

## Voicing Passion

### The Emotional Economy of Songwriting

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#### Abstract

This article examines articulations of the role of passion in accounts of the life and work of the songwriter. It draws upon a range of interviews with successful artists captured in the *Sodajerker On Songwriting* podcast. It is suggested that these interviews capture the 'voicing' (Toynbee, 2003) of the conventions of creativity in popular music, exploring a context in which passionate motivation, expression and understanding of the (potentially) affective responses to songs are paramount to the labour of the songwriter. The article explores how the core of this labour deals in emotion, attempting to articulate feelings in recognizable, tradable form. This is a process that is both instrumentally rationalized but often *felt* to be a deeply authentic process, understood (and believed) to spring from the individual's emotional experience, so conferring identity in a generic field. In light of current debates about the nature of creative work and emotional labour, the accounts drawn upon here can be seen to epitomise many of the qualities of what constitutes 'good work' through a mode of self-actualisation.

**Keywords:** songwriting; songwriter; music industries; passion; creativity; voicing; affect; emotional labour.

## Introduction

A normative and perhaps dominant characteristic of how music is framed is in terms of its emotional qualities and the affective responses it elicits (Hunter and Schellenberg, 2010; Juslin and Sloboda, 2011). Emotion is understood to be a quality of the sound and shape of music itself, while passionate responses and attachments determine the conditions of its consumption in terms of meaning, assessment and taste as well as the acquisition of artefacts in the form of recordings and associated ephemera. Indeed, passion also informs the terms upon which the music industries operate; as the corporate rhetoric of EMI Music Publishing suggests, its 'employees are experts in their field, and passionate about the work that they do'.<sup>1</sup> Such instances abound, illustrating how the advertising of an emotional investment in the business of music informs ideas of reliability and integrity, even at corporate level. This is a trope writ large in the understanding of the work of the creatives responsible for the origination of the songs that are the focus of this article and which as Isherwood (2014: 2) states in appositely lyrical terms, 'are the heart, soul and backbone of the music industry'.

In this article we ask how are the production of songs informed by ideas of passion as articulated by its creators and how do those ideas function in the field of music? Songs, the people who write them and the processes by which they come about, and indeed the ways in which they are consumed, are an intriguing site for thinking of ideas of passion. The idea of powerful emotions of love, or indeed hate, of desire and sex appear to be the *sine qua non* of popular song and its production.

Our questions, and the source of our insights originate in a reflexive approach to this cultural practice formulated in a dialogue between producers and researchers. Simon Barber, the co-author of this piece, whose own research encompasses the political economy of the music industries is, along with Brian O'Connor, part of a professional songwriting duo called Sodajerker. Since 2012, this duo has been conducting interviews with an array of songwriters about their work that have been circulated online as a series of podcasts. Available across a variety of online platforms such as iTunes, AudioBoo and Stitcher, *Sodajerker On Songwriting* has attracted over a quarter of a million downloads, and in turn, has been featured in other media forms including books, magazines and online fora devoted to exploring the practice of songwriting. At the time of writing there were over sixty episodes available whose subjects include: Rufus Wainwright; Richard M. Sherman who, with his now deceased brother Robert, provided a range of work for Disney Studios including the songs for *Mary Poppins*; Carole Bayer Sager; Neil Sedaka, Jimmy Webb; Suzanne Vega, Johnny Marr and Billy Bragg.

In what follows, we first explore the context of studies of music and the wider creative industries. We then outline our use of Sodajerker's interviews and the utility of this oeuvre for framing practice and the meaning of emotion in cultural work in relation to Jason Toynbee's ideas of 'voicing'.<sup>2</sup> We then explore some of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.emimusicpub.co.uk/about/index.php>

<sup>2</sup> The *Sodajerker On Songwriting* podcast, available in full at <http://sodajerker.com/podcast> is licensed via Creative Commons and we make use of the interview material as a publicly available resource.

the ways in which passion can be conceptualized in songwriting, of how it describes attachments to music, ideas of what constitutes work and how it contributes to individual identity and authenticity.

