

The background of the cover features a light green field with faint, white musical notation, including a treble clef and a staff with notes. A dark blue horizontal band at the top right contains a more prominent, stylized musical staff with notes. The overall design is clean and modern, with a focus on music-related imagery.

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# Lied und populäre Kultur Song and Popular Culture

Jahrbuch des Zentrums  
für Populäre Kultur und Musik

Musik und Professionalität  
Music and Professionalism

WAXMANN

Lied und populäre Kultur  
Song and Popular Culture

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Song and Popular Culture

Jahrbuch des Zentrums für  
Populäre Kultur und Musik

62. Jahrgang – 2017

herausgegeben von

Knut Holtsträter und Michael Fischer

Musik und Professionalität  
Music and Professionalism



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# Vorwort

Unter dem Titel „Musik und Professionalität“ möchte das Zentrum für Populäre Kultur und Musik (ZPKM) in seinem Jahrbuch für 2017 Beiträge zusammenbringen, die eine Kategorie problematisieren, welche Popularität und Musik auf verschiedenen Ebenen berührt. Das Adjektiv „professionell“ ist schnell zur Hand, wenn es um die qualitative Einschätzung von populärmusikalischen Handlungen und Produkten geht. Sei es, dass etwas „professionell gemacht“ ist, sich eine „professionelle Haltung“ finden lässt oder der Akteur einfach ein „Profi“ ist oder zumindest so agiert. Das „Professionelle“ als Kategorie der Zuschreibung funktioniert in unserer alltäglichen und Fachkommunikation, es erleichtert uns in gewisser Weise die Verständigung über gemeinsam verhandelte Phänomene.

Oft bleibt dabei aber ungeklärt, wer oder was eigentlich bestimmt, wer oder was professionell ist. Gibt es neben den auf die arbeitsteilige Gesellschaft ausgerichteten Definitionen von Profession und Professionalisierung womöglich noch andere Konzepte von Professionalität (hinsichtlich Virtuosität, Arbeitsethos, Lebensunterhalt, Arbeitsteilung und Arbeitsfeldern) und wie unterscheiden sie sich untereinander? Welche Kompetenzen müssen „Profis“ heutzutage besitzen und welcher Gestalt sind die Aneignungsstrategien?

Sehr glücklich sind wir, dass dieser Themenbereich von verschiedenen disziplinären Blickwinkeln aus betrachtet wird: Mit den Beiträgen von Charlie Bramley und Thomas Krettenauer sind zwei verschiedene Ansätze aus dem Bereich der Musikpädagogik vertreten. Anita Jóri und Martin Lücke betrachten das Phänomen der Professionalisierung bezüglich der Ausbildung für die Musikwirtschaft, wohingegen Timor Kaul mit qualitativen Interviews in einem Szenekontext arbeitet, der sich abseits von Institutionen definiert. Thomas Renz betrachtet einige Teilaspekte seiner großen empirischen Studie zu Jazzmusikerinnen, während Risto Pekka Penanen das Thema in eine historische Dimension bringt. Die Gegenstände von José Gálvez, Benjamin Düster und Christopher Jost sind im Bereich der Gegenwart und der audiovisuellen Medien angesiedelt, auch hier geht es um die Frage, wie Professionalisierung inszeniert, zelebriert oder einfach deren Effekte genutzt werden. Die Herausgeber bedanken sich bei allen Autorinnen und Autoren, die sich auf diesen Jahrbuchschwerpunkt eingelassen und die Mühe auf sich genommen haben, ihre bisherigen Themen pointiert zusammenzufassen und neu zu beleuchten oder ein neues Thema zu erschließen.

Neben dem großen thematischen Schwerpunkt geben wir wie seit jeher auch freien Beiträgen in unserem Jahrbuch Raum, welche die stetige Forschungsaktivität der verschiedenen Fächer im Bereich von Lied und populärer Kultur dokumentieren. Den drei Verfasserinnen und Verfassern Beate Flath, Christina Pileggi und Hans-Werner Retterath sei herzlich für ihre Einsendungen gedankt. Freie Beiträge

oder Beitragsvorschläge können nach wie vor und unabhängig von den Regularien und Terminvorgaben der Call for Articles gerne an uns gerichtet werden.

Schließlich sei auch den Autorinnen und Autoren herzlich gedankt, die mit ihren Beiträgen in unserem Rezensionsteil dazu beitragen, den wissenschaftlichen Diskurs für unseren Forschungsbereich lebendig zu erhalten. Auch für diese Rubrik freuen wir uns immer über Titelvorschläge oder Angebote von Rezensionen.

Ein besonderer Dank geht an Pascal Lienhard, der im Rahmen seiner Tätigkeit als studentische Hilfskraft zur Fertigstellung dieses Jahrbuchs beigetragen hat.

Zum Schluss einige editorische Anmerkungen: Wie im letzten Jahrgang unterstützen wir als Herausgeber die Schreibweisen und Gepflogenheiten des Amerikanischen und Britischen Englisch. Das mag beim ersten Durchblättern besonders hinsichtlich der Interpunktion und bei einzelnen Wörtern irritieren, bildet aber, wie wir finden, die Vielfalt der Forschungslandschaft besser ab als eine bereinigende Formatierung in eine der beiden Möglichkeiten oder gar eine Vermischung beider. Ebenfalls bewährt haben sich die Zusammenfassungen/Summaries unmittelbar vor den jeweiligen Beiträgen. Auch hier haben wir die Auswahl der Sprache den Autorinnen und Autoren überlassen.

