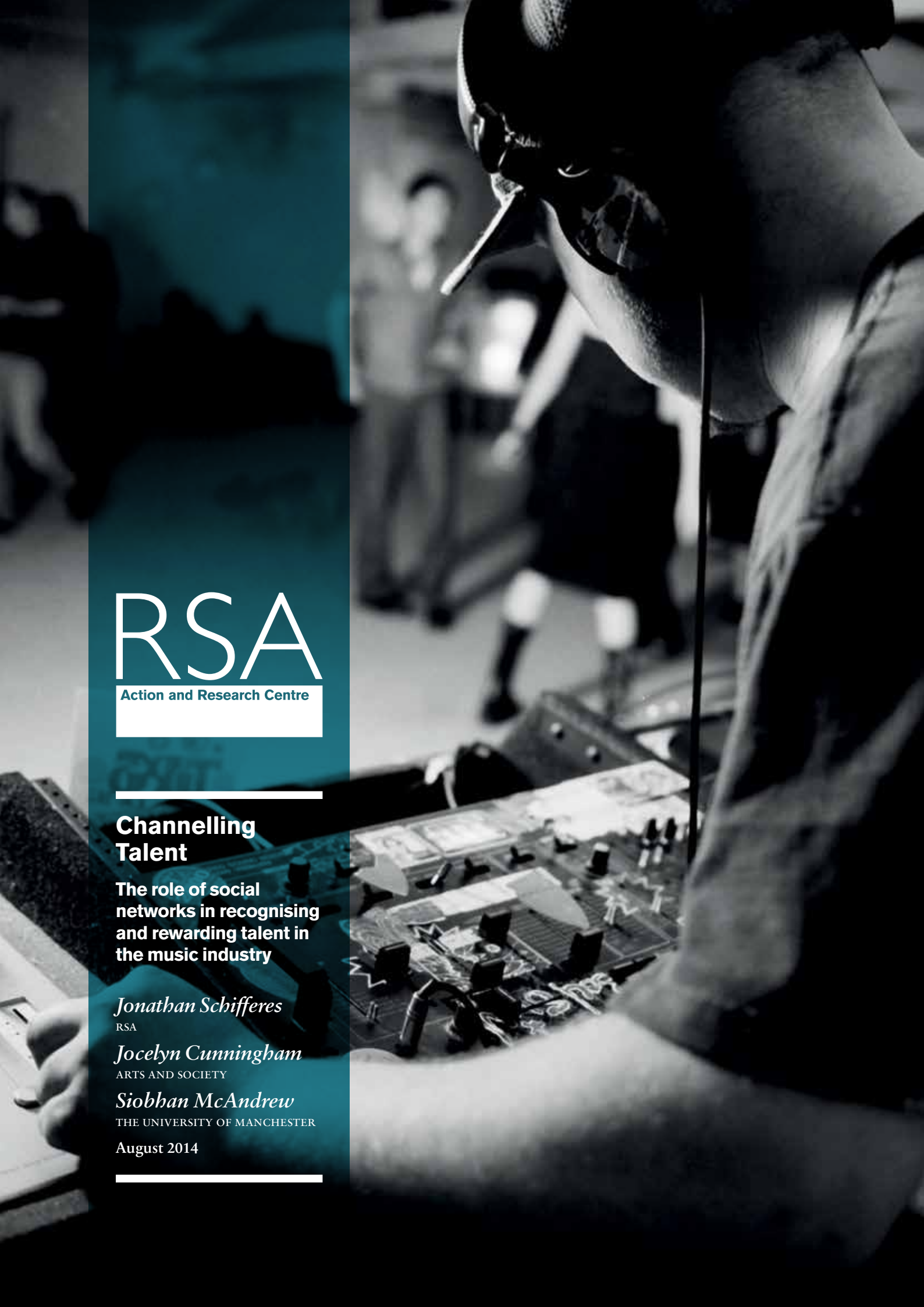

RSA

Action and Research Centre

Channelling Talent

The role of social networks in recognising and rewarding talent in the music industry

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Contents

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About the RSA

The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) believes that everyone should have the freedom and power to turn their ideas into reality – something we call the Power to Create. Through our research and 27,000-strong Fellowship, we seek to realise a society where creative power is distributed, where concentrations of power are confronted, and where creative values are nurtured. The RSA Action and Research Centre combines practical experimentation with rigorous research to achieve these goals.

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Executive Summary

Talent is an increasingly relevant factor influencing success in the knowledge economy. Schools identify 'gifted and talented' children, companies recruit in the 'war for talent' and in the creative industries we refer to artists as 'the talent', supported by 'talent managers' and 'talent agents'.

Talent always has a social context. Many people can point to a moment when they realised their potential because someone else gave encouragement and praise. The expectations of our teachers have been shown to have a particularly strong influence on our future success. Parents invest in developing their children's talents. Talent shows and open auditions rely on judging panels. Our understanding of talent is based on an accumulation of millions of judgements of others. In other words, it depends on the networks of information that we participate in.

This study looks at the mechanisms which generate, develop, promote, recognise and reward talent in music. Music has established tests, objective measures for identifying pitches and following rhythm, and teaching institutions which develop musical ability, and performance repertoires which showcase ability. Practicing music is leisure for millions, and most of us listen to music every day; it's in our environment even if we choose to avoid it.

Through our social interactions and associated social norms we create and reinforce a notion of talent and the talented.

Through our social interactions and associated social norms we create and reinforce a notion of talent and the talented. Taking steps to ensure these norms are constantly questioned, and interactions encouraged across and alongside existing channels has the potential to create broad benefits. For example young children are better able to distinguish musical tones and pitches having been exposed to many different types of music.

Talent does not exist in isolation. It is responsive and interactive to its environment. As Malcolm Gladwell and other have argued, it is through disciplined and extended practice that great achievements are often realised, but they are rarely realised alone. The Beatles played *together* regularly in Hamburg before making their best music and achieving fame and fortune. Talent is realised through people engaging with other creative forces including their audience.

In channelling musical ability into creative, critical and commercial success, talents are mediated by other factors. The music industry commercialises and commodifies talent: a vast network linking musicians to audiences that is in a period of accelerated change. The digitisation of music, the falling costs of music technology, and the growth of internet connectivity in homes, workplaces and personal devices has meant that established and traditional business models in which record labels have influence over the majority of music consumption and production are being challenged. The barriers to entry are lower for people making music, but the recognition and reward comes in different and unpredictable ways. New networks are forming, providing alternative channels.

Music provides a particularly rich field of inquiry to understand better the relationship between social networks and talent. If our taste for the type of sounds we want to listen to is influenced by our networks, then talent must also be considered as a subjective attribute. Our research

generated a definition of talent as understanding how your abilities relate to the materials that you use; the active use of those materials with creativity and sympathy; and an understanding of context and meaning in how others respond to and inform your actions. Importantly, talent is not static but responds to influences and environment.

Labour markets in well-functioning economies with heterogeneous talent allocate talent to appropriate sectors or jobs in the economy. We should be concerned with how networks serve to make this allocation effective - in music and all sectors. In music, it is clear that ability is more evenly distributed than the resources to develop it, and talent is distributed more widely than the concentrated financial rewards enjoyed by superstars and executives.