### **Researching songwriting**

Songwriting, like all creative work, might take place outside of any direct economic framework. However, as Richard Caves has suggested: 'Great works of art may speak for themselves, as connoisseurs declare, but they do not lead self-sufficient lives. The inspirations of talented artists reach consumers' hands (eyes, ears) only with the aid of other inputs-humdrum inputs-that respond to ordinary economic incentives' (Caves, 2003: 73). Thus, any description of an *emotional* economy of songwriting can be set in the context of the financial worth of the music industries and the nature of those incentives. A report by UK Music (2013) into the UK music industry in 2012 valued it at £3.5Bn, with songwriters and composers representing £1.6Bn and music publishing £402m. Creative Blueprint gives a figure of 145,520 individuals employed in this industry with 3% - around 4300 of that number - involved in 'Composition of Musical Works and Music Publishing'.<sup>3</sup> This number suggests a rather specialized, perhaps elite, field of activity at odds with an image of the industrial scale of this business. In fact and as noted by Adorno himself, 'producing hit songs still remains at the handicraft stage' (1990: 306).

A sense of the scope of songwriting and its relevance to this special edition is indicated by a description of the *Guild of International Songwriters and Composers* as 'a home for 'songwriters, composers, singer songwriters, performing artistes, lyricists, DJs, poets and all those involved in the music industry'.<sup>4</sup> While many songwriters may be relatively unknown when compared to music performers, their output is ubiquitous across media forms and formats. The songwriter supplies work for releases by music labels of all kinds of genres which are heard across radio schedules and in advertisements; they write soundtrack material and theme tunes for film, television and computer games and are commissioned to make musical theatre come to life.

For the purposes of this research, songwriters are typically understood via two categories: as artists that perform their own material ('singer-songwriters'), or as professional tunesmiths whose work is made available through music publishers and whose skills might be for hire in particular contexts. Our primary focus here is on those non-performers although in all of these cases, it is usually the cultural significance of the work produced by them that is afforded attention.

As with many areas of the cultural industries (see: Beck, 2003; Hesmondhalgh, 2008), details about what these workers do and how they do it are often obscured, shrouded in mystery, or at the very least bound up in mythology that precludes detailed investigation. As Mike Jones has suggested, for those who are interested in popular music 'we know a great deal about our emotional attachment to the

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<sup>3</sup> Creative and Cultural Industries Statistics, 2012-2013, available at: <http://creative-blueprint.co.uk>.

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <http://www.songwriters-guild.co.uk>.

popular music we love, but, simultaneously, next to nothing about how such music is made' (Jones, 2003: 148).

There is certainly very little work on the organised approach to songwriting carried out by professional songwriters, either alone, as part of songwriting teams, or as employees of songwriting/publishing institutions. A great deal of available material concerns the aspirant songwriter or addresses a broad, non-specialised audience. The market for 'how to' books designed to teach the fundamentals of songwriting, including techniques for writing 'hits' and strategies for selling songs, has been served by the likes of Hirschhorn (2001), Ewer (2005), Blume (2008) and Pattison (2012). There is a smaller, but notable, mainstream market for books in which songwriters are interviewed about their writing processes, such as those authored by Zollo (2003) and Rachel (2013). However, such interviews are typically uncritical and lack the kind of analytical overview that might establish themes and commonalities between respondents.

There are a number of published works dealing with songwriting as a component of Western music production, many of which take the form of informal histories. This sort of work is often organised by context, such as songwriters tied to specific historical and geographical scenes, labels or companies. For instance, Tin Pan Alley (Jasen, 2003), The Brill Building (Emerson, 2006), Motown (George, 1986) or production teams like The Chic Organisation (Easlea, 2004) and Stock, Aitken & Waterman (Harding, 2009). Contemporary songwriting teams such as Xenomania, The Matrix or The Writing Camp have been awarded much more cursory attention, primarily by the music press (Kawashima, 2004; McCormick, 2009).

Academic literature pertaining to songwriters has tended towards either a musicological approach - studying song forms and characteristics - or the study of creativity itself. Examples would include Burns's (1987) *typology of 'hooks' in popular records*, Fitzgerald's (1995) work on *Continuity and Change in the Evolution of the Mainstream Pop Song* and the work of Hass et al (2010) on *Quantitative case-studies in musical composition*. Bennett (2011, 2012) and McIntyre (2008, 2011) are two authors that have examined creativity in songwriting teams, particularly in the recording studio. The most instructive and relevant work pertaining to this study is Groce's (1991) look at professional socialization and the process of becoming a songwriter, though that has little to say on the question of passion and its role in the life and work of the songwriter.

As we now discuss, passion plays a part in navigating the contradictions of creative work. Passion is performed, understood and articulated as something that defines the value of good songwriting, a mode of creation caught between economic and aesthetic demands. Judgments of work are measured in the economic yield of songs as commodities. These instrumental demands are sometimes (although not consistently) held at bay and are at odds with other assessments, which are bound up in a sense of emotional integrity, and authenticity tied to an understanding of the act of songwriting as creation.

