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## **From serious leisure to serious work, or, when folk music struck a chord: careers, Habermasian rationality and agency**

### **Abstract**

This paper uses the English folk music scene to consider the career arc that can develop when leisure turns to work for folk musicians. In considering this move from amateur to professional, it draws together ideas of casual leisure, serious leisure and work, highlighting the agency exercised in their career, the centrality of a familial and musical habitus, and the structured network of the scene based around various actor roles. Whilst some seek out and others stumble across professional careers, each shifts from communicative to instrumental rationality creating tensions in a tightly knit Professional, Amateur, Public (P-A-P) network. In this paper, we see how folk musicians are involved in various leisure or professional actor roles but it is in the latter that individuals are seen to benefit from the hedonic elements of casual leisure and the learning of serious leisure whilst being paid as a professional.

Keywords: Habermasian rationality, serious leisure, career, folk music, morris

## **From serious leisure to serious work, or, when folk music struck a chord: careers, Habermasian rationality and agency**

### **Introduction**

This paper began its life in a wider study of the English folk music scene where it was thought that a community rooted in Englishness would be found amongst the morris dancers and musicians. Early on, in pilot interviews, it was discovered that these two folk music groupings were very distinct, albeit with morris dancers expressing views that they ought to listen to more (contemporary) folk music and musicians recognising the shared musical roots of the tradition. Our look at the cultural web of the English folk morris dance scene (AUTHORS, 2013) revealed leisured individuals who gain sustenance from their involvement in a tradition based on an Englishness that is difficult to define and in a state of constant flux. Here, our attention turns to the musicians within the English folk music scene who we perceived as having a wider ranging outlook with community engagement that varied from amateur to professional, casual to serious, English to international and from play to work. Before continuing our research, we returned to the literature to explore what this meant for the musicians who appeared to be involved in a work/leisure professional practice continuum between what Habermas (1984, 1987) would refer to as communicative rationality and instrumental rationality. For the morris dancers, being a dancer was serious leisure (Stebbins, 1982) but, typically, not the paid work of a professional – for the musicians in this study, serious leisure is much more serious than simply developing a set of musical skills. This was the crux of the difference between the morris dancers and the musicians as the former were firmly basing their leisured life on a communicative rationality which involved a significant amount of socializing with friends who had similar interests. In this way, their involvement being similar to the connection between social dance and serious leisure observed by Brown (2007).

Stebbins (1997) also recognised the differences between the amateur and the professional in his work on leisure by use of a macrosociological view of a Professional, Amateur, Public (P-A-P) perspective (Stebbins, 1977). His work, therefore, is linking into Habermasian rationality as activities move from a communicative leisured amateur to an instrumental professional whilst interacting with a public that shares a common interest.

Our intention in this paper is to understand how the musicians allied to the English folk music scene engage with this community over a period of time. In doing so, we are asking

questions about the influences that would impact upon shifts between the communicative and instrumental rationalities when playing folk music as a serious leisure activity.

## **Literature Review**

This paper concerns itself with looking at the musicians involved in the English folk music scene and, hence, it is useful to reflect briefly on that scene and where it comes from. The term ‘folk music’ is one that has been argued over but most concede that it is music whose roots are in the long held traditions of the local population. Whilst there are contemporary composers of folk song, the more traditional folk singer seeks to reinterpret old songs or tunes where copyright has often expired and thus their composition becomes acknowledged as ‘traditional, arranged by’ or, more commonly, ‘trad arr.’.

In most traditions, music is closely related to dance as can be seen in the name of the guardians of English folk music, the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS, 2014). The dance associated with English folk music is known as ‘morris dancing’ and has a long if contested history (Judge, 2002). As a consequence, local interpretation of this dance varies considerably amongst the ‘sides’ as the local groupings of morris dancers are termed. Each side, assuming it draws from local tradition, will use local tunes that often go back centuries albeit having been traditionally arranged by the musicians. However, it should be noted that English folk musicians do not always play music for the morris sides as their interest may be driven by the words that come with traditional songs as opposed to the unembellished tunes preferred for dancing.

As a further word of introduction, it is useful to consider musical communities. Some writers on popular music have considered these as musical scenes based on genre of music (Wallach & Levine, 2011), location (Hracs et al, 2011; Cohen, 2012) or both (Guibert & Sklower, 2011) and, sometimes, that location is defined as localised, global or virtual. In terms of their development, Ruth Finnegan (1989) is credited with highlighting the grassroots musical communities that might develop into scenes in whichever way the latter might be defined. Whilst these writers often perform ethnographic studies of scenes, here, our work is looking specifically at the individual level of folk musicians and their continuing interconnectedness with elements such as venues, record labels and so on. Following the work of Spracklen (2009), who draws on the work of Jurgen Habermas (1984, 1987) we are interested in the way music serves as a

communal space for the formation of different kinds of leisure: the communicative leisure of free choice (which is part of the free, communicative action of the Habermasian lifeworld); and the instrumental leisure of global capitalism (which is part of Habermas' instrumental rationality).

Stebbins (1977) recognises within his aforementioned P-A-P framework that there can be interaction between a scene's professional, amateur and public elements that blur the definition of a musician within a leisure context. Furthermore, as we have noted, Stebbins' (1992) view of casual leisure, serious leisure and work reflects the continuum between Habermasian communicative and instrumental rationalities. So, his work is important to our considerations here and warrants further examination.