Es sei noch auf einen weiteren Aspekt hingewiesen, der in der Vorbereitung dieses Jahrgangs besonders wichtig wurde: In den deutschsprachigen Beiträgen haben wir die von der Universität Freiburg verabschiedeten Richtlinien für gendergerechte Sprache angewendet, und zwar indem wir an den betreffenden Stellen nach Möglichkeit beide Genera angeben („Musikerinnen und Musiker“). Bei den historischen Beiträgen fällt dies nicht besonders auf, denn meistens sind die dort thematisierten Personen eindeutig einem sozialen Geschlecht zugeordnet. Die Sprachregelung wird bei den Beiträgen offensichtlich, in denen es um aktuelle Themen und empirische Daten geht (u.a. bei den Beiträgen von Jóri, Lücke und Renz). Geht man mit der Linguistik davon aus, dass das Sprechen das Denken beeinflusst, so haben diese Beiträge in der Redaktionsphase (unverhofft) eine weitere Dimension gewonnen. In ihnen klingt nun oft die Frage durch, welche Rolle das biologische und soziale Geschlecht für die Professionalität im Musikbereich spielt. Oft lässt der redaktionelle Zusatz „Musikerinnen und Musiker“ die Frage offen, wie es gefühlt oder tatsächlich um die Beteiligung (und Benachteiligung) im Bereich des Kulturmanagements und der Jazz-Szene steht. Auch wenn dadurch einige Passagen dieser Beiträge an Lesefreundlichkeit verlieren – den betroffenen Autorinnen und Autoren sei an dieser Stelle für ihre Nachsicht gedankt –, sei dies in Kauf genommen, um Sie, geehrte Leserin, geehrter Leser, auf weitere wichtige Diskussionen einzustimmen.

Knut Holtsträter und Michael Fischer, Freiburg i. Br. im Mai 2017

# **MUSIK UND PROFESSIONALITÄT – MUSIC AND PROFESSIONALISM**



Charlie Bramley

## **Beyond the Boundaries of Professionalism**

### **Introducing Anarcho-Pop into the Lexicon of Popular Music Studies and Education**

#### **Summary**

*This article will critically explore the role of professionalism within popular music culture, in particular the legitimacy of its boundaries as a precursor for music education. While the identity of popular music was perhaps historically conceived in opposition to the highbrow professionalism of Western art music, there has been over time an increasing presence of professionalism that has been pivotal to the development of popular music culture and its influence in the educational sector. The fight to be taken seriously within education for instance has required pedagogical approaches that require assimilation into existing government curricula. This has resulted in a music education, broadly speaking, that has created an image of music that is typically based upon deeply embedded notions of music as a sphere of specialism and elitism. I want to therefore introduce the concept of Anarcho-Pop, in order to demonstrate an alternative, improvised approach to making popular music that seeks to move beyond the boundaries of professionalism (professional/amateur; musician/non-musician; musical/unmusical, etc). Through ethnographical accounts and case-studies, I will present Anarcho-Pop as an alternative model of music-making that in its attempt to make music anarchic hopes to create an image of music that is fully accessible.*

#### **The Professionalisation of Music**

Professionalism as a term applied to music is most commonly thought of along a continuum of hierarchy – there are those with highly developed skill-sets that can routinely demonstrate standards of excellence in musicianship; then there are those amateurs or non-musicians whose perceived lack of skill sets positions them for failure under scrutiny. The historical circumstances in which this perception has been allowed into universal ubiquity are complex and varied, but we know that generally, amateur music-making was historically associated with popular, or entertainment-based music, whilst the ‘serious’, ‘professional’ music became associated

with orchestral music-making. We also have some landmarks that have certainly contributed to the assimilation of this notion of professionalism within institutional settings. Estelle Jorgensen, in her book *Transforming Music Education*, historicises such a landmark from the Middle Ages:

The development of a class of professional musicians in Europe during the Middle Ages however, established guilds which formalized requirements of musicians ... and prevented unqualified persons from entering the profession ... the technical requirements of musicians gradually increased to such a degree that by the twentieth century, professional music making lay outside the reach of the ordinary person.<sup>1</sup>

This perspective introduces the way in which such a hierarchical division of musical labour might have become normalised over successive generations. More specifically, Jacques Attali cites the medieval street jongleur musicians who antagonised a high-culture society in which a rigid division between ‘serious’ music and ‘popular’ entertainment-based music was clear:

It took centuries for music to enter commodity exchange. Throughout the Middle Ages, the jongleur remained outside society; the Church condemned him, accusing him of paganism and magical practices. His itinerant life-style made him a highly unrespectable figure.<sup>2</sup>

Attali goes on to cite a quote from the French Government in 1835: “The government could greatly improve the street music of Paris and exert a powerful influence [by having] in its pay a considerable number of musicians equipped with always well-tuned instruments, who would only play good music.”<sup>3</sup> For Attali, the sentiment of this statement ‘says everything there is to be said: about aesthetics and political control, about the rerouting of popular music toward the imposition of social norms.’<sup>4</sup>

Christopher Small describes the consequences of such a historical process as creating the perception of a ‘pyramid of musical ability’, in which therein lies a rock bottom section of the pyramid, who are no longer ‘amateurs’, but are perceived to be absent of any musical ability whatsoever:

Below this layer of the pyramid are those whose lot it is simply to contemplate and ‘appreciate’ the music objects created by composers and presented by performers ... Those who

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1 Estelle Jorgensen: *Transforming Music Education*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2003, p. 31.

2 Jacques Attali: *Noise. The Political Economy of Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1985, p. 14.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

4 *Ibid.*

do not imagine that they might ever take part in a public performance, so completely has the culture been taken over by professionalism.<sup>5</sup>

The ‘power’ of this pyramid image has been ‘instilled through the state education system and other bearers of the official values of our society’ to the extent that those at the bottom have been convinced that they could somehow be ‘unmusical’. This is, according to Small, ‘pernicious nonsense, because every human being is born with the gift of music’.<sup>6</sup> What we want to gain further clarity on however, is whether or not the dominance of the pyramid image is transformed in any fundamental way through popular music education (PME). To do so, we will need to further explore the ways in which notions of professionalism and specialism are institutionalised through music education provision, in order to gain the background context to the introduction of PME. The idea that music is a specialised activity requiring a revered skill-set that only certain individuals can attain to, is something which is pervasive and leaks itself throughout societies, but especially, it seems in the minds of those geared for active learning. Alexandra Lamont and Karl Maton have done some significant research into this area, which I think highlights the impact of such a situation on children. They draw on recent findings in the U.K. that suggest 91% of children and young people aged 7–19 liked listening to music, but only 39% engaged in music-making activities and that less than 10% opt to study music at GCSE-level on average. Most interestingly though, Maton and Lamont developed a framework for studying pupils, called Legitimation Code Theory, which devised questions that mapped onto the following different forms of learning codes:

‘relativist’ – ‘Anyone can do it, nothing special is needed’.

