a method disengagement or avoidance may increase depressive symptoms. Therapeutic studies too drawing on randomised trials have highlighted music's utility as a tool to reduce depressive symptoms in a clinical capacity (Maratos et al., 2008). Subsequent randomised trials conducted by Erkkilä et al. (2018) suggested music therapy, when combined with standard care, was more effective for reducing clinical depression amongst working-age people compared to standard care alone, findings supported by meta-analysis by Allbers et al. (2017).

Actively playing music too has also been found to positively impact feelings of depression and anxiety. Work by Ploukou and Panagopoulou (2018) amongst oncology nurses found an intervention of playing music reduced clinical measures of depression and anxiety, measured using the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS). Studies of older adults have also shown that playing music positively reduces both depression (Seinfeld et al., 2013) and anxiety (Hars et al., 2014). There have been interesting studies on the impact of group drumming as a means of improving mental wellbeing (Fancourt et al., 2016a, 2016b; Perkins et al., 2016), as well as on how playing music can improve confidence, with increased confidence being linked to reductions in depression, stress, anxiety and aggression (Shayan et al., 2011). However, evidence regarding the impact of playing music is not entirely consistent: a twin study conducted by Wesseldijk et al. (2019, p. 1) proposed that "overall individuals playing a musical instrument (independent of their musical achievement) may have a somewhat increased risk for mental health problems". The relationship, therefore, is not a simple one.

In addition, there is substantial literature on the positive impact of singing on mental health and wellbeing (see Clift et al., 2010). Many studies of singing have focused on older adults, such as work by Coulton et al. (2015) which found that group singing had a significant impact on mental health-related quality of life, which was maintained over three months following the end of the programme. Clift et al. (2016) have conducted a detailed review of literature on singing and older people, including those affected by dementia, and a general consensus emerges that regular group singing has mental wellbeing benefits. In addition, contributions to this field have focused on the value of community singing for people with long-term mental health challenges who have little previous experience of singing as adults (Clift et al., 2017; Clift & Morrison, 2011). However, in a systematic review, Williams et al. (2018) do sound a note of caution. While they highlight evidence of the positive impact of group singing in choirs amongst those diagnosed with mental health conditions, they point out that most

studies reviewed have moderate to high levels of bias and that further research is needed to validate their claims.

However, perhaps of even greater importance in the context of the argumentation developed here is not the outcomes of these studies i.e. that singing or playing music can improve wellbeing, but procedural questions around *why* and *how* these improvements take place. Studies such as these illustrate the ways in which music as a tool might be mobilised and employed by individuals in order to achieve specific outcomes related to health and wellbeing. Maintaining a focus on community singing for a moment as an example, work which develops Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of "flow" offers biological and neurochemical evidence for a process conceptualised as "social flow" whereby group bonding via collective singing has been seen to reduce stress and arousal measured in levels of the ACTH hormone (Keeler et al., 2015). Studies such as this and others suggest that it is the musical participation itself which can be seen to improve wellbeing, rooted in this case in the experience of group bonding derived from singing. Fascinatingly, however, work in this area highlights the importance of musical *context* and how the music is *used* (and participated in) as impacting outcomes. For example, work by Fancourt et al. (2015) demonstrates how singing without an audience has been seen to improve psychological outcomes (in lower levels of cortisol, for example), whilst singing in front of an audience saw the opposite outcome (increased level of glucocorticoids). A similar oppositional dynamic was seen in the work of Grape et al. (2002). This tells us that whilst music can be seen to improve wellbeing in specific psychological and clinical studies and under specific conditions, the ways in which the music is used and experienced is central in determining these neurological and biological outcomes, and that for those who use music in high-pressure, instrumental and outcome-focussed ways, the relationship between music and wellbeing is likely to be less clear. It is this second group – music professionals – I will turn to next.

