Fans or friends?: Seeing social media audiences as musicians do

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Abstract

In the last decade, engaging audiences through social media has become an important element of life as a musician. This paper analyses interviews with thirty-six musicians to understand how they perceive their interactions and relationships with audiences online. It highlights the blurred boundaries between fans and friends, identifying how online interactions can bring interpersonal rewards for musicians, as well as how they can raise interpersonal challenges. Musicians balance these tensions through a range of strategies that depend on their need to protect themselves, their loved ones, and the integrity of their fans' experiences. Rather than approaching online audiences as 'fans' who are necessarily less powerful, many of the musicians engaged them as equals.

Keywords: Music, musicians, fans, social media, relationships, friendship

It has now been at least thirty years since music fans took to the internet, creating fan communities and building relationships. When audiences began using the internet to share and build their fandoms, those they were discussing were rarely online. Online fan activity was seen by music and entertainment professionals as more of a geeky anomaly than a trend to take seriously. Academics (perhaps on account of our own geekiness) gave the phenomenon more weight, beginning serious inquiry into online fan studies in the 1990s (e.g. Baym, 1993, Clerc, 1996). Fan research now offers many rich ethnographies of online fan groups and nuanced analyses of the dynamics at play within them and between them and the texts around which they congregate.

Fast forward to the 2010s. The recording industry is reeling from the activities of online audiences and what once seemed irrelevant is now at the center of rethinking how to make music making and its associated professions sustainable. Nearly all music professionals seem convinced that social media — and in particular musicians' use of those media to connect with audiences — are key to their survival. Yet integral as social media have become for media industries, and as present as once-aloof celebrities have become online, little if any research has examined this from the perspective of the artists the fans discuss and the industries sell.

This paper explores online music audiences from the perspective of musicians. One reason studies like this are uncommon, as Ferris (2007: 380) explained, is the access issues involved:

> Access can be earned only through official gatekeepers, such as agents, managers, or security personnel, and then only if the purpose of the contact is deemed legitimate by those gatekeepers. Celebrities may be leery of participating in research as subjects/respondents because of privacy protection issues — even with scholarly promises of confidentiality, the risk of information release may seem too high.

In contrast, there has been work on music fans and social media (though far less on music fans than television and fiction fans). These studies have generally emphasized fan community. Condry (2004), for instance, analyzed the implicit community norms behind file sharing, arguing that from within the community it was unethical not to share music. My work on fans of independent Swedish music (Baym, 2006) showed how audiences adapted to Web 2.0 by organizing into 'networked collectives' that are distributed across multiple sites.

Previous work has been mixed in its treatment of artist-audience relationships. Baym and Burnett (2009) and Baym (2011) showed that individuals in fan communities build one-on-one relationships with musicians and labels as they help spread music within and beyond national borders. Others, however, have treated these relationships as parasocial. Soukup (2006), in his analysis of fan sites, stresses the bonds formed amongst fans, noting only that 'public and interactive characteristics of digital technology encouraged the perception that the celebrity "could" visit the fansite' (331). Beer (2008) similarly positions musician profiles on Myspace as sites through which fans connect with one another rather than forming real relationships with the artists. However, he argues that the artists (in his case Jarvis Cocker) facilitate fan-to-fan relationships when they are present on their sites. He writes:

> Jarvis's presence is not essential to the connections; the network operates through this space without him being in constant attendance. Yet his intermittent interjections remain essential in giving a sense of 'livingness' to the

profile, while remaining only a part of a range of multi-dimensional and decentralized interactions and connections. (2008: 231)

Although Beer's article is titled 'Making Friends With Jarvis Cocker,' he dismisses the relationships formed between audiences and Cocker, writing 'whether visitors to places such as Jarvspace are in fact communicating and making friends with the actual performer or with a record company employee does not seem all that important, for the outcome is the same.' Social network sites, he argues (2008: 233), provide the sense that the 'distance between popstar and interested enthusiast is eroded (although we can of course argue that this is illusory).' Despite Beer's assumption that the Myspace friendships formed with musicians in social media do not actually involve musicians and individuals in meaningful personal connections, he rightly points out that social media 'friend' connections represent 'a reconfiguration of the relations between performers and audiences [since] the "rock god" or "popstar" becomes an ordinary member of the network as that enigmatic distance is breached and they become a "familiar friend"' (2008: 233). Rather than assuming parasocial relations, this paper draws on interviews with thirty-six musicians conducted in 2010-2011 to analyze musicians' perceptions of that relational reconfiguration, investigating the interpersonal dynamics at play as they encounter audiences through social media.

Few studies to date have examined public traces of how public figures engage audiences through social media. One exception is Marwick and boyd's (2011) study of 237 highly followed Twitter users, a set which included a number of musicians as well as politicians, technoculture pundits, and more. They argued that these tweeters 'perform celebrity' in a way that 'complicates the dynamics between celebrity practitioners, their audiences, and those who occupy spaces in-between' (2011: 157). Furthermore, they showed that social media have changed the relational expectations audiences have for public figures:

> Twitter also disrupts the expectation of parasociality between the famous person and the fan. The study of celebrity culture has primarily focused on fans as separate from celebrities, but the ability of famous people to read and reply to fans has given rise to new sets of practices and interactions. Celebrity practitioners must harness this ability to maintain ongoing affiliations and connections with their fans, rather than seem uncaring or unavailable. Thus, Twitter creates a new expectation of intimacy.

Perhaps more than most, musicians, whose songs are so easily shared online and whose livelihoods are so clearly at stake, are caught in the fray of these disrupted expectations. Musicians now find themselves in a career where continuous online impression management and relationship building seem to be requirements.

Marwick and boyd focus on the practice of celebrity, which 'necessitates viewing followers as fans [and] requires that this asymmetrical status is recognized by others' (2011:

144). They note the parallels between what those they study do and what Senft (2008) described as 'microcelebrity' in which individuals who are not famous (such as camgirls) use social media to create audiences for themselves. Marwick and boyd (2011: 140) describe microcelebrity as 'a mindset and set of practices in which audience is viewed as a fan base; popularity is maintained through ongoing fan management; and self-presentation is carefully constructed to be consumed by others.' They continue:

> Just as we now see 'regular' people adopting micro-celebrity tactics to gain status online, we also see famous people using similar techniques on social media sites to maintain popularity and image. We argue that 'celebrity' has become a set of circulated strategies and practices that place fame on a continuum, rather than as a bright line that separates individuals.

Viewed through the lens of 'celebrity,' the relationship with audiences is founded on asymmetry and a clear performer/fan distinction. The musicians interviewed in this project have audiences that range from a few thousand to millions, and might thus be considered to fall in many spots between micro-celebrity and celebrity. However, the analysis presented here complicates the idea that these people are necessarily practicing 'celebrity.' Instead, I argue that the positioning of audiences somewhere between unequal 'fans' and equal 'friends' is itself continuously negotiated through practice.