Talent is contingent on social networks which include all of us. We therefore have a social responsibility to remove barriers to talent development, to understand that talent is mediated and realised through other attributes and privileges, and to champion the evident benefits of participating in creative practices for individuals and society.

By raising awareness of and highlighting a diversity of perspectives, and innovative and progressive practices and programmes, participants in the music world can ensure their networks are efficient channels for talent - for everyone's benefit.

We recommend:

- **Music institutions, with their stakeholders, should develop and publish their definition of talent as part of their wider mission statement.**
- **Programmes should create opportunities for stakeholders in various music worlds to bridge professions and sectors.** By connecting music to the wider arts sector and creative industries, this would develop in musicians the pedagogical expertise to widen participation through a variety of types of engagement.
- **Further research should investigate the psychological effects of music participation in a digital age. Research should investigate how the impact of online feedback shapes music in a different way.**
- **Those working with musicians should distinguish relevant and irrelevant mediating factors for musical talent and make assessments with respect to this.**
- **The effectiveness of initiatives to develop and support talent in music should be evaluated, and resources for initiatives should be allocated on the basis of effectiveness.**

Introduction

This paper suggests how various participants in the music world can ensure their networks are efficient channels for talent - for everyone's benefit.

This paper explores the mechanisms which generate, develop, promote, recognise and reward talent in music, and the creative industries and the arts more broadly. By raising awareness, and highlighting a diversity of perspectives, including innovative and progressive practices, this paper suggests how various participants in the music world can ensure their networks are efficient channels for talent - for everyone's benefit.

The music industry is experiencing a period of accelerated change. The digitalisation of music, the falling costs of music technology, and the growth of internet connectivity in homes, workplaces and personal devices has meant that established and traditional business models in which record labels have influence over the majority of music consumption and production are being challenged. As one essay recently put it:

> In one of those odd paradoxes of technology, it has taken the digital revolution to reassert an ancient, oral tradition: music as shared culture… The fundamental flaw of previous attempts to monetize digital music has been the industry's insistence on treating music solely as a commodity. The digital revolution demands music be shared culture, and successful monetization will require music to be treated as such.[1]

Simultaneously, during times of austerity arts organisations face increasing competition for public funding, and many are choosing to respond by articulating their contribution to wider social issues such as community cohesion, economic development and social justice.

This short briefing paper contributes to the Music Communities programme of research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and coordinated by The University of Manchester.[2] Broadly, this research explores how music worlds are embedded in networks and connections that act as a catalyst for generation of resources such as social capital. Using quantitative 'social network analysis', the Music Communities programme seeks to highlight how social networks – people's personal and professional connections - are critical for the creation of music and to musicians building and sustaining careers, a phenomenon which is ever clearer in the internet age.

1. Dahlman, Ian, deWaard, Andrew and Fauteux, Brian, 'The Cultural Capital Project: Radical Monetization of the Music Industry', *Journal of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music*, 3 (1) (2012).

2. The Music Communities project AH/J006807/1 is funded as a 'pilot demonstrator' project under the Connected Communities programme co-ordinated by the Arts & Humanities Research Council.

Musical talent

Music provides a particularly rich field of inquiry to understand better the relationship between social networks and talent. For example, within music there are well-established objective tests for ability such as exams, and for quality such as awards. There are also frequent complaints that popular acts are often manufactured, the result of a commercially-driven process in which record labels control music production, distribution and promotion.[3] This results in a preference for compliant musical artists and serves to disfavour unproven styles of music and performance.[4]

Music forms a major part *of* the creative industries - a successful and growing sector of the UK economy. One recent study found that the UK hosts 7.7million music tourists annually, spending £1.4 bn and supporting 20,000 jobs.[5]

An important determinant of the prosperity of an economy is how well its labour markets allocate the pool of workers with heterogeneous talent to appropriate sectors or jobs in the economy. Accordingly, we should be concerned with how networks serve to make this allocation effective - in music as in all sectors. According to Columbia University economist Moshe Adler, there is no agreement about the relationship between talent and success in the arts, but "superstardom" means that market rewards are concentrated on just a tiny proportion of artists. Such concentration always raises the question of efficiency; 'superstardom may be inefficient not only because it raises prices for consumers but also because it deprives other artists of the opportunity to practice art.' In the interest of equity and efficiency, then, society would benefit from broader participation in music practice, performance and in all aspects of the music world.

Channelling talent

This RSA briefing paper explores how social networks channel talent in the music world. We specifically focus on contemporary music: this includes popular commercial genres and genres with a smaller following such as grime. Our starting point is that the music world includes all those creating, commissioning, observing, curating, and criticising music, following Howard Becker's definition of those co-creating "Art Worlds".[6] Music networks are formed by the relationships between these people. They exist largely to create effective channels for identifying, developing, promoting, marketing, disseminating, recognising and rewarding talent.

Building on the interview evidence we have gathered from practitioners in music, we define talent **as understanding how your abilities relate to the materials that you use; active use of those materials with creativity and sympathy; and an understanding of context and meaning in how others respond to and inform your actions**. Importantly, talent is not static but responds to influences, environment. It is evident through the strength of flow of these abilities; it is not a stock or resource.

3. Berry, Joanna, 'Welcome to the machine? :changing music industry value frameworks and the key characteristics of new music industry business models', PhD Thesis (2011), (URL: https://theses.ncl.ac.uk/dspace/handle/10443/1169).

4. For example, Syco, a joint venture of Simon Cowell and Sony Music, integrates TV and music production through *The X-Factor* and *Britain's Got Talent*.

5. Destination Music, Bournemouth University International Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Research, 2010 (URL:https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-music-publishes-study-into-economic-contribution-of-live-music)

6. Becker, Howard S., *Art Worlds*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

The music world brings talent to audiences who provide cultural or financial capital for individuals (ie money and/or status). In our analysis we follow the work of others[7] and consider this process to be inclusive of audiences - the public - as a key part of the music world. Listening to music is an active rather than passive consumer act, influencing the music that is subsequently made, and most people have participated in making music in this way at some point during their lives. Indeed, one of our case studies highlights how audience feedback online influences a musician's output.

To realise musical ability requires a battery of social and personal skills in addition to innate musicality. People can also bring to their participation in the music world other attributes which carry social status, prestige or financial capital. These bring power to bear in shaping and exploiting channels for talent, and in some cases distort the effectiveness of the network. Furthermore, the concept of talent *itself* is part of what enables power to become concentrated; and concentrated power in the music world can in turn narrow the definition of talent, with negative consequences. This follows Michael Young - the politician, author and reformer who coined in satire the term meritocracy - who criticised the embrace of the concept of merit by those who ignored their own role in making a society in which merit was defined and socially revered by those with the power to make such definitions.[8]

We conclude by suggesting how music organisations could experiment

7. See, for example, Rancière, Jacques, *The emancipated spectator*, (London: Verso, 2009).
8. Young, Michael, 'Down with meritocracy', *The Guardian*, 29 June 2001, http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/jun/29/comment

with new practices. These practices would lead to a more inclusive and therefore effective system for channelling talent to achieve recognition and reward (cultural and financial capital). Supported by evidence we have collated, we argue that if the power to create music is realised more widely this will ultimately enrich society because musical participation has intrinsic benefits. Through our social interactions and associated social norms we create and reinforce a notion of talent and the talented. Taking steps to ensure these norms are constantly questioned, and interactions encouraged across and alongside existing channels, has the potential to create broad benefits.

