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“Practice, Entrepreneurship and Subjectivity in Artist Identification with Applications to the Covid-Era”

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Abstract

How we define an artist and how we use census and survey data to study artist behaviour is a cornerstone of cultural economics. Frey and Pommerehne (1989) list eight criteria for identifying an artist, from time spent on and income derived from art-making, to reputation and recognition, organizational membership and professional qualifications. We take a radically subjective approach where we use only the last of their categories, artist self-identification, to attempt a theoretical advancement in art economics. Concurrent with the professionalization of economic science at the university and positivism in economic policy emerges a quantitative focus on production in labor markets (Tribe 2022). This seems a Procrustean bed for cultural economics in that artists tend to be self-directed, entrepreneurial and self-employed and when they do work for others, do so only as a second “job” in order to support creative practice (Throsby 1994). This is not a labor market model where income is maximized and redistribution is needed for fairness. There is an over-supply of art, subsidy may not be necessary as may create moral hazard (Benhamou 2003). We use Max Weber (1919)’s original notion of avocation (substantive value) versus vocation (instrumental value) and determine that it may be wrong to fit art-making into the categories of mainstream industrial and labor economics. For our book *Artists and Markets in Music* (Routledge 2023) we conduct a grassroots snowball sampling survey method where the criterion is self-identification as a musician. The survey might help us to test differing relevancies for the SAD production function in music as proposed by Samuel Cameron (2015, 2016) as well as further identifying market heterogeneity as discussed in Throsby (1994).

JEL Codes: I26, Z13, B40, O3, J82

Key Words: Arts Entrepreneurship, Musical Artist, Creativity, Covid-Era, Industrial Organization, Snowball Surveys

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Ah, a pianist! I see,' said Mr. Rodgers, 'an excellent pianist, but perhaps hardly a musician. Very reserved, very honest, and with a great love of animals.

Trevor was a painter. Indeed, few people escape that nowadays. But he was also an artist, and artists are rather rare.

-Oscar Wilde²

I Introduction

This paper attempts a heterodox approach towards the study of art and artist in cultural economics. The approach is embedded within a larger critique of the mainstream economics profession. In orthodox labor economics, with exceptions, “work effort” is seen as a cost to the employee and a benefit to the employer. The wage will clear where marginal costs equals marginal benefits. This brings economic efficiency in the wage-labor market because it is assumed that “workers” want to maximize their utility (trading-off income and leisure) and employers (capital) their profit. Markets, properly steered by the state when markets fail, are an instrument towards realizing a goal: that of full employment and maximum economic growth. Mainstream macroeconomics is about realizing the quantitative instrumental values of income, wealth, consumption and growth (see, Klamer 2016). This is the foundation for economic planning under the economics of industrial organization.

We reiterate an under-emphasized alternative hypothesis and find that instrumental economic thinking may not be appropriate when considering artist behavior. A well-known finding is that artists in fact don't try to maximize their income, rather seek to maximize the time spent on their craft by working for others only to the point where outside income is needed to supplement art income (see, Throsby 1994). For the same level of education, artists earn less income than those in the same scientifically-defined occupational categories. “Artists are found to work fewer hours [for others, author], suffer higher-unemployment and earn less than members of the reference group” (Alper and Wassall 2006, 814).

² The first epigram is from “Lord Arthur Saville’s Crime” (1891), and the second is from “The Model Millionaire” (1887).

This means that in neo-classical economic thinking there must be an “over-supply” of artists in that artists continuously remain in the market and continuously don’t receive the expected equilibrium money wage. Artists subjectively trade-off economic income for non-pecuniary “psychic income”. This behaviour is not consistent with the models used by economic experts for regulating the economy. Instrumental economic thinking may not be applicable to a potentially nebulous category called “artist markets”.³

Procrustean Bed

To better make this point of a Procrustean bed created for analyzing human behavior, the first section of the paper is a discussion and critique of the rise of economics as a profession under modernism, and how applied fields such as labor economics and industrial economics are now relegated to an elite under a system of control (bureaucratization) which begins with the Great War nationalism (Weber 1919). Modernization theory is that there has been a “professionalization of everything” accelerated in the ‘post-War’ period. We use Keith Tribe’s recent *Constructing Economic Science* (2022) as an entry-point to describe how discussion in political economy transforms into an elite economic “science” and how this is reinforced in the academy beginning in the early-20th century and intensifies through today’s covid-era.

Art creation has intrinsic value (again “psychic income”) that is not reducible to utilitarian-based welfare economics. The occupational-based survey method oftentimes misidentifies those who consider themselves artists in that self-identified artists may get classified through standardized surveys into occupational categories other than the arts due to the need to supplement art income (see, Alper and Wassall 2006). Do artists really fit the category of wage-labor in a “labor market?” Our thesis is that the answer is “No.” We supplement research which has found that artists tend to be more entrepreneurial-oriented than others in society with a preference for self-employment rather than consider themselves as working for others (see, Towse 2001). Our proposal is that placing artists into a “labor market” may be a classification error.

³ “Science is what we understand well enough to explain to a computer. Art is everything else we do” – Donald Knuth, https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Donald_Knuth

The Failure of Market Failure

Specifically our paper is about musical artists, musicians being an especially difficult “class” of people from which to gain information (Madden 2004). The over-supply of artists (“the starving artist” and “don’t quit your day job”) may not be a market-failure which needs correcting through, for example, subsidies determined by state bureaucracies to equalize economic wages between artists and others in expert-determined industrial classification. Artists behaviour may not be reducible to economic thinking and to do so for public good reasons as defined in neo-classical economics may cause more harm than good in terms of allowing an environment for creative flourishing.

Our approach attempts to disentangle a perhaps overly-aggregated and mechanistic neo-classical approach to art economics with a more subjective, entrepreneur-oriented approach. The third section of the paper discusses methodologies used to identify artists and evaluate artist behaviour, including the use of surveys. We find that most historical approaches have missed the long-tail distribution of artists who practice as an avocation, with psychic income, rather than a vocation. This means that “winner-take-all” superstar effects may be overstated. We also discuss our survey method which helps explain why we use artist subjective self-identification as the sole criteria for ‘judging’ who is an artist.

We conclude by returning to political economy. Arts are part of a larger economic biology. Without a healthy economic body the arts are less inclined to flourish (there are of course exceptions). We find that, for the US, we should be more humble in our requests for state funding of public goods because there has been structural change in the US economy over the last 15 years which requires addressing the fiscal condition of the nation-state.

II The Professionalization of Everything

What is economics and how is it different from political economy?

Political economy (moral philosophy’s successor) began with the discussion tradition of the Enlightenment in the 18th century and then to what is now known as classical liberalism in the 19th century with an ideal of free-trade trade and a minimal state. Tribe (2022) tells the story of the rise of professional economics in the 20th century as distinct from political economy from a new discipline to a scientific profession which is engaged in expert planning as an embedded part of the operations of the state. This mutual benefit and self-interest, between

economists and the political power which they help consecrate, is willfully guided by academic economists, especially Lionel Robbins who started the first undergraduate class in economics at Cambridge University in 1903 purposefully to help promote a new “science” of experts. The laissez-faire of classical political economy is now a thing of the past.

Robbin’s goal is furthered with the publication of *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* with its canonical definition of economics, “Economics is the *science* which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses.” (Robbins 1932, 5, *emphasis* added). This new science gets the name “neo-classical economics” to give a sheen of tradition, a decades-long process which Tribe calls “the scientization of economics.” In Weberian terms science becomes institutionalized as a vocation, and no longer an avocation, in the modern social economy dominated by the nation-state after WWI.