### **Listening to songwriters**

The first episode of *Sodajerker On Songwriting* offers an interview with Billy Steinberg, author of 'Like A Virgin' (Madonna), 'True Colors' (Cyndi Lauper), 'Eternal Flame' (The Bangles) and 'I Drove All Night' (Roy Orbison). Such luminaries are reached and enlisted in part as a result of Barber and O'Connor's own status as music business entrepreneurs: as part of their labour, they pursue the round of 'pitching' songs to artists as figures like Steinberg has done, seeking to establish their 'brand' and reputations as producers of original commercial material. While websites such as *Taxi*<sup>5</sup> and podcasts, like *The CD Baby DIY Musician Podcast*<sup>6</sup> advise on how to get into the music business, *On Songwriting* indulges its creators' aesthetic curiosity. As stated in the introduction to the first episode, this is an attempt to explore 'how things get made' in the form of 'conversations with successful songwriters [...] trying to find out from them how they've approached their craft'. Interviews are driven by Sodajerker's expertise and understanding as musicians, as well as fans of songs and particular writers. The aim is to avoid reducing songs to musicological equations or to pursue any notion of the 'secret of success'. An attention to the technicalities of song craft maintains a practical sensibility that derives from an invitation to autobiographical reflection, thus prompting much memory work on the part of interviewees. Of course, this very process raises questions about the nature of recollection and its use in research in terms of reliability and claims to the truth of any individual account. For instance, one wonders whether it is in the telling that the romance of songwriting emerges, inflected by other available accounts and a general discursive repertoire in which 'passion' figures.

Certainly, each episode of *Sodajerker* involves considerable research into the musical oeuvre of each subject as well as an exploration of familiar anecdotes that in some cases have been rehearsed on many occasions. The interview technique involves a tendency to avoid such stories or approach them in novel ways. For instance, the focus may concern how chord sequences for specific songs were created rather than issues of fame or celebrity status or crises that informed the making of a particular album. With a guest like Johnny Marr, the interview touches on his work with groups such as Electronic, Modest Mouse and other projects integral to his professional identity before turning to the subject of The Smiths

The careers of the subjects of *Sodajerker On Songwriting*, which we draw upon as source material, encompass 60 years of popular music practice in the Anglophone world, between the recording industry and a wider entertainment business. Don Black for instance, renowned for his work with John Barry on a range of theme songs for the James Bond movie franchise, began writing in the 1950s. Black estimates that he has worked with in excess of 150 partners. A figure like Graham Gouldman began his career as a songwriter based in Manchester, England, providing material for local bands Hermann's Hermits and The Hollies before a spell at the Kasenetz-Katz hit factory in New York; in the 1970s and 80s he achieved some personal fame as a key member of 10cc. More recent successes include Guy Chambers who collaborated with Robbie Williams on most of his best-known songs ('Angels', 'Millennium', 'Rock DJ') and Sacha Skarbek, who achieved

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.taxi.com/music-business-faq/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://cdbabypodcast.com>

international success with artists such as James Blunt, Adele and Duffy.

Don Black has told Sodajerker that 'I've never had any theories about songwriting'. This is a useful reminder that the individual accounts drawn upon here rely upon a personal and anecdotal perspective of creative qualities that are often evinced in a combination of words and music with resultant affects and passions not always reducible to rational explanation. For instance, Keith Negus and Mike Pickering (2004) note that:

The creative experience is something which is intensely felt. It often seems to defy language as if words are incapable of fully capturing the sensation involved, or of explaining what went into the making of a particular artistic form. While we must keep this in mind, it remains the case that the creative experience requires a will to expression, and to communication with others (2004:22).

As they suggest, this drive to communicate is writ large in artists' accounts of their motivations and objectives. As established music industry creatives, Sodajerker's interviewees are familiar with requests to so articulate their experiences and biography and are well-practiced in presenting what is, in many cases, well-rehearsed material. Given the historical, geographical and industrial reach of these subjects we use their testimonies to tease out and explore thematic perspectives rather than offering an exhaustive picture.