Casual leisure manifests itself as "play" when an individual may choose to pick up, say, a guitar for the purpose of "active entertainment" or talk in "sociable conversation" about music. These are all terms that Stebbins (1992) recognises as central to casual leisure but also indicative of communicative rationalities from which pleasure derives as proposed by Habermas (1984, 1987). Indeed, for some, this is the area where there is "true" leisure in that the individual chooses to play or sing and has the freedom to start or stop the activity as suits them. Whilst considering there is a hedonic element to casual leisure, Stebbins accepts that this activity may be a lone pursuit as much as one shared in a communicative way with others. Most dancers and musicians would accept that there is pleasure in solitary dancing or playing music but a number of them seek to share this in a communicative way with others. This public performance may take many forms: casual leisure is best seen as the communicative leisured amateur performing in an intimate setting amongst friends in the 'session' where instrumentalists play together in an informal setting such as a bar or the 'singaround' where there is a similar informal relationship between singers.

Stebbins' key contribution to the thinking around leisure is that of serious leisure which is the middle ground between what was once regarded as simply play, or casual leisure, and work. He recognises that seriousness in leisure may emerge as an individual perceives themselves as an amateur in a particular field, a hobbyist or interested in career volunteering (Stebbins, 1992, pp. 8-19). Each one of these is discernible in the folk music community where amateurs will play floor spots at folk clubs, fans of folk music turn their interest into the hobbyist pursuits of collecting recordings or attending live music events, and others may volunteer to get involved with organising performances on the folk music scene. In this way, such roles go beyond the

hedonistic pleasures of casual leisure, say, playing in a (music) session at a small, intimate venue.

In fact, within the hobbyist pursuits of serious leisure, Stebbins (1992, p.10-15) describes collectors, makers and tinkerers, activity participants and the “folk artist.” However, he points out that this definition of folk artist is not to be confused with “commercial performers or producers of these arts” (Stebbins, 1992 p.13). Furthermore, the lack of interaction by Stebbins’ folk artist within the P-A-P framework mentioned earlier means that they are similar to the activity participants such as bird watchers (Kellert, 1985) or morris dancers (Bishop & Hodgett, 1986, cited in Stebbins, 1992 p. 12). Instead, he points out that “they perform or produce strictly for their own (pleasure) and perhaps that of others in the same community, whilst making their living in some other fashion” (Stebbins, 1992, p.13). In the context of our work, this clearly reflects our study of morris dancers (AUTHORS, 2013) and highlights their separation from those professional musicians who earn all or part of their living from playing music. The latter are seeking to exploit further their own talents to produce music that can be shared with others for (commercial) benefit whether in recorded format or live performance.

More recent interpretations of Stebbins work by Gallant et al (2013) add further weight to our interest in applying serious leisure thinking to this work. Their redefinition of serious leisure as “the committed pursuit of a core leisure experience that is substantial, interesting, and fulfilling, and where engagement is characterized by unique identities and leads to a variety of outcomes for the person, social world, and communities within which the person is immersed” (p. 104) reflects the unique aspects that might be observed in those pursuing musical careers within a folk music based community. Their insights of serious leisure also point to social, political and economic contexts which we might anticipate as having relevance to the folk music scene.

Bourdieu (1983, 1993) examines how artists behave within what he refers to as “the field of cultural production.” In presenting his ideas, an objective view is taken that implies the surrounding social structures will define this environment for artists. At the same time, he proposes that artists have an inherent disinterestedness in the need for financial or social capital whilst producing works that form their own cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993). Whereas Stebbins (1992) suggests that careers may follow a trajectory between the amateur and the professional in a way that implies the artist must seek out the gatekeepers that limit such as the musician making

recordings or live performances. In doing so, his view is more subjective and dependent on individuals and their thoughts, actions and so on. Stebbins (1992, p.68) defines the career that might result as “the typical course, or passage, of certain-types of amateur-professional practitioners that carries them into, and through, a leisure role and possibly into, and through a work role.”

Within these two points of view, a tension can be seen between the need of artists to develop the cultural capital of their art and the social capital required to identify and win over gatekeepers in order to achieve the financial capital needed for day to day living. This tension comes into play when we consider the agency exerted by an individual where a musician is, perhaps, faced with a choice of a few hours of artistic creation or picking up the phone in an effort to present that cultural object to others. Referring to their work as an “economy of exchange,” Scott (2012) observes the way that music producers start with limited financial capital and convert this into other forms of capital that are useful in cultural production. In this sense, he uses the term “producers” for those who put together a cultural object to be publicly presented as opposed to the producer of the object itself. For both types of producer, the tensions of the “economy of exchange” are present in the field of cultural production

These subjective views of the musicians’ experience might also be considered to be embedded into networks as described in the “art worlds” of Becker (1982). Whilst his work has been criticised as not recognising the art networks of different geographies or interests, more detailed examinations of networks like the London punk and Manchester post-punk scenes by Bottero and Crossley (2011) reveal their interactive nature. Closer to our study on folk music, Dubois and Méon (2012) consider the sub-field of wind music in France and conclude that understanding is better when the objective structure is linked through to subjective understanding via a network. Fine (2013, p.1) discusses how such interactive networks of shared interest are held together by a “sticky culture” that has “remembrances of the past, focusing on the hero, the critical moment, and validated styles.” While his work focuses on chess playing, it is another activity that has the potential for serious leisure as well as work. Certainly, that definition of a “sticky culture” has a resonance with musicians and the consideration of musical history, iconic musicians and shifting musical styles.