In the United States modern economic planning becomes part of the federal government during the 30 Year Crisis (WWI, The Great Depression, WWII). This creates demand for economists. After WWII the main university textbooks in economics are now written by Americans not Europeans and advanced education in the United States is no longer seen as inferior to that of Europe. The GI Bill for WWII, Korean, and Vietnam war veterans, and later guaranteed and direct student loans, means greatly expanding university education and the establishment and growth of economic science as an elite profession serving the welfare-warfare state establishment.⁴

Further to mutual gain between economists and policy-makers and furthering the rise of experts and the administrative state, the US Employment Act of 1946 creates the President’s Council of Economic Advisors. The CEA is now part of the White House to help the nation-state move from an "ad hoc style of economic policy-making to a more institutionalized and focused process."⁵

Now under law economists are given expert status to propose spending and taxing in the President’s Budget to help ensure nation-wide employment. The Full Employment Act of 1978 further requires each administration to move toward ‘full

⁴ The first Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel is awarded in 1969.

⁵ Quote on purpose of US CEA from, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/cea/about.html>

employment’ and ‘price stability’ within a specific time period. The economy (society) is now seen as can be directed by the centralized state as opposed to the decentralized laissez-faire as proffered by the original political economists the Physiocrats.

III Rethinking the Definition of “Artist”

Concurrent with the professionalization of economic science at the university and positivism in economic policy emerges a quantitative focus on production in labor markets (Tribe 2022) and accordingly the state-goal of ‘maximizing’ productivity in the instrumental forms of GDP and employment measures. This seems a bad fit for the economics of the arts in that artists tend to be self-directed, entrepreneurial and self-employed and when they do work for others, do so only as a second “job” in order to support creative practice (see, Throsby 1994). This is not a labor market model where income is maximized and redistribution as needed for fairness as determined by state-experts. There is an over-supply of art in standard economic Supply and Demand models because artists produce art for psychic income; psychological income not always realized in market exchange. Subsidy may not be necessary in that artists are already producing an over-supply of art if measured by the market. Subsidies may well create moral hazard for artist behaviour in that subsidized artists may then produce less and less-risky art (Benhamou 2003).

Frey and Pommerehne (1989) list eight criteria for identifying an artist, from time spent on and income derived from art-making, to reputation in terms of awards and other peer recognition, and professional organizational membership and professional qualifications. We take the subjective approach in our critique of industrial organization, avoid category errors of external classification, and use only the last of their criteria, artist self-identification, in our determination as to who should be classified an artist and by whom. In this we follow Towse (2001) who describes surveys which have focused on artist self-identification as a criteria for categorization, and then how these results compare with more “externally-assessed definitions of artists, aggregated industrial classifications to examine artist employment and earnings” (48).

In this self-identification subjective classification of art (and artists, or in our case, music and musicians) we are helping to reintroduce an alternative to the administrative state which can presume to choose what is art and which allows the special interests, bureaucratization and economic rents that this intervention allows. We can see the juxtaposition between the market test (free-association) for

music and state-created categories (expert knowledge and regulation) in the work of cultural economist Samuel Cameron.

It might seem the definition of music is not very important for an economic approach as it might be considered to be whatever the producers and consumers say it is. Or, what government statisticians say it is. Once they give it a SIC (standard industrial classification) code and a formal name then that is the music industry” (Cameron 2015, 2).

In our research we are not presuming to be experts in defining music or industries. Instead we use artist (musician) self-identification to help us gain insight into behaviour and decision-making at the subjective individual level for this self-defined “class” of people. A main purpose of this paper is to motivate thinking beyond the status quo practices of today’s economic science. We are specifically questioning the need to subsidize the arts based on expert knowledge as can be common rhetoric in the literature.

Tribe (2022) describes how the development of economic science plays-out during Robbins’s creation of the new field. There are the empiricists, who would use oftentimes state-created data (statistics) to find reiterations of the social problems they are concerned with from these statistics, without using economic theory (political economy) to help understand the underlying reasons for the phenomenon. On the other hand there are the rationalists, who tend to insist upon theory before any data can be understood. There may yet to be a unified approach between the practioners of these methodologies which satisfies the philosopher of science.

On Surveys and the Definition of Artist

Most if not all artist surveys start with pre-created lists or paid advertisements seeking participants and many if not most involve remuneration for taking the survey or participating in the discussion or experiment. This means that decisions have already been made as to the question of artist determination, a form of survey-bias.

We are interested in the 2018 the Music Industry Research Association (MIRA) survey headed by Alan Krueger of Princeton University. The majority of the around 1,200 respondents are members of the Recording Academy’s philanthropic subsidiary MusiCares from which MIRA obtained the necessary information to

conduct the survey.⁶ This respondent universe was supplemented by additional lists of potential respondents from paid list-provider American List Council (ALC, now Adstra) based on SIC codes. Respondents were given an Amazon gift card upon completion of the survey.⁷

The first question asked in the MIRA survey is if the potential respondent currently makes their living from income derived from music-making, or if not, do they aspire to do so. If the answer is in both cases “No,” then the potential respondent is ineligible to take the survey. This method is biased towards those musicians who have already ‘established’ themselves as popular artists and misses the long tail distribution in the supply and demand for music, as facilitated by the digital economy.⁸

There may be a big difference between a GRAMMY member or an established business with a music-oriented SIC (NIAC) and those who play cover music in a pub or are engaged in crowd-sourcing or streaming at the margin, especially during the covid-era of live music curtailment by civil authorities. The former might follow a normal distribution, which is obtainable by economic scientists through statistics. Information on the latter might not be available as readily and is the essence of the knowledge problem. We propose that both groups are musicians, even though the former only may be part of the universe of academic and policy research on the behaviour of artists.⁹

⁶ The Recording Academy is the organization which produces the annual GRAMMY Awards. Alan B. Kreuger and Ying Zhen, a coauthor on this paper, were the lead investigators for the Princeton-administered MIRA survey.

⁷ Bowles (2016) describes how monetary exchange might trivialize and instrumentalize social exchange, crowding-out intrinsic value at decentralized and local levels. He also proposes that economists need to find and use heterodox data sources.

⁸ We fully acknowledge the value of luck, or serendipity, in the financial success of musical artists. We explore Cameron’s (2015, 2016) augmented SAD production function for music later in the paper when discussing our survey research questions and results.

⁹ We intend the use of the terms “musician” and “musical artist” as synonymous in this paper. There may be a difference, for example a musical artist may include only those who create original content. This discussion is beyond our scope here.

Market Definitions and the Long Tail Distribution

In the following we create two heuristics to help us understand the aggregation problem in the statistics used in economic science specifically relating to music. In Illustration 1 we can visualize normal and long tail distributions in the *supply* of music. (These are just ideal-types and will vary with what rhetoric the analyst is attempting.) Illustration 2 shows a long tail distribution heuristic in the *demand* for music.

Neo-classical regulatory economists in the competition policy (anti-trust) field may for example choose a sample which is in the normal distribution in order to prove monopoly behaviour, without taking into consideration the long tail competition in supply and demand whose inclusion would negate institutionalized and mechanistic market-concentration indexing on behalf of authorities seeking to reconfirm and expand institutional power.¹⁰

For example, Krueger (2005) uses only venues which seat 2,000 or more people in the measure of the market for live music and Kreuger (2019) uses *Billboard* Top 100 artists in the measure of the recorded music market to look at superstar income effects. Both of these studies ignore the long tail distribution of alternative music such as local pubs and concerts in the park, and of course today in the covid-era and beyond the live streams under the many digital platforms and practices recently.

Taking partial-equilibrium datasets and using them to generalize about society writ-large can be reductionist. We may be being generous here in that prestige analysis may be cherry-picking the superstar effects from the long tail distribution and the rest of the market from the normal distribution. What to keep in mind from Illustrations 1 and 2 is that the area under the long tail distribution can be greater than the area under the normal distribution, so the welfare gains can be greater. Reducing analysis from more general equilibrium to more partial equilibrium will by definition find more monopolistic behavior in need of expert regulation.