Whatever access we have to songwriters, Groce (1991) states that their work is often understood as part of a 'special and innate gift' that is 'unexplainable' (1991: 33), rather than as a craft oriented process. He argues that all humans are capable of dancing and singing and making music, and that songwriting is a 'deliberate process' with a 'desired end' (1991: 34). In this thesis, beginners can be understood to be 'socialized as songwriters', learning the craft from others in the field. A similar analysis is expressed in more nuanced fashion by Jason Toynbee who, in a consideration of rock, suggests that its 'mythology of original expression has tended to downplay the voiced nature of the music. The individuality and distinctiveness of a particular band or artist is emphasized instead.' (2003: 47). Here, his concept of 'voicing' is useful for framing the practices of songwriting and the discourses that are articulated in each Sodajerker interview and how we make use of them.

Toynbee explores the apparent asymmetry of capitalist production in general and the kinds of social relations and working conditions manifested in the cultural industries and the music business in particular. This asymmetry derives from the powerful idea, shared by those in production and audiences both, that cultural work such as that of the songwriter is built on 'special powers of creativity which cannot be routinized' (2003: 53). Toynbee asks how we might make sense of the actualities of creativity when 'In popular music-making, its most significant aspect, contra the romantic conception of authorship, is its limited and social character.' Toynbee thus characterises forms of creativity in the music industries as 'social authorship' in order to comprehend how artists understand the undefinable conventions of their field, of 'how symbolic materials, idioms, and rules become available to her concretely and historically.'

Enlisting Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field, Toynbee suggests how creation takes place between 'the set of structuring dispositions acquired by the artist over the life course' (2003: 42) and the rules and conventions which govern the worlds of cultural production. For him, the artist creates from a set of 'possibles', in this case the 'voices', or sound-images of popular music which 'might include instrumental and vocal timbres, beats, genres, riffs, song forms, snatches of melody and characteristic chord changes, not to mention tropes of performance' (*Ibid*). Here, voices are heteroglot and polyphonic, articulated in an artist's individual style or indeed, in the "'standard"' song form.' (*Ibid*) The music maker creates and innovates from the available repertoire of voices (or, as he notes elsewhere, its "radius of creativity"[2000]), selecting, editing and combining as they give voice to their expression.

While Toynbee is clearly thinking of the material resources available for song creation as sound, 'voicing' is useful to extend to a whole of range of *ideas* that are expressed about that process of creation, framing what is said about music as much as what is played. Voicing is an attractive concept too in terms of connotations of ventriloquism, which is a resonant way of thinking of the ways in which the output of the songwriter is 'appropriated' and interpreted by performers. For the most part however, ineffable concepts such as passion are enlisted in order to articulate what might otherwise seem beyond explanation in songwriting. Certainly, insights into the emotional qualities of songwriting as work, of the passion for music and its place in musical creation are revealed in *On Songwriting's* invitations to talk about the practicalities of the craft. Often unbidden, reference to the subject of emotion thus appears to be an inevitable aspect of any discussion of songwriting. Between them, these individuals voice the 'possibles' of their craft in the shape of their music and in the reflections on their experiences of how that music was made.

In the next section we analyse how passion functions in descriptions of the production and condition of the song, emerging from a subjective sense of personal investment in its writing. We suggest that passion operates as a means of defining the value of both song and songwriter, of its connection with a wider field of practice, an imagined audience and the terms upon which success is evaluated.

### **Voicing passion**

That songwriting is imbued with emotions – from the commitment of the author to the song itself and its consumption – is conventional enough to appear intuitive to writers and listeners both. The normative quality of passion *for* music and understood to inhere *in* music informs a wealth of 'how to' works and guides to aid the songwriter in setting out on a creative path. In such cases, there is some discussion of the emotional qualities of songs although this is rarely more meaningful than the assertion that emotion matters. Gary Ewer's (2005) *The Essential Secrets of Songwriting*, for instance, wonders at the reasons for the frequency of popular songs about love, suggesting that:

People find it irresistible to allow themselves to be pulled into a song that describes strong emotions they've felt before. They like to know that others

have felt that same sentiment. [...]. If you are looking for great song material, choosing love, particularly of the “unrequited” variety, will be a popular choice (Ewer, 2005: 91).

Such advice is a step towards liberating one’s creative talents, leading to rather mechanistic and reductive ideas of the relation of song structure to its affective qualities. As Ewer suggests: ‘A bridge is a component of a song whose purpose is to help sustain and build energy for that final chorus. Usually, there are a minimum of two choruses prior to a bridge. The text of a bridge is usually more emotional and passionate than the chorus’ (Ewer, 2005: 52). Likewise, Joel Hirschhorn’s jocular *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Songwriting* (2001) instructs readers in ‘Knowing the Power of Emotion in a Melody’ (2001: 170). In considering whether to take particular songs ‘to the next level’ (i.e. setting compositions down in demonstration form for presentation to others), Hirschhorn asks songwriters to evaluate it at the most fundamental level, asking themselves: ‘Is the song capable of evoking true human emotion?’ (2001: 262).