‘knower’ – ‘you need to have ‘natural ability’ or a ‘feel’ for it’.

‘knowledge’ – ‘You need to learn special skills or knowledge’.

‘elite’ – ‘only people with ‘natural ability’ can learn the special skills needed’.<sup>7</sup>

They then asked students a variety of questions pertaining to the perception of five different subjects: Maths, English Literature, Science, History and Music. Perhaps surprisingly to some, they found that Music topped the charts, above all other subjects for the perception of elite knowledge code. The children overwhelmingly thought that ‘only people with natural ability can learn the special skills needed’ to play music.<sup>8</sup> Lamont and Maton also found an increase in this perception as the children got closer to GCSE study, as the curricula emphasis shifted from notions of

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5 Christopher Small: *Music of the Common Tongue*. London: Calder Publications 1987, p. 179.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

7 Alexandra Lamont and Karl Maton: Choosing Music. Exploratory Studies into the Low Uptake of Music GCSE. In: *British Journal of Music Education* 25 (2008), no. 3, pp. 267–282, here p. 270.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 267.

‘independence’ and ‘creativity’ more towards efficient display of ‘skills’ and ‘knowledge’, in particular the ability to possess both ‘natural ability’ and ‘technical control’. Although a specific study, the data here points to more general issues with how ‘elite’ conceptions of musical knowledge are being disseminated that stratify musicality into distinctions between ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’, or worse, between ‘musical’ and ‘unmusical’. This is the background context then, in which PME is introduced, so the question becomes to what extent can PME’s pedagogical models hope to break this perception of music’s ‘elite knowledge code’?

## Popular Music Education

PME in educational institutions frequently includes models of learning that are based on the real-world music-learning experiences of popular musicians, thus attempting to emphasise a ‘knower’ code of musical learning.<sup>9</sup> Musical Futures is one such model that has been central to the adoption and use of popular music in many curricula, and is described as ‘a radical approach offering new and imaginative ways of engaging young people in musical activities’.<sup>10</sup> Professor of Music Education at the Institute for Education (London, U.K.) Lucy Green has been pivotal in developing the theoretical framework of informal learning at the core of Musical Futures’ approaches. Privately-funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation in collaboration with the Institute, three local education authorities in the U.K. were commissioned to implement Musical Futures in secondary schools to try and improve participation in music education at this level. Musical Futures rapidly developed, implementing its strategies in roughly 600 schools within the UK and overseas.

In terms of its approach, Musical Futures is, ‘At its heart ... a set of pedagogies that bring non-formal teaching and informal learning approaches into more formal contexts, in an attempt to provide engaging, sustainable and relevant music making activities for all young people’.<sup>11</sup> The following visual figures will illustrate attempts to integrate Musical Futures into UK National Curriculum, at Cramlington Learning Village, Northumberland, U.K:

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9 Lucy Green: *Music, Informal Learning and the School. A New Classroom Pedagogy*. Farnham: Ashgate 2008.

10 John Finney: *Music Education in England 1950–2010. The Child-Centred Progressive Tradition*. Farnham: Ashgate 2011, p. 178.

11 Musical Futures: ‘Work With Us’. <https://legacy.musicalfutures.org/resource/28109/title/musicalfuturesworkwithus> (accessed on 5 September 2015). Expired link.

	Term 1	
Y7	<b>Transition Project/Classroom Workshop</b> <i>Ben E King/Sean Kingston</i> Four chord trick; Whole class composition  Large Ensembles	<b>Landmarks</b>  Chords I, IV, V, VI Minim/semibreve Subtle dynamics  <i>Revisits transition unit from Primary</i>
	<b>Bands project</b> <i>Ting Tings</i> Band Carousel; Small group compositions  Small Ensembles	<b>Landmarks</b>  Syncopation Strophic Form  <i>New band instrumental skills, now composing in smaller groups</i>
Y8 R1	<b>Motivate a couch potato – Composing</b> <i>Needing You – David Morales</i> <i>Various exemplars for each style</i> Whole class workshops; Small group compositions; Sequencing using Fruity Loops  Techno, Samba, Salsa, Hip hop, Bhangra, Country, Ambient, Eastern, Funky	<b>Landmarks</b>  Regular/irregular rhythms Half time tempo Non-western instruments Synthesis Conducting Contrasts in texture Structuring phrases Variation of phrases Instrumental ranges  <i>Students working in small groups paying attention to stylistic conventions.</i>

Fig. 1: Musical Futures: Music Curriculum Overview and Mapping of Progression<sup>12</sup>

12 <https://www.musicalfutures.org/resource/21/title/cramlingtonlearningvillage> (accessed on 24 October 2012). Expired link.

Primary Music (Wider still, and wider)

	Year Key Stage 1		Lower Key Stage 2		Upper Key Stage 2	
Pitch	High/Low	➔	Steps/leaps	Pentatonic Patterns	➔	Major/minor
Duration	Long/short Steady Beat	Rhythmic patterns	Strong beats Weak beats	Metre Crotchets/Quavers	2,3,4	5,6,9 Dotted/ swung
Dynamics	Loud/quiet	Gradation	➔	Strong contrasts	➔	Accents & articulation
Tempo	Fast/slow	Gradation	➔	Comparing tempi	➔	Tempo for mood effects
Timbre	Exploring	Wood, metal, strings	➔	Orchestral family timbres	➔	Electronic sounds
Texture	One sound Several Sounds	Layers	Melody Accompaniment	➔	Weaving parts	Chords
Structure	Beginnings Endings	Simple repeated patterns	Question & answer	Ostinato	Rounds	Ternary forms

Fig. 2: Table demonstrating how Musical Futures methods translate to curriculum objectives at U.K. Primary School levels<sup>13</sup>