¹⁰ We agree with Vassallo (2017) who finds that competition regulatory decisions can be based on arbitrary market measurements and therefore regulation itself may be arbitrary. As a corollary we agree with Rogers (2018) who finds that monopoly power in general can only be gained with state-granted barriers-to-entry.

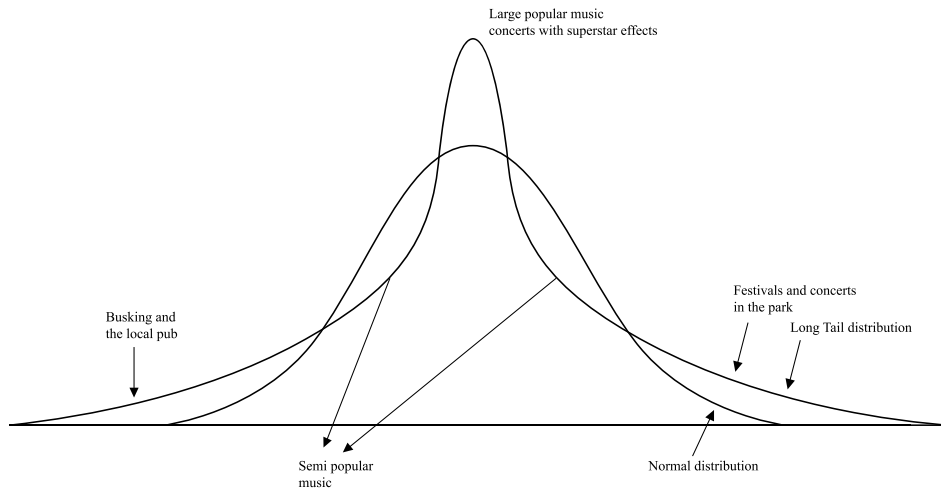


Illustration 1: Normal and Long Tail Supply-Side Distributions for Live Music including Streaming

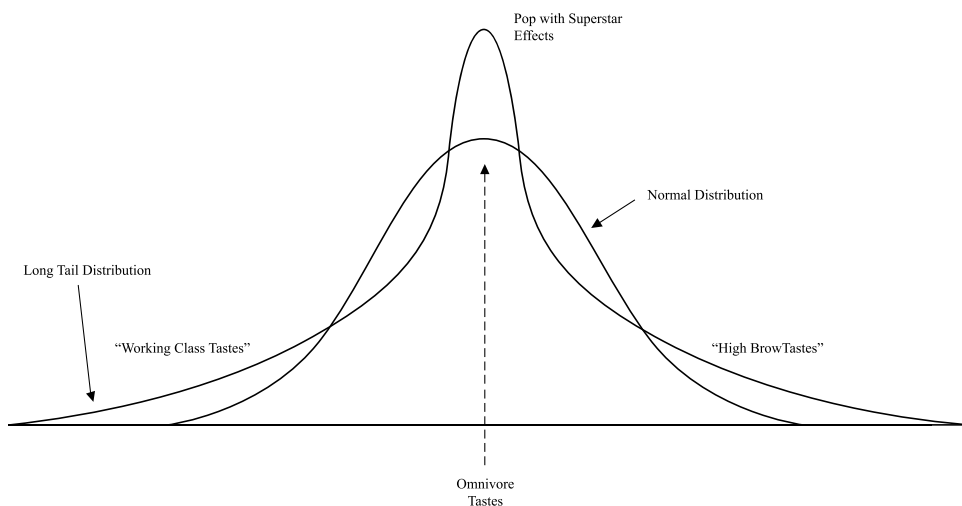


Illustration 2: Normal and Long Tail Demand-Side in Tastes for Music

Illustration 2 reiterates the long tail distribution but on the demand-side using Bourdieu's class-based aesthetics on the tails. A normal distribution may miss long tail distribution musical genres such as those who enjoy going to small punk rock or rap or alt-country shows as opposed to those who enjoy Opera at the Kennedy Center or jazz at the Blue Note. Long tail distributions are alternatives to the charts and how superstar effects are measured for both royalties and live performance income, either in-person or streamed. These alternatives bring intrinsic value to both performer and audience, value which can't be instrumentalized or redistributed based on economic statistics.¹¹

Our Survey Process and Results

In this section we present the preliminary findings of our survey which was developed as a compliment to the MIRA survey discussed above. The survey was conducted on surveymonkey.com and was open from January until August 2022.¹² The survey was distributed mostly through word of mouth to friends and

¹¹ In our forthcoming book (Weber, Zhen and Arias 2023) we critique applied economics findings regarding superstar effects using long tail distribution analysis. We also have a case-study which shows increasing omnivore tastes in the US (cf., Mellander et al 2018).

¹² The summary information used here is from our surveymonkey.com snowball survey as of July 31, 2022. There were 34 questions, with the average time to completion of 7.5 minutes for the survey with a 99% completion rate. For a copy of the survey please contact the lead author. Final results will be included in Weber, Zhen and Arias (2023). We did not want to continue the survey later than August 2022 in that we already had two years of the covid-era state interventions.

This is the introductory page that respondents see when they begin the survey:

Cultural Economics Musician's Survey

Welcome to Our Survey

Thank you for your interest. This is part of research we are doing on the lives and well-being of musicians, especially during the last two years of the covid-era. The survey should take about 5 minutes. We will not share your personal responses with anyone and all questions are voluntary.

The survey results will be part of our book *Artists and Markets in Music: The Political Economy of Music During the Covid-Era and Beyond*, by Ying Zhen, JJ Arias and Cameron Weber (Routledge 2023). We would be happy to share the summary survey results with you.

acquaintances of the authors of this paper who then were asked to pass onward if they find the process of value. It is of the “snowball sample” survey method.¹³

The first question in the survey is “How long have you considered yourself a musician?,” with the response option scaling from “0” to “75” years. Respondents indicating “0” years will not have their responses included in our final results as do not self-identify as a musician. We present the preliminary findings below in terms of the specific research questions we are trying to answer.¹⁴

1. The SAD Production Function for Music

One of the main objectives of our survey and research is to test the augmented SAD production for music proposed by Samuel Cameron (2015, 2016). First we will give a summary our own interpretation of this idea as we have yet to find any related applied research. The inputs to music production are capital, labor, serendipity, authenticity and drugs.¹⁵

Capital includes the technology present at a given time including the “natural resources” of artist or collective talent. Production is also limited by the recording or performance technology at a given time and place.¹⁶ *Labor* is measured by “effort units,” not time as in orthodox economic measurement. (Here we might suggest instead “quality of concentration units” as might better capture the creative process. Brian Eno has said that it is not time towards his practice which matters rather the quality of the concentration at a given time and place).

Serendipity is applicable to both supply and demand. Artists help create their own demand through entrepreneurship. Some entrepreneurial success maybe be blind luck through the market discovery process. Mick Jagger has said that being English he believes the reason the Rolling Stones have had such success is because they are lucky. There may be serendipity in the production process as well such as

¹³ No paid advertising or lists were used to find respondents, nor was there any financial incentive to take the survey. We did not use social media to distribute the survey.

¹⁴ This paper contains preliminary findings only, econometric analysis will be included in Weber, Zhen and Arias (2023).

¹⁵ $Q = f(K, L, S, A, D)$.

¹⁶ For example it is conventional wisdom that most songs which are successful on streaming platforms have hooks within the first 30 seconds.

in mistakes which turn productive. Miles Davis is known for recording his improvisations to capture the unique combinations. For those on the spiritual side serendipity may also represent the “divine intervention” of which many artists speak when describing their inspiration and execution.