Such comments capture a repeated motif that we explore below in which emotion is bound to a concept of authenticity and to the musical and lyrical form of song. Thus, Kara DioGuardi’s forward to *Songwriting for Dummies* (2010) captures a recurring, perhaps generic, quality of songwriter autobiographies. These are not dissimilar to those of other creative workers where experience and maturity go hand-in-hand with fully realised emotional realism. DioGuardi, a songwriter and Warner executive, reflects on her own development:

It took me years to develop an internal dialogue with myself that I could trust. Hit songwriting is about putting your real personal experience into melodies and words that are universal and easily digested. You can embellish on your experiences, but there should always be truth at the core (2010: 12).

While Groce’s research examines the dispositions of the aspirant songwriter to whom such guides are addressed, Sodajerker’s interviewees are well-established creative workers who are likely to be quoted in them. What defines the qualities and capabilities of each in the field is their success. Each has a long list of ‘hits’ (and, importantly, ‘misses’). Their status is underwritten by industry awards: Grammy’s, Brits, Ivor Novellos and Oscars, amongst others. Above all, each can claim songwriting as their primary occupation – their profession – from which they have made a reputation and a living.

How then do individuals come to be songwriters? How is it that one comes to seek out a ‘how to’ book or otherwise learn about the emotional necessities of their craft and of crafting their passion? How does one make a success of such things? By way of answer, a recurring aspect of the autobiographical detail of Sodajerker’s interviewees comes in their reminiscences of how they started as listeners. Steinberg for instance, details how as a youth, his own household had no tradition of musical practice and no family member owned any records. He was, however, influenced by two older friends and became an avid consumer of music and collector of records: ‘I was very, very keen on that record collection and played them over and over again’. For Steinberg, in light of a lack of formal training, or



recollection of any conscious attempt to plan to be a songwriter, when he did turn to put adolescent poetry to music he found that he had 'assimilated song structure' from simply listening to a great deal of music. He claims that he listened so attentively, that he reached the point where he 'just knew how to do it'.

Each songwriter has similar stories to tell of their love for particular songs or music in general. As PF Sloan recalls, in popular music he found, 'the feeling that set me reeling, all of my life'. Certainly, interviewees testify to their abiding love of music, of the tunes that prompted them on their path, of those figures that inspired them, for their peers and contemporary music and indeed, they speak of their affective attachments to their own work. Mann and Weil for instance express their enthusiasm for hearing singers perform and record their songs, an experience that never empties the abiding thrill they find in their own creations which was established as they were written.

Each has a highly individual narrative of how their route to their career developed, and for every untutored Steinberg, there is a musically trained and accomplished songwriter like Neil Sedaka, who won a place at the Juilliard School of Music and became an accomplished classical pianist before his career as a songwriter (and performer) blossomed. Ultimately of course, the success of a songwriter and their songs as affective objects is measured in the first instance in financial rewards when it is bought for use in particular contexts or when it becomes a hit with consumers. Sacha Skarbek pinpoints a recent moment of individual consecration in a reflection on his collaboration with James Blunt. This resulted in enormously successful songs such as 'You're Beautiful' which had an impact on Skarbek's reputation and status as writer and producer. Noting how things changed for him: 'it's like you're given a sort of badge to wear [...] you're accepted into a certain sort of club. It's an affirmation of what you've been able to do'. In a reflection on working with Phil Spector on 'You've Lost that Lovin' Feelin'" for the Righteous Brothers, Mann and Weil recall a moment when all of the song's elements gelled to the producer's satisfaction, whereupon he told them: 'You can go to the bank'. Here we should note in terms of songwriters' love for their own songs, Mann does say that 'I'd rather hear them than not', acknowledging that this is also a reassuring indicator of an income stream. Likewise, Paul Williams notes that when he hears a song of his on the radio, it represents 'money in the bank'. We suggest that the satisfactions and pleasures of such statements are emphatic of the fact that the passion for songs and the emotional investment of their writing involves – in the first and last instance – an economic assessment. It is this measure that ultimately confers status on the songwriter and that they do, after all, merit such a title and all that it entails.