Music careers and psychosocial perspectives on work

Alongside the literature outlined above, a growing body of literature adopting a critical perspective towards creative labour points towards musical careers being synonymous with high levels of financial precarity (Morgan & Wood, 2013), inequality of access (Brook et al., 2020) and sexual discrimination (Conor et al., 2015). With reference to wellbeing and mental health, in particular, research has suggested that professional music makers suffer from high levels of anxiety, depression and other mental health conditions, and that these conditions might be explained by the nature of musical work itself (Detari et al., 2020; Gross & Musgrave, 2020; Jacukowicz, 2016; Loveday et al., *in press*; Vaag et al., 2016). For example, Gross and Musgrave (2016) reported via a self-selecting sample of 2211 musicians and music industry workers that 68% had suffered from self-reported depression, and 71% suffered from self-reported anxiety and/or panic attacks, with later work suggesting that the nature of *being a musician* was, respondents felt, at least partly responsible for these conditions (Gross & Musgrave, 2017). Certainly, the evidence base in this area is relatively new and must be treated with caution, not least given the self-selection bias in the survey data cited here. However, similar findings illustrating incidences of anxiety and depression being up to three times

higher amongst musicians compared to the wider public have been seen in the work of Krueger (2019, p. 71) too.

An increasing number of studies over the past twenty years have pointed to risk factors in musical careers which might have the capacity to be emotionally and mentally damaging. Gross and Musgrave (2020) delineate these findings into three areas, referred to as 'status'. The first area, "the status of work", concerns the particularities of musical labour. Here, sources of anxiety include financial precarity (Berg, 2018; Parker, 2015), performance anxiety (Kenny, 2011; Kenny et al., 2004; van Kemenade et al., 1995), anti-social working hours (Dobson, 2011), and the prevalence of alcohol or substance use (Forsyth et al., 2016; Kegelaers et al., 2022; MIRA, 2019). These findings suggest that some of the characteristics of music as "employment" present challenges to emotional wellbeing rooted in musicians' destabilising experiences of uncertainty over things such as their sources of revenue, their professional status, their understandings and definitions of success, their performance and reception thereof, and their future and ability to survive. The second area, "the status of value", concerns the ways in which musical work achieves culturally mediated value and status, with sources of anxiety being the culture of the music industries e.g. bullying (Eynde et al., 2014, 2016), high levels of pressure to succeed (NZMF, 2016; Record Union, 2019; Shorter et al., 2018) and vulnerability derived from a presence on social media platforms (Gross & Musgrave, 2017). These findings suggest that the ways in which highly personal and reflexive musical pieces are shared and ascribed cultural value online, with fans, and within "the music industry" can be a source of anxiety driven by feelings of vulnerability. Finally, "the status of relationships" concerns the damaging impact musical work can have on the relationships musicians have with those around them, including disrupting family life (Detari et al., 2020; Vaag et al., 2014) or missing loved ones while travelling for extended periods on tour (Kenny et al., 2012; Kenny & Ackermann, 2008). These findings suggest that musicianship, and the total commitment demonstrated by musicians to their craft, can have negative ramifications on their closest relationships. Gross and Musgrave also highlight a number of occupational stressors faced by female musicians in particular, whose self-reported rates of anxiety were 77.8% (compared to 65.7% for men), including sexual abuse, misogyny, increased vulnerability to harassment online, and anxieties over age and appearance (see also Conor et al., 2015). As Gembris (2012, p. 371) observes; "health is endangered by performing music on a high level over a long time".