Authenticity is also tacit knowledge and practice. It is a fallacy to believe that originality only comes from the “noble savage” outside the “stuffy confines of formal linear music training” (Cameron 2015: 80-81). The truth may lie somewhere in-between and is realized through the specialization of labor. People may travel to seek authenticity, for example to New Orleans for jazz and funk music or Nashville (or Bakersfield) for originating country songs or Jamaica for reggae, as did the Clash to write *Give ‘Em Enough Rope* shortly after the Rolling Stones recorded *Black and Blue* there. Ray Davies of the Kinks wrote songs because he couldn’t play covers. The punk rock revolution reaches back to 1950s rock and roll to realize authenticity. Artists seek collaboration with others along the temporal stages of production to help realize an original vision.

Drugs can either be a form of capital as an input to the creative process or they may be an occupational hazard that has become “ritualized” and “institutionalized”. The truth is again probably somewhere in between. The choice of stimulants (or explicitly none at all) can be a means to connect audience and artist. Stimulants can also help with performance, much like cocaine in the Great War, speed with Johnny Cash and Motorhead, Red Stripe beer with early 1960s ska, and marijuana as a sacrament for the later Rastafarian reggae musicians. The Velvet Underground sings about heroin. Cameron (2015) writes of the indulgent ‘cocaine albums’ of pampered major label best-selling artists of the 1970s. Drugs can also be a proxy for madness, or the tortured artist. Or in the case of for example Beethoven, Django Reinhardt, Brian Wilson, Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, Jerry Garcia, Tony Iommi and Kurt Cobain actual physical disability.

The production function is not testable using cardinal data, as the factors of production are tacit, so we use the value approach and ask the respondents about each of the three SAD input variables requesting ordinal responses. For the first two variables we ask, *do you think serendipity (authenticity) plays a role in the success of a musical artist?*¹⁷ For the third variable we ask, *do you use stimulants (teas, coffee, marijuana, wine, liquor, etc.) as part of the creative process?* The results are shown in Illustrations 3 and 4.

¹⁷ We do not define success, leaving this interpretation subjective to the respondent. In our open-ended question, *Describe any other changes in your craft that have occurred during the covid-era*, one of the responses was, “Success is not the same as artistic success please note”.

	Do you think <i>serendipity</i> plays a role in the success of a musical artist?	Do you think <i>authenticity</i> plays a role in the success of a musical artist?
# of Respondents	115	114
Extremely Important	17%	22%
Very Important	35%	44%
Somewhat Important	37%	25%
Not So Important	9%	6%
Not at all Important	3%	2%

Illustration 3: Subjective Importance of Serendipity and Authenticity in the Success of a Musician

Preliminary results (Illustration 3) show that more than 50% of our respondent musicians value both serendipity and authenticity, more so authenticity, at the extremely and very important levels of subjective utility towards what they might view as success. Relatively few people believe serendipity and authenticity do not play a role in the success of a musical artist.

	Do you use stimulants (tea, coffee, marijuana, wine, liquor, etc.) as part of the creative process?
# of Respondents	115
A great deal	9%
A lot	18%
A moderate amount	23%
A little	22%
None at all	22%

Illustration 4: Subjective Importance of Drugs in the Creative Process of a Musician

What is interesting to note in Illustration 4 is that only 22% of respondents report that they do not use stimulants at all as part of the creative process. This might mean that around 75% of musicians in the survey do consider drugs as part of their practice. Combined with the findings on serendipity and authenticity this might provide preliminary support for a SAD production function for music. It will take more robust survey data and the use of econometric techniques to determine if these preliminary results are significant.

It is generally understood (see, Towse 2001, Hoffman et al. 2021) that artists are more entrepreneurial-oriented than the rest of the populace. Entrepreneurial theory and real-world examples tell us that entrepreneurs tend to be more optimistic and have greater risk-preference than do others. Serendipity can be realized through market discovery at a particular time and place and substantive entrepreneurial action can help realize authenticity. In a section of our survey asking for reflections on creativity and entrepreneurship during the covid-era, one question asks, *How much do you agree with this statement, "Good art can come from bad times?"* We might use individual responses to this question as a proxy for entrepreneurial attitude for those identifying as musicians. Illustration 5 shows that a large majority of respondents agreed with this optimistic statement.

There is no variable in the SAD production function for the industrial organization of musicians in that I/O subfield not model the entrepreneur. In entrepreneurial theory, unions, with long-term contracts under special rules of law and therefore sticky asset-specificity, create friction for the timely allocation of resources towards their best subjectively-determined use. A survey question in the grouping around the SAD production function-related ideas asks, *Is it important to be a member of a labor union for the success of a musician?* More than 70% of the respondents answered "not so important" or "not at all important." Illustration 5 shows that those exceptions who believe that union membership is important, who we might assume to be less entrepreneurial-oriented, are more likely not to agree with the optimistic statement.

	How much do you agree with this statement, "Good art can come from bad times"?	
	All Respondents	Those who find union membership is extremely or very important for success
# of Respondents	114	8
Strongly agree	38%	38%
Agree	41%	25%
Neither agree nor disagree	17%	25%
Disagree	1%	0%
Strongly disagree	2%	12%

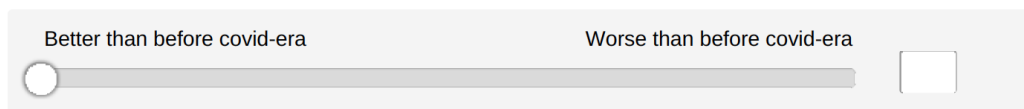
Illustration 5: Creative Optimism and Union Membership

2. Insight on the Covid-Era

The second main purpose of our survey research is to gain insight into musician behavior and attitudes during the creative and economic environments of the covid-era and beyond.¹⁸ Severities of lockdowns vary in different places at different times and individuals practicing differing forms of musicianship are heterogeneously affected by enforced isolation. For example composers and songwriters may be less effected than performing artists. Those depending on collaborations for in-person recording and rehearsals and those giving music lessons have to make entrepreneurial pivots during the covid-era. Those living in rural areas are less effected than those living in the city. Those already streaming or otherwise better positioned may be better able to adapt and profit by exogenous shocks.

Our hypothesis is that musicians who find differing aspects of craft relatively more important will have differing subjective responses in their local environments during the covid-era. Illustration 6 contains two questions we ask to see how differing priorities toward craft and practice effect subjective well-being. The questions are ordinal in nature on a continuum scale from “0” on the left-hand side to “100” on the right-hand side. The lower the number the better is subjective utility.

10. How have you been doing *creatively* during the last two years of the covid-era?



11. How have you been doing *economically* during the covid-era?

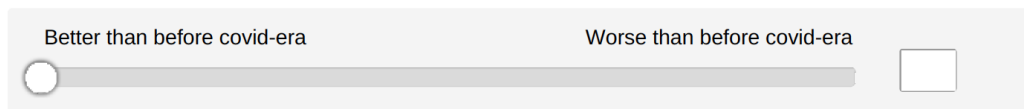


Illustration 6: Two Questions on Subjective Well-Being During the Covid-Era

¹⁸ We are defining the covid-era in the US as beginning with the National Emergency declared by President Trump as of March 1, 2020, redeclared by President Biden on February 24, 2021 and extended and continuing through today (October 2022). Davies et al. (2022) find that the C19 emergency ended in England at the end of 2021. This is not the case now (October 2022) in the US with the extension of the ‘national emergency’ and the rule of law changes that this has allowed to continue; especially in areas such as sole-source government procurement, extended temporary publicly-funded healthcare and extended temporary intergovernmental fiscal transfers.