As Skarbek suggests, economic success opens doors as well as allowing individuals to determine some of the conditions under which they work and what kind of work they do. This manifests itself in a familiar trope that Hesmondhalgh labels the 'commerce-creativity dialectic' (2007, 20-1). Thus, Steinberg gives a sense of what is at stake for the writer, speaking of how one is emotionally attached to one's work and where one's own assessment of its affective value and commercial potential often supersedes and counters suspicions and even rejections that come from the intermediaries who may seek to sell and promote that work. In Steinberg's account, his work with Tom Kelly on the song 'Like a

Virgin' met with dismissive assessments from many in the industry, but they proceeded on the basis that they 'knew it was good'. More generally, Skarbek pinpoints ambivalent feelings about the nature of the success identified through hit songs. He suggests that while an individual may write up to two hundred songs a year, about one song in every four years achieves any kind of success. He describes how for many writers their best-known works are not necessarily their favourites, or felt to be the best examples of their writing ability.

Discussion of the fact that professional songwriting involves remuneration serves as a reminder that while it what might appear to be the result of 'talent', 'intuition' or indeed a passionate vocation, it is a job of work. In spite of an occasional deference to the ineffable qualities of the unconscious and its role in creativity, many of Sodajerker's interviewees are quick to demystify what they do although this does nothing to disavow the passionate attachment to song or its value. Don Black for instance is most matter-of-fact about his craft, avoiding any romantic notion about his work (although its very attractiveness to many may of course sound the opposite to podcast listeners). He suggests that 'songwriters are very hard to interview because there isn't always a story behind the song' although 'people love an anecdote'. For Black, such anecdotes often demand of the songwriter a narrative telling of how they conceived of a song's delivery by a particular performer, as if the results of the creative process were all anticipated and calculated from the start. In fact, he summarises his perspective on a song's success in a motto that came to him by way of Paul McCartney's self-deprecating assessment of writing the song *Yesterday* that 'it was just a good day at the office'. Furthermore, Black is sceptical of the kind of writer who is precious about establishing a particular mood or seeking a particular site convivial to creative work. As he says: 'I've always been happy to do it my kitchen', so avoiding any conditions or restrictions on his craft, emphatic perhaps of the way in which for him and others, the language, emotion and situation of songs emerge from quotidian situations and feelings.

From one angle, the kind of activity described by Sodajerker's interviewees means that their work appears to be unrecognisable in any conventional sense *as work*. So invested in a rewarding emotional attachment to their work are *these* examples that they appear to present the acme of self-actualisation apparently promised by creative labour as well as a vision of the conditions and object of 'good work' theorised by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011). Don Black for instance recalls that one of the attractions of songwriting was observing a team from a Denmark Street publishing house excusing themselves for a walk in a local park in order to seek inspiration for a song. He recalls thinking 'What a way to make a living!' Certainly, he suggests that his work feels anything but laborious, recalling by way of his work as a lyricist on the song 'Born Free': 'It came pretty easily ... most songs do come pretty easily'. This story is echoed by others who claim to have written songs with similar ease: Billy Bragg talked of originating melodies in the car and finishing them as songs when he arrives at his destination. The song 'Never Buy The Sun' was an example where he finished the song very rapidly and was playing it within days in his live set. Rufus Wainwright talked about walking home from the hospital in Montreal on a very cold night where he had been visiting his ailing (now deceased) mother Kate McGarrigle, and by the time he got home 'a song had

arrived'. Jimmy Webb described this how sometimes the process is so spontaneous that it is like 'a wind blew through the room and left a song on the piano'.

As evidenced in the experience of Neil Sedaka, Mann and Weil at the Brill Building, PF Sloan's time at Screen Gems, Graham Gouldman's tenure at Kasenetz-Katz or, the manner in which Xenomania currently work, songwriting is something that can be organised in industrial fashion, to the rhythm of a conventional working day and set of designated outputs. While such organisation might appear to mitigate the potential free play of emotional investment, many interviewees vouch for the productive discipline of organised songwriting for accessing and organising the qualities that are deemed to make effective and affective songs. For Paul Williams the acme of this approach is associated with the city of Nashville. Williams describes this as the greatest place in the world to learn about songwriting:

Because in Nashville at 10 o'clock in the morning you sit across from a stranger or somebody you have sat across from many times and don't really like ... and you say something that is just stupid, and they say something stupid back and you just follow the pebbles of an idea and suddenly, magically, a song has appeared.