In support of such shifting views of objectiveness, Prior (2011, p 126) points out that Bourdieu makes limited reference to musicians in his seminal works even though others have

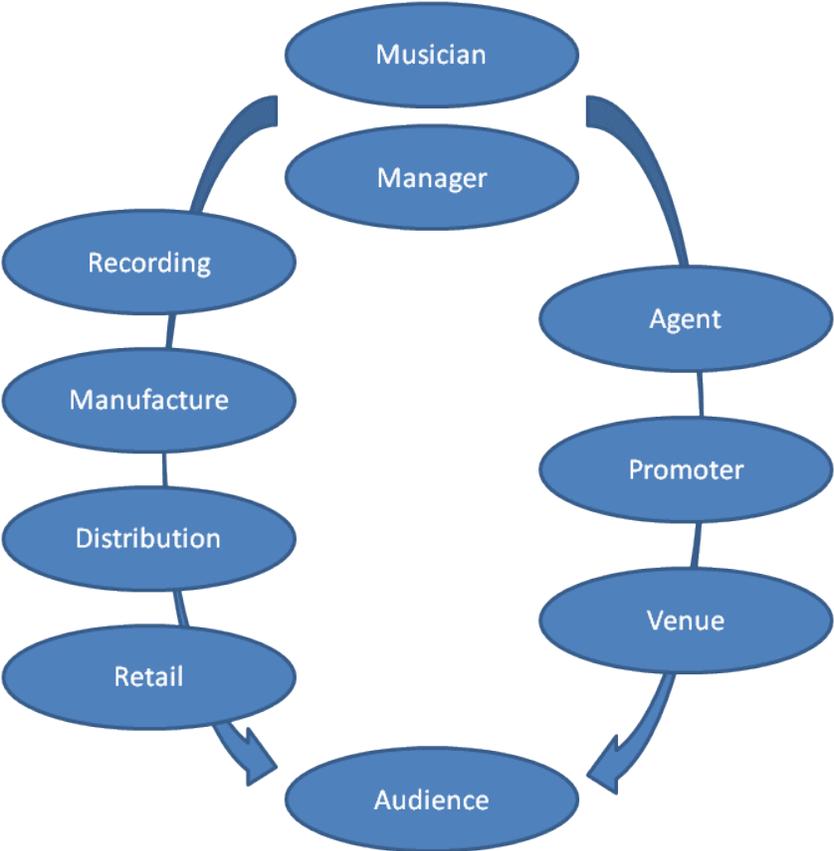
made use of the concepts of habitus, field and capital in this area (Bottero & Crossley, 2011; Rimmer, 2011; Scott, 2012). Instead, he points us to the work of Born (2010) because she identifies that Bourdieu “refuses to admit either the mediating effects of art or the creative decisions of the producer” (Prior, 2011, p 131). Her post-Bourdieu view (Born, 2010, p.171) suggests that the “theory of cultural production requires reinvention in relation to five key themes: aesthetics and the cultural object; agency and subjectivity; the place of institutions; history, temporality and change; and problems of value and judgement.” While our study does not intend to explore all these areas in detail, there are clear pointers to themes for our examination of the folk musicians’ career.

In this paper, we are exploring how folk musicians fit into networks of cultural production, reflect the balance between the disinterestedness of Bourdieu, their interest in pursuing folk music as a career and the agency they exercise over time in making these choices as emphasised by Born. However, at this point, it is useful to understand the structure that surrounds a musician who engages with what might be called the music business and its gatekeepers, a poorly defined and understood area (Baym, 2011). Musicians who wish to engage within the P-A-P framework effectively have two areas of musical production on which to embark. Namely, these are the provision of recorded music and the performance of live music where the former may act as a memory of the latter and the latter may be desired after enjoyment of the former. Whilst these mechanisms are inextricably linked, they have their own independent existence with, say, concert promoters often having no knowledge of how to produce recorded music.

In Figure One, these two areas are shown broken down to the essential actors (in an instrumental sense) involved with the cultural production of music and its distribution to an audience. When a musician begins to offer their music to an audience, they would almost certainly not have a manager to co-ordinate this for them. Hence, they are the producers in the sense of both the cultural object and managing its presentation to the public. Recorded music needs to go through a process of recording, (product) manufacture, distribution and (store) retail albeit that the growth in downloaded music has compressed these steps to, in effect, recording and distribution. A development in technology that has transformed the nature of the recorded music industry and caused the companies involved to drastically change their strategic approach or die (Baym, 2011). For the musicians, whilst it has significantly altered the economies of

recorded music, it has also required engagement with different companies in order to offer their audience a (digital) product. However, performing live is to offer a service rather than a product, which means a musician needs a venue (somewhere to play), a promoter (to hire the venue and attract the audience) and an agent (to contract with the promoters). This set of relationships is unlikely to change unless you consider that some may merge, for example, with the promoter being the venue management or the musician acting as the agent. All these relationships may, later, be co-ordinated by a manager in order to allow the musician to focus on the cultural object.