This emerging research area represents one theoretical perspective to explain the potentially greater incidence of mental ill-health amongst musicians rooted in their working conditions and occupational stressors. Other psychological explanatory factors drawing on personality, backgrounds and individual differences (see Gillespie & Myers, 2000; Kemp, 1995; Power et al., 2015) cannot be entirely discounted, and indeed, many of the studies mentioned above acknowledge that occupational factors are rarely the sole cause. Alongside this, musicians have been seen to report high levels of job satisfaction (Detari et al., 2020), and also that being a musician provides them with a sense of purpose, belonging and identity (Banks, 2014; Gross & Musgrave, 2020; Taylor & Littleton, 2012). In addition, there is a relatively narrow, ethnocentric concept of musical work and musical careers in much of the literature in this area, and further research is needed to explore the extent to which musicians forging careers in, for example, developing global music markets experience their careers in similar or distinct ways (see Barbar

et al. (2014) for a notable contribution from Brazil). Nevertheless, these findings point to a range of psychosocial features of musicianship which sit uncomfortably alongside the findings from the first part of this paper. These include the perfectionist tendencies of workers who are highly driven and see this work as central to their identity and sense of self, as well as the toxic interrelationship between precarity and instability in the context of a workforce which has a deep passion and love for their art-form, and whose work is profoundly meaningful to them. That is, this literature presents a picture of occupational factors being about more than a simple relationship between economic precarity and anxiety, or between “failure” and depression. Instead, these studies present *musical work* in particular as possessing specific characteristics, rooted in the relationship between the musician and their musicianship, as being sources of anxiety and/or depression in musicians’ lives.

From music-makers to “musicians”: methodological disembedding and the encouragement of participation

What is it that joins these two strands of literature, and differing units of analysis, together? As suggested in the introduction, studies such as those in the first part of this paper which present music as being beneficial to health and wellbeing are drawn upon by well-meaning charities, social enterprises, advocacy organisations, governments and international bodies committed to promoting the social utility of music (and culture more broadly) as a force for improving mental wellbeing and health, and thus encourage participation in music-making. However, it is worth considering that some of these young music-makers, reaping the emotional benefits of playing music as amateurs, may want to go on and become professional musicians as part of a process referred to by Pitts (2017) as “lifelong musical engagement”. Indeed, work by Bonde et al. (2013) and Lilliestam (2013) highlights the link between childhood exposure to music and the development of lifelong engagement with music (which might take the form of becoming a professional musician for some). To phrase this another way, some of those who begin *drumming* or *singing*, may want to go on and become *drummers* or *singers*. Not all will of course – such as, one assumes, elderly singers who use music for the improved outcomes seen in the work of Clift et al. (2016) or those for whom music remains a lifelong hobby such as those in the work of Finnegan (2007) – and a variety of factors are likely to influence who does and does not (talent, motivation, parental encouragement, social conditions, resource availability, peer group, personality type, etc.). However, some will.

Research helps us to understand how this happens. Work by Bonde et al. (2018, p. 262) on a random sample of 25,000 adult Danes found “a clear association ... between singing and playing in childhood and being active as professional or amateur musicians in adult life”, which can come about as a result of moving through various “pathways” (Taylor & Luckman, 2020). Work on identity formation by psychologists too offers a helpful insight in understanding this process as being one whereby exposure to music allows some music-makers to construct a personal identity and system of belief which sees them as “musicians”, or which Evans and McPherson (2015, p. 409) refer to as “a strong long-term view of their abilities and profile as musicians”. In this context, work to better understand the journey from someone who plays music for fun, and someone who develops the requisite interest to pursue their musicianship professionally has

sought to take a lifelong account of how a professional musician develops (see Manturzewska, 1990) with key transitions emerging e.g. from adolescence into early adulthood (Burland, 2005), and the eventual emergence of musical career ambition.

Perhaps more interesting than *how* this takes place, however, is the question of why this matters. This emergence of musical ambition represents a conceptual tipping point at which how music is *used* by individuals begins to change, whereby it evolves from being used principally for reasons of fun, enjoyment and pleasure, and takes on a new dimension of utility encompassing employment, sustenance and identity formation. The emergence of professional musical ambition then, is where the lack of methodological nuance around the links between music and wellbeing begins to unravel. In encouraging all of this musical activity predicated on the specific uses of music seen in psychological and clinical studies, it is worth reflecting on the reality that some of these young people might potentially – perhaps inadvertently – encounter a tension between the well-evidenced benefits of music, and the reality of being a musician and the requirement to use music in new ways i.e. as a tool of construction (of identity, of career, etc.). These unforeseen costs of musicians have been observed amongst orchestral musicians, with Brodsky (2006, p. 674) noting: “it often comes as a shock to musicians themselves that achievement of their career goal is at the expense of their own personal health”.