The RSA's core mission is to empower people to be capable, active participants in creating the world we want to live in. We call this unleashing the power to create. In practice, this means working to challenge concentrated forms of power and the orthodoxies that stifle diversity and initiative, and supporting the development of creative and collaborative individuals, institutions and communities.

Method of the inquiry

This short briefing paper summarises the findings of an inquiry involving the following steps:

- Reviewing the outputs of academics working on mapping networks of people in diverse music worlds.
- Searching for written articles considering how talent is defined in a range of contexts, and how it affects life opportunities.
- Formulating a series of lines of inquiry about how the concept of talent is relevant to music, and how social networks play a role in recognising and rewarding talent.
- Critically analysing recent work which explores changes in the music industry and music education and evaluates the impact of music programmes.
- Surveying a number of arts organisations in the UK and describing their efforts to pro-actively shape networks in order to provide more effective channels through which talent can be developed and flow to achieve recognition and reward.
- In-depth interviews with individuals in the contemporary music world to understand personal experience and perspective on the role of social networks in channelling talent.

Existing research

Social networks in theory and practice

Social networks constitute the fabric of social life, and culture emerges from such networks. In other words, society and culture exist by virtue of social interaction. Understanding how relationships between people work can help us understand a part of culture such as music, and how each creative process has a social context.

The ways in which individuals and organisations link together generates opportunities and distributes resources, facilitating forms of action, both individual and collective, which would be very difficult, if not impossible, in their absence. Dense networks generate incentives for co-operation and trustworthiness. This in turn provides an environment supportive of various forms of activity. Sociologist Ronald Burt applied network theory to economics, arguing that the role of entrepreneurs is to fill 'structural holes' in networks: bridging gaps between others with complementary resources or information.[9]

Networks take many forms: they are systems of relationships which can be local or global, online or offline. Social networks are social connections and interactions – such as friendship, kinship, seeking advice and sharing information. Interactions with other people may be formal or informal. For example, a lot of music we choose to listen to comes informally: recommendations from friends (including online) or sources of opinion such as blogs and magazines. In a more formal sense, many parents support their children financially to access music education at institutions with employees meeting objectives in a structured work programme. The power of social networks is often described as *social capital*.[10]

Tastes are formed and techniques are shared and copied as people within a network influence and encourage each other.

Considering music specifically, styles, genres and scenes can be understood as being made up of a set of networks, resources and conventions. Tastes are formed and techniques are shared and copied as people within a network influence and encourage each other and build the network, bringing in others. A question often posed to musical artists is "who are your influences?" Relative status is determined within networks as musicians both compete and co-operate to demonstrate their ability to create and perform. Critics and talent scouts are similarly recognised by their ability to identify these abilities. Performing musicians are often described as artists: they are generally (but not necessarily) at the centre of the creative process of writing, composing or arranging music.

In practice, access to networks in the music world - to potential collaborators, teachers, mentors, investors and audiences - is mediated,

9. Burt, Ronald, *Structural Holes: The Social Structure of Competition*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

10. Putnam, Robert P., *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

meaning it works through other factors. For example, we may only be able to access the best teachers if we live in a city where they teach, or if we can afford their lessons. In other words, for a range of reasons, people who want to participate and profit from the production of music don't all have an equal opportunity to translate abilities - talents - into outputs which bring cultural or commercial rewards. **Ability is undoubtedly more evenly distributed than existing public and private resources to develop talent.**

Furthermore, as consumers of music, our awareness of the immense world of music is highly dependent on the role that others play. Information theorists have observed that the more information we are connected to, the more important processes of navigation become. A lot of music that we are exposed to - for example in shops and workplaces and on TV commercials - does not reflect our deliberate choice. Most would agree that music is not a meritocracy in which the most talented receive proportionate recognition and reward. As well as being musically talented, musicians must demonstrate other attributes (most obviously, physical looks).

As well as commercial musical success being highly concentrated, the power to influence the taste of others is also concentrated.

To realise musical ability may require other social and personal skills; personal discipline, an ability to get on with others, entrepreneurship, technical skills such as web design. People can also bring to their participation in the music world other attributes which carry social status, prestige or financial capital. These bring power to bear in shaping and exploiting channels for talent. These can distort the effectiveness of the network. Personal wealth can also buy opportunities to be taught music, acquire instruments, and record music. Existing fame in another aspect of popular culture can be used to crossover to music. Recent examples include Rebecca Black's success having self-financed a music video via ARK Music Factory or the musical endeavours of fashion and film stars.

As well as commercial musical success being highly concentrated, the power to influence the taste of others is also concentrated. The efficiency of the music world – or of any social network – in sharing information in part relies on the network being exclusive, bound, and limited. People in the network trust others in the network, especially those with established status. Mainstream radio producers have long played an important connecting role, seeking out songs with 'crossover appeal', originating in one genre but with widespread appeal leading to potential popularity.

Today, the music world, with global online sharing of tastes, outputs, tools and techniques, is in flux. While the financial and technological barriers to accessing information and contacting others online are falling, this could serve simply to reinforce the value placed in offline relationships and live music performance (as suggested by the work of sociologist Manuel Castells). The networks of the music world are not wholly inclusive or connected; in the interests of efficiency, we should not want them to be. The challenge is to understand what kind of talent development is neglected as a consequence, and what kind of trade-offs are involved. For example, Radio 1Xtra was launched by the BBC in 2002, in part justified by the challenge of "black music" losing its audience due to "commercial pressure" on mainstream commercial radio.[11] This move to create a

11. Letter from Greg Dyke, Director-General of the BBC, to Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 21 May 2001 (URL: http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/regulatory_framework/service_licences/tv/6_may01_newtvandradioservices.pdf)

"home of black music" could be seen to allow talent development and recognition for music of black origin; however, it also perhaps reduced pressure on Radio 1 to feature this music in mainstream programming.

'The talent'

Music is almost always personified in its artists: they provide the brand.[12] Often referred to as 'the talent', artists are considered, first and foremost, the primary talent which others work with to maximise the value of the product.

The concept of talent is perhaps inseparable from a sense of having something which is valued by others. Indeed, the word originates in Middle English, from Old English *talente*, from Latin *talenta*, plural of *talentum* unit of weight or money.

Most contemporary definitions of talent are inconclusive: it's a slippery subject. According to one academic paper which tackled the subject: 'personal talent is defined as exceptional ability to select and attain difficult life goals that fit one's interests, abilities, values, and contexts.'[13] With his 2008 book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell revived interest in the famous theory of expertise pioneered in 1973 in relation to chess.[14] This theory suggests that it is through disciplined and extended practice - 10,000 hours or more - that great achievements are realised. Talent is never the only consideration, and Gladwell uses the example of The Beatles playing *together* regularly in Hamburg before making their best music and achieving fame and fortune; "No one—not rock stars, not professional athletes, not software billionaires, and not even geniuses—ever makes it alone."