Williams is too pragmatic an individual to suggest that his sense of magic is anything other than ellipses for the actual graft of songwriting. The creative process is illustrated here in the effort to eke out something of value, of producing material from inauspicious conditions based on a combination of 'gratitude and trust' where the very presence of a co-writer, who may not contribute a word or note, is enough to prompt productivity.

Nonetheless, some of the overtly pleasurable aspects of songwriting expressed elsewhere are extended but also balanced in other accounts of collaboration and the pressures (which may still be pleasurable) born of necessity. As Sacha Skarbek notes of the negotiated relationships and situations of working face to face when writing with artists such as Duffy and Adele, such partnerships 'can be worth a lot of money: a lot of people are waiting for a result'. In such instances, individuals are required to develop trust with collaborators quickly and in a largely instrumental manner. Such encounters might suggest that this kind of work is on a par with descriptions of other contemporary work in terms of 'emotional labour'. Derived from Arlie Hochschild (1983), emotional labour is associated with work in the service economy and a display aimed at customers. A critical take on this condition is presented by Nick Couldry and Jo Littler (2011) with regards to the ubiquitous deployment of 'passion' of the kind captured in the example from EMI quoted at the outset of this article. For these authors, passion is a means of describing the responsiveness of employees to the demands of employers. It is a performative and abstract term 'since it refers to a continual responsiveness to a hypothetical demand' (2011: 270). There is an inevitably ersatz quality about this responsiveness echoed in songwriting: Skarbek's comments reveal some of the ways in which emotion must be tapped into and deployed in quick time by writers as they deal with each other and the representatives of the music industry.

However, one wonders whether this label and critical stance is one that adequately encompasses the ambiguities of the songwriter's labour – or indeed other types of creative production in which passion is a translatable, tradable measure of value in both economic and cultural terms. Of course, the acme of songwriting lies in the authenticity of emotions that can be conveyed in a song or derived from it in performance – by the interpretation of singers and by audiences too. However, and to evoke the idea of good and bad work again, while the sublimation of the self and of emotion in this form of affective labour by songwriters certainly takes place, passion is also a quality that serves to affirm individual integrity and authenticity. These qualities inform the personal rewards felt to accrue in doing such work and, however romanticized, to underwrite the freedoms and self-actualization of creative labour.

In an assessment of the relation of music and emotion, Hunter and Schellenberg (2010) identify 'the still unanswered question of the nature of affective reactions to music: whether they consist of true emotions, moods, aesthetic emotions, or liking responses' (2010:155). For us, such a question is bound up in the nature of production as much as responses to music from consumers. By looking at the emotional motivations, attachments and investments of songwriters we are of course attentive to the problems presented by any attention to the intentions of authors (and consequences of their work) (e.g. (Mosser, 2008). Of interest here is Hunter and Schellenberg's mention of psychological assessments of 'true emotions' which connects also to a longstanding critique of the integrity and quality of the passions expressed in the popular song represented by the work of many of those interviewed by Sodajerker. Something of what we have in mind here is expressed in a recent music review which suggests that 'There is confessional songwriting that sounds as if it has been ripped from the writer's chest. And there is the seam, beloved of X Factor contestants whose lyrics elicit a desire to dash the nearest breakable object to the ground.' (Cairns, 2014: 22). While such positions do rather confuse writing and interpretation, they are evidence of an abiding discourse of authenticity in the domain of popular music in which concepts of passion play a key role.

Songwriting, as evidenced by those interviewed by Sodajerker involves calling upon and deploying the most heartfelt emotions in an often-instrumental fashion. Skarbek, for instance, refers to one collaborator who is able to dig into his deepest emotional resources at moment's notice. These songwriters do diverge on what kinds of emotions make for the most affecting songs. Steinberg is suspicious of melancholia as a basis for a song, whereas Stephen Bishop ('Save it for a Rainy Day', 'Separate Lives') says 'When you are happy ... it's hard to say [sings] "It's great to be with you/Making love all night" It's just so difficult to write happy love songs. I've done it, but it's so difficult.' Reflecting on an upbeat song he wrote for the film *Unfaithfully Yours*, he comments that 'It's rare that that comes out of me. It's much better to get sad songs'. The common quality of all of these accounts and the manner in which songwriters rationalise the variety of work they do is expressed by Paul Williams. He suggests that the best expression emerges 'from a place of authenticity' which, metaphorically speaking can be located in the 'centre of my chest'. Furthermore, the 'courageous honesty' and effectiveness of songwriting for him comes from the insistence that one should 'write what you

feel' and which allows an audience 'to connect' with the feelings of a song; 'What felt unique to the centre of your chest is the thing that audiences can relate to'.