Indeed, this construction of an identity as a musician now is one which is culturally popular. Musical careers are often seen as highly glamorous and even mechanisms for disadvantaged youngsters to achieve social mobility given the apparent – and espoused – meritocracy of musical work. Alongside this, encouraging participation in the arts has become a political imperative in the United Kingdom, with government reports keen to provide methodological toolkits for arts organisations to demonstrate the emotional and health benefits of their work (Daykins & Joss, 2016). Alongside this, the UK’s post-industrial transition to a knowledge economy over the previous thirty years has led to a positioning of the creative industries as being crucial both in stimulating economic growth (Lee, 2014) and as a source of soft power (McClory & Harvey, 2016), with the music industry, in particular, being keen to demonstrate both its economic value and its positive emotional impact (Bemrose, 2019). In other words, it is possible to trace the emergence of a form of societal encouragement of participation in creative and cultural work (including, but certainly not limited to, musicianship) which has developed in the UK over the previous decades: being a musician is cool, exciting, valuable economically and culturally, and good for you, goes the argument.

This centralisation of music as being both good for us and good for the economy, can be seen in educational terms too, reflected in what has been called an “explosion of popularity” (Born & Devine, 2015, p. 135) of students studying music, music business, and music technology courses within Higher Education, for example. We know that many of the young people undertaking these courses want to go on to become professional musicians, and indeed this is the primary motivation for some of them. In this context, there has been an increased interest in how music graduates manage their transition from education into the music industries (Bartleet et al., 2012; Barleet et al., 2019; Bennett et al., 2018; Ghazali & Bennett, 2017), and the notion that we should try and prepare musicians for their careers not only with technical and business expertise, but

also some kind of psychological preparedness for the challenges of their work, is one which is gaining traction.

As such, it can be seen that there are a variety of angles from which a professional musical career is encouraged; socially, culturally, educationally, etc., across various levels and spheres of society; from educational settings, to the state and international bodies. Indeed, much of this encouragement is premised on the notion that participation in music and engagement with music-making is a good thing and good for the young person making music. However, encouraging the use of music in the construction of individual identities and as a possible career trajectory premised on the benefits of music to wellbeing ignores the ways in which music-making actually produces positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes in clinical studies and disembeds them from the contexts in which they are observed. We have witnessed the emergence of a form of governmentality which articulates participation in music-making and a specific *use* of music as a form of identity construction and career development, and by extension a source of positive wellbeing, and yet, this use of music is *not* what gives music its wellbeing qualities. That is, wellbeing does not manifest in these contexts - quite the opposite in fact - and a clearer articulation of this paradox around the uses of music is needed. In other words, we should not necessarily uncritically encourage participation in music-making given the impact on those who might seek to take their music-making further and build a career as a musician, and indeed to do so on the basis of wellbeing is methodologically imprecise.

Conclusion

In seeking to bring together two different perspectives, this paper has suggested that there exists a tension between “music” and “musicians” vis-à-vis conceptualisations and understandings of emotional wellbeing i.e. between the benefits that musical practice can provide, and the lived experiences of those embarking on musical careers. This paper has presented prominent contributions in the respective fields of interest in order to highlight academic contrast between views from scholars examining music and wellbeing, and those who are working to understand musicians’ wellbeing. The contrasting findings of the research examined herein proposes that *how music is used* i.e. the role it plays in the lives of music makers, matters. Music as a free tool – to express, to play, to create – has many positive wellbeing benefits, whilst music as employment, and a form of performance perfectionism and optimisation can have negative wellbeing ramifications for some. It appears that the idea that “making music is therapeutic, making a career from music can be traumatic” (Gross & Musgrave, 2020) perhaps best encapsulates this duality. It is important, however, that in discussions of the benefits of music, we do not forget the voices of working musicians which are often lost in discussions around the positive impact of music on emotional wellbeing; that is, we must ask the question, beneficial for who and in what way? Indeed, Clift (2020) advances a similar argument. When contrasting the work of Matarasso (2019) and a World Health Organisation report by Fancourt and Finn (2019), he notes