On the face of it, there are many ways in which fan/artist relationships are fundamentally different from friendships. While friendships are by definition voluntary and equal (e.g. Wiseman, 1986), artists do not get to choose their fans, cannot choose to terminate that relationship, and the admiration is usually not mutual. Friendships also entail expectations (e.g. Bigelow & La Gaipa, 1980; Fehr, 2004; Wiseman, 1986) that may not hold in fan/artist connections. Hall (2011), in a meta-analysis of the literature on friendship expectations, identifies four dimensions of expectations. First, is 'symmetrical reciprocity,' meaning that friends are mutually loyal, authentic, trustworthy and supportive. This mutuality cannot be assumed in fan/artist relationships. 'Communion,' the second dimension, means that friends are expected to be emotionally available to one another, demonstrate empathic understanding, and disclose to one another. Clearly fans and musicians do not expect this of one another although, as we shall see, it occurs more than one might expect, particularly when people in these relationships use social media. 'Solidarity' is the expectation that friends will engage in mutual activities and offer companionship. Again, fans do not generally expect musicians to hang out with them, nor do musicians expect that of fans. Finally, friends are expected to provide benefits such as resources, information, and popularity, an expectation known as 'agency.' Musicians certainly provide resources and information for fans, but it is less likely that fans provide these things for artists.

Fan/artist relationships might seem to be better understood as market relationships, given that artists are selling things audiences want. Certainly most of the rhetoric in the

music industries represents fostering relational connections as a means to sell more product. However, as Badhwar (2008) argues, market and friendship relationships are not as different as they may first appear. Market relations are generally seen as utilitarian, meaning that they are means to other ends, while friendships are ends in their own right. They are also fungible, as any seller is interchangeable with any other seller. Yet 'the features of instrumentality, fungibility, impersonality, and so on are neither peculiar to market relations, nor an all-or-nothing affair; rather, they are present in varying degrees in both market and nonmarket relationships, including friendship' (Badhwar, 2008: 312). 'Even relationships that come into being for purely instrumental reasons have a noninstrumental dimension,' argues Badhwar (2008: 314), 'because people are not mere instruments to each other's ends, but ends in themselves.' Friendship, economic production, and artistic production are motivated by similar desires to exercise 'creative or productive powers in worthwhile enterprises' (Badhwar, 2008: 314) and the exchange of the results of that productivity 'requires a sense of fairness, honesty, trustworthiness, and the ability for trust' (Badhwar, 2008: 316). In sum, then, although there would seem to be many differences between friendships and artist/audience relationships, it would be a mistake to see them as strictly dichotomous. Indeed, as this paper will show, they are not.

Research into friendship and social media (e.g. Baym & Ledbetter, 2009; boyd, 2006; Fono & Reynes-Goldie, 2006) points to the ambiguity of the term 'friend,' and the complications that arise from sites' use of the word as a built-in label for diverse connections. People called 'friends' online may be anything from strangers to acquaintances to lovers to family to best friends and more. This raises the problem of 'context collapse' (boyd & Heer, 2006), in which people must address diverse audiences with the same messages, presenting only one identity to sets of people who would normally merit different sorts of identity performances (Goffman, 1959). Performers face this context collapse in that they encounter friends, fans, family, gossip columnists and others online (Marwick & boyd, 2011).

For performers, however, social media may differentiate audiences as much as they collapse them. Instead of engaging audiences only through broadcast media and live performance with tightly constricted social roles, performers are now more likely to encounter them as individuals with whom they can have ongoing interactions online. This paper explores how musicians understand the interpersonal benefits and tensions between approaching fans as fans and as friends and how they strategically manage the challenges these uncertain boundaries create.

The Musicians

Most of the musicians with whom I spoke were either what one manager called 'legacy artists' (those who had been in the business since the 1980s or before and had established audiences prior to the rise of social media) or what Norwegian musician Sivert Høyem referred to as 'the last generation of analogue musicians.' These artists experienced the shift from encountering audiences primarily at shows and through mass media to also

encountering them directly through social media. I also spoke with musicians who got their start after Myspace began in 2002. These people had never been musicians in a time when engaging social media was not germane to the job.

I interviewed thirty-six musicians in North America and Europe, as well as three managers and a producer. Most were from the United States and the United Kingdom. I also spoke with musicians from Canada, Sweden, Norway, Australia and Spain. Most of those with whom I spoke could be loosely categorized as indie or alternative rock, but they also played pop, electronica, punk, alt country, jazz, desi, reggae, ska, new classical, and ambient music. Only nine of the people with whom I spoke were women, reflecting in part the gender balance of popular music. Just three were non-white. A list of interviewed musicians is in Appendix 1.

The genre, regional and ethnic shortcomings of the sample are attributable in part to the difficulties of gaining access to this population discussed by Ferris (2007). With a long history as a music fan who has known many musicians over the years, I relied initially on my social networks to recruit musicians. I also received introductions through the organizers of the French music trade conference MIDEM in exchange for posting excerpts of some interviews on their blog. I originally intended to use snowball sampling, but quickly found that this did not work. Very few of the people I interviewed referred me to others. Initially this seemed to be because musicians thought I only wanted people who are exemplars of using social media well, but gradually I came to suspect that it reflected a tacit norm of not giving out each other's contact information. Many of the contacts I made led to dead ends, reflecting the facts that giving interviews is something musicians do all the time, and one which does not result in publicity holds little appeal, and that many musicians do not want or feel able to talk about their relationships with audience to a researcher.

Interviewees were given the choice to be entirely on record, entirely anonymous, or to be on record but with some segments made anonymous. Only one musician chose to speak entirely anonymously. In several cases I sent finished transcripts to musicians so they could mark which parts they wanted anonymized. Approximately a quarter of them asked to have some sections of their interviews anonymized, usually passages in which they criticized their fans or said things they did not want their management or labels to hear. Everyone quoted and named here has consented to being identified. I worked from an interview protocol and had a few questions I asked everyone, but I sought to create a conversational feel and draw out musicians' perspectives rather than imposing my own frame on the conversation. Many of the interviews thus went in directions that depended on the answers and topics the musicians raised. The shortest interview was 15 minutes and the longest was two and a half hours. Most were approximately 50 minutes long. The interviews totaled approximately 30 hours or about 850 single spaced pages of transcripts.

I began analysis by reading through all the transcripts carefully, listing each of the points musicians made. This resulted in a list of 215 codes that I organized into hierarchical categories. One higher-level category was Personal Relationship Dynamics; it is those data that I focus on here. With this as an initial guide, I then went through each transcript

carefully, using qualitative analysis software to iteratively code all passages that addressed the relational dynamics of online musician/audience relationship. For this I used 37 codes. I then exported all excerpts I had coded (approximately 30 single spaced pages) and continued to sort and recategorize them into like kinds, looking for underlying dynamics of variation and similarity.

In what follows I briefly discuss how social media have changed communication between musicians and their audiences, making it potentially far more personal than before. I turn then to the interpersonal rewards musicians experience as a result of social media engagement, including the opportunity to meet new people, as well as receipt of social support and the validation that their music has supported others. However, social media also complicate relationships with audiences and the next section considers the technical and social challenges artists face as they struggle with the sites, their own privacy boundaries, and problematic audience behaviors. Finally, I turn to some of the strategies musicians have developed to manage these issues.

No More Rock Stars

Social media have made it all but impossible to practice celebrity with the aloof distance of yore. 'In the old days,' said Mark Kelly of British band Marillion, 'pop stars, rock stars used to just drop out of the sky didn't they? And now they're tweeting about what they had for breakfast or whatever.' Said Roger O'Donnell, who spent a decade playing keyboards in The Cure before becoming a solo jazz musician:

> In the past bands could disappear for four years and live in a mansion somewhere, and people were just happy when they did come down from their Ivory Tower and release a record and allow you to go and buy it.