In relation to music, attempts have been made to define talent as perceptual awareness and discrimination, creative interpretation, and commitment. However, it is not divorced from social context or an individual's opportunities. As educational psychologist John Feldhusen wrote in 1995:

> The discipline of psychology has been telling us for a long time that human abilities are diverse and that their development may be partially determined by genetic influences, but environmental events in the home, school and community in interaction with people and things are major determinants of the extent to which talents develop into expertise, creativity and productivity in careers.[15]

Talent has been considered in other areas of society including business, economics and government. Writing in 1998, global consulting firm McKinsey & Company talked of a "war for talent" in the information age:

> In the new economy, competition is global, capital is abundant, ideas are developed quickly and cheaply, and people are willing to change jobs often. In that kind of environment, all that matters is talent. Talent wins.[16]

12. Exceptions include library and stock music, and the phenomenon of 'outsider' music where being invisible, unknown or not recognisably a musician in the conventional sense can add appeal.

13. Moon, Sidney M., 'Personal talent.' *High Ability Studies*, vol. 14 (2003): 5-21.

14. Simon, Herbert A. and Chase, William G., 'Skill in chess.' *American Scientist*, vol. 61 (1973): 394-403.

15. Feldhusen, John F., 'Talent development vs. gifted education.' *The Educational Forum*, vol. 59 (1996): 346-349.

16. Fishman, Charles, 'The War for Talent', Fast Company, 31 July 1998, http://www.fastcompany.com/34512/war-talent

For economic geographers such as Richard Florida, talent could be considered as equivalent to human capital, evidenced in measures such as whether people hold a college degree.[17] In recent years, business leadership advice has attempted to reduce talent to the formula "Talent = competence *x* commitment *x* contribution"[18] - which begs the question of how we define these terms. Others have sought to put the concept of talent in a social context; rather than being a collection of personal attributes, talent is the inter-personal ability to navigate a network and use these ties and relationships to be productive.[19]

More concretely, after interviewing 100 talent managers, Human Resource Management expert Professor Carole Tansley of Nottingham Business School found that:

> There is no single or universal contemporary definition of "talent" in any one language; there are different organisational perspectives of talent. Current meanings of talent tend to be specific to an organisation and highly influenced by the nature of the work undertaken. A shared organisational language for talent is important. There is high level of influence of management consultants in the development of the term in managing people with unique knowledge and skills...Talent management that only recognises a narrow definition of talent negatively impacts on the full utilisation of a nation's talents.[20]

What does previous research leave unanswered?

This study analyses the role of social networks in shaping definitions of talent.

The first key consideration is that **talent is only rewarded monetarily if an income stream can be captured from its products, but it can be recognised more widely in less tangible ways.** Consumers are part of the system. Their choices and purchases fuel the pursuit of music for many. Their choices are not expressed neutrally, in a sterile vacuum. Music is a part of our own identity formation, how we articulate who we are. This is inherently a social process, and particularly important in adolescence. A recent study found that 68 percent of 14 to 24 year olds listened to music through a computer every day.[21] With a product which is culturally important to defining our identities, like music, our taste is highly influenced by the wider networks we are part of and which shape the production, distribution and promotion of music. Technological change means these networks are changing fast.

If our taste for the type of sounds we want to listen to is influenced by our networks, then talent must also be considered as a subjective attribute.

If our taste for the type of sounds we want to listen to is influenced by our networks, then talent must also be considered as a subjective

17. Florida, Richard, 'The Economics Geography of Talent', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 92 (2002).
18. Ulrich, Dave, and Smallwood, Norm, 'What is talent?' *Leader to Leader*, no. 63 (2012): 55-61.
19. Whelan, Eoin, 'It's who you know not what you know: a social network analysis approach to talent management.' *European Journal of International Management*, no. 5 (2011): 484-500.
20. Tansley, Carole, 'What do we mean by the term "talent" in talent management?' *Industrial and Commercial Training*, vol. 43, no. 5 (2011): 266-274.
21. Bahanovich, David and Collopy, Dennis, 'Music Experience and Behaviour in Young People', University of Hertfordshire and UK Music, (2009)

attribute. It's not just something you are born with, but it depends on people wanting to consume the sounds you are capable of making. The focus therefore is on **the processes which redefine talent, within a dynamic system which shapes the taste for music**. A musician has a far more complex relationship with those who judge talent than does a sprinter, who has more objective performance measures. Within music new activities are labelled as demonstrative of talent; for example, as people master new technologies or as new genres emerge. These are given recognition and cultural value, while others are de-valued as fashions change.

We ask music practitioners whether talent is a label which has the capacity to reassure us about the efficient and fair operation of a network. Potentially, talent provides comfort and a coherent narrative, enabling us to remain naive to the power of networks to include and exclude based on attributes (and societal inequalities) unrelated to talent. Within networks, power to define talent and influence others is not equally distributed. While some power is earned (and a meritocracy would acknowledge more power to those with more merit), some power is unearned and borrowed from elsewhere. Talent is heavily mediated by relationships, and our research seeks to explore how this network works – gatekeepers, mentors, teachers, publishers, agents, and critics work to signify who is talented and why.

Our understanding is that talent is a label which - like other characteristics such as intelligence or trustworthiness - cannot exist unless it is recognised by others in a network. Being defined as talented is *particularly* dependent on social networks. Can we be talented if that talent is never recognised by others? Unlike skills, which have associated qualifications which attempt to create external (non-personal) and consistent and objective validation of someone's ability, there are few formalised processes in which talent is recognised. This may be related to the rise of talent shows and award processes.

Finally, **we understand that talent is culturally-loaded**; it is associated with certain processes more than others and these associations are promoted and discouraged through social networks. We can have a talent for cooking, gardening and photography in our personal lives; for negotiating, public speaking or writing in our working lives. It is less likely we would describe childcare or cleaning as talents we exhibit at home, nor would we often say being good at driving a taxi or at waiting tables represents a talent. When we assume tasks are routine, we assume they can be taught and learned by a generic worker; no talent is necessary to perform them well. The ascription of status and esteem to performing different functions (including making music) is evidently socially constructed; we can see it varies greatly between different societies. There is evidence that concepts of skill and talent are applied differentially to men and women in the workplace.[22] This study considers how talent can be loaded with other reference points, and differentially applied.

By highlighting how the concept of talent is itself dependent on a network, **we seek to challenge those with power in the music network to experiment with new practices**. These practices would lead to a more

22. Jenson, J., 'The talents of women, the skills of men: flexible specialisation and women', in Wood, S. (ed.), *The transformation of work?* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp.141-55.

inclusive and therefore effective system for channelling talent to achieve recognition and reward (cultural and financial capital). Research with music practitioners and progressive arts organisations features in the following section.

Personal perspectives: the role of social networks in channelling talent

The music sector is going through dizzying and seismic change, particularly with regard to contemporary popular music. This has fundamental implications for how networks function in channelling talent. To illuminate this, we focus on three aspects of culture change where the nurturing of talent and networks are central to this change.