Secondary Music at CLV

	Year 7		Year 8		Year 9	
Pitch	Harmony I IV V VI	Simple Intervals	➔	Instrumental Ranges	Aural identification	Perfect/imperfect Cadences
Duration	Minim, Semibreve	Syncopation	➔	Regular/irregular	Rubato	➔
Dynamics	Subtle Contrasts	Building Tension	➔	Responding to conduction	Sforzando	➔
Tempo	➔	Building Tension	Half time	Responding to conduction	➔	Italian terms
Timbre	➔	Consonance Dissonance	Non western instruments	Synthesis	Instrumental techniques	Vocal techniques
Texture	Aural identification	Building Tension	Contrasts	➔	Homo/poly/mono- -phonic	Vocal harmonies
Structure	Strophic	➔	Structuring phrases	Variation	➔	Middles

Fig. 3: Table demonstrating how Musical Futures methods translate to curriculum objectives at U.K. Secondary School levels<sup>14</sup>

As can be seen by the figures above from the Musical Futures website, Musical Futures does shift how music classes are delivered, and there are many opportunities for full collective playing. However, despite its radical intentions, in practice, these approaches are not a rupture of existing curriculum objectives, but more accurately, a coherent mapping onto those objectives. Musical Futures wants to show children how popular musicians typically learn to play music, rather than how orchestral musicians typically learn. It elevates the chord sheet over the score, the electric guitar over the violin, and so on. In doing this, it of course opens up more opportunities to produce music in a more readily relatable fashion, enabling chil-

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

dren to learn the structures of songs and styles they already tend to know, in a more collaborative and intuitive way. This may offer hope regarding uptake of Music at GCSE, but it still relies on an initial 'knower' code that ultimately feeds into the same elite knowledge reservoirs that the curriculum demands. As such, while the route may have changed, the destination remains the same. Children are being taught a fundamentally notated means of making music. Written symbols correlate to the assumed fundamentals of musical meaning (chords, keys, harmony, etc). I would add at this stage, that the same goes for most, if not all other methods of 'teaching yourself' popular music, such as guitar tabs, chord sheets, and suchlike. There is a substantial popular music myth that 'teaching yourself music' is somehow radically different from someone else teaching you music. Of course, you can modify the parameters, set the trajectory, change the route, go faster or slower, but you're always going to end up in the same place, in terms of skills and knowledge.

Lucy Green herself has even said that popular music itself as a whole 'is not all that different to the classical style',<sup>15</sup> when it comes to its relationship to notation and orthodox musical structures. This recognition by Green inadvertently points to the major flaw in PME's attempts to suggest popular music's 'informal learning' is in any major way a departure from the orthodox destination of children's 'formal' musical learning. For instance, as Chris Philpott states, drawing on the work of Goran Folkestad, 'the moment of informal learning is an orientation to playing and making music [while] the formal moment is an orientation to learning how to play music'.<sup>16</sup> I would strongly argue that these are not that dissimilar in the Musical Futures context, since the way 'music' is conceived here is strongly loaded with ideology. What is it to make 'music' in this context? The process of 'making music' in a PME context is inextricably tied up with 'how' to make music, so the distinction becomes misleading.

Through the development of PME, there has been an explicit battle to demonstrate the pedagogical benefits of 'how popular musicians learn'.<sup>17</sup> However, somewhere amidst the success of doing so, especially the mapping of Musical Futures tasks to existing curriculum objectives, this so-called radical movement revealed a more conservative conclusion – that these models of music-making can seamlessly be institutionally legitimated as 'serious', 'professional' music. This has exposed the illusory nature of the binary between 'popular' and 'serious' as it is commonly practiced; all established (and institutionalised) musical domains agree to a musical

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15 Lucy Green: *Music on Deaf Ears*. Manchester: Manchester University Press 1990, p. 136.

16 Chris Philpott: *The Sociological Critique of Curriculum Music in England. Is Radical Change Really Possible?* In: *Sociology and Music Education*. Ed. by Ruth Wright. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing 2010, pp. 81–92, here p. S. 89.

17 Lucy Green: *How Popular Musicians Learn. A Way Ahead for Music Education*. London: Routledge 2002.

fundamentalism – that there is such a thing as correct musical structure, organised according to structuralist paradigms such as keys, scales, chords, harmony, and melody. The secondary function of this musical structure is that it can and must be fixed in time, in order to be reproducible through performance by adequately skilled performers. Education to this end then must follow a form of knowledge code. It follows that there is a distinction between those who have the skills and knowledge to ‘make’ and ‘perform’ music and those that do not yet have those abilities. If we allude back to Small’s ‘pyramid’, the ‘amateur’ in the PME landscape is more isolated than ever, as not only has PME failed to challenge musical fundamentalism, but it has pledged allegiance to it, leaving no space for anything outside.

## **Opening up Spaces of Resistance and Renewal**

It could be said that there has been a slow degradation of popular music in general from an approach to making music that at one time carried oppositional and anti-hierarchical tendencies towards a conservative assimilation into institutional legitimacy. Historically, the distinction between ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’ no matter how paper-thin carried a symbolism of rebellion that was important to popular music’s identity. And to a certain extent the degradation of that identity, while happening slowly over centuries has taken on a rapid progression over the past two decades. Consider that in 1994, Nirvana were the biggest band in the world on the basis of their on-the-edge, chaotic live performances and, at times, noise-based output. Fast-forward to today, and the same bands that had gained middle-of-the-road status in the late 90’s are continuing to headline rock festivals (Metallica, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Pearl Jam, Green Day) whilst newcomers who have smoothed the edge off alternative music have become huge successes on the back of a new stale rock music (The Killers, Kings of Leon, etc). Even consider those artists who have been considered controversial over the past two decades – artists such as Marilyn Manson, Nine Inch Nails, Hole, Slipknot, and Eminem. While these artists have often cited as pushing the edges of acceptability and legitimacy, in reality, all of their music by and large is constrained neatly within acceptable musical structures, and conforms completely to musical fundamentalism. Unlike Nirvana who were brought up on an amateur Punk-rock ‘just get up and play’ attitude (especially live), the aforementioned groups’ controversy lies mostly in their surface-level extremities, as opposed to anything that fundamentally challenges musical approach itself (with the possible exception of Eminem whose allegiances to hip hop tie him to various creative approaches that we will discuss shortly).