'Stars in the '60s and '70s were untouchable,' said 23-year-old Greta Salpeter of the American bands The Hush Sound and Gold Motel:

> It was this kind of like exclusivity complex where you couldn't really know anything about them, and that's what made it so interesting. And today it's changed. It's like if you make yourself invisible and you make yourself exclusive in this modern music age, people won't care.

Sydney Wayser, another young musician agreed, 'You can't just show up and be a rock star and not put the effort in to showing your fans you care anymore.' Whether they like it or not (and, as we will see, many do), musicians often have little choice but to be more accessible to their audiences.

Audiences have also become more accessible to their musicians. Fans had always sent letters to musicians, and many of the older musicians mentioned receiving and often collecting and saving fan letters (one still rued a spilled paint incident that destroyed all their

saved letters). But social media dramatically increased how often audience members contacted them. Myspace opened a floodgate by making it easy for audience members to reach out. Stuart Braithwaite of Scottish band Mogwai, for instance, said:

> When Myspace became popular and people could write straight to a band, I think that was a point I think a lot of people had never considered that you could just email a band. So I think p— we definitely— when that first started we got a lot a lot of correspondence through Myspace from people I don't think would maybe have considered sending us an email.

Chris Murray, a ska musician from Canada who's been located in California for many years, argued that Facebook's comment feature made audiences even more likely to reach out to musicians directly:

> I think it's better setup for that than Myspace was where someone can just leave a comment on your page or like a post, that type of thing. It's a lighter touch you have, I would say, for somebody just to 'like' what you have. You announce a show and somebody 'likes' it. Or somebody wants to just say on your wall, 'Oh, I saw you in this place, it was really cool' or 'I saw you five years ago,' or 'I've never seen you. Are you coming to where I am?' I find a lot more people approach me out of the blue in that way than did on Myspace where usually it involved writing a message, which I think people were a little more hesitant to do than they are to just post a comment.

What's more, when audiences reach out to musicians through social media, they often expect that musicians will interact with them. 'I would say that now people expect you to reply to them,' said Zoë Keating, an American new classical musician with more than a million Twitter followers, 'they expect you to respond to their tweets. It's not like "Oh my God, she actually wrote back." It's like "of course you wrote back."'

For musicians, then, like other public figures, social media have affected the amount and expectations of communication with their audiences. Where once they were expected to be aloof and inaccessible, now they are expected to be present and to engage. 'Interesting days,' mused Mark Kelly, 'it's one of those things I suppose people are still trying to find out - where to draw the boundaries and what works and what doesn't, you know?'

New Connections/New Rewards

As I've mentioned, the intimacy constructed between celebrities and fans online is often understood as illusory (Beer, 2008; Marwick & boyd, 2011). Yet nearly all of the musicians with whom I spoke experienced personal benefits as a result of direct access that blend the rewards of friendship with those of performer/audience relationships and suggest that intimacy — or at least intimate moments — may be quite real for performers as well as

fans. These benefits include the opportunity to create new personal relationships, to build on those that begin on tour, and to receive social support through instantaneous feedback and hearing how they have supported others in times of crisis. Understanding these interactions as musicians do means shifting from viewing performers through lenses of commodification toward viewing them as social and creative beings.

New Friendships

Musicians have always befriended members of their audiences as they chatted after shows, crashed on their couches, and, on rare occasion, built relationships through responding to fan letters. For many musicians, the chance to build relationships through playing music is one of the main reasons they stick with this difficult path. 'One of the best things about making music is you know a lot of people,' said Spanish singer-songwriter Nacho Vegas (who does not use social media but anticipates that he will eventually):

> You know a lot of people in every place you play. And you always play music, and you always talk about music, and talking about music, it's something similar to talking about life. And you talk about music and then you talk about life. So you — I made a bunch of friends that I know, just from playing someplace [...] You get your mind more open just by playing and knowing people and being in different places. It's one of the greatest things about being in music.

'I'm pretty friendly and outgoing, and I like to talk to fans,' said Roger O'Donnell, 'in fact, a lot of my best friends started off as fans.'

These days, in addition to meeting in person, musicians often strike up friendships with audience members through social media. 'You can become great friends through social media,' said Brian Travers, saxophone player for British reggae band UB40, 'you can really be honest, really talk.' Steve Lawson, an ambient solo bass player from England who has written more than 80,000 tweets, described friendship as the most important part of his musician-audience relationships:

> I'm making friends with people who listen to my music and then I became a part of their life and they become a part of mine. And I am truly enriched by that. And the music becomes the soundtrack to that relationship.

'I don't like to call them fans,' said O'Donnell, 'Not anymore. They're more like friends, people that are interested in my music and what I'm doing. [I get] three or four [emails] a day, and I'll answer, and I have good conversations with people.'

As they are for most people who interact online (e.g. Baym & Ledbetter, 2009) the lines between meeting and forming relationships online and offline are fluid, and mediated and in-person connections can be mutually reinforcing. For example, when Zoë Keating, who lives in Northern California, played Colorado:

there were a number of people there who came up to say hello afterwards who only knew me on Twitter […] So they came to the concert just based on our social media connection. And they felt secure enough in our relationship that we could go hang out.

Some musicians use social media on tour in order to meet fans before the concert. Nathan Harold, who plays bass with the American band Fun told me:

There was a show in Phoenix that we were playing and I was looking at my phone and a couple of people were tweeting at me saying, 'Hey I'm out by the merch, come hang out with us.' And now I know them personally, so that's always a cool thing.

The outspokenly political British singer-songwriter Billy Bragg uses Twitter to find local protests and opportunities for activism with his audience when he tours. Canadian electronica star Richie Hawtin (aka Plastikman) also actively uses social media to meet audience members while touring:

Before a show I might post and ask where people are. Like if I'm playing Korea, I might ask 'where is everyone' and someone will say 'they're eating salted squid next to the venue.' So I'll go there and try to meet some people. I travel so much that if I didn't reach out and make connections with people there it would all be a blur.

Social media can help build and sustain what begins offline as well. Said Chris Murray:

I have a page on Facebook where there are over 4,000 people. That's a lot of names, you know, and not everybody I know is on my Facebook page and I can't remember everybody's name. But, I find, okay, I'll see somebody at a show a few times. I'll start to recognize, 'Oh, here's somebody who's coming to shows, becoming a regular' and then I see their face on Facebook with their name and that really helps me out because it's like, 'Oh, there's that person. Oh, this is their name' and it's like I forgot it the three times I met them in person. But, if they start liking stuff that I'm posting and I see their name and face repeatedly, that helps me out. So, definitely, it strengthens my connection to people.

In short then, social media supplement the traditional means of creating new relationships that playing live has long provided artists, allowing musicians to meet new people who enrich their lives. For some, this undermines the very idea that the people with whom they

interact online should be considered 'fans.' Others, as I will discuss below, are committed to maintaining the fan/friend boundary, either for reasons of privacy or of maintaining the music's appeal, making it trickier to engage audiences online. Power balances are not predetermined by social categories of 'musician' and 'audience,' they are negotiated.

Social Support

One of the major functions of friendship in adult relationships is the provision of social support, or help that is provided for personal rather than professional reasons. Among the benefits of receiving social support are better psychological adjustment, higher perceptions of self-efficacy, better coping, improved task performance, better disease resistance and recovery, and lowered risk of mortality (Burleson & Macgeorge, 2002). In addition to fostering one-on-one relationships, social media interactions can provide everyday social support for musicians. They receive instant feedback. Interactions with audience members online also offer memorable high points that can be profoundly validating, such as when people write to tell musicians how their music has helped them in the most difficult times.