- Drawing on recent studies, we highlight how **training and development** needs further attention, since the majority of those in the music world manage their own portfolio approach to their music career. We profile the career of David, who engages a broad range of people in music in a number of ways.
- The **digital revolution** means musicians practice in new ways, as the relationship between consumer and producer is blurred and the potential for remote collaboration and influence multiplies. We profile the experience of Sean, an 'at home' electronic musician.
- **Traditional roles are evolving**: those who develop talent, be they artists, promoters or producers, need to play their part in ensuring networks operate for the benefit of the whole music ecology and the imperative to innovate. We draw on a recent interview (with permission of Red Bull Music Academy) with Elijah, founder of the Butterz record label.

Today musicians create portfolio careers for themselves, which necessarily cross a very broad range of skills. The reality is far from the popular notion of struggling and then 'making it' or having a talent in one area and that being sufficient to sustain a lifetime's work. Even the most prestigious conservatoires offer programmes that develop an assortment of skills, highlighting the fluid boundaries between teaching, performing and collaboration. The most common role beyond working as a performer is teaching according to the recent Musicians' Union report, *The Working Musician*.[23] When musicians were asked to identify which

23. *The Working Musician*, Musicians' Union, (2012) (URL: http://www.musiciansunion.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/The-Working-Musician-report.pdf)

role they earned income from, 81 percent earned income from performing and 60 percent from teaching. Recording, composing and session work were far less significant.

> There is no such thing as a typical musician. The blend of roles, patterns of paid and creative work, employment status and working hours vary across musicians and across different periods in their careers. Developing a portfolio career, made up of a number of different jobs is a necessary characteristic of many musicians' careers; this invariably involves developing non-music skills such as business, marketing, teaching and community engagement.[24]

In understanding the role that talent and networks play in the life of a musician, **it is important to recognise the diversity of roles that musicians play across a complex and changing landscape and therefore the breadth of networks that any one individual would need to engage with** and also, the very definition of talent in the everyday context of a working musician.

Renowned music educator Peter Renshaw, formerly of the Yehudi Menuhin School and Guildhall School of Music & Drama, refers to the subtle changing landscape of music training in the last decade in his recent paper, *Being in Tune*.[25] He asks the extent to which conservatoires, colleges and other training organisations are willing to re-examine their priorities and rearticulate the assumptions underlying what they do. How far are they preparing their arts practitioners to respond creatively to the massive changes taking place in society?

Renshaw conducted research with collaborative arts practitioners with a strong track record in participatory arts practice and identified key distinct outcomes of this kind of work:

- Strengthening people's self-esteem, self-respect and sense of who they are through participating in the arts.
- Developing a sense of belonging by breaking down feelings of alienation and isolation through working collaboratively in arts projects.

The Guildhall's Dialogue Project explicitly reveals these outcomes. An interviewee music student frames this as more of an understanding or approach:

> I am clear in my own practice and training delivery that a lot of community music training is in fact an orientation to a type of approach and that that approach is pretty much the same with all groups – reflective practice, creative group work, empowerment strategies, understanding inclusion etc. [26]

Other studies have revealed that employers of music teachers have trouble determining who will have skills which complement musical talents,

24. Ibid, p.5.
25. Renshaw, Peter, *Being - In Tune: A Provocation Paper*, Guidhall School of Music & Drama, (2013) (URL: http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/sites/default/files/research/Being_In-tune_Report_Oct_2013.pdf)
26. Unattributed interview, video (URL: http://www.gsmd.ac.uk/youth_adult_learning/creative_learning/projects/)

leading to effective practice. A portfolio career also has implications for the networks that individuals operate within. Without a wider understanding of the skillsets and qualifications a musician needs to have to enable working across sectors, employers can fall back on who they know and trust, creating a tendency for inclusivity. Employers in Kathryn Deane's study *Employing Community Musicians* are clearly uncomfortable with this dynamic.

> Inclusiveness – this is tricky. It can be such a closed network. I am receptive to [practitioners] getting in touch if they can invite me to see something. Perhaps we could look at ways in which practitioners can share examples of their work more easily. [27]

Below, **David, 24** explains the different attributes he considers important in being a musician and leading the participation of others, his views on talent, and the role of networks in his career:

> My musicianship is good but not what makes people remember me. My talent is relating to my audience. You need to be willing to be a fool and have the confidence to let go. I have to lead the band as well. In improvising music you need to let go and let it come through you into your hands and the same is true with people - here I am - Ta Da!
>
> This confidence in performance is also crucial for teaching or musical direction. And crucial for building relationships and trust. It's also a kind of being present, in the moment, in building relationships in general.
>
> **You can always hear when someone has a spark that can't be learned. Talent is the indefinable spark. I relate talent to young people. I work with a few thousand kids but can hear the spark that identifies talent. Talent is not universal nor is it necessarily important if you want something enough and can be good at it, you can make a life of it. Lots of people waste talent or lose it along the way.**
>
> I say yes to most things - do a lot of freebies and this is always rewarded. The people who you network with will sometime be your audience. I could work with 150 people as a musical director and then, 10 of these might come to a gig of mine a year later. Then one of them might end up doing publicity for me with a professional discount. It's an on-going cycle. If you see networking as an exchange of skills, it really helps everybody.[28]

"You can always hear when someone has a spark that can't be learned. Talent is the indefinable spark."

One of the most significant outcomes of the digital revolution in the music industry is the inevitable disruption of hierarchies and established industrial practices. Not only does this indicate shifts in social norms, attitudes and behaviour but also a shift in our understanding of the creative process itself.

There are profound shifts in thinking about who creates and how in technologies such as SoundCloud at the same time as television programmes such as *The X Factor* emphasise the traditional hierarchies of power with experts in the industry deciding fates, and yet the role of public opinion is still prevalent there as well.

Below, we profile Sean, a 23-year-old musician making a living part-time

27. Dean, Kathryn, 'Employing community musicians – an ArtWorks Navigator artists lab', Sound Sense, May 2013 (URL: http://www.academia.edu/3815978/Employing_community_musicians_-_an_ArtWorks_Navigator_artists_lab)

28. David, personal interview with the RSA, November 2013.

from his work in electronic music. He has participated in bands since his mid-teens, performing live throughout the last eight years. Although Sean had formal music tutoring (achieving Grade 7 in vocals, and receiving tuition in guitar and piano) and an inspiring music programme at secondary school that enabled him to play large concerts and travel abroad, he found the skills he really valued through learning on his own. He described his learning journey as starting with listening to anything that anyone recommended, to exploring processes with a laptop, a microphone or software that captured what he wanted. This approach influenced Sean's choice of electronic music and its particular facility of being able to be created at home:

I chose music as a defiance to school. Electronic music had no rules, a kind of blank slate – I learned how to use everything from scratch. Often those who do music from the home are driven by taking a more independent approach to music. It lets me *play*, putting everything into the sampler – a simple strip of audio.

I put up a song. It was easy. People want to hear something fresh, new and it's accessible; it's free. It happens to hit a note where bloggers start to talk about it, often quite poetically. Other listeners can lay claim to it, spreading it to their networks and friends. This happened with our very first song and my band became quite a big deal. Our first song got over 800,000 hits. Immediately lawyers and promoters were in touch and our business was born. It's a canon-izing process. It begins to integrate you within a musical canon – you are a part of the dialogue. You're taken seriously by consumers and the industry.