As Daniel Fischlin notes, rebellious sounds in music are inextricably linked to particular contexts and time periods:

The sounds of Bob Dylan's electric guitar [...] Igor Stravinsky's driving polyrhythms in *Le Sacre du Printemps* [...] and Edgar Varese's sonic non-pitch textures have all incited outraged responses or criticism because they announced the arrival of revolutionary sounds in contexts unwilling to accept them. Insofar as they pushed the generic limits and expectations of their audiences, those sounds represented resistance to orthodoxies and conventions.<sup>18</sup>

It's important to recognise that 'the introjection of new sonic textures, unheard of instrumentations [and] unimagined sonic possibilities' are not only linked to the 'opening up [of] spaces of resistance and renewal that have an important connection with emergent rights discourses',<sup>19</sup> but that on a musical level can be closed down again when those disturbed surfaces resettle. Furthermore, when they resettle, they often put down deeper roots. For instance, it was the talent-show judge Simon Cowell who had to remind a contestant who attempted to sing a cover version of Nirvana's 'Lithium', that this would have been Kurt Cobain's worst nightmare!<sup>20</sup> He was right; the antagonistic nature of noise-based music has been slowly absorbed by a mainstream entertainment industry preoccupied with talent shows and sterile musical outputs.

When we look to musical approaches then that could challenge musical fundamentalism, it is only in the approaches of improvisation where it becomes possible to play and make music either without knowing 'how' to make it, or to disregard entirely that there is such a specific thing as 'how' to make music ('formal learning'). In improvisation as an approach to music-making, we see an approach that opts out of the standard assumptions of musical fundamentalism and goes beyond the binaries of professional and amateur, prompting a 'relativist' code of musical learning that carries no imperative to subscribe to any specific knowledges or skills.

While it seems on first glance that to improvise musically is to simply generate sound that has not been pre-determined, in practice, there are such varied and conflictual accounts of improvisation as an approach to making music, that most improvisation theorists and practitioners have preferred to avoid a definition altogether, including the British improviser Derek Bailey, who said that only an academic would have the temerity to mount a theory on improvisation.<sup>21</sup> Avoiding a concrete definition was also the position of the mammoth *Oxford Handbook of*

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18 Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble and Rebel Musics: *Human Rights, Resistant Sounds, and the Politics of Music-Making*. Montreal: Black Rose Books 2003, p. 12.

19 Ibid.

20 *Nirvana Lithium World Idol Simon Cowell Hates it*. Online available via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTW3asaS5sc> (uploaded on 28 February 2010 by user 'Jesse Salvatore', accessed on 2 November 2016).

21 Derek Bailey: *Improvisation. Its Nature and Practice in Music*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press 1992, p. x.

*Critical Improvisation Studies*.<sup>22</sup> As David Borgo writes of the various terminologies associated with improvisation ('free-form', 'avant-garde', 'outside', 'contemporary', 'new', etc.), they all align themselves with particular strategies and political inclinations, which makes it difficult to unify them coherently. However, he argues that they share something fundamental:

The primary musical bond shared among these diverse performers is a fascination with sonic possibilities and surprising musical occurrences and a desire to improvise, to a significant degree, both the content and the form of the performance.<sup>23</sup>

For the purposes here, this article will explicitly abandon the idea of improvised music as a genre ('improvised music' that sounds like X, Y or Z), and instead focus on improvisation as an alternative *approach* to making music that can inhabit many forms and styles. As Knut Holtsträter writes:

[...] music which is partly or completely improvised calls into question the nature of musical-artistic expression and with it, the *Werkästhetik* as well as the manual and technical procedures and principles of composed music, expressed in such bywords as structure, form, idea and in aesthetic premises like subjectivity, expression, development.<sup>24</sup>

## The Rebellious Role of Improvisation in Popular Music

Improvisation is an approach to popular music-making that has actually been fairly prevalent in the history of popular music culture. As an approach it creates the possibility for an obliteration of formal learning altogether. As free jazz saxophonist Ornette Coleman says of his own practice: 'I've been playing music since I was a teenager, and I wasn't composing then because I didn't even know that you had to compose music to play, I mean that composing music meant different from just playing'.<sup>25</sup> Coleman's own musical training notwithstanding, this highlights Attali's own definition of composition as merely to 'to put together', which is as radical as it is simple: 'it is this demystified yet humanly dignified activity that Attali wishes to

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22 George Lewis and Benjamin Piekut: *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016, p. 3.

23 David Borgo: Negotiating Freedom. Values and Practices in Contemporary Improvised Music. In: *Black Music Research Journal* 22 (2009), no. 2, pp. 165–188, here p. 167.

24 Knut Holtsträter, Editorial. In: *Act – Zeitschrift für Musik und Performance*. Issue 5: *Analyzing and Interpreting Improvised Music* (2014), pp. 2–7, here p. 2.

25 *Interview with Ornette Coleman (Part 2)*. Online available via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdqRfHdbnXE> (uploaded on 4 February 2008 by user 'Official Bonnaroo YouTube', accessed on 23 October, 2012).

remove from the rigid institutions of specialized musical training in order to return it to all members of society'.<sup>26</sup>

There are different approaches to improvisation, which vary from improvising within certain structural constraints (i.e. within a set key), all the way to free-form improvisation with no structural constraints. As we move forward, I want to illustrate how these varying approaches have historically influenced popular music culture. For instance, Melvin Backstrom's discussion on the association between the Grateful Dead and improvisation shines further light on the association. The Grateful Dead infamously improvised jam-rock live on stage for their entire career to unprecedented success, surprising everyone when their audience fan base actually ripped up the rule books and reveled in the unpredictability of every live show, knowing that the excitement from seeing the Grateful Dead was precisely in not knowing what was going to happen each night. To make the association between free-form improvisation in particular more impactful, the previously mentioned free jazz legend Ornette Coleman actually once joined the band on stage during an improvised set, confirming David Malvinni's assertion that the Grateful Dead 'owe much to the achievements of the jazz artists of their time'.<sup>27</sup> Backstrom notes that 'despite the critiques of the value of improvisation to, and indeed its actuality in, popular music (Frith, Adorno), its importance to the Grateful Dead ... would be difficult to overstate'.<sup>28</sup>