**Figure One: Providing recorded and live music to an audience**



We propose, using our knowledge of the industry, that what is significant in these relationships between the artist and those in the industry is the Habermasian tension between communicative rationality and instrumentality. A musician is intrinsically motivated by the urge to create something and may be inspired to create by the productions of others. But there is another compulsion to get the music heard by others, and to make music that attracts social and

cultural capital. Managers and the other actors in the process might be fans of the music in a communicative relationship with the musicians, but they will be more likely to be concerned about the instrumental “bottom line” of economic capital.

For the UK folk music scene, it is generally accepted that its current form was shaped by the 1960s revival charted in the writing of Sweers (2005), Boyes (2010) and Frith et al. (2013). Within recorded music, record labels such as Topic Records developed (Winick, 1997) and continue today to guide their artists through each of the steps in the above mentioned process.

Alongside the aforementioned arrival of music downloads, the major shift over that period was the DIY nature of the industry that came about during the punk period of the 1970s and continues today (Strachan, 2007; Dale, 2008). The combined effect was to sweep away the need for musicians at the start of their career to pander to large record companies in order to get their recorded music to their fans. While this offers the musician an opportunity to exercise tight control over their recorded output, it clearly takes them well away from communicative leisure and requires an instrumental approach involving contracts with manufacturers, distributors and retail - mirrored in Figure One by the formal, instrumental relationships with agents, promoters or venues that are required in order to present their music in live performance.

## **Methodology**

### ***Rationale and Approach***

The approach to this research on folk musicians parallels our earlier work on the morris dancers (AUTHORS, 2013, p. XX) where we had assumed they “would share sufficient backgrounds and opinions to allow us to combine the two groups into one analysis of the English folk scene as one imagined community.” Pilot interviews quickly proved this wrong and our morris research focussed on their “leisure lives” whereas, here, our focus is on how the folk musicians might pass from leisure through to work on the folk scene. In this research, we seek to emulate Geertz (1973) in developing “thick” accounts of how musicians traverse this path.

Our consideration of literature has highlighted the importance of Stebbins who followed a grounded approach to his work (1992, p. xiv). We followed a similar path, as we discuss in our published work on English morris dancers (AUTHORS, 2013 p. XX):

The theoretical underpinning of the methodology is naturalistic and inductive (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), following Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their grounded theory approach, but allowing ourselves to be aware of the limits and the aims of our study. The literature review provided the basic structure of a set of themes used in the interviews, but we did not limit ourselves to that structure - where respondents discussed new issues we responded to them and modified our interview schedule.

### *Positionality*

We are both folk music fans with many years' experience watching folk music gigs and buying folk music records. Additionally, the lead author has had a career promoting live music including folk music for over 30 years. While this may lead us to be subjective in our research analysis, we believe that our positionality as critical insiders allows us to understand the folk music scene and keep a reflexive distance between us and our respondents (AUTHOR, 2013; AUTHORS, 2013).

### *Sample*

We interviewed 13 people starting with 10 who had established careers within the folk music scene of the UK. Whilst seeking those with lengthy careers, it was our intention to capture a range of ages and differing experiences (singers, instrumentalists and song writers). This can be seen in our list of interviewees set out below with some of their background:

**Kit Bailey:** Based in Sheffield, daughter of Roy Bailey who has a folk music career spanning over five decades. Has pursued a career related to music but largely in a non-performing capacity.

**Martin Carthy:** Based in East Yorkshire, married to Norma Waterson and father to Eliza Carthy. Internationally recognised and highly influential having inspired both Bob Dylan and Paul Simon in the 1960s.

**Andy Cutting:** Brought up in London, diatonic button accordion player who came to the fore playing with Blowzabella in the 1980s. Has since accompanied many artists ranging from Kate Rusby to The Who.

**Martin Ellison:** Lancastrian melodeon player who has been very active in his local folk scene and various semi-professional folk music groups since the 1970s.

**Fay Hield:** Yorkshire based, studying folk music at the turn of this century. Formed The Witches of Elswick with fellow students before pursuing a solo career. Gained her doctorate studying folk music community at The University of Sheffield (Hield, 2010).

**Steve Knightley:** Songwriter best known for his partnership with multi-instrumentalist Phil Beer in the group Show Of Hands. Based in South West of UK, they have been recording together since the early 1990s.

**Roger Liptrot:** Has played in the folk clubs of Greater Manchester but is best known for his Folkimages website (Folkimages, 2013).

**Anaïs Mitchell:** American born, started recording at the turn of this century. Has developed an interest in traditional music and recorded the album “Child Ballads” with Jefferson Hamer derived from the songs collected by Francis James Child.

**Martin Simpson:** Born in Scunthorpe, England, started recording in the mid 1970s and has pursued a career on both sides of the Atlantic working with artists as diverse as June Tabor and Jackson Browne.

**John Spiers:** Oxfordshire based, melodeon player who began his career in a duo with Jon Boden. Their first release in the early part of this century before the expanded line up of Bellowhead was developed.

**Steve Tilston:** UK songwriter who began recording in the early 1970s and has played in solo, duo and band formats on the international folk scene.

**Chris Wood:** An English folk musician who writes his own solo material but is also know for drawing from traditional music in his duo work with Andy Cutting and as a member of The Imagined Village.