The results are shown below in Illustration 7. We find that musician respondents report to be only slightly worse-off both creatively and economically during the covid-era. The only outlier are those who use stimulants “a great deal” or “a lot” as part of the creative process (30% of respondents) who report to be not worse-off during the covid-era. This might mean that those who use drugs in their practice may enjoy more risk-taking behaviour in general and are better able to pivot in uncertain times.

We find that musicians valuing serendipity are doing worse-off creatively than all groups except those who value unions. The reason for this of course might be that inspiration from spontaneous social interaction experiences a negative shock due to “social distancing,” in some places more extremely than others.¹⁹

¹⁹ In our open-ended question, *Describe any other changes in your craft that have occurred during the covid-era*, we received 62 comments. Here is hopefully a representative sample.

“Zoom lesson/coaching”

“less contact less inspiration”

“Collaborating with others is challenging as I don't want to jam virtually at all.”

“I began teaching high school full time. Stable pay but less time for performance and practice”

“I didn't have any jobs and could not practice it was quite depressing”

“The ability to work from home and stay home has allowed me to spend a lot of time composing and enjoying my piano. I have considered selling my compositions- something I'd never considered before.”

“self-employed”

“Performing more as a solo artist has caused me to expand my music recording skills”

“Must be WAY more savvy in social media now!”

“A lot more writing and home recording”

	Better or Worse <i>Creatively</i> During Covid-Era?	Better or Worse <i>Economically</i> During Covid-Era?
All Respondents		
Ordinal response ("0" = Better, "100"=Worse)	52	56
(# of respondents)	(115)	(115)
Serendipity	56 (59)	56 (59)
Authenticity	52 (75)	57 (74)
Drugs	49 (30)	55 (30)
Entrepreneurship	52 (77)	57 (77)
Union	58 (8)	77 (8)

Illustration 7: Results on Subjective Well-Being During the Covid-Era

We asked a series of questions under the main heading of, *What type of entrepreneurial “pivots” have occurred in your craft during the covid-era?* Responses to only two of the six questions showed enough variances among relative craft-practice values to make any preliminary findings. These questions are found below in Illustration 8.

26. .

I am streaming more I am streaming less

27. .

I have more time for artistic creativity I have less time for artistic creativity

Illustration 8: Questions on Practice “Pivots” During Covid-Era

The main finding here is that the 30% who report to use drugs in their practice relatively more than the other respondents have been best able to take advantage of the growth in streaming during the covid-era. However this comes at the cost of having less time for creativity. This is an interesting finding in that our survey musicians may not consider music streaming a “creative industry.” We also find that only labor union members have had less time for creativity during the covid-

era. This may be in that work on the the shop floor is uncertain, except for the politically connected, especially during the covid-era.²⁰

	Streaming More or Less During Covid-Era?	More or Less Time for Creativity During Covid-Era?
All Respondents		
Ordinal response ("0" = More, "100"=Less)	45	38
(# of respondents)	(104)	(113)
Serendipity	43	40
	(52)	(58)
Authenticity	46	38
	(70)	(73)
Drugs	39	46
	(26)	(29)
Entrepreneurship	44	39
	(71)	(76)
Union	47	53
	(7)	(8)

Illustration 9: Responses on Practice “Pivots” During Covid-Era

We ask a general question related to outside revenue and labor union musician membership. Illustration 10 contains the preliminary results. In a Bourdieuan lens we find that those who value formal education as an important part of success are more likely to have the cultural capital necessary to navigate the process to receive state arts funding during the covid-era. This may be an example of consecrating the ruling elite. 86% of those who value education are able to gain ‘relief’ funds versus the 57% who do not value formal education as important. As expected labor union members place less value on entrepreneurship and formal education relative to the rest of our respondents.

	All Respondents	Respondents Believing <i>Education</i> is Important to Success	Respondents Believing <i>Entrepreneurship</i> is Important to Success
(# of Respondents)	(32)	(14)	(23)
I have received private grants for the arts during the covid-era	50%	60%	60%
I have received government "relief" money during the covid-era	57%	86%	57%
I am a member of a music-related labor union	25%	15%	17%

Illustration 10: Funding Sources by Practice Value-Type During Covid-Era

²⁰ The Broadway show “Hamilton” received \$30m in covid-era ‘relief’ funds from the US federal government (Paulson 2021).

3. Does education help determine long-term survival in the arts (music)?

This research question applies to the thesis that education contributes to the staying power of artists (see, Bille and Jensen 2018). The idea is that more education provides a network and connections and a sensibility which helps to sustain a life in the arts. A potential bias in official statistics is that this method is more likely to capture those that have remained long enough in the arts to be categorized into a music-oriented occupation than those who are newer in the field. As an alternative indicator of the relationship between education and longevity in music we ask the question, *Do you think formal education is important in the success of a musical artist?*

As shown in Illustration 11 the average number of years our respondents have self-identified as musicians is 28 years. We divide the sample into those who have been musicians for 14 years or less, and those who have been musicians for 15 years or more and their corresponding views on the importance of education. It is not clear from these preliminary findings if those who have been musicians longer consider education more important than those who have been musicians for a shorter period. From our preliminary results it is indeterminate if education brings longevity in the arts. A more definitive analysis requires an expanded set of data.

	All Respondents	<15 Years as Musician	>14 Years as Musician
# of Respondents	114	24	88
Ave. Years as Musician	28	6	35
<i>Do you think formal education is important in the success of a musical artist?</i>			
Extremely Important	5%	4%	4%
Very Important	13%	17%	13%
Somewhat Important	43%	33%	43%
Not So Important	30%	33%	29%
Not at all Important	10%	13%	10%

Illustration 11: Education and Longevity as a Musician

4. How Does Education Relate to Art and Non-Art Income?

As discussed one finding in the literature is that education has little or no positive effect on art income. However related findings (see, Throsby 1994, Alper and Wassall 2006) show that education has a positive effect on the non-arts income of artists.

	Respondents Declaring that Education is Not Extremely or Very Important in Success	Respondents Declaring that Education is Extremely or Very Important in Success
# of Respondents	93	21
1. Average Income	\$55,000	\$38,000
2. Music Income Only	\$8,000	\$8,000
3. Non-Music Income (1-2)	\$47,000	\$30,000
% of Income which is Non-Music Income (3/1)	86%	79%

Illustration 12: Education and Music and Non-Music Income

Preliminary results (Illustration 12) confirm that education does not increase the earnings of musical artists. Respondents who value education more earn less than those who value education less. However the results do not show that education correlates to greater non-art (music) earnings. Musicians responding that formal education is less important earn more from non-music activity (86% of income) than those who do consider formal education important (79% of income is non-music income).

The average income of those who least value formal education in music (\$55,000) is about the median of those earning income in the USA while those musicians who believe education is more important earn less than the national median.²¹ This finding helps to confirm previous results which show that those with more cultural capital tend to have less income than those with more economic capital.

²¹ We note that those indicating that education is extremely or very important does not mean the respondents have formal education in music, a question we did not ask directly.

Summary of Survey Results

The first finding is that our snowball survey sample is not large enough to make general findings. Of our 115 respondents only 8% value labor union membership for the success of a musician at an important level (although 25% of respondents are labor union members). For this reason we can only provide a “first look” into our research questions especially as related to industrial organization.

With this caveat we find support for the SAD production function for music (Cameron 2015, 2016) in that the majority of respondents report that these character values are important for the success of a musician. A unique finding here is that those who report to use drugs as an active part of their music practice (30% of our sample) tend to have been better able to pivot towards streaming during the covid-era, but at the cost of time for creativity. One reason for this finding might be that those who value stimulants in practice may be more risk-taking than others and that risk-taking is part of the entrepreneurial profile.