If the Grateful Dead's association with free-form improvisation involved borrowing from complex jazz musical lexicons and structural paradigms, a far more mainstream and grassroots popular music example can be easily found in the domain of hip hop. To hear an example of the ways in which conservative 'proper' musical construction can be challenged, we can definitely hear this in hip hop musical culture generally, but particularly, in the art of Freestyling. A highly inventive practice that is normal to hip hop street culture, which has made its way into the mainstream of hip hop music. Hank Shocklee, member of the legendary Bomb Squad production team has went further to suggest that the various innovative musical strategies of hip hop have explicitly come about through hip hop's self-identification with an apparent 'lack' of formal musical training:

In dealing with rap, you have to be innocent and ignorant of music ... Trained musicians are not ignorant to music, and they cannot be innocent to it. They understand it, and

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26 Susan McClary: Afterword. *The Politics of Silence and Sound*. In: Attali: *Noise* (see nt. 2), pp. 149–160, here p. 156.

27 David Malvinni: *Grateful Dead and the Art of Rock Improvisation*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press 2013, p. 9.

28 Melvin Backstrom: Review of *The Grateful Dead in Concert. Essays on Live Improvisation*. Ed. by Jim Tuedio and Stan Spector. Jefferson, NC: McFarland 2010. In: *Critical Studies in Improvisation* 6 (2010), no. 2, pp. 1–5, here p. 1.

that's what keeps them from dealing with things out of the ordinary. For example, certain keys have to go together because you have this training and it makes musical sense to you. ... we [on the other hand] go by what feels good ... We might use a black key and a white key playing together because it works for a particular part. A musician will go 'No, those are the wrong keys. The tones are clashing.' We don't look at it that way. We believed that music is nothing but organized noise ... That's still our philosophy, to show people that this thing you call music is a lot broader than you.<sup>29</sup>

Not only does Shocklee believe in actively rebelling against certain assumptions of musical fundamentalism, but he also seems to identify himself (and other hip hop producers and rappers) as not being musicians at all. This is of course nonsense, as Shocklee and hip hop musical culture has produced some of the best and most influential popular music ever, mostly, as a direct result of these musical approaches. However, it is significant that he is bringing back this rebellious association with alternative music-making approaches (typically misunderstood as 'amateur' approaches). As Tricia Rose says of Shocklee in her book *Black Noise*: 'Shocklee believes that his ignorance of formal musical training allows him to see beyond what has been understood as correct and proper sound construction, giving him greater range of creative motion'.<sup>30</sup> For our concerns here, it is the revolutionary claim that a perceived 'lack' of musical knowledge can actually give greater musical possibilities. It is certainly the case that many experimental popular music practices have made their most valuable and potent contributions towards revolutionary popular culture when they were at their most 'lacking' in conventional musical language.

For instance, let us now look at a popular music practice that goes even further into the depths of the anarchic wing of improvisation. Enter Anarcho-Punk, and in particular, Penny Rimbaud and Crass. Rimbaud's version of Punk was anarchic through and through, importantly, right down to the fundamental rupture of musical structure itself. It was a challenge to the conservative musical fundamentalism that had been allowed to take hold of popular music culture. I will quote at length from Rimbaud as his words summarise so much of the argument I want to develop here, with regards the sort of anarchic approach to socio-musical organisation that is possible within a radical popular music movement:

People would come by and say 'can I join in?', and it didn't matter whether they could 'do' anything. I mean that seemed pointless, to do tests, if someone said they wanted to play guitar, then they did ... our rhythm guitarist never ever learnt what a chord was in the seven years that we were on the road, and wasn't actually very interested, but he did a spectacular job of making a good noise. We were reasonably unique, because most other

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29 Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal: *That's the Joint! The Hip-hop Studies Reader*. London: Routledge 2004, p. 418.

30 Tricia Rose: *Black Noise. Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press 1994, p. 120.

people were just going for formulaic 4/4, whatever that stuff is, 3 chord wonders. Well we were like 1008 chord wonders because we didn't know what any chord was anyway.<sup>31</sup>

Rimbaud's vision was to take the original Punk maxim of 'just get up and play' to a whole new level, making this approach to music-making immediately available to all, but importantly with a scope that was far broader than its more conservative Punk cousins (The Sex Pistols, etc.) who were far more interested in learning the 'basics' of musical structure in order to present a raw, noisy and surface-level revolt against mainstream commercial professionalism. However, Crass drove deep at the substance of musical fundamentalism and professionalism itself, challenging the idea that you had to learn what chords were, what the proper construction of sound was, and in doing so, allowed for an opening of musical doors that were (and still are) almost universally closed. They did what very few popular musicians are willing to do, despite their surface-level proclamations – they attacked the core of musical professionalism and specialism by stating anyone and everyone can play music right now.

So when we look at these examples together, we begin to build a picture of what the ideal improvising popular music would be – something that would bring the best of all of these elements somehow – that could introduce the notions of anti-professionalism and specialism that Crass did by saying anyone and everyone can make music immediately, laughing off the tenets of musical fundamentalism, whilst allowing for the pleasure and enjoyment of repetitive structures such as hip hop and jam rock. What would this ideal improvising popular music look and sound like?