Whilst the majority of our interviewees can be described as English folk musicians, there are three exceptions to this. This came about as the themes of our research started to emerge and we noticed both the international elements to some folk musicians’ careers and the breadth of involvement a musician may have in the wider folk scene. Hence, we took the opportunity to interview an American musician with a keen interest in UK folk music (Anaïs Mitchell); the daughter of a well known folk musician whose career path took her away from performing but largely remained in folk music (Kit Bailey); and a slightly reluctant performer who found his way in the folk scene through photography (Roger Liptrot). In this way, we were able to contrast

emerging themes amongst the musicians that may or may not fit with alternative routes through the folk scene.

In line with the best practice of the British Sociological Association's Research Ethics Policy, and, our own institution's policy and processes on research ethics, all the respondents have given their permission for their names to be used. Initially, we proceeded on the assumption that we might keep them anonymous but, talking to our respondents, it was obvious that they were happy for discussion of their career to be in the public domain. Some comments that were slightly sensitive have not been attributed to the specific interviewee(s).

### ***Data Collection***

We developed an interview schedule that started with biographical, historical details, and then moved on to asking respondents about their professional careers in folk music. As we moved through their life-stories we also made sure we asked them about their connections, awareness and relationships in the wider English folk scene. Following Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Glaser and Strauss (1967), we allowed the interviews to be as open-ended and wide-ranging as possible, to give our respondents control over what they wanted to tell us, while at the same time we used our literature review to stop the data collection being purely grounded in the experience of the authors. We interviewed the musicians in a wide range of locations, depending on their availability: some in their homes, others in public spaces and some in venues. The duration of these interviews was typically between one and two hours with some of the interviewees kindly responding to follow up questions on email.

### ***Data Analysis***

We analysed the data using a combination of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and discourse tracing (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009). Discourse tracing is an analytical method that uses a continuous reading of texts and transcripts, moving between the theoretical framework and the data to slowly develop an understanding of the key discourses common to the data. This allowed us to continually analyse the data until we were confident we had found enough shared narratives and discourses across our respondents. We then used our own positionality to test our working codes and discourses, which were then re-applied to the data to see if we were building a coherent analytical narrative (AUTHOR, 2013).

## **Findings and Discussion**

Our research followed the career trajectory of the musicians that we interviewed revealing themes that often reflected their personal journey through a "field of cultural production". Here, we set out the key themes as they were revealed to us: becoming musicians; when serious leisure becomes serious work; agency develops career through instrumental rationality, and, moving within fields of cultural production.

### ***Becoming musicians***

How do the musicians enter a field of production? For the majority of our interviewees, they arrived in a world where their close family had some sort of interest in music. That might not be folk music and it might not involve performing but they entered an environment that shaped their habitus and offered them an opportunity to gain cultural capital because of an absorbed musical knowledge. On the other hand, some quite clearly rejected their first contact with folk music and perceived this capital as valueless. Here, Andy Cutting shuns the folk club before he developed the skills of being able to play the accordion and its associated cultural capital:

Yeah, my mum and dad went along to the local folk club... I would occasionally go and, more often than not, sit in the car the whole night. I was seven. I'd rather stay in the car rather than listen to what seemed like endless ballads that all seemed to have the same tune and you couldn't quite understand what they were singing about.

Most were influenced by relatives, though sometimes friends, who proved to be the door openers, sometimes literally, for those who had not only already gained an interest in music but some playing skills too. Martin Ellison was taken to a folk club at the age of 13 by a distant relation; at the age of 15, Steve Tilston was taken to a folk club by his friend; by 13 years old, Martin Simpson was a regular at Scunthorpe Folk Club and recalls playing there:

...horrendous, my voice hadn't broken and I couldn't play. I murdered various ballads but they were really lovely and encouraging. They could see I was monstrously, deadly serious and I just kept absorbing everything that came at me.

For these interviewees, the structure provided by the folk clubs (and coffee bars) in the 1960s was a welcoming one despite some of the concerns with the “rules” of the folk club registered by Boyes (2010, p.237). As Martin Carthy puts it, these were places where he could (and still can) sharpen his tools, “walk up blind alleys, find my way out and still get generous applause.” Clearly, these musicians are using their agency to begin a journey that allows them to develop and translate cultural capital into the networks of social capital though, in some cases, it was part of the networked community that came looking as recounted by Chris Wood:

At 13 or 14, I was playing Simon and Garfunkel’s “Scarborough Fair” at a schools’ music day and the woman who ran Whitstable Folk Club was there scouting. All those years ago, she was totally on the case. She saw me playing and said that I should go down to her folk club. There was all these university students there, around 10 years older than me, that bit more accomplished and more dedicated. I was like a dog with two \*\*\*\*\* and this turned out to be John Jones, Alan Prosser, Ian Telfer (later of Oysterband).

In other cases, our interviewee was surrounded by music and even parents who knew how to play instruments but found their own way into playing at folk clubs as Martin Carthy makes clear on his Desert Island Discs appearance (BBC, 2012). Exercising their agency in this way is often driven by a passion for music which has emerged in the main by listening to recordings. Listening to music on record from an early age, Martin Simpson “fell in love with songs”:

Listening to Paul Robeson when I was three or four, I remember going phew (blows out), this makes me feel, I don’t know what it is. Melancholy? I didn’t understand. I had no frame of reference for it but I loved how it affected me.