You are the most in control because you are the agency. The relationship between action and result is so close. If someone emails you, you email them back… Both parties are trying to work out whether this relationship is for them. The industry can see you are able to generate demand but their interest is for the future. Is there a real world value for the investor? People keep tabs on artists and wait to see if they adapt and continue to evolve. We had contact with bookers, promoters, but little with decision makers. The label wants to know if we are really serious - are we able to talk about what we do and are we in it for the long game?

Digital opens up particular kinds of exchange. We were catapulted into the musical game by huge networks of people we don't know which brought us into contact with people we now know in the real world that help us work. People on a mass scale exchanging ideas freely with an unidentified number of people is incredibly powerful. It puts you on show. Supply and demand means you have a road-tested product. There's a hand-me-down dynamic. Anyone who is involved in these sorts of digital networks (Twitter/ SoundCloud/ tumblr) is getting access to so much content. I find 'consumer' is an accurate description for the kind of engagement that is taking place.

This network is interwoven with layers of degrees of authenticity – it's a cobweb. Many people do this for love of music. And then there is the layer of trend-setting, knowing what's cool, what's happening and this is a direct way of accessing that. People are super hungry for the new stuff. And some want to be competitive and want to be there first. Then there are the bloggers - bloggers rely on other bloggers to pass it around. People get their music from each other. The established sites have become so definitive. And then there is the actual development of the genre. Particular tropes develop which then influence others and a kind of musical dialogue ensues.

Talent is an understanding of the materials that you use and the articulation of those materials with a degree of flair and sympathy and an understanding of context and meaning. Technique and involvement with the practical side of what you do no doubt contributes massively but adept people can be talentless too.[29]

29. Sean, personal interview with the RSA, November 2013.

Finally, Elijah, founder of Butterz record label, tells the story of founding the label. From this account, a journey from fan to entrepreneur is clear. **Music networks influence new approaches to doing business and making music.** All business ventures constantly wrestle with the tension between exploiting existing productive niches and exploring new types of products. Butterz has established rules which keep challenging the output to find new forms, and collaborations at the fringes of music mean that Elijah aspires for Butterz "to be known in loads of different circles for different reasons" - a diversified strategy suitable for changing times in the music world:

Butterz originally began as a blogspot. I was blogging about grime in 2007. It was at the same time I was at university. A lot of the other grime blogs that I used to read had really slowed down on their productivity; they'd basically all stopped blogging at the same time. So, I just used the opportunity to reach out to a lot of people that I liked that weren't getting coverage elsewhere. This was at the same time that I was meeting Skilliam at university and we were playing tunes; I was one of the few people at uni that had decks in my room.

We decided to do a show on the university radio and it kind of hopped along from there. We got the opportunity to do a pilot show on Rinse FM in November 2008. We were asking for feedback for weeks, we kept on doing cover shows. We were doing cover shows for about five months and then officially joined, just as I finished university in 2009….

Originally we came up for the idea of the label, maybe in March of 2009. It was always in the back of our minds that we wanted to do it. I had a conversation with [grime artist] Terror Danjah... He said, "I'll be involved and I'll make you tunes for the label." The first two tunes, *Bipolar* and *Air Bubble*, he made them both on the phone while I was talking to him. I didn't know him that well at the time… I had the idea to get a remix of one *Air Bubble*. I think I sent it to maybe four producers and started playing them on our Rinse show. People kept asking me for the parts to remix the tune. So, I asked Terror if I could put the parts on my blog and let anyone remix it. He was pretty apprehensive about doing it at the start but then he said, "If you think it's a good idea, let's roll with it and see what happens." Within a few weeks, we had over 150 remixes, and that was something that had never been seen before – in our area of music anyway. People were calling it an open-source label, and it just made us think about how we put out our music. It's not just about a record… or when you put out something, it doesn't mean it's finished. Every record is a project that could maybe go on forever, and in the most positive way possible...

It's weird being a corner of music, and you've got your crew and people think you don't interact with other people, but certain times those little gestures just go a long way… [For example], Swindle and Silkie both have so many similarities in their music, but they've been pushed to different people for a long time...A lot of people always hit us up with dream collabs and requests that they want to see. Swindle and Silkie is one of the ones that always cropped up. I think they just linked up out of that. They didn't know each other before music but they said, "Look, everyone keeps saying that I need to do a tune with you," and the feeling was mutual…even to this day people are like, "I want another Swindle and Silkie record." But this kind of unwritten rule we've had with the label is to try not to do two releases by the same people. I hope there will be more Swindle and Silkie, but not on Butterz because we're trying to keep the variety poppin'...we [also] had this rule of not having two solos. So, I said, "If you're going to do another release on Butterz, it has to be with someone else."

Butterz in the next few years, I just want it to be something that people can't pin down. As we started, we were a blog and then it kind of developed into a record label and now a lot of people know it for parties. When we did a

collaboration with Mishka from New York, we were known in the streetwear circuit...

I think as long as we keep doing creative things, it's going to keep opening creative doors, in terms of where you're known and in terms of where the music can get heard. In terms of the artists on the label, they're all doing completely different things with what they want to do with their career, so Butterz is going to be known in loads of different circles for different reasons and that's how I want to keep it. I don't want it to easily be summed up in one sentence. It's going to be difficult for anyone to compete with, because we're not competing with anyone or we don't know what we're doing ourselves. We're kind of just doing things on feeling rather than trying to get somewhere. [30]

30. Elijah, interview from December 2012, excerpts reproduced with permission of Red Bull Music Academy; full text available online (URL: http://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/magazine/butterz-interview)

Progressive practice: organisations providing alternative channels for talent

In this chapter, we profile three organisations which are making interventions which focus on the role of networks, and broaden the definition of 'talent', in order to help musicians adapt to the changing conditions outlined in the previous sections. **the hub** works across the UK to develop the sector through networks and innovative partnerships. It is based on their principle that meaningful development will only happen through looking at the ecology of the industry and music communities. **More Music** has established a programme - Stages Live - which immerses emerging musicians with the 'professionalism' necessary to complement their musical talent and translate it into commercial success through live performance. **In Harmony Liverpool** is inspired by El Sistema, a Venezuelan project bringing youth orchestra to inner city schools and seeks to provide a cohesive force for wider social change. Working in West Everton at the Faith School, 200 children aged 3 to 14 take part for five to ten hours per week, and have performed on local and national stages.

the hub

the hub engages in initiatives which build, strengthen and diversify development of the sector through networks and innovative partnerships. They base their programmes on the principle that meaningful development will only happen through looking at the ecology of the industry and music communities.