## Introducing Anarcho-Pop

From 2011 to 2015, I worked alongside my PhD supervisor Dr. William Edmondson on building a network of improvised musicians in Newcastle, U.K. that would focus on the practice of freely improvising popular music. Pivotal to the idea was to undo many of the notions of professionalism and specialism pervading perceptions of popular music-making and obstructing people from getting on with the making of music. How many times have we heard from popular music mythology the various apparent roadblocks to making and releasing music? The amount of time it takes to make an album; the writing period, writers block, recording studio problems, the complexities of post-production, and so on all of which is intended to make us believe that recording and releasing an album is somehow inherently a difficult, painful and long process. It is in the interests of an entertainment industry to up-

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31 Crass – Penny Rimbaud Talks (*High Qual/Full/2007*). Online available via, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mADo\\_8D8nmc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mADo_8D8nmc) (uploaded on 19 September 2012 by user 'pan-crack', accessed on 14 March 2014).

hold these assumptions, in order to create products that are highly anticipated and hold high economic value. Most importantly, they rely upon the assumption of professionals doing serious work, mirroring the old orthodox ideologies of ‘serious music’. And so in the face of these stagnant circumstances, Edmondes began developing the notion of a praxis called Wild Pop, as he describes here:

Wild Pop is a movement that promotes the idea that pop music can be made any time, anywhere, without any prior discussion and minimal preparation. Applying the methodology of free improv to the immediacy of a feral entertainment context, Wild Pop can be proliferated anyhow, anywhere.<sup>32</sup>

In practical terms, Wild Pop allowed for a hyper-prolific series of recording sessions, whereby groups were quickly gathered together to record with mobile audio and video recording equipment, which can be quickly uploaded online with artwork and any necessary additional documentation. In terms of the musical output, this is a little less clear. There is no direction, guidance or instruction of what to do. It is in many ways an authentic oral tradition, in the sense of performers doing what they like to do with their own chosen instrumentation and genre interests, and then other performers watching this and realising they can also follow this approach to suit their own interests.

How does this approach to popular music-making relate to standard understandings of popular music then? Inevitably, this approach does not produce highly rigid musical products that produce hyper-predictable catchy tunes. However, to freely improvise popular music, whether it sounds like Taylor Swift, hip hop, jam rock, or techno is essentially the same thing. It is to ride on the coattails of pop music’s ubiquitous accessibility and hijack its core musical characteristics for your own usage and for your own interests. If I was to define the methods involved in this musical approach, I would draw from the definition of free-form improvisation that improvising double-bass player William Parker uses, simply referring to it as ‘free music’: ‘The definition of free music is that you are free to choose whatever style you wanted to play ... It’s not no-structure, it’s free to use any structure that you want to use’.<sup>33</sup> This definition allows for the possibility of a free-form improvised popular music. For those who would consider such an approach an impossible oxymoron, consider that we are talking here not of a negative liberty ‘free-from-form’, but instead a positive liberty ‘free-to-use-any-form’. In other words, performers are free to improvise in any style they like.

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32 William Edmondes: *Wild Pop*. <https://vimeo.com/wildpop> (accessed 21 March 2016). Expired link.

33 Eyal Hareuveni: William Parker. Everything is Valid. *All about Jazz*. Online available via <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/william-parker-everything-is-valid-william-parker-by-eyal-hareuveni.php> (published on 7 March 2005, accessed on 23 February 2015).

Wild Pop has always been about embracing the inevitable diversity that this involved, the constant cutting across popular music styles at will, embracing and deviating from orthodox patterns at whim. As such it is not a *genre* of music, but an *approach* to making pop music spontaneously. Such unpredictability results in a feralizing of popular music – an opening up of rigid, ‘domesticated’, institutionalised popular music structures to the un-tamed nature of free-form improvisation, musicking<sup>34</sup> beyond and in response to industrial conditions that produce marketable products. This activity is not industrialised, focused on commodity or narrow understandings of successful products, instead it is about reclaiming the process of pop music via the relentless pursuit of immediate sonic pleasure that is both individually empowering and socially meaningful. It thus embodies elements of a revolutionary politics that challenges the constraints faced by popular musicians in the entertainment industry. This musical approach also enacts what jazz fiction writer Nathaniel Mackey has entitled a ‘discrepant engagement’ with popular music. Mackey’s usage of the word ‘discrepant’ refers to an engagement that rattles and creaks the entity which it engages with, in this case, popular music. By rattling the fixed structures of popular music, freely improvised popular music can create a close but divergent musical identity with these styles, but as Mackey says, improvisation is always ‘an activity supplemental to more firmly established disciplines and dispositions, an activity that hinges on a near but divergent identity with given disciplines and dispositions’.<sup>35</sup>

In the research leading up to Wild Pop, Edmondes cited two core dynamics of conventional pop music: irresistibility and inevitability.<sup>36</sup> These two characteristics stem from the embrace of repetitive patterns that stimulate expectation and gratification in the listener. This gratification is almost always immediate without delay. However, in the feralizing process of Wild Pop, whilst such repetition is routinely embraced in a way that stimulates expectation of gratification, such gratification can be often delayed and is not guaranteed. This produces a slightly off-phase irresistibility, a heightened sense of expectation – ‘will they repeat that section?’ rather than ‘they definitely will repeat that section’. Wild Pop supplements conventional pop music by feeding it with a hyper-rich vein of radical, diverse exploration that poses

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34 Christopher Small: *Musicking. The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Press 1998.

35 Nathaniel Mackey: *Discrepant Engagement. Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994, p. 19.

36 Gustav Thomas: The Impossible vs. the Unthinkable. A Sequel to ‘Wild Productivity in the Age of Evaporation’. In: *Claws & Tongues*. Online available via <https://clawsandtongues.wordpress.com> (published on 9 November 2016, accessed on 11 April 2017).

the ultimate challenge – go ahead and make the most seductive techno on the spot; thrash out some extreme heavy metal; improvise pop songs, why not?<sup>37</sup>