For Anais Mitchell, it was the story telling aspect that attracted her to songs and song writing. However, for some, this love of music was less about songs and more about instrumental music as Martin Ellison suggests:

By the age of about 13, I had my first concertina. People would take them down from their attics and you could pick them up for just a few pounds (not the case now). And because of my interest in this music, I started hearing music from outside of Lancashire like John Kirkpatrick and Martin Carthy but it was that instrumental music (and some of the accompaniment) that just struck a chord with me. I love songs but have never been a singer and never really wanted to sing.

This combination of musical and familial elements influencing habitus is clear when considering the response of Steve Knightley. Around the age of 12 or 13, he was influenced by his step-brother who worked for the armed forces in Germany and returned with the recordings of Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Bob Dylan and other American folk musicians. Having not been born into “a folk music family,” he picked up a guitar at 14 but was interested in flamenco, singer songwriters such as James Taylor, acoustic music as heard on Island Records’ samplers but not “differentiating it or putting it into a specific genre.” This use of recorded music to garner culture capital traverses geographical, genre and art world boundaries as exemplified by Anais Mitchell whose early listening was at home in Vermont where her author/English teacher father surrounded the family with books and folk music records with “heavy hitting lyrics” which encouraged her to “express herself” in the story telling of song.

Very early in their lives, our musicians are seen to exercise their agency in an environment where music surrounds them whether that is heard inside or outside the home and in recorded, broadcast or live formats. In developing their cultural capital, personal choice of how to exercise their agency may lead them to writing songs, singing or playing instruments but each one develops social capital within their network of musical contacts.

### ***When serious leisure becomes serious work***

How do our musicians relate to their leisure and work lives? Our interviewees all show an exercising of their agency and some move on to become professionals within a working role. However, in traversing this career path, their time may be spent in various forms of leisure and work though central to these activities is always cultural production. It is clear that cultural production dominates whether our musicians are on a stage being paid for playing to a large

audience, busking or playing for no pay in a session at the local pub. This readiness to move back and forth between work and play is exemplified by the comment from John Spiers:

It (busking) is a very sociable thing to do, got me out of myself and from that picked up the odd bit of paid work playing in ceilidh bands. I still go out to sessions now though not as obsessively as I did. It really hones your playing down to a fine art.

His hedonic casual leisure in playing with local amateurs clearly spills over into a more serious leisure element as he develops his playing alongside the professional work that includes his role in the band Bellowhead with long time musical partner, Jon Boden. In this way, the activities of our musicians seem to blur the definitions of casual leisure, serious leisure and work. When working, they not only have a hedonic enjoyment as if it was casual leisure but also are engaged in developing their skills when playing with other professional musicians as if engaged in serious leisure. On the other hand, if not working, our musicians may be involved with leisure activities that offer learning or hedonistic pleasure. Hence, it appears that the work/leisure professional practice continuum finds the professional folk musician gaining the most in that they can benefit from casual and serious leisure but be paid to learn and derive basic pleasures whilst performing to the public. Indeed, many of our interviewees expressed the sentiments of being lucky to be earning a living from something they enjoyed as their play and work merged into one

This rich professional life can be confusing when musicians interact with the P-A-P framework where the different roles interact with certain expectations. Such a blurring of the boundaries between leisure and work forms comes to the fore in the (folk) singing club organised by Fay Hield and her partner, Jon Boden (Royal Traditions, 2013) where professional folk performers mix with amateur singers and those simply enjoying a night out:

With Jon, because he organises it, when people come new they can be a little bit star struck and not know how to talk to you but that's a fame thing and it breaks down when they hear me and Jon singing squeaking drunk at the end of the night – “ah, so, you're a real person.” In fact, almost the more famous Jon's got, the more we are keen to do real stuff trying to get people involved. We wanted to support the pub, keep the singing going

and be able to invite guest singers that we wanted to hear. We do it in the main bar of the pub. So, the locals are in as well and there's this real gradation. People have to pay for seats right next to the artist which nearly always sell out. Then, there's a band around it where locals come in and people who missed out or students can have a pint and sing. There's bit of banter there and, then, there's the people who are in the pub on a Saturday night who sit on the outskirts around the bar. I thought the locals may hate us but a couple of them have won the raffle, even sung and all's fine.

While recognising that some folk clubs are well run and others not, Andy Cutting notes the frustrations of a professional working alongside the amateur where they "sing the same songs and forget the same words every week." While his duo partner, Chris Wood, expresses the importance of this situation where the cultural capital of stage craft is learnt by the amateur aspiring to improve or even become professional in that "there has to be a place where people learn to swim and find their level." The tension in these situations comes about as the agency of our musicians draws them away from an amateur communicative rationality into the world of professional instrumental rationality bringing with it such as contracts to perform for a certain period, at a specific time and in a particular venue. Our interviewees recognised the two extremes and observed that the sometimes awkward mix was a necessary evil for the opportunity to learn.

Whilst personal agency and a love of playing music may drive some of those within the folk music scene towards being professional musicians, others see their working career going in other directions. For some, playing music remains a casual leisure activity despite being encouraged by others. As Roger Liptrot says, "the happiest part of it for me was learning a song that I could play on a guitar and actually sing." Indeed, when he was offered and played a paid performance at a folk club, his reaction reflected a communicative casual leisure rationality suggesting "that it was all just part of the friendship and my mates getting up." Those that are not drawn into performing folk music can be found taking other professional roles in the folk music scene. Kit Bailey happily found herself involved in various roles such as a folk music agent, event organiser, stage manager and so on describes it this way:

I enjoyed being involved with musicians but I've always been a backstage person. I'm not a performer though I love singing.