We find that labor union members (25% of our sample) value entrepreneurship less and are less optimistic about the future and are more adversely affected creatively and economically during the covid-era. This is not an unexpected result in that entrepreneurship as stated (as opposed to industrial organization) is tacit in our thesis of the SAD production function for music.

Those who value formal education in the success of a musician more than others tend to have better connections (less opportunity cost) for receiving state grant-funding during the covid-era. This would follow Bourdieu’s theory of elitism through state-consecration in the arts. We are unable to confirm previous findings that those who value education tend to stay in the (musical) arts longer than those who do not (see, Bille and Jensen 2018). And our preliminary findings tend to refute the result that (musical) artists who value education tend to earn higher non-art (music) wages than those who do not value education (see, Throsby 1994).

On the other hand we are able to help confirm Bourdieuan findings which show that those with less cultural capital (who report to value education less) earn more income than those who value cultural capital relatively more (see Illustration 12).

III. Analytical Predispositions in Social Science

Social scientists have pre-analytical visions which help determine objects of study and therefore results of research (Schumpeter 1954). We might expect that cultural economists will support state funding for the arts. Cultural economics as a field emerges concurrently with the rise of economic science as an elite profession with expert knowledge to ‘guide’ the economy in the second half of the 20th century. Flew and Swift (2013) find that the first key development in the creation of “cultural policy” as an institution is the formation of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1946 as coordinated by J.M. Keynes. This power symbiosis is an example of what Tribe (2022) describes as the evolution of elite economic science where economists serve the state and vice-versa.

Baumol and Bowen (1966) is seen as the first text in cultural economics and contains what has become known as Baumol’s “cost disease” which states that as the economy becomes more productive the performing arts will become more costly to produce relative to the rest of the economy.²² The cost-disease argument is that the state needs to subsidize ‘fine-art’ or it will become too expensive and priced-out of the market.

State intervention may be needed to preserve fine-art and culture, mostly provided by not-for-profit organizations. Intervention in this case makes ‘fine-art’ available for the general public in a way that over-rides consumer sovereignty and individual preference. Art (culture) is a form of public good as identified by experts and which might be supported by the state through technocratic administration. Snowball (2019) summarizes the evolution of social-economic arguments for state subsidy to the arts and finds that there are “advocacy” claims and otherwise claims from “proper” research.

The field enlarges (see, UNESCO 2009, Throsby 2010) and now includes analysis of for-profit businesses grouped into industries which have creative content, most often attached to copyright. The sources of value are music, literature, and the performing and visual arts. The cultural and creative industries (CCI) are born, and with it the responsibility of professional economists to make claims for policy and planning in regards to this (post-industrial) growth sector.

²² It takes four musicians the same time to perform a Beethoven string quartet today as it did in 1800. You can’t change this with robotics.

This turn in cultural economics may instrumentalize art and artists into jobs and GDP.

Snowball (2019) frames the narrative into ‘developing’ and ‘developed’ countries. Nation-states which are considered developed create cultural plans and maps which use intrinsic value arguments such as democratic participation and inclusion and equity to justify state intervention into the arts. Less developed nation-states (and other decentralized polities) may use instrumental values such as economic development spillover effects and economic growth and job-creation arguments for arts subsidies.²³

As geographies develop, economic rationales for state intervention for the arts change from instrumental values to intrinsic values but nonetheless remain. Tribe’s co-evolutionary symbiosis is realized as art (culture) becomes what the state says it is through political resource transfers guided by experts. In her concluding section Snowball (2019) summarizes the varieties of national cultural policies, from “culture states (such as France), cultural protectionism (such as Canada), social-democratic culture (such as the Nordic countries) and the laissez-faire approach (such as the US)” (2019, 136).

II. Summary: Political Economy of the Arts in the USA

Snowball (2019) may be optimistic in classifying the cultural policy situation in the US as one of laissez-faire. The US arts situation might be termed a form of soft corporatism, where states and cities practice a “beggar-thy-neighbor”²⁴ form of corporate welfare in the competition to attract creative investment. An example is prestige (labor union and state development corporation approved) television and film productions, policies which are regressive. For example crafts labor-union members in film and other screen media productions tend to have greater income than the median person and bigger budget productions usually go to corporations with the ability to enforce copyright and make campaign donations at the expense of perhaps more artistically risk-taking projects.

²³ For a critique of the Keynesian multiplier for economic development and job-creation see Towse (2010, 284-285).

²⁴ Or, “race to the bottom” as polities compete with each other to give more subsidies and tax breaks to attract (cultural) projects while footing the taxpayer and future generations with the bill.

Public monuments on the National Mall in Washington, DC glorify US military interventions overseas, until 1973 with the use of conscripted labor. The Kennedy Center honors program provides a platform for US Presidents to consecrate the power of the office with superstars in the performing arts. Intellectual property law in the US might be specifically designed to give copyright protection to corporate interests.²⁵ Not-for-profit organizations in the US (who as is well-known receive pre-tax donations) might have an incentive to support partisan programming which includes political solutions to social problems in order to perpetuate their tax status and increase social consecration and thus status-signaling monetary donations.

We agree with Flew and Swift (2013) who find that we should not be looking exclusively at partial equilibrium and when analyzing arts and culture,

The realm of implicit cultural policies could of course be enlarged even further: attitudes towards organized religion, systems of media regulation, international legal and economic agreements, and *overall levels of taxation and government* all impact upon the levels and forms of government supports for culture (155, *emphasis added*).

Methodologically we might look at the larger political economy to better frame advocacy for the arts. If economic prosperity leads to flourishing in the arts, then we need a macroeconomics which leads to prosperity.²⁶ Our survey question “Can good art come from bad times?” assumes that there can be good times.

Fiscal Problems Inhibiting Subsidies in the United States

In particular we are interested in the current macroeconomic condition of the USA. The monetary and fiscal expansion in the US during the covid-era has led to the highest inflation in 43 years and the highest debt per capita levels in US history since World War II.²⁷ To make matters worse unfunded federal liabilities are 300%

²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copyright_Term_Extension_Act

²⁶ “I am a warrior, so that my son may be a merchant, so that his son may be a poet,” John Quincy Adams, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/595745-i-am-a-warrior-so-that-my-son-may-be>.

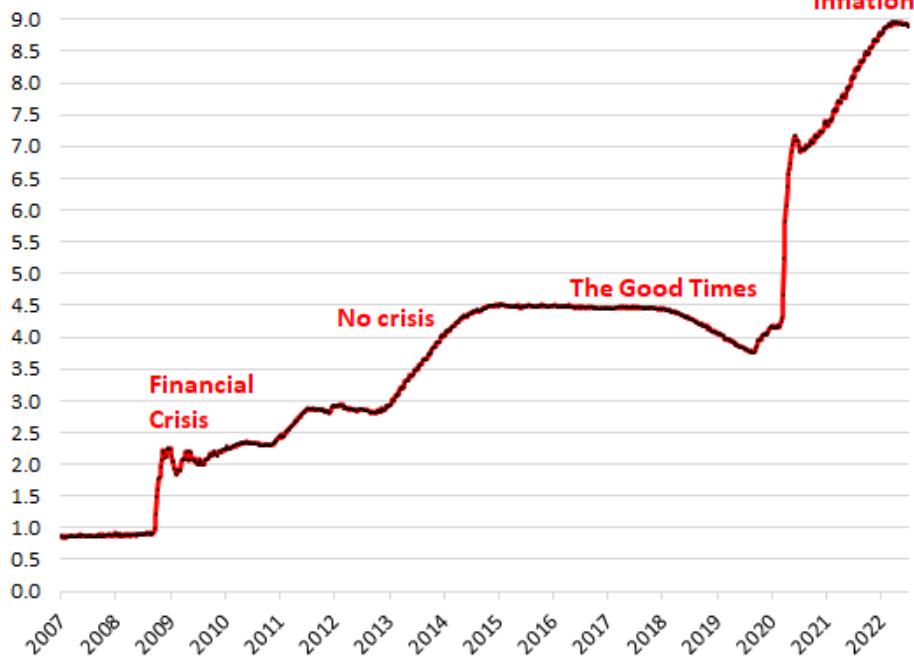
²⁷ The assets on the balance sheet of a central bank is a proxy for the money supply. We can see below how much the money supply has increased during the covid-era, which can help explain the high levels of inflation.

greater than the on-budget spending and debt levels. Using the logic of public choice, we might find that current debt-financed spending today helps to create votes today, whereas the debt is passed on until tomorrow to those yet born let alone voting. In a methodologically individualist world-view, one might believe it aesthetically and ethically wrong to pass debt and unfunded liabilities to future generations based on the preferences of the current generation.