I now want to take this opportunity to expand on the remit of Wild Pop, lacing it with a higher potency of radical socio-musical activism, and a third-degree black belt in anti-professionalism. As such, I introduce the notion of Anarcho-Pop. Let me explain via a momentary historical diversion. Anarcho-Punk and in some cases, hip hop really showed us the way. To storm in, put it all on the line, dive deep into the residue of music's resources and use whatever you want, make it all up and rip up the rule book. To disregard entirely, any distinction between a musician and you. To make popular music anarchic, we have to live by these ideals. Anarcho-Punk for instance created a set of musical aesthetics based around the loosely guided Punk idiom. Anarcho-Pop will do the same thing around the very notion of popular music. It draws from the experience and motivations of Wild Pop, but draws specific influence from the anarchic approach to collective music-making and the obliteration of the binary between 'professional' and 'amateur' that bands such as Crass promoted. It seeks specific activist strategies of direct action to introduce so-called 'non-musicians' to become regular music-makers. As such, it goes beyond the experimental strategy of utilising established musicians and improvisers to make improvised pop music, and becomes radical social activism, instigating antagonism and rupture in the social fabric of conventional popular music culture. Anarcho-Pop believes that pop music can be freely improvised by anyone and everyone and it seeks to undermine the pedestal that musicians have stood on for centuries. It does so on the mantra that 'music is too important to be left to the musicians':

Music is too important to be left to the musicians, and in recognizing this fact we strike a blow at the experts' domination, not only of our music but also of our very lives [...] to control our own musical destiny, provide our own music rather than leaving it altogether to someone else to provide.<sup>38</sup>

Christopher Small introduces a radical notion here, although I can't attribute to him the radical statement I'm about to make, which is this: musicians will destroy music if left to their own devices. It's sad to say, but too often, it is in a musician's interests to maintain the belief in a hierarchy of knowledge, in order to preserve their professional status above all those passive 'amateur' consumers (including pupils and students) who remain in awe and admiration of their 'gifted' talents. Anarcho-Pop begins from the belief that this distinction between 'musician' and 'non-musician' is

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37 For audio-visual documentation of Wild Pop, see this video medley I have edited, <https://vimeo.com/169703270>.

38 Christopher Small: *Music, Society, Education*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press 1996, p. 214.

bogus. I have both theoretical arguments and practical experience to demonstrate this further.

The maintenance of a fixed conception of musical identity/meaning/knowledge is not only illegitimate in any fundamental way, but also, runs the real risk of not hearing other musical identities emerge whose voices could create multiplicities of musical meaning. To compare briefly with sociological theory, Jacques Ranciere has strongly critiqued the sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu for allowing ‘the division of knowledge between social groups [to] appear as an explanation of inequality’ – in hypothetical musical terms, according to Bourdieu’s theory, ‘non-musicians’ do not play music regularly because they have not had access to formal musical training. On the contrary, Ranciere would say, non-musicians do not play music regularly, because they would not be treated or ‘heard’ in the first instance as musical.<sup>39</sup> The elite code in other words exists from the beginning and stratifies people into those who have it and those who do not. William Corlett has made a very similar point in his book *Community without Unity*, in which he argues that strategies to deepen or widen participation in something is always hindered by the fact the criteria for access never changes.<sup>40</sup> In musical terms, to widen participation in music, a shift in the criteria of what a musician is must be part of that strategy. Otherwise, the same amount of musicians will be produced through education with the same skill-sets, leading to the maintenance of musical sameness and the preservation of elite knowledge codes. We can therefore borrow from this sociological theory the idea that there should not be a fixed conception of musicality, which everyone must attain to in order to be heard. Instead, we should be listening more attentively to the voices that come through when notions of musical professionalism are abandoned.

There are also practical precedents that demonstrate this theory in practice. From 2013–2014, I spent a year implementing a series of case-study projects that consisted largely of improvised music workshops and events entitled ‘The un-Musical project’. The participants were selected on the basis that they had as little music-making experience as possible and they did not consider themselves musicians (and in some cases considered themselves ‘unmusical’). I then delivered a series of workshops introducing them to the approaches of free-form improvised music. I made no explicit suggestion of the type of music we would make. It was more important in the early stages to address their fear of making music. The fear of playing music by so-called ‘non-musicians’ has been a recurrent finding in all of my work in this area. Throughout the project, at no point did I ‘teach’ any conventional musical knowledge. Participants were given a range of electronic and acoustic instruments and invited to use these instruments in whichever way they wanted. I

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39 Ibid.

40 William Corlett: *Community without Unity. A Politics of Derridian Extravagance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. xviii–xix.

introduced various well-known improvisation exercises to stimulate direction and objectives, such as call and response games and the following of sounds around a circle.

After eight weeks of regular activity, the participants had gained enough confidence in playing music, that I began introducing them to live performances and recording sessions with Wild Pop performers. This experience demonstrated how within a relatively short amount of time exploring music-making, these so-called 'non-musicians' could integrate into performing groups with highly trained, regular performing musicians in improvised pop groups. I carried out several interviews with these performers afterwards to ascertain their perception of the un-Musical project participants. I asked specific questions about the perceived musical ability of the participants, and whether or not they noticed anything different about these participants and their ability to play in this group. To summarise from the most suitable question, when asked: 'Did you notice any problems with how participant A was able to integrate into the group today?' 72% of performers stated no problems whatsoever; 20% of performers stated some problems were noticeable but did not contribute to any significant problems in the performance; 8% of performers stated lots of problems were noticeable and did contribute to significant problems in the performance.

Of those that identified problems, this ranged from noticing anxiety issues such as hesitation to the fast-changing musical dynamics by participants, to specific musical problems such as apparently obvious musical connections being missed in some way by these participants. In this case, what seems likely to deduce from this is that musicians can have deeply rooted understandings of musical meaning, and to provoke alternative musical relationships during music-making can be unsettling. In more direct terms, if everyone appears to be playing in the key of C, and someone doesn't even know what a key is, then this is unsettling to a professional musician, but to go back to Hank Shocklee's point from earlier, there is a range of creative force beyond these traditional sources of musical meaning. This range has been hitherto unexplored in this area of musical practice. We should attempt to hear this range.

There is nothing substantial in this practical data to suggest that there would be any problem with these non-musicians continuing to regularly make music in these groups. More practice would only help to expand the musical options available to them and give them more confidence. However, Anarcho-Pop posits a revision of the conventional understanding of practice, deliberately undermining the old adage of 'practice makes perfect'. Anarcho-Pop defines the practice of being a pop musician as the intense dedication to listening and playing pop music without any explicit authority on 'how' to make such music, or the expectation to conform to any established musical conventions or skills. What happens if you practice eight hours a day at making music, but without any formal training objective, without a goal