Williams' account is particularly insightful for his insistence that this is the approach he has brought to all of his work, whether spontaneously composed or written for assignment. He suggests that much of this work has involved writing what he calls "'Hallmark card lyrics" a lot of the time and "pick me up and love me" songs'. Nonetheless, such work was invested with genuine emotion: 'it is what I felt. I felt it and said it, and people responded'. The image of the Hallmark Greeting card is a reference point for a hackneyed, ersatz, mass-produced sentiment that might connect with a dismissal of the cheapened nature of popular song (Papson, 1986; West, 2010). In this characterisation, Williams is rather self-deprecating, yet it is underwritten by his integrity and the value that audiences have expressed in their affective attachments to his work. For many songwriters, this connection and recognition of what went into their work is paramount. As Black suggests: 'The greatest compliment you can pay a songwriter is when someone comes up to you and says "I felt that"'.

Between them, these writers have written songs designed to be delivered by puppet frogs ('The Rainbow Connection') and to pet rats ('Ben'), to be heard as 'bad' songs (*Ishtar*) and as advertisements for a bank ('We've Only Just Begun') as well as more conventionally 'commercial' fare about boy meets girl. Whatever the subject and context for delivery, each piece has come from a place of integrity and aims to connect emotionally with both performers and listeners. In each case, and whatever the perceived generic qualities of the available 'possibles' of songwriting and the limitations captured in perceptions of the formulaic nature of popular song forms, the writer's emotional reference points are deployed to insist upon the integrity and distinctiveness of their work. Don Black advises songwriters to 'Always try to write for yourself. Don't copy and don't follow. You are unique. There's only one of you. Try and put your individual signature on each song' (<http://donblack.co.uk>).

## Conclusions

We have seen then that passionate ideas about music motivate the desires and careers of songwriters and passion and a reflexive sense of the world of emotions is paramount to their labour. This labour deals in emotion, attempting to articulate feelings in recognizable and tradable form, a means of communicating with consumers whose responses are measured in terms of their purchase of songs and their affective attachments to them as cultural goods whose value might not be reducible to a cost price. The songwriter's work then involves a process that is both rationalized in pursuit of hits but is often *felt* to be deeply authentic, understood (and believed) to spring from emotional experience. We suggest then that it is productive to think of emotion in terms of its value as part of the emotional and aesthetic economy of the creation of popular music. As our focus here on *successful* songwriters suggests, passion has a tangible, if unquantifiable value in the business of popular music and the wider entertainment world when viewed as capitalist enterprises aimed at profit maximisation. And yet, the nature of how songwriters feel about their craft, individualized through the stamp of their emotional input, seems to distance it from the 'taint' of the corporate realm. Of course, those referenced here have, by and large, done well from that system although, as we have seen, the rewards of songwriting are not wholly economic.

In setting out some of the functions of passion in the field of songwriting, we recognize that we have suggested that a particular field of practice merits opening up for study. The pertinence and scope of this practice in the context of an exploration of passion and media is, we hope, an obvious one. While the stories captured by *Sodajerker On Songwriting* might appear to be largely positive ones, they are not so uniform. There are, of course, other accounts to be heard and, in an industry where there are far more 'misses' and would-be songwriters than success stories, more work is merited.

In their exploration of creative work, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) outline how affect and emotion can be contrasted with a reasoned cognitive domain (knowing, perceiving, conceiving) although the former encompasses non-cognitive experience beyond emotion. They comment on the fact that a concept of affect, while useful, appears to be a preferred term for social theorists, employed in the face of 'a fear that the idea of emotion is somehow tainted by liberal humanist individualism' (2011: 163). Rather like the rejection by post-structuralists of ideas of self-realisation and autonomy, they suggest that there is a risk of neglecting considerations of subjective emotion for social research and theory. Certainly, an understanding of the apparent rewards and satisfactions of work seen from subjective perspectives, particularly in the creative sector, are important to understanding normative qualities of good and bad work which have meaning for peoples lives. Those who invest what seems like their very essence in their work might not be unreflexive about their relationships with the corporate world. The songwriter's position and experience might offer a useful site for further reflection on the nature of self-realisation and how authenticity features in its articulation.

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