In Illustration 15 we find that debt per person levels have only become an unacceptable trend for the last around 15 years, since the state responses to the housing boom-and-bust starting in 2008. These interventions are then of course continued and exacerbated by covid-era interventions. Our proposal is that we as socio-economists should be responsible about identifying this structural change and perhaps be making claims for more responsible long-term fiscal reforms rather than claims for subsidies for what we are classifying as public goods requiring state-outlay today.

Fed's Total Assets, From Crisis to Crisis

Trillion \$, week ending Wednesday



Source: Fed H.4.1. Balance Sheet

WOLFSTREET.com

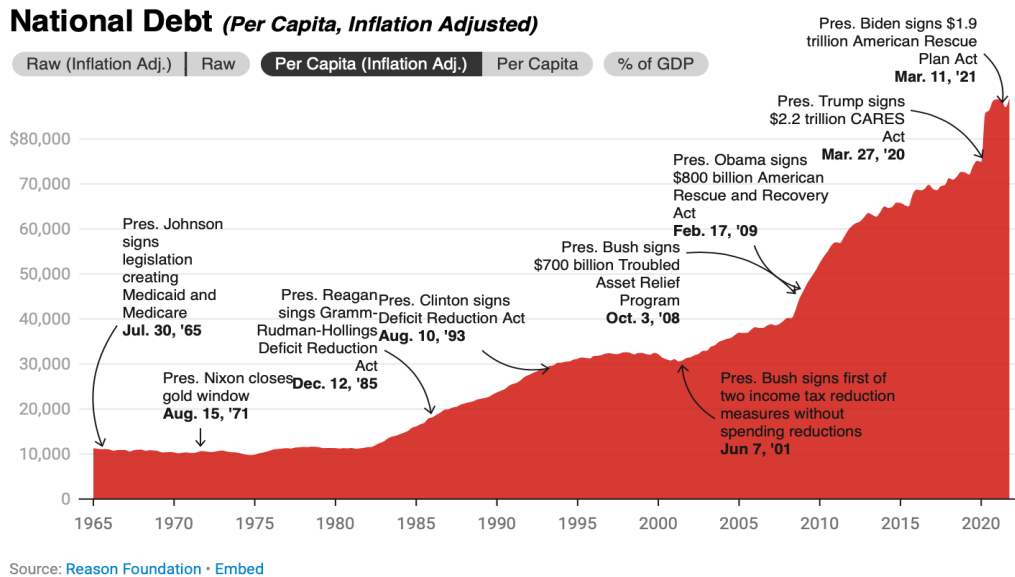


Illustration 15: National Debt Per Person Over Time (Reason Foundation 2022)

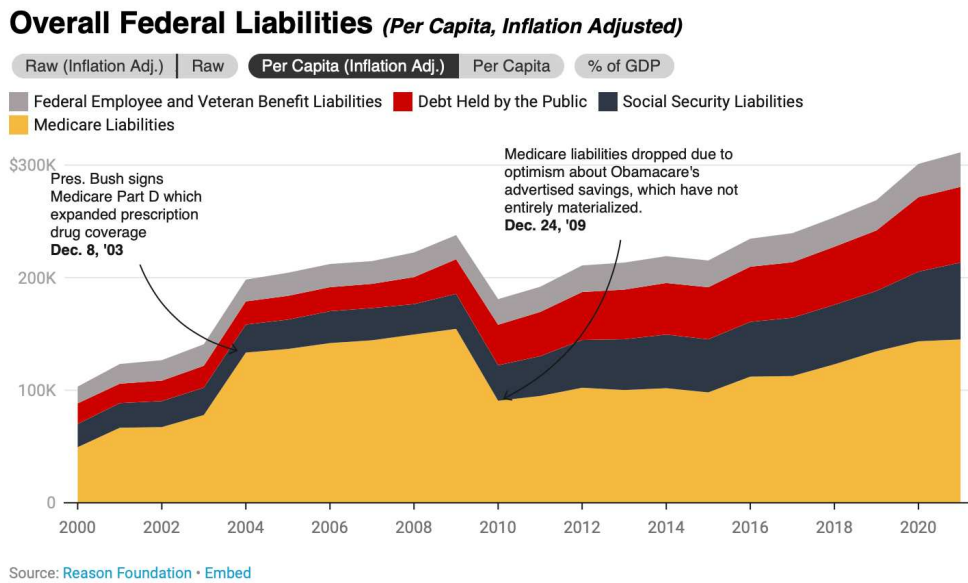


Illustration 16: National Debt and Unfunded Liabilities Over Time (Reason Foundation 2022)

From Illustration 16 we learn that unfunded federal liabilities for promised spending is more than 300% the on-budget numbers. We might agree that it is

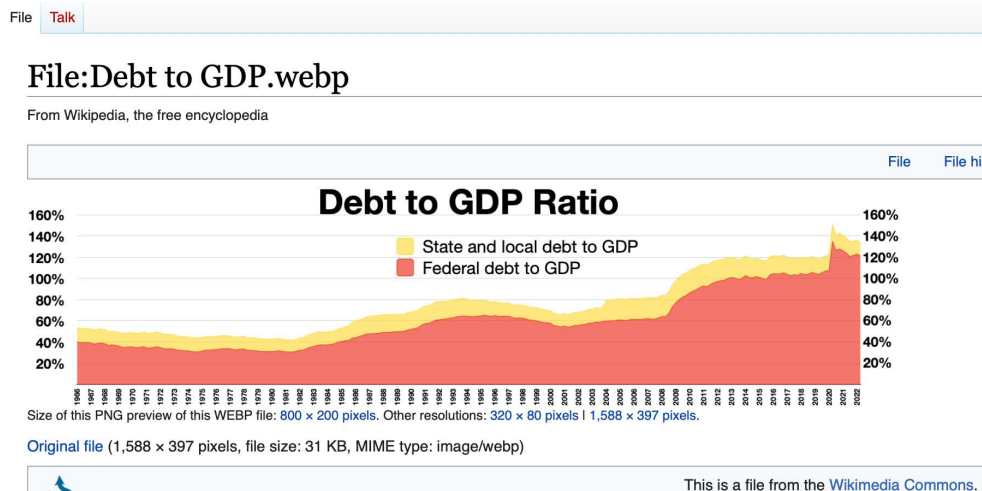
wrong to pass along around \$400,000 in debt and liabilities to future generations as the status-quo.²⁸

Deconstructing Positivism

Our preliminary survey results imply that serendipity, free-association, is valued by artists (musicians) and that artists (musicians) are entrepreneurial-oriented and intrinsically self-motivated.²⁹ A thriving economy allows thriving arts. “The economy is, then, a reservoir from which art plays draw money income as a context for the maintenance of the plays. Art participants treat income not as an objective but as a constraint” (1996, 132).