Reflecting Stebbins' definition of career trajectory (Stebbins, 1992, p.68), following from our sample choice, most of our interviewees chose to develop from casual to serious leisure and have professional careers in the folk scene. Those who chose to exercise their agency to develop a professional performing career gain the benefits that are found in both casual and serious leisure but have begun to set up tensions within the P-A-P framework by virtue of the tangible instrumental rationalities of contracts, etc as well as the intangible instrumental rationalities felt between the three elements of the framework.

### ***Agency develops career through instrumental rationality***

How do the musicians develop their careers within the field of English folk music? Our consideration of where serious leisure becomes serious work has already identified the individuals' agency and Habermasian rationalities as central in that shift. Here, we seek to identify the temporal elements implied by Born (2010) and the engagement of our musicians with the particular elements of musical production identified in Figure One.

For some of our interviewees, their movement into paid work is early in their career with Steve Tilston pointing to paid performances at the age of 15 whilst Martin Simpson cites his first commercial appearance at 14 years old. In doing so, theirs is a rapid acceleration away from the communicative rationality of casual leisure into a world of professional public performances at venues that involves the contracts of instrumentality (though often word of mouth is cited as the route into these early experiences). Yet, others find opportunity in different ways and are barely thinking in terms of a performing career as Fay Field indicates when commenting on her move across various folk roles before her singing career commenced:

I'm not really about where I end up in life. I'm certainly not interested in financial rewards and just want good stuff to happen... I was brought up with the idea that this (the folk scene) is your lifestyle, where you go on holiday, what you do, and it hasn't really occurred to me to look for a job elsewhere, or, maybe, I'm just lazy (laughs) and lucky that it's come to me through this.

Whether thinking in career terms or not, a musician's agency may lead them to interact with the actors seen in Figure One. While early on in their careers, most musicians cannot afford to add a manager to their payroll; later, having constructed their own habitus, they can be less trusting of sharing this with another. Especially, as one interviewee suggests, when their suggestions are "crass" and "manipulative" in a way that feels like "a Machiavellian way of realising their artistic ambitions through another person." On the other hand, another musician, Anaïs Mitchell expressed her pleasure in being signed to the Righteous Babe label as it was the home of one of her favourite songwriters, Ani DiFranco. In doing so, she reflected a common approach to career in that the musicians often talked about exercising their agency via other trusted musicians to find the actors that can help their professional development. She highlighted that willingness to reach out to another musician without even knowing them when approaching Martin Carthy to appear in her ensemble performance of the "Hadestown" album in London:

I took a stab in the dark and he said "yes". He's so game. He hadn't even heard the record when he agreed to do it. His publicist or something was asking "would you like to sing the voice of Hades in this Greek mythology thing."

When asked how, as an American, she discovered the primarily English and Scottish songs collected by Victorian folklorist Francis James Child (1882-1898) that are featured on her record, "Child Ballads", Anaïs Mitchell indicates how technology has made it easier for these networks of agency to develop and resulted in her interest in English folk music:

I'm not sure. You'll meet people on the road and they'll say you should play this venue or use this producer. At the end of a long night, I remember someone showed me a YouTube video on their phone with Paul Brady playing "Arthur McBride" in the 1970s. I just got that record with Andy Irvine and fell head over heels in love with that.

Described by Martin Carthy as "serendipitous experiences...like being told I had to go down to The Troubadour to hear proper folk music," there are chance meetings that change relationships whether involving other actors in cultural production or more personal involvement

that relates back to family. For example, respectively, Kit Bailey noted how her father's contacts led to a job as a folk music agent and Martin Simpson pointed to a personal relationship that partly influenced moves between England and the USA.

Whilst agency may be influenced by the opportunities that present themselves in the complex networks of cultural production and the relationships that sit inside or outside those networks, our musicians often displayed a concentration on the cultural capital as opposed to the financial capital that would be accrued in predominantly professional roles. Roger Liptrot commented on limitations to his use of agency in the direction of a professional performer as follows:

I got married, all the other things going on, you're moving house, you really needed to work at it. You've got to be dedicated to a point; your family have to take a back seat to some extent. I'm dead happy just doing what I'm doing and playing.

Despite this recognition of the potential for the dedication of serious leisure to impact upon personal relationships, Liptrot went on to utilise his agency within the more family friendly, serious leisure context of photography and now has a much revered website of folk performers down the years (Folkimages, 2013).

Over time, we see the agency of the musicians develops their career through the social capital of the networks that have resulted from their accrued cultural capital. This use of agency is helped by "serendipitous experiences" and modern technologies that help interpersonal communications and the transmission of music related media. Whilst this may lead the professional musicians into extensive networks that cover different physical and genre geographies, others are content in the serious leisure afforded them by more local, mainly amateur networks that allow cultural capital to develop.