This comes at a time of significant investment in music provision for young people. Regional music development agencies such as Generator[31] are the most significant mechanisms for this and usually linked to any national initiative such as Musical Futures[32] or Youth Music.[33] Arts Council England on behalf of the Department for Education are investing more than £171m in the creation of a network of music education centres

31. http://www.generator.org.uk
32. https://www.musicalfutures.org/about
33. http://www.youthmusic.org.uk

across the UK.[34] the hub distinguishes its approach from the offers of membership organisations or development agencies such as Generator, which focus upon advice and guidance, training programmes and the promotion of events, primarily for the mainstream music industry. In the words of director Julia Payne, the hub pursues:

> ...targeted and intense engagement with those independent of genre, independent of label, independent of mind and spirit. We want to foster a community that considers sharing as a core part of what they do, not just the communications element but how to consciously bring in sharing ideas and practice from the beginning. So for example this might be a product, in which case we might be looking for open source access or process, in how a venue might build access for musical development. We look for sharing the approach at the heart of the project.
>
> We hope to create a community of the curious and generous. Networks are at the core of our work, both in how and who we work with. We pass on networks and generate new ones. The sector must develop the artist, producer and promoter or the music ecology doesn't work.
>
> [Through the New Music Plus project that was developed by PRS for Music Foundation in partnership with The Hub] we have paired producers with their counterparts in unfamiliar settings to promote a 360 learning environment, foster collaboration and develop talent. This also requires the artist to work differently. Through the project, we and PRSF bring networks of these partners together quarterly and themethese events to focus on a different area of learning. These networks are key to it working and ensure that the learning and development continue beyond the lifetime of the project. For example, a producer and artist working with the Edinburgh Art Festival developed a relationship with Turner Contemporary art gallery through the learning networks and will go on to work with them.[35]
>
> We encourage sharing of both content and relationships. So, a very tangible product such as a toolkit for example could be uploaded onto a range of websites and therefore reach more people. But also we are developing a programme entitled Semesters of Learning in which we will have webinars, blogs, resource material available and most importantly, the opportunity to say what you think, not just as a music professional responding to current working conditions but also as the man in the street as a valued listener.[36]

the hub's approach might also enable the potential to overcome the disjointed nature of training and development across the sector and the challenge of closed networks. Julia defines talent as follows:

> **Talent is a fundamental aspect of all roles in music; artist, promoter, producer. Definitions for each would be:**
>
> - **Artist: an ability to make work and connect with an audience.**
> - **Producer: an ability to put together projects that are more than the sum of their parts. A curator of location, artist and audience.**
> - **Promoter: an ability to find the right artist for the right venue or event and the ability to persuade an audience to come.**

34. http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/our-investment/funding-programmes/music-education-hubs/

35. http://prsformusicfoundation.com/Partnerships/Professional-Development/New-Music-Plus.../New-Music-Plus...UK

36. Julia Payne, personal interview with the RSA, November 2013.

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34. http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/our-investment/funding-programmes/music-education-hubs/

35. http://prsformusicfoundation.com/Partnerships/Professional-Development/New-Music-Plus.../New-Music-Plus...UK

36. Julia Payne, personal interview with the RSA, November 2013.

quality-of-life; a large proportion of well-off, middle class children study music without expecting to make it their primary career.

There are social and intellectual spillovers from studying music, and particularly if engagement begins young. Access to music is of particular importance because music has particular social and psychological benefits. Indeed there are emerging research findings regarding the relationship between music and subjective well-being.[37]

The El Sistema model of community development through music practice is profiled below in its incarnation in Liverpool, led by the Liverpool Philharmonic with local partners and known as In Harmony. This follows the tradition of programmes that integrate music across the curriculum and see it as community-building beyond the school and professional development for the teaching staff. In the last ten years there

has been an increased emphasis on fostering creative and collaborative learning in schools. For example Creativity Culture & Education's (CCE) Creative Partnerships programme brought creative workers such as artists, architects and scientists into schools to work with teachers.

El Sistema started in Venezuela in 1975 and seeks to use music education, founded on inclusive ensemble work, as a vehicle for social action. A study led by Andrea Creech at the Institute of Education in London reviewed 277 programmes from 58 countries in addition to the 400,000 Venezuelan children participating in that national network.[38] According to the study, the common approach of Sistema programmes cultivates an 'affluence of spirit' and is founded on holistic principles of collective, cooperative education characterised by trust, support for self-esteem, empathy, teamwork, commitment, structure and discipline. Sistema programmes aim for a holistic approach and high aspirations, involving wide community engagement and support for social and emotional development: musical, cognitive and creative.

37. MacDonald, Raymond, Kreutz, Gunter and Mitchell, Laura (eds.), *Music, Health, and Wellbeing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

38. Creech, Andrea, et al., 'El Sistema and Sistema-Inspired Programmes', 2013, (URL: http://sistemaglobal.org/litreview/)

Evaluation of Sistema programmes globally has revealed that Sistema is most impactful when partnerships extend beyond the school, and when teacher development encourages dual aims of social and musical development.

In Harmony is based in West Everton at the Faith Primary School and The Beacon Church of England Primary School. Since 2009 over 200 children aged 3 to 14 take part for five to ten hours per week, and have performed on local and national stages.

Recent evaluation work found that the leadership role provided by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic is a potent partner in generating community pride, securing external financial support, and raising In Harmony's profile through the affiliation with the In Harmony performing group: West Everton Children's Orchestra. The high quality musical interventions made possible through the orchestra are arguably critical to the quality of the musical pedagogy and its impact on the children. Key findings of the evaluation include:

- Data on educational attainment at Faith Primary School continues to evidence significant quantitative improvements in children's academic performance and positive impact on the significant number of children with Special Educational Needs.
- Attendance figures at Faith Primary School have improved with a significant decrease in absence rates across the school.
- Children and young people continue to feel excited at taking part in In Harmony, reporting a sense of confidence, achievement, commitment, belonging and pride.
- Data on musical attainment demonstrates quantitative improvements in the musical skills being developed, with Ofsted confirming a high quality music programme.
- Data on children's well-being demonstrates an emerging positive trend.
- The West Everton Community report increased pride and continuing enthusiasm for In Harmony. Residents feel more involved in their community, with parents reporting improved relationships with their children and schools, and feelings of improved wellbeing.[39]

However, the evaluation also noted the pressure that music faces in competition for limited time within the school curriculum. In Harmony teaching is not fully integrated into other subjects, and the music teaching expertise pre-existing among other teachers is not drawn upon. The commitment required to achieve what is defined as musical 'excellence' is not for everyone, and there are competing interests that children might seek to pursue. As the programme becomes established, regular and normal, it loses its novelty. Now in its fourth year, sustaining excitement among participants, and sharing the potential of the Sistema approach to transform wider pedagogies, requires sustained reflection and improvement.

39. Burns, Susanne and Bewick, Paul, In Harmony Liverpool Interim Report: Year Three, August 2012 (URL: http://www.ihse.org.uk/sites/default/files/In%20Harmony%20Liverpool%20Year%203%20Interim%20Report%20-%20March%202012.pdf)

Evaluators note significant successes, but urge the project not to consider itself a static model – rather, it should evolve into an ongoing learning process, which engages a wider range of community-based institutions.

The experience of In Harmony Liverpool, a programme inspired by El Sistema, highlights that there are transferable approaches to widening the benefits of music participation from different corners of the globe. Importantly, the nature of the project – with a whole school invited for significant involvement in a collective musical practice – means that musical learning is an inclusive communal process of self-discovery, and this affects a wider sense of identity and potential. It explicitly encourages the realisation among young people of their own value as human beings and as unique and talented individuals, using their own judgement and that of their immediate, proximate social network. Secondarily, as a public and philanthropic investment, "El Sistema is a way of developing people…it presents the opportunity to develop musical ability in a more democratic and affordable way."[40]

40. Marshall Marcus, CEO European Union Youth Orchestra, Founder & Chair Sistema Europe, Trustee In Harmony Sistema England, personal communication with the RSA, November 2013.