Though the term 'musician' may conjure images of people on stage before adoring throngs, much of their working time is spent without adoration or even feedback. 'When you do music it's hard to get any — I guess any real positive feedback,' said the drummer of a successful American indie band who chose to remain anonymous:

> It's like you do a record and no one hears it and you slave over it. It's really hard to do. You do that for six to nine months. And then people start hearing it. And playing live shows really ties all of that together. But also it's good to see what people are actually thinking about it [on the internet].

Sivert Høyem, who is a true celebrity in Norway, likewise enjoys the continuous feedback: 'I like knowing that there's a lot of people out there who are interested and seeing what their reactions are whenever I'm posting information about a new gig or a new tour or new music.'

Emily White, manager of Urge Overkill, referred to the 'instant gratification' offered by audiences online:

> When I first started working with them, Eddie would say, 'Yeah, you know, I'll be at home writing songs and does anybody care?' And then he's like, 'But then I post on Twitter and Facebook and all these people respond immediately. And I'm like, "Wow, people really care."' You know, so I think it can be really wonderful instant gratification, especially for a songwriter who is at home.

Mike Timmins, of Canadian alt country band The Cowboy Junkies, also praised 'the immediacy of the internet,' even in the context of touring when they have their most direct encounters with audiences:

People will write a quick note about the concert they saw last night. 'Yes, and we really loved this' — you know, something really as simple as that. Again, it's a nice touch. It's almost like a thank-you note. 'I had a great time at the show last night.' And, again, those things are just — it does help. It just is a sort of — especially when you're on the road and you're grinding it out and you get a few of those, and it's like 'Oh, wow, okay. So we did — we touched some people last night.' So that sort of stuff does help.

Social support researchers have noted that one form of social support is the realization that you are needed and matter to others (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). The ongoing flow of mediated social interaction between audiences and artists means that musicians now hear many more stories of how their music has helped others than they did before. These tales can be deeply moving for the musicians. When I asked musicians to tell me about an interaction with audience members that they found particularly rewarding, many told stories of receiving a private message about how much they had helped someone. 'Sometimes I get personal messages,' said Høyem, 'people write me or send me a message or something about how they were at a gig with their father and how they really connected through the music.' Sydney Wayser explained why she liked social media, speaking of a fan:

> who emailed me a long time ago with one of my songs from my first record and she just was crying basically. She was so emotional and she was just saying, 'You opened up this whole blockage of these emotions I had because of the song and thank you.' And I feel if I was so separated from the fans and from the listeners I would have never been able to know that I actually really affected someone like that. So I do like that aspect.

The story musicians told me most often was of hearing that their music helped someone deal with death. Each person who told me one of these stories experienced it as a humbling moment of validation. Steve Lawson, for instance, told me:

> There was a guy that sent me an email and all it said in the email was 'My dad just died. All I can listen to is you.' And I thought 'Is this spam? I don't know, is this weird twisted spam?' What I did was put the first half of his address from gmail.com into Google and it brought up his Last.fm profile. And indeed he had spent the last three days listening to nothing but me. And so I sent him a message back and just said, 'What can I say? I'm so sorry to hear that. I'm humbled that I've managed to provide some kind of solace in the middle of all that. Let me know if you need anything.'

David Lowery, of the American bands Camper Van Beethoven and Cracker, does not like to

befriend fans but likes to argue politics with them on his Facebook page[1]. 'I just remember this one guy who used to always argue,' he said:

> and then I just noticed, he sends me a message directly, and it's about his mom is actually basically dying and her final request is this one Camper Van Beethoven song, *Take Me Down to the Infirmary*. I don't know, just— he wrote me this really interesting note, it was just how his mom was old but she'd turned him on to— he played Cracker so much, she started listening to Cracker and it was just interesting. We always have these kind of nice little personal conversations now. I was kind of stunned and flattered that somebody would — basically the song that she wanted to hear on her deathbed and it was— just wow, I— it never really occurred to me that our music could penetrate that far into someone's emotional life or something like that […] And I feel like I have a personal connection with this person and actually his brother's also on my page too. So I feel like I have a personal connection to them now.

Music anthropologist Fonarow (2010) suggests that one reason these tales might have such power for musicians is that their creative output is so often cast as 'entertainment' and 'play,' terms which suggest frivolity. These stories can thus be seen as affirming for musicians that they do more than provide surface pleasure, and that their life's work is not just a trivial leisure commodity. Trying to manage difficult emotions is also a major creative impetus for many musicians. Reflecting on a 2002 Jars of Clay song about death that people still regularly mention on Twitter as helping them deal with loss, their guitarist Stephen Mason explained:

> What I think poetry does at its best is it gives words and new words to feelings and maybe helps develop a new context to understand feelings. So that's why we love what we do. That's a large part of it, on the creative side.

Nacho Vegas described conversation and song as 'opposites':

> I make songs because the things I sing I can't put in words talking with somebody. Because when you talk to a friend, or to somebody, you think in a logical way. But there is another way of communicating to people, a way that has nothing to do with logic, with your reason. So these are the confusing things that you have to put in songs to try to — I don't know — to understand. You make a song, you don't understand anything, but at least you got it and you can see it from outside and you say, there is a better life of sensitivity that is hard to explain.

In contrast to relationships based on inequality and a clear boundary between performer and fan, many of these musicians thus experience strong connections with their audiences that are more personal than celebrity and suggest the kind of symmetrical reciprocity and communion friends expect of one another. Through social media, audience members become friends and provide social benefits of friendship in ways that can reward artists' passion for making music and enrich them personally.

New Connections/New Challenges

However, social media present musicians with many challenges, both in their forms and, more germane to this paper, in the more personal social contacts they enable. In this section I address the media and social challenges that musicians raised.

Media Challenges

At a very basic level there is the problem that there are so many media through which performers can engage fans directly (and vice versa), they all take time, and which are in vogue change so rapidly that musicians often feel overwhelmed. As Gary Waleik, of the recently reunited 1980s American band Big Dipper said:

> You could see the progress from Myspace to Facebook to Twitter. Everyone just loses their minds at the latest thing, and says 'No, this is how you do it.' And there's never any sort of consensus. I mean as corrupt and horrible as the old record industry was, at least it was a barely stable way to get the word out about music and get the music out for decades.

Indeed, altogether the musicians mentioned nearly 40 different sorts of social media through which they interacted with audiences, including Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, email, official website forums, mailing lists, fan sites, guest books, apps, and music oriented sites such as Last.fm, Bandcamp, Soundcloud and Indaba. It is a dizzying array that is hard even for those who devote their lives to studying social media to keep up with, let alone those who would rather write and play music.

Once sites are chosen, their infrastructures can still create problems for negotiating the social boundaries between fans and friends. Facebook, for instance, has both personal profiles and fan pages, the former being required in order to have the latter. Musicians must thus make forced decisions about whether specific individuals should be categorized as 'fans' or 'friends.' Furthermore, fan pages were introduced some years after personal profiles, so musicians who took to the site early may have already admitted 'fans' to 'friend' pages.

At the time of these interviews, Facebook also limited friends to 5000, so those who would like to think of all fans as friends had to send people to their fan pages if they become too popular. The American singer-songwriter Jill Sobule would have preferred that everyone

be her 'friend' rather than facing the uncomfortable interpersonal task of having to decline friend requests:

> People want to become my friend and they can't because it's over the Facebook friend limit. So there's times it's like 'Oh God, how do—' you know, you gotta tell people. And I try to do that like once every two weeks. I'll just watch TV and I'll be saying 'Okay, I can't add you but join my musician page.'