### ***Moving within fields of cultural production***

How do our musicians move about as actors in their cultural production? We started our look at the literature by way of considering music scenes and all interviewees considered the folk club circuit a welcoming environment of learning. Martin Carthy's longevity playing folk music also led to mention of the coffee bar scene of the 1960s in London whilst Anaïs Mitchell noted the

appeal of iconic clubs such as Club Passim in Boston. John Spiers also cited the development of numerous English folk festivals as central to the health of the contemporary scene. Whilst scenes, festivals and clubs come and go, it was clear that there is much activity by our musicians away from performing live on the English folk music scene.

Education helped form some of the networks of cultural production for our interviewees whether as direct involvement in folk related degree courses like Hield's studying in Newcastle or promoting music as undergraduate students as described by Steve Knightley. Others were so driven by their passion for music that, like Martin Simpson, they dropped out of education to pursue their interest in performing directly with the folk music scene's clubs and other venues.

However, on making that journey out of home where music surrounded them, not all our interviewees moved straight into cultural production in the sense of writing or performing music. Fay Hield's parents were involved with folk clubs and morris dancing sides but, whilst "not doing that rebelling thing," she passed through working as a music agent to her folk music partner, some promoting and running festivals before developing her career as a singer. In that earlier period, her singing was limited to the casual leisure of singarounds where she highlights that she "never knew anything different ....that is how I learnt what the culture was and what singing was."

Kit Bailey, daughter of folk singer Roy, was surrounded by music more than most of our interviewees; following her father as he performed and when passing musicians would stop over with the family. Yet, she did not initially follow the musician's path at all, preferring to pick up on the politics that filled her family life in equal measure. She comments on how these political sensibilities in her habitus were to the fore:

Well, folk music was always part of my life growing up and I just loved it as it was in our lives but I kind of did that rebelling thing in my teenage years and got into goth stuff like Bauhaus. At that time when you become a teenager and you start wanting to do things different to your parents, I stopped going to (folk) festivals. But I never really left it behind mainly because Roy started off as a traditional singer but pretty quickly got into more political songs. Being in Sheffield at the time of the miners' strike and CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament), I was involved in lots of the politics of the left.

Most all of the musicians were wary of being confined to the English folk music scene whilst at the same time recognising its benefits. One interviewee concerned that his Welsh background did not fit with the Englishness element of our project; many suggesting their approach to folk music came via other more contemporary song writers such as Bob Dylan; many citing the influence of other genres such as blues music, and, certainly a wide range of listening. Quite naturally, this leads some musicians to move geographically in the pursuit of enriching their cultural capital. Martin Simpson saw the USA as “an opportunity for a huge musical adventure because so much of what I was inspired by was based in American music.”

Others would see opportunity in different actor roles which may or may not indirectly lead to cultural capital production. The latter reflected by the career path of Kit Bailey taking her into production roles at rock music events such as V Festival and highlighting that the folk scene offers various roles within music performance which are not exclusive to the folk music scene.

Having noted earlier how musicians can nurture their professional performing careers on the folk music scene, our interviewees can be seen to play other actor roles such as the agents, promoters, etc that are seen in Figure One. By virtue of the sample of our research, most are seen to progress towards the performing role but this may be done relatively directly or via a more meandering route. However, others who were brought up in a folk music habitus or simply had developed a passion for folk music were able to find professional actor roles outside of performing that help produce the “sticky culture” of the scene.

## **Conclusion**

Whilst observers of mass media “talent” shows such as X-Factor speculate that these are driven by a hunger for celebrity as opposed to the seeking out of high quality cultural production, our paper highlights how a music scene holding different actor roles together via a “sticky culture” can offer a rich network within a field of cultural production. We note that the uniqueness of an individual’s career path is reflected in a number of elements.

Firstly, there is variation within the agency exercised by the folk musicians. Folk musicians are central to the success of cultural production in developing their cultural capital and exercising agency to develop social capital within a network of musical actor roles that can span different geographies and genres. The mix of amateur and professional within the P-A-P framework can offer peculiar tensions by virtue of the tangible and intangible instrumental

rationalities. How the individual musicians chose to react in exercising their agency in these circumstances is central to how their serious leisure based careers develop.

Secondly, there are different options available to the musicians in terms of their actor roles in the folk music community. Whilst the musicians have central roles in the cultural production, it is clear from all of our interviewees that other actor roles are essential in offering platforms for the use of leisure as a tool of both professional development via serious leisure and hedonic casual leisure. These actor roles are not viewed as mutually exclusive and moving back and forth between roles that might be seen as work and play is commonplace. As Fay Hield puts it when referring to her singers club (Royal Traditions, 2013), “There, I’m a floor singer, not a professional singer. It’s not like the pop industry where they don’t rehearse in garages anymore because they are pop stars.”

Whilst some of the actor roles are there by virtue of the structure of the scene set out in Figure One, a musician may find that exercising agency comes about from either deliberate seeking out new roles or “serendipitous experiences”. Within this, it can be seen that modern technologies that support and shorten interpersonal communication help musicians to exercise their agency in seeking out actor roles and generating folk music’s cultural artefacts.

Finally, as observed in the work of Gallant et al (2013), there are social, political and economic contexts which shape the directions in which the folk musicians choose to exercise agency. The influence of friends and family, for example, is central to the choices of our folk musicians in exercising agency to develop their careers. Similarly, there is the enduring appeal of folk music where not only is the community welcoming but participation can be as simple or serious as social or economic factors allow.

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