The central contrast between the two reports is revealed through a stark difference in the use of language. In the WHO report the word ‘arts’ appears 616 times, but the word ‘artist’

appears only 11 times. In *A Restless Art*, on the other hand, the word ‘arts’ appears 290 times, whereas ‘artist’ appears 571 times ... For Matarasso, the artist, whether professional or non-professional, occupies a central position, while in the WHO report, and presumably the research it surveys, the artist is effectively erased from view.

We must ensure that this erasure, even if inadvertent, is resisted.

The argument advanced in this paper presents a particular challenge for those of us engaged with the task of music education. How can we encourage participation in music making, with all of the emotional and psychological benefits cited herein – alongside the camaraderie, self-actualisation and personal pleasure – whilst simultaneously preparing those music-makers who develop the desire to build a musical career for the reality that the psychosocial nature of the work has the potential to be emotionally damaging? This is a question those of us tasked with music education must seek to urgently confront. Indeed, this represents an area for future empirical examination of the challenges presented herein regarding how those of us working within music education might seek to make music *healthier*, whether via curriculum design, pedagogical and conceptual approaches to module/course construction, or simply through expectation management strategies with our students concerning what they want to “use” music for and how. Hearing from the voices of music students too would add an insightful perspective to these debates i.e. to hear how the music, music business and music production students of today understand the role that music will play in their lives and how they propose to manage their relationship with music – how they want to *use* music – which as suggested can be a tool of expression and fulfilment as well as potentially a source of turmoil and even pain.

Few would want to deny young people the joy found in musical practice and the benefits of musical creation suggested by the scholarship in the first part of this paper. However, it is crucial that in encouraging this musical practice, we simultaneously confront the findings of the scholarship from the second part of this paper, and prepare those young people for whom music is (or becomes) more than a hobby, fun with their peers, or a private practice of individual fulfilment, for the reality that the very practices they are doing because they love them may have the potential to harm them in certain instances. Not all young music-makers introduced to music as amateurs will want to develop musical careers, but some certainly will. We cannot claim, simply, that “music is good for us”, because in doing so we semantically privilege the idea of the instrumental benefits of “music” for some, whilst denying the emotional and psychological challenges, rooted in the nature of musicianship, faced by some musicians.

An even harder question to answer is how we might go about resolving this paradox. How can we work with musicians to ensure that the well-evidenced positive impacts of music-making are not lost as the nature of music as work and employment overrides some of these impacts? The work of Trondalen (2013) seeks to grapple with this tension, suggesting that musicians need to centralise the joy of music-making and focus less on the career-element of their musical work. In this respect, as she notes, the stresses and strains of musicianship are likely to be mitigated by music-making itself; “the problem is also the solution” (p. 183). Bonde et al. (2018) suggest that this might be the basis for meaningful therapeutic interventions. However, again this presents profound challenges, particularly for music education. How can we square the circle of encouraging young people to learn and study music, in a climate which encourages

them to believe in themselves and construct a musical identity and career rooted in passion and desire, only to tell them that they should simultaneously ignore the idea of music as a career? Perhaps the point is not just to “offload” this work onto musicians, their therapists and music educators. Instead, it may be that it is incumbent on us as researchers to adjust our analyses and methodologies to look at music and wellbeing in a broader and more sophisticated frame that explores both how it is lived and experienced, its political economy, and, most crucially, the connections between the two.

Note

1. The adrenocorticotrophic hormone controls the production of cortisol (also known as the “stress hormone”).

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