Deciding what exactly constitutes a 'friend' for Facebook purposes is a process most of the site's users deal with, but it's one made even more complicated when there is the alternative of a fan page. The genre bending American musician Honeychild Coleman described her collapsed contexts on her Facebook friend page:

> People were like, 'Oh, be my friend.' And I'm like, 'Oh, you should be friends with Apollo Heights, not me. This is my personal page.' And it made me realize there is a difference between a friend and a fan in cyberspace. […] On Facebook, my family's on there. You have conversations with people. It's a little bit more of a social thing, and I think that — and I like it for communications. I like it for talking about politics — all those things. I think that should be separate from the artist page, and I'm starting to see— I don't wanna be talking about, 'Oh, someone's in the hospital,' and five minutes later, 'And by the way, I have a show.' To me, that— there needs to be a separation between those types of communications. So that's why the fan page should be a different thing.

Musicians who began connecting with fans on Facebook before the site created fan pages may now find themselves with Facebook friends they would rather have on their fan page. British musician S-Endz, of the Desi band Swami, like several people to whom I spoke, preferred Twitter because of its asymmetry that allows fans to follow him without his having to follow them back (a functionality Facebook has since implemented with subscriptions). But to now unfriend people whose requests he's previously accepted seems unacceptably rude:

> When we started, [Facebook] was just profiles. And so you'd have hundreds and hundreds of fans just adding you. And at the time that was the only way to engage with them. I'm not going to sit here now and just delete all the people who are my friends and say, 'Go to my page. I don't want to know what the fuck you're talking to people about.'

For musicians with tens of thousands of fans, audience demands on a site like Facebook can simply be too much. On the sites' ability to scale up interaction may outpace musicians'

ability to engage. S-Endz explained that:

> Some of our band members, particularly our female singer, Liana, just can't even use chat at all. It's just off, because the moment she turns it on, there will just be a flood of messages from all these random people.

Similarly, Brian Travers of UB40 (who have sold more than 70 million records in their thirty plus year history) left Facebook quickly:

> I kept getting sent kisses and teddy bears and people say, 'Why haven't you sent me a teddy bear back?' Except there are 11,000 people signing on. I thought 'no, this is crazy.'

On the other hand, Travers is a prolific tweeter and clearly loves the easy banter with fans he is able to attain there, but on his own terms.

Social Challenges

The increased interpersonal expectations social media seem to entail also raise social challenges. As Nacho Vegas put it, 'It's much easier now to be in contact with your audience, but it's too much easier.' Musicians must navigate whether to disclose as though they were speaking to friends or fans, and they must manage audience members who are overly emotional in ways both affectionate and hostile.

Disclosure

Friends are expected to engage in self disclosure with one another, an expectation that raises dialectical conflicts between being open and honest and protecting the self and the other (Rawlins, 1983). For many musicians, talking about their daily lives comes easily and feels fine. Disclosing to fans and disclosing to friends seem like the same thing. Musicians like Steve Lawson or Zoë Keating maintain a single online identity that integrates the personal with the professional. As Keating said:

> I don't see a distinction. It's like I'm an individual and I happen to have this creative life. There is no distinction. I think that's why social media is so — I find it — I'm kind of facile. It's sort of easy for me because I don't have to think up like 'is that my inside voice or my outside voice.' For better or worse they're the same voice.

Others would prefer to reserve personal disclosures for friends and family. 'I do draw like a pretty strong line between how I communicate with fans and how I communicate with friends,' one musician told me. Yet they often feel pressured to disclose personal

information by sites' infrastructures, norms of use, and by promoters and managers.

The reluctance to treat fans as friends by disclosing personal information may stem from privacy concerns. 'Twitter and Facebook's microblogging aspect kind of demanded fresh personal content and I have certainly felt the pressure to keep up with that,' said American singer-songwriter Erin McKeown, 'and that is often at odds for me with the amount of things that I'm willing to talk about with the three or four thousand people who follow me online.' She continued:

> It's like having boundaries without having the appearance of having boundaries and trying to find a way to interact in a sincere and genuine and meaningful way with people and that reflects your personality but also, you know, is not completely transparent - maybe that's not the right way to put it - but leaves some information that is just for me.

Even musicians who enjoy personal disclosure to audiences find themselves having to negotiate privacy boundaries for the people with whom they have close relationships. While some musicians, such as Stephen Mason, post baby pictures to Twitter, others try to keep their families out of the discourse entirely. 'I don't allow any discussion of my kids on the Web page,' said David Lowery, 'we delete any comments or Facebook comments or anything about that. And I don't know where that started, but that started a long time ago.' Similarly the Scottish singer-songwriter (who has long lived in the United States) Lloyd Cole told me:

> If people ask me stuff which is too personal, I don't go there. I try to keep my — especially as my wife is hyper-sensitive to it — I try and keep my wife and children pretty much completely out of it. I might mention the odd thing, like I've got a little band with my children now for fun, playing AC/DC songs and things. But my father recently uploaded a video of it from our basement, which one of the fans got hold of and put it on the forum, and my wife and I don't want my kids really to be recognizable with my work. So we asked that to be taken down, and I made a point of saying, 'This is something that shouldn't happen again.'

Said Keating:

> If it's Christmas and I'm with my family members at Christmas I won't tweet. I won't talk about other family members. Unless I ask them like say, 'hey can I post this?' I'll ask them. So I make a division there because it's not just me, it's somebody else. I don't want to impact somebody else's life.

As Cole's quote suggests, spouses often influence musicians' boundaries of disclosure. Mark Kelly, for instance, had to cut back on his personal tweeting after his wife 'told him off' for disclosing too much:

> The thing for me about Twitter was I was finding it quite fun but I was also being a bit risky with it and doing, you know, just things I thought really very interesting either for me to do or for people to read it. You can have that sort of approach where it's almost like a corporate, you know, we're sending out messages and this is all information about the band, but I think it was me personally that was doing it. I was just tweeting whatever was going on, you know? […] I got told off by my wife for posting stuff that's too personal […] the thing I got told off about was tweeting that I had a vasectomy. But it's like if you're gonna do it, well for me anyway, I felt like I had to do sort of stuff that was going on. It might or might not be interesting for other people. I must admit I haven't done so much lately. Maybe I've gone a bit- gone too far with it now.

Musicians may also resist disclosure because they believe that their audience gets more from their music when there is distance between listener and musician, and some believe this distance necessarily entails a power difference. Disclosure threatens mystique, which threatens fans' experience. In his article Beer (2008: 233) reflected on seeing musicians he admired while waiting in line on a cold night to see them:

> I could see through a second storey window two members of the band inside smoking and talking. Despite the discomfort of my environment this felt like the *right amount* of distance between them and me. I seem to remember having a conversation at the time about it not being a good idea to meet your heroes. It would seem that the opposite sentiment fuels what is happening to music culture during Web 2.0.

Musicians may agree that the days of rock stars falling from the sky are over, but like some fans they are divided over whether that is to music's benefit or detriment. 'I have met some of my heroes,' warned Lloyd Cole:

> and it's not always a good thing. And I do think that that inequality in the relationship is what keeps it alive. And I think one of the things that's possible with my web presence is that the last shards of my mystique are in danger of being completely obliterated.