Recommendations

Who is benefitting from shifting concentrations of power in the digital age? YouTube is a new concentration, while consumers benefit from free access to select from an immense de-concentration of sources of music production. Emerging artists now face a more risky, entrepreneurial terrain to navigate than record labels once offered. They need to leverage other skills such as marketing, sound production and web development, and they have new incentives and opportunities to develop other proficiencies in the pursuit of a musical career. Artists perhaps have more power to determine their trajectory, but it comes with responsibility and requires their own investment. They change tactics as the old revenue models are shrinking; but many new revenue streams pay lowly rewards, themselves contributing to the shrinking of the record industry. The relative financial viability of live performance versus recorded music privileges different attributes of musicians and lifestyles.

At this time of rapid change in how music is shared and how talent is channelled for commercial and personal reward and recognition, there are several initiatives which would serve to capture the transformative potential of music participation. **Ability is distributed more widely than the resources available to develop it into talent, and talent is distributed more widely than the concentrated financial rewards enjoyed by superstars and executives.**

It follows that our recommendations are aimed at broadening the allocation of resources to develop talent. We encourage participation in networks which distribute music with less mediation from existing concentrations of power which have been transferred from elsewhere. We call for greater transparency in the factors which lead key institutions and platforms for music to host, suggest and promote different music. To capture the potential empowerment of artists and democratisation of taste for music promised by online peer-to-peer networks, a range of other supporting measures need to be taken across the wider music world.

Recommendations, drawing on the research process and findings outlined above, are as follows:

Since talent is a fuzzy concept, there is benefit simply from answering the question "what do we mean when we talk about talent?

First, all would benefit from a more open definition of what constitutes talent. **Music institutions, with their stakeholders, should develop and publish their definition of talent as part of their wider mission statement.** Since talent is a fuzzy concept, there is benefit simply from answering the question "what do we mean when we talk about talent?"

Second, to best capture the benefits of widening participation in music, **programmes should create opportunities for stakeholders in various music worlds to bridge professions and sectors.** By connecting music to the wider arts sector and creative industries, this would develop in musicians the pedagogical expertise to widen participation through a variety of types of engagement.

Third, there should be **further research into the psychological effects of music participation in a digital age**. One impact of new technologies is to redistribute audience attention with a 'long tail'. Whereas previously we all watched or listened to a handful of channels in our millions, we now also have millions of outputs being watched by small numbers of people on YouTube. While on the one hand this is perhaps more inclusive because we have a bigger market of producers (with the low barriers to entry afforded by access to technology), on the other hand we still only have blunt tools to measure merit (comments, views, likes), which can serve to encourage and discourage. Online performance and sharing is especially dependent on a radically dynamic social network, which for many people is formed *through* participation in the music world. The public transparency of feedback may also accentuate the extent to which success is defined socially, less individually, and less through judgements of elites. **Research should investigate how the impact of online feedback shapes music in a different way**, and differs compared to traditional patterns through which people consider their talent develops; subject to acknowledgement, encouragement and criticism from others face-to-face.

Fourth, institutions should consider the ways in which attributes unrelated to musical talent affect the processes of filtering information and selecting among competing talents. An instructive example comes from the introduction of blind auditions behind screens, concealing identity. The number of women in US orchestras grew from 5 percent in 1970 to 25 percent in 1997. Statistical analysis by the National Bureau for Economic Research estimates that between 25 percent and 46 percent of this change is attributed to the introduction of blind auditions.[41] **Those concerned with identifying and developing talent should consider how they are affected by pre-conceived notions of what talent 'looks like', and take actions which encourage assessment of talent free from mediating factors which aren't considered relevant**.

Fifth, while exclusivity is a key attribute of what makes networks efficient, we need to better understand how initiatives to develop talent can have positive as well as negative impacts. In broad, global networks, where most participants would not start from a position of seeking to discriminate in talent development, we need to better understand how established networks and pathways reinforce themselves through leveraging the power of other resources. All network structures involve trade-offs – but we would all benefit from more explicitly understanding what those are. **The effectiveness of initiatives to develop and support talent in music should be evaluated, and resources for initiatives should be allocated on the basis of effectiveness**. For example, support for talent development and recognition in non-mainstream genres such as 'black music' in the UK. It is also worth considering the impact of talent development on individuals. For example:

> There are also negative social stigmas attached to both the gifted label and the categorization of the child as ungifted…children who see themselves as being gifted or see their own ability as an entity are less effective learners

41. Goldin, Claudia and Rouse, Cecilia, 'Orchestrating impartiality: the impact of "blind" auditions on female musicians', NBER Working Paper 5903 (1997).

than children who see their abilities as incremental or growing through effort to learn.[42]

Finally, the most puzzling question is how we broaden the definition of talent without diluting it. Talent is a label which people use to differentiate, so we can't all be talented in the same field. One direction could be for influential institutions (such as schools, employers, and public services) to emphasise the value of *different* talents. This follows the approach of the Connected Communities programme of work at the RSA, whose work has highlighted the different types of assets that individuals can command within their communities. More broadly, many public and third sector agencies are considering developing 'asset-based' approaches. This represents an inversion in traditional thinking about how interventions create social change. Rather than focusing on addressing deficits in individuals and communities, the definition of resources are reconsidered to include the existing skills, capacity and knowledge of local residents - their passions and interests and their relationships to each other and institutions.

The reasons *different* talents are valued differently are still not well-understood, but it is likely that we project other desirable characteristics onto our concept of talent. Talent is often understood as a subject of collective judgement in the performing arts (such as the ITV show *Britain's Got Talent*), but it would be progressive to experiment with narratives which showcase creativity and ability beyond art and sport to include the lived experience of most people's working and domestic lives. We often cast judgement as to whether someone has *made the most* of their talent – on our terms, rather than asking whether they have *made the best* of their talent – on their own terms. One recent study by the New Economics Foundation sought to break the association in the public imagination between high pay at work, talent, and a contribution to social value - the study estimated the social value created (and destroyed) by a set of contrasting jobs.[43]

In channelling talent, we would all benefit from appreciating our sensitivities to the power others have in influencing the values and labels we give ourselves.

Talent might benefit from the equivalent of the Dove *Real Beauty* campaign – which attracted an uprising of consumer appreciation by highlighting that people's impression of the beauty of others was often more positive than their own self-perception. We won't ever get to a situation in which everyone is considered equally beautiful, or talented. However, in channelling talent, we would all benefit from appreciating our sensitivities to the power others have in influencing the values and labels we give ourselves.

Talent is contingent on social networks which include all of us. We therefore have a social responsibility to remove barriers to talent development, to understand that talent is mediated and realised through other attributes and privileges, and to champion the benefits of participating in creative practices for individuals and society.

42. Feldhusen, John F., 'Talent as an Alternative Conception of Giftedness.' *Gifted Education International* 11, no. 3 (1996): 124-27.

43. Steed, Susan and Kersley, Helen, *A bit rich*, (London: nef, 2009). (URL: http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/a-bit-rich)

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