The purpose of our research has been to question the micro-economic ‘science’ of industrial organization and to propose that it might be better for the arts if we had flourishing nation-state economies.

²⁸ We also see a structural change of increased debt to GDP for the USA beginning with the interventions after the housing boom-and-bust and again accelerated during the covid-era.



²⁹ “Serendipity is problematic in an organized market” (Cameron 2016, 6).

Exchange of Value Between Art and the Economy

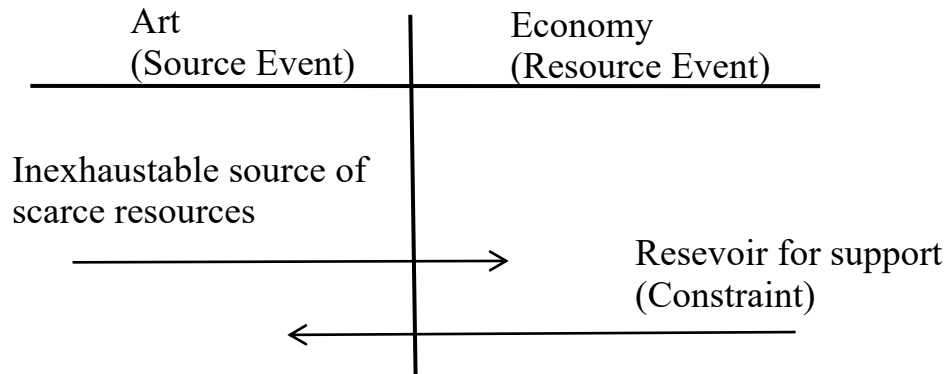


Illustration 19: Heuristic on Exchange of Value between Art and the Economy. Diagram by authors, adapted by from ideas by Hutter 1996.

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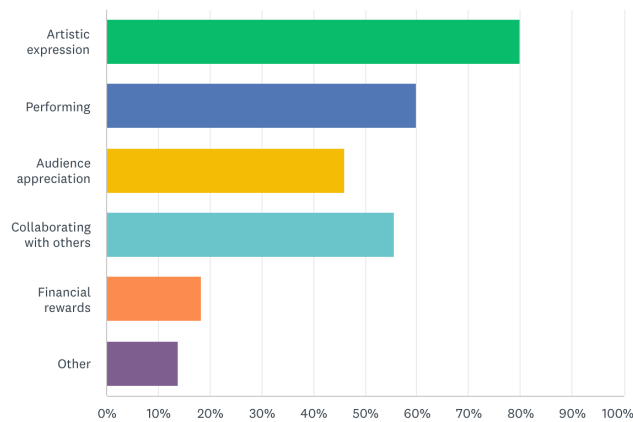
Appendix: Our Snowball Survey Questions Designed to be Compatible with the MIRA 2018 Survey³⁰

Q17

Customize Save as

What do you like most about being a musician? (Check all that apply)

Answered: 115 Skipped: 1

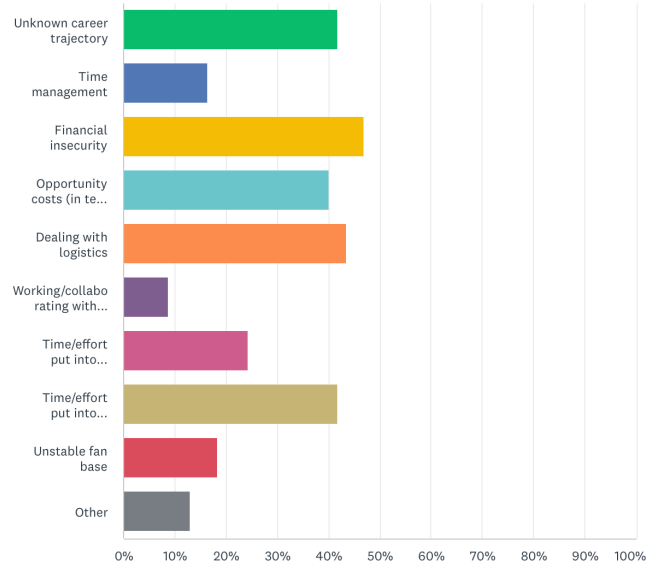


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Artistic expression	80.00% 92
Performing	60.00% 69
Audience appreciation	46.09% 53
Collaborating with others	55.65% 64
Financial rewards	18.26% 21
Other	13.91% 16
Total Respondents: 115	

³⁰ Screenshots taken from our Survey Monkey website August 25, 2022.

What do you like least about being a musician? (Check all that apply)

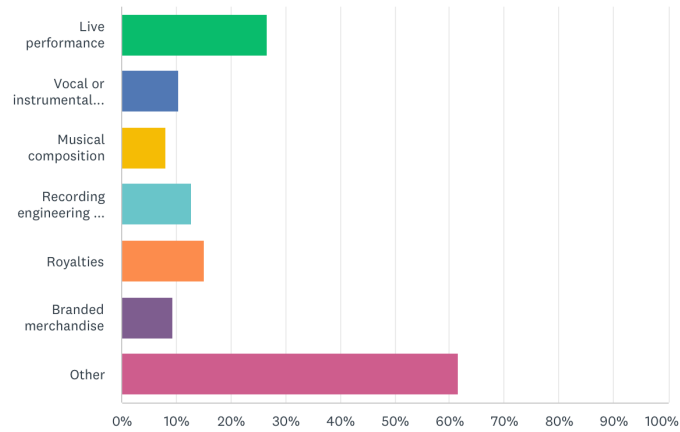
Answered: 115 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Unknown career trajectory	41.74% 48
Time management	16.52% 19
Financial insecurity	46.96% 54
Opportunity costs (in terms of family and other pursuits)	40.00% 46
Dealing with logistics	43.48% 50
Working/collaborating with others	8.70% 10
Time/effort put into getting paid for music streamed/played	24.35% 28
Time/effort put into marketing oneself	41.74% 48
Unstable fan base	18.26% 21
Other	13.04% 15
Total Respondents: 115	

Over the past seven days from which categories did you earn income? (Check all that apply)

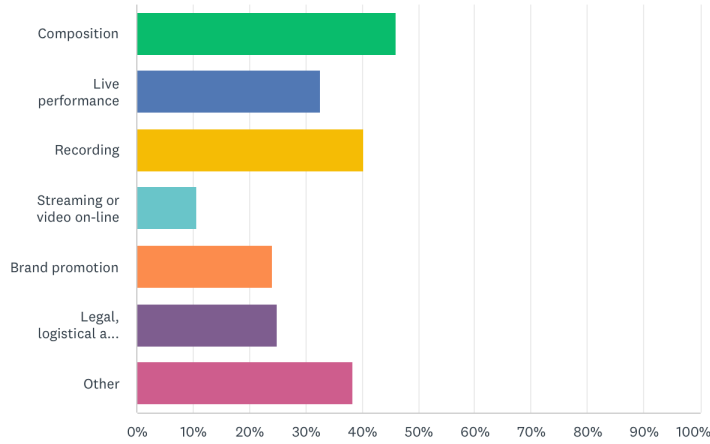
Answered: 86 Skipped: 30



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Live performance	26.74% 23
Vocal or instrumental recording	10.47% 9
Musical composition	8.14% 7
Recording engineering or producing	12.79% 11
Royalties	15.12% 13
Branded merchandise	9.30% 8
Other	61.63% 53
Total Respondents: 86	

Over the last seven days in which activities were you engaged? (Check all that apply)

Answered: 104 Skipped: 12



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Composition	46.15% 48
Live performance	32.69% 34
Recording	40.38% 42
Streaming or video on-line	10.58% 11
Brand promotion	24.04% 25
Legal, logistical and administrative	25.00% 26
Other	38.46% 40
Total Respondents: 104	