Another musician told me:

> I think that artists should maintain a certain distance […] We haven't really entered into this period. This is uncharted waters for artists, where everything is on display. And I'm old enough to grow up in a time when that's not — you don't expect that from your artists. You want there to be some mystique. You want the revelation at the end. You don't want the day-by-day minutiae.

The American pop musician D.A. Wallach (whose band Chester French was the first band on Facebook since they were Harvard students when it launched) explained why he didn't always tell fans what they wanted to know:

> You want to create an exciting experience of being a fan for your audience. And that involves both presenting and concealing information in interesting and surprising ways that make it fun to follow you, fun to wonder what you're up to or whatever […] I think there is a virtue on the customer service side of things, if it were a traditional business, in answering every single question on Twitter. But I think as an entertainer there might be kind of a value to answering one out of every ten so that it feels really special if you do, and you're kind of reinforcing some sense of inaccessibility or stardom.

Musicians who value mystique and distance must thus navigate how to be engaged enough to foster audience connections without engaging so much that a transformation from fan/artist relationship into friendship damages the magic of music. Said Mark Kelly, whose band has released many albums that were fan-financed:

> It's a tricky one because at the end of the day you've got these fans that are into your music and it's almost like you know the musician isn't the music. You've got the message and the messenger, and maybe they should be kept a bit separate because if they find out too much about it, it might interfere with their enjoyment of the music that they listen to. People say they want to know everything that's going on but again, when we're in the studio writing and recording if I was to tweet everything that happened, you know, the things that people say, the arguments that we have, the stuff that goes down, it would probably destroy the magic a little bit, you know?

On the other hand, there are many musicians who think mystique is over-rated and celebrate social media's potential to destroy it. These are the musicians who eschew the celebrity relationship, prefer not to think of their audience as fans, and believe that the mutual experience of direct and open access serves only to enhance everyone's rewards. As Stephen Mason said:

> It's gotten so much easier and I think we're removing some of the mystique of all that that used to be you know a decade, two decades ago in the music industry […] the music and the engagement with fans has not suffered, it has only gotten better, it has only improved, it's only made the experience on our end as the artist, more enjoyable and I have to say, as a music fan too, who follows a lot of bands on Twitter, and Facebook, it's enhanced my experience of a lot of bands that I love as well.

The late Gustaf Kjellvander, of Swedish band The Fine Arts Showcase, argued strongly for that this demythologizing of musicians:

> There shouldn't be a dividing line. I don't believe that there should be. It's breaking down the barriers of the inaccessibility of the artist, which is good. It makes people realize it's something they can do themselves. It's important to remember that people who play music are just people. The internet helps that, it's not this huge iconic book of characters, rock stars. Personally I think the rock star thing is boring and played out. It's good it's just people playing folk music, music by the people for the people.

Choosing how much to disclose is thus a question of balancing one's own and one's family's comfort level with beliefs about how much the audience wants to or should know in order to maintain the power of the musical connection. Having an online social presence is not just a question of being there, but of making ongoing strategic choices about what to say and what to keep private in order to maximize the personal, social and professional benefits for themselves, their loved ones and their fans.

Overly emotional audience members
Contrary to perceptions of all fans as overly emotional, most musicians find that almost everyone they deal with behaves entirely appropriately. However, nearly all of them encounter audience members who are inappropriately emotional. In some cases, fans feel too connected to them. In others, people may be too angry with them. The continuous flow of mediated social interaction exposes musicians to regular emotional displays that are uncomfortable, scary or hurtful. 'I think Twitter has changed a few things, and Facebook's changed a few things,' said Brian Travers, 'we are — you can kind of be subject to some kind of crazy people, and that could get to you.'

People have strong positive emotional responses to music, and fans often generalize those feelings to the musicians who made that music. A few of them may misread the significance of direct interaction or be mentally or emotionally unstable. The result can be what Stephen Mason called 'false intimacy' in which fans feel more connected to the artist than the artist feels to them. Said Lloyd Cole, 'it's possible that you get people who are somewhat delusional about their relationship with the artist, and I don't think it's to be

encouraged. […] You're my community, and obviously I appreciate the fact that you keep me in business, so to speak, but our relationship is not like a normal friendship.'

False intimacy often takes the forms of communicating too frequently and disclosing too much. 'Occasionally you get people who just won't stop writing you and it turns into crazy shit,' said D.A. Wallach, 'you end up hearing about their abusive father or whatever and at that point I stop writing back.' Though this can be unpleasant, it may be easier to manage through social media than it is in person. The American musician Kristin Hersh, of Throwing Muses and 50 Foot Wave, told me:

> Sometimes I'll get the equivalent of a fan letter from someone who seems particular confused or needy. I feel for them but they can't hurt me from there. The only ones that concern me are when they're really drunk and it's the middle of the night and I'm alone.

Some, like Sivert Høyem, feel compelled be nice and to respond, making it doubly difficult to maintain manageable boundaries that feel safe. This is particularly challenging where physical access is not difficult:

> I guess some people have really— they have that kind of connection on a really spiritual level or whatever, and they really feel that they know me, and that can be pretty scary. For a small country like Norway, that's just not okay. <chuckles> […] Nowadays, it's easy for people to monopolize you if they want to. And I have people just sending me ten emails each day and contacting me and following me on everything I do, sending me text messages and stuff, which is just really tiring and annoying […] Some people pick up on everything I do, and they seem to think that it's all very significant, so they just seem to get a little too much— I don't know. Yeah, there's been quite a few who have been a little scary. But also sometimes, since you're really available to people all the time — if people want to get a hold of me, they can — so some people — you just start communicating with people and they just kind of — it can take up a little bit too much of your time, because they write back all the time, and I don't want to be rude […] and it can get a little too friendly.

Musicians also find fans imposing on them for favors they have no standing to ask. Stuart Braithwaite, for instance, said:

> You do get the odd bizarre requests. Like some guy from South America wanted — I think he wanted me to play on his record, but I didn't know his music. I didn't know the guy. It was just a really bizarre request and he kind of kept going on about it.

Greta Salpeter wouldn't mind doing these kinds of things, but hasn't got the time to fulfill all the odd requests she gets to 'send my friend in Japan a birthday card,' and so on.

The sense of false intimacy is described as particularly likely toward singers. Though it is misguided and can be difficult for them, given that music is meant to connect, that sense of closeness cannot always simply be dismissed as a problem. As Nacho Vegas explained:

> Another important fact is, not just that you're the lead singer, but also the one who writes the lyrics. That could create in some people who like your songs the sense that you have important things in common, like feelings or experiences in life, which is not always true. But it can be beautiful as well. Relationships with the audience can be beautiful and strange at the same time, and that's great, I think.

Not everyone in an online audience is a fan. Musicians must also deal with antifans (Gray, 3002; Pinkowitz, 2011) who take advantage of the anonymity of the internet to spew what Billy Bragg called 'unsolicited invective':

> I write a column for *Q Magazine* every month and the one that's in the current issue is about exactly this, it's about getting unsolicited e-mails from people who tell you that you're shits and that you should shut up and what an asshole you are and how I deal with it.

'The idea that I am my music and my music is me in that way is really odd,' said Steve Lawson:

> People who come looking for a particular thing don't find it and try to hold me responsible because they don't like it, and I find that really weird. The internet lets them say it in a way they wouldn't otherwise.

Musicians sometimes receive invective via email, as Bragg described, but it is most commonly encountered when musicians dare to look at how they are being discussed outside their own sites. YouTube can be particularly difficult, as Roger O'Donnell described:

> They can be mean though. It can be really hurtful, I think, especially on YouTube. I think there's something about YouTube. The people that comment on there, I think, if you put them together and gave them weapons and put them in uniform, they could take over the world, 'cause they are the nastiest people I've ever come across. […] It's just venomous and evil and nasty, no holds barred. And you know if you met them in a bar, they wouldn't say boo to you.

Some, like Jill Sobule, gave up on following discussions about themselves outside of their own sites:

> I did for awhile and then I stopped doing that because you'll get a hundred really great things and then you'll get one like kind of mean thing or you look at YouTube and people are just — people just comment just so they can, you know. They're usually probably like 14-year old kids or damaged ex-frat boys, I don't know, who have nothing better to do but to say negative things. But why put myself through that?

In contrast to increasing their continuous access to social support and friendship, the relationships and interactions created via social media have also pushed artists to manage tricky boundaries around disclosure and the management of their own and other people's emotions.

Strategies

As the analysis presented thus far indicates, these musicians' identity and relationship performances on social media are diverse. As they navigate the tricky waters between celebrity and friend, openness and distance, equality and difference, musicians develop strategies about their media and communicative practices.

Choosing Media

I have mentioned the anxieties musicians feel around the plenitude of media and of messages directed to them. One way they handle this is by using media that allow them to manage their interactions with the most comfort. Musicians vary in their perceptions of a site's qualities and affordances as well as in their personal preferences. For instance, some of the musicians liked Twitter for its asymmetrical relationships and broadcast-like qualities, while others liked it for its ease of interpersonal engagement. Steve Lawson appreciated that Twitter limits who sees messages and lets him block people: 'The great thing about Twitter is that if someone says "Steve, I think you're a dick," only their followers are going to see it. I can ignore them, I can block it.' Others didn't get Twitter and preferred Facebook for its norm of niceness and 'light touch.'

As Jill Sobule's comments about avoiding YouTube indicate, musicians also make choices about whether to expose themselves to any particular medium. Lawson runs several Google alerts to see how he is discussed across the internet while others assiduously avoid reading anything written about them outside their own sites and pages. Some simply chose not to use social media at all, or to minimize their engagement with it. 'If I have 15 minutes,' asks American jazz singer/guitarist Kate Schutt:

am I going to read some fucking, excuse my French, but fucking small print about Facebook, you know, who can view this and that and try and figure it out in my brain or would I rather practice my guitar and become a better musician? I would rather practice my guitar and become a better musician.

Choosing How Much To Interact

Musicians may use a medium but have personal policies to limit how much they engage with the audience. Conversely, they may actively foster interactions with audience members. 'If I don't want to answer peoples' questions I'm silent,' said Kristin Hersh, speaking of Twitter, 'now I'm allowed to be silent sometimes.' Another musician is comfortable talking to fans one-on-one in the context of a show but refuses to get into email exchanges, keeping to a self-imposed rule of always replying, but never more than once. Others, like Sivert Høyem as discussed, feel compelled to keep replying or have trouble deciding at which point to stop.

Musicians respond very differently to antagonistic messages. Some refuse to engage with antagonists and ignore their messages. 'People are entitled to their opinions,' said S-Endz:

> and if they're wrong, they're wrong. More often than not, I think that some of those people, they've prejudged you on some random basis regardless. And even if they know they're wrong, they're still going to have the same opinion of you anyway. So it's kind of pointless.

Others engage their critics, opening discussion rather than shutting it down, a strategy that may result in stronger personal connections. Billy Bragg gave this example of dealing with an 'asshole' who emailed his office address:

> Last week it was some guy telling me that I didn't know what I was talking about and that I should go live in the European Union because I talk a lot about English identity but I'm also an internationalist. It was like three or four lines, and I just e-mailed back and said, 'Look mate, I live in the EU already, as do you.' You know, stupid point to make. […] He obviously wrote it on a blog somewhere just before he sent it to me just out of spite. So I just e-mailed back to him, 'Are you talking to me or at me?' That's what it said. And then he came back with a long apologetic letter and 'oh the idea that there's actually a human being at the end of this,' you know, 'that's the last thing people like me want.' It was really interesting.

Similarly Mike Timmins explained:

I don't get angry, but if somebody's really pissed-off about something, I'll usually respond to them in a reasonable way and try and explain what our motivation was or whatever it is for doing what it was and go from there. And more often that not, people send off these emails — they don't expect to hear back. <laughs> And when they do, they go 'Oh, hey, well, thanks for getting back to me. Yeah, I guess you're right.' You know, more often than not, they kinda go 'Oh, yeah, okay, I understand. Okay, well, thanks for responding.' So that's kind of good too.

Defining the Relationship

Some artists who prefer a fan/artist divide seek to explicitly limit and define their relationships, as we saw in Lloyd Cole's comment that 'our relationship is not like a normal friendship.' Similarly David Lowery thinks it best to make that distinction clear:

I always thought that was where it gets weird, because sort of the fans start thinking of it as this friendship, and actually what you're doing is actually kind of — not really manipulating them — but you've been using them to get your information, your art, you're using them to promote your band, basically. And sometimes fans think it's more friendship, and it's not, really. And so that's weird and awkward. And so thinking about that as one of the things it's like with — sort of specifically not trying to have as much personal interaction and kind of treat it — and just kind of be a little more honest about relationships, sort of not really have it quite as a friendly personal communication link.

In addition to managing which media they use and how much they communicate, the main way for musicians to define their relationship with fans is to strategically manage the topics they discuss. 'People feel like if you start tweeting or if you're on Facebook, everything's open to the world,' said Sydney Wayser, 'if you don't want people to know your phone number, don't put it on Facebook.' Many define relational limits by only posting what is relevant to their music. 'I'm quite happy to talk about anything revolving around the music,' said Mike Timmins:

My personal life is my personal life, and there's nothing interesting in there anyway, so it's not like anybody's been prodding in there. So, I don't know, I mean, I don't know if there's anything that would be definitely off-limits. It's just I prefer to keep stuff — I prefer to talk about the music. Especially with an audience member, that's why they're there. That's why they've come to the show. It's got nothing to do with me personally. It has to do with the music. So let's talk about the music.

Others emphasize discussion of other people's music, positioning themselves as music fans as much as musicians. Said Steve Lawson, 'I still spend nine-tenths of my time on social media platforms talking about other people's music.'

Emphasizing Community

Finally, musicians also manage the tensions inherent in one-on-one interactions with their fans by shifting the emphasis from that dyadic relationship to what Billy Bragg referred to as 'providing a social framework' for audience community. This may be accomplished by providing a discussion forum on the official website and minimizing direct involvement in its conversation, or it may be accomplished by raising a wide variety of topics besides personal self disclosure. Erin McKeown, for instance, talks sports:

> That's something that I like to talk about with my fans that is absent of this power/fan relationship […] the other day somebody just posted something really awesome about this scoreboarding system from 1911 that was so awesome that I was just like 'Oh my God!' I would never have known it. The post was like 'hey thought you'd like this.' I don't know who this person is but they know that I love baseball so they shared this really great obscure weird thing about baseball. And I know that that's a direct result of me being a clear sports fan in my interaction with people. And I just appreciate that, I appreciate that level of interaction of community. Like 'here's something awesome and weird' and we can go back and forth. […] I also think that can certainly feed a career in terms of cultivating a community of people online [who] might have gathered because we like my music but then we can talk about other things which is just vastly more interesting to me.

Jill Sobule likens her online presence to that of an Eighteenth Century salon host:

> What I like to do, because that's not that exciting is to engage and say 'what do you — what are you guys thinking?' What I loved to do is when I moved to L.A. from New York I was like, 'does anyone have a good dentist?' And then, it's almost like I would rather — like I would rather have a blog where it's not about me. It's just for a community of people to talk to each other, like-minded people. So the madam of my house.

Billy Bragg discussed the death of someone who had been integral in his fan community. The level of grief they all — including he, who was visibly moved telling me about it — experienced showed him 'we're not just talking about fans. It's something else. Not just people, these are friends.' As Beer (2008) suggested, in emphasizing community, musicians foster friendships amongst the fans. Their own roles in those communities are open to negotiation.

Discussion

This analysis is consistent with Marwick and boyd (2011) in conceptualizing public figure's social mediated personae as practices rather than constants. But by looking at relating to audiences from musicians' perspectives, this study reveals that public figures online perform a broader, more challenging range of identities than 'celebrity.' Even when they want to perform 'celebrity,' they must manage tensions between that and performing something more like 'friend' as they strive to balance new expectations of socially-mediated intimacy with the needs to protect themselves, their loved ones, their fans, and their music.

Audiences' connections with musicians and other performers are often considered 'parasocial.' As Marwick and boyd (2011) said, this parasociality is complicated by the fact that celebrities and audience members really do interact online. This study shows how we might turn parasociality on its head by considering performers' experiences. The relationships musicians and other performers had with audiences when their communication was mass-mediated might have been parasocial in their own way. Public figures encountered their audiences primarily as anonymous masses, so deindividualized as to be almost fictional.

Social media changed that so that public figures may now use media to develop real social connections with particular people. Intimacy is not just something fans project onto artists, it can be something artists experience when they interact with their audiences. Direct communication may help public figures or hurt them, but it regularly moves them. These social-media enabled connections involve creative, social people as prone to experiencing human emotion as anyone. Public figures who use social media cannot just be considered one-dimensional strategists seeking to present a self that creates enough of a sense of authenticity to be successfully commodified (Marwick & boyd, 2011). They do not just affect audiences. Audiences affect them.

The concept of 'celebrity,' and - perhaps by extension - 'fan', entail power differential. Some of the musicians I spoke with valued that differential, not because it made them feel important, but because they believed their music's effect depends on it. Others thought it great that the internet lessened power differences by increasing accessibility. In between were those who wanted both equality and distance. In short, public figures have differing attitudes toward power and closeness with their audiences online. They are in uncharted and ever-changing waters, making it up as they go along.

Some of these relationships can clearly come to be friendships in the sense that friendship scholars describe. They can be mutual, equal and voluntary connections in which partners expect support, resources, companionship, and so on. Friendship, as Badhwar (2008) argued, can share many qualities with market relations, and market relations can share many qualities with friendship. 'This exchange of the moral good of mutual respect for each other as ends forms the matrix for the exchange both of commodities and of other goods in reciprocal, voluntary relationships,' she wrote (2008:318), 'such mutual respect in market exchanges relates us as equals.' Fan/artist relationships need not be inherently

unequal, resembling friendship only on account of Facebook and Myspace's decisions to call those connections 'friends.' They are negotiated and, depending on artist and audience preferences, occur on many points on a continuum between distant commodity relations and close interpersonal bonds.

Although I entered this project expecting to find differences that depended on genre, the choices artists make seem to be far more influenced by personal qualities. One might, for example, expect that singer-songwriters, whose musical effect often depends on a perception of authenticity and earnestness, might prefer friendships with audiences, yet Erin McKeown is uncomfortable getting close to her audiences while Billy Bragg thrives on it. A classical musician might be expected to prefer distance, yet Zoë Keating is an exemplar of someone who does not draw lines between fans and friends. It may be that particular fan communities negotiate norms for how artists ought to interact with them, akin to the norm policing Bennett (2011) has discussed, but these data did not indicate that audience communities shape musician choices, and investigating this possibility would require a methodology that directly investigated the traces of interactions with audience and community responses to artist messages.

Similarly, one might expect age to be a factor, and indeed some of the older musicians with whom I spoke did indicate that with age has come greater wisdom about how to manage their audience relationships. However, this too was described as a process of learning their own personal limits, rather than hewing to some universal wisdom. The younger musicians generally took it for granted that they should interact with audiences, but there were exceptions, such as Kate Schutt who chose to leave social media. Older musicians were divided with some, like Lloyd Cole, preferring the distance and mystique of times past and others, like Roger O'Donnell, celebrating the daily opportunities to have meaningful interactions with his audience.

In conclusion, this article might influence how we think of audiences. Through the eyes of musicians, they are revealed in part as relational partners. They may be distant 'fans,' relegated to interacting primarily with one another, but they may be people who become friends. They may be the people whose stories provide motivations for continuing to create. They may be long-lived communities of friends, gathered around but transcending any particular public figure. Some are antifans, abusive and hurtful, others are too adoring and can be frightening or imposing. We cannot assume that their relationships with the people around whom they gather are only parasocial, nor that they are content with parasociality. Just as it has raised questions about what public figures really get from interacting with their audiences online, this paper should raise questions about what those audiences really seek in their performers' mediated engagement and how they perceive performers' engagement with them.

Biographical note:

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Appendix 1: Musicians interviewed

Legacy Musicians (12):

United States: Jon Ginoli (Pansy Division) Kristin Hersh (Throwing Muses/50 Foot Wave), David Lowery (Camper Van Beethoven/Cracker), Jonathan Segel (Camper Van Beethoven), Jill Sobule, Gary Waleik (Big Dipper).
United Kingdom: Billy Bragg, Lloyd Cole, Mark Kelly (Marillion), Roger O'Donnell (ex-Cure), Brian Travers (UB40)
Canada: Michael Timmins (Cowboy Junkies)

Last Generation of Analogue Musicians (15):

United States: Ahmed Best (Cosmic Ghetto/STOMP!), Honeychild Coleman (Apollo Heights/Pollen), Zoë Keating, Erin McKeown, Chris Murray, Stephen Mason (Jars of Clay), Anonymous Drummer

United Kingdom: Stuart Braithwaite (Mogwai), Steve Lawson

Sweden: Johan Angergård (Club 8/Legends/Acid House Kings), Jonas Fårm (Starlet)

Canada: Richie Hawtin (Plastikman)

Norway: Sivert Høyem, Thomas Seltzer (Turbonegro)

Spain: Nacho Vegas

Post-Myspace Musicians (9):

United States: Nathan Harold (fun.), Greta Salpeter (Gold Motel), Kate Schutt, D.A. Wallach (Chester French), Sydney Wayser

Sweden: Gustaf Kjellvander (The Fine Arts Showcase), Rickard Lindgren (Hell on Wheels)

United Kingdom: S-Endz (Swami)

Australia/German: Rick Bull (Deepchild)

Notes:

[1] As of this writing, Lowery has deleted his Facebook profile. In an email to me, he explained this was due to his sense that it was interfering with his concentration, concerns that Web 2.0 is "an architecture of exploitation," and the amount of "trolling" he's had to deal with since becoming an outspoken advocate of copyright.