

ARTIST VALUES AND A SOCIAL PRODUCTION FUNCTION FOR MUSIC:
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE COVID ERA

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Abstract:

The covid era represents an historical “event” which allows us to study how values intersect with cultural production in an observational study. This research updates the findings in *Artists and Markets in Music: The Political Economy of Music During the Covid Era and Beyond* (Weber et al. 2024) where using the survey process we explore subjectively-determined artist values (in our case musicians) and how artists with different values react entrepreneurially and attitudinally to the externally-imposed structural change in the field with the mandates of the covid era. We revisit the findings from a value-based approach to examine how our evaluations appear in the now post-covid era. The main findings in the survey process, which has the same caveats as all surveys, are that self-defined musicians value a spontaneous order and are entrepreneurial-oriented. We use the ‘pivot’ of business models, especially forms of streaming during covid as an example. This change in practice leads to an acceleration of the long tail production and consumption in recorded music already occurring during the digital era, and a rapid increase in live music once the mandates end. Using the model of the spheres of action towards realizing value (Klamer 2016) we find that the covid “event” creates less interaction in the Social sphere. This can negatively effect creative well-being (praxis) in the Cultural sphere, especially for those musicians who value serendipity and entrepreneurship. The negative effects of the covid era interventions on economic well-being are more pronounced than those on creative well-being in that artists (musicians) are driven to produce their art, perhaps even more so under difficult times. The findings also reiterate the differences between economic and social or cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) in that those valuing cultural capital more tend to value economic capital less.

Keywords: Economics of Music, Praxis, Cultural Capital, Covid Era, Streaming

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1. Introduction

The covid era represents an historical “event” which allows us to study how values intersect with cultural production in an observational study. This paper updates the findings in *Artists and Markets in Music: The Political Economy of Music During the Covid Era and Beyond* (Weber et al. 2024) where using the survey process we explore subjectively-determined artist values (in our case musicians) and how artists with different values react entrepreneurially and attitudinally to the externally-imposed structural change in the field with the mandates of the covid era. The research in our book ends in December 2022 and we revisit the findings to see how our evaluations appear in the now post-covid era.

The survey questions derive from the values proposed for a social production function for music (Cameron 2015, 216) and is supplemented by other questions relating to the research program in cultural economics. The main findings in the survey process, which has the same caveats as all surveys, are that self-defined musicians value a spontaneous order and are entrepreneurial-oriented, using the 'pivot' of business models, especially forms of streaming, as an example. This leads to an acceleration of the long tail production and consumption of recorded music already occurring during the digital era and a rapid increase in live music once the mandates end due to spillovers.

Political economy and post-structuralism

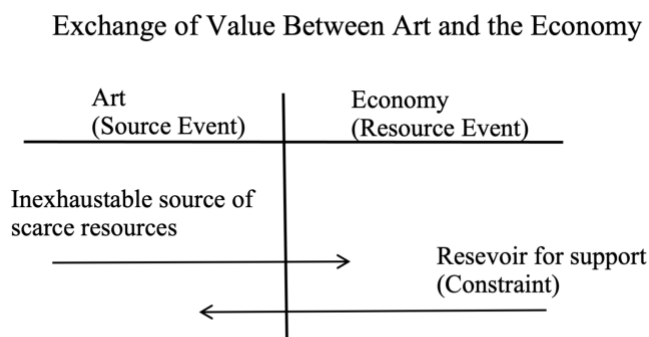
In the book we use political economy and develop a form of post-structuralism to establish the theoretical framework for understanding expected behaviour during the covid era. There are two overlapping structures in the socio-economy in which we are interested. The first is the structure of the state. We use state-theory to proscribe self-interest to the state. The state has the incentive to maintain and grow its discretionary power and it may be that a (significant) event such as the pandemic is the opportunity to do so, much as war and depression in the recent past.

The second structure is that of music production and consumption itself. We start with the findings in cultural economics that artists (musicians) are ‘driven’ to produce and therefore do so not to maximize income and rather only work for others to the point where it subsidizes their own art-production. Unlike other models of labor markets, artistic ‘work’ brings forms of value rather than disutility. As the theoretical framework predicts, during the covid era we find the state, especially the federal government, seeking to expand its discretionary power beyond existing institutional constraints. Concurrently we find that musicians who value authenticity and serendipity find ways to refashion the structure to work around these externally-imposed

constraints. In this paper we focus primarily on the second structure, and values in the cultural field of music. The relationship between these two structures is shown below in Illustration 1.¹

Art (music) is an inexhaustible source of scarce resources due to the artistic drive which is realized with the work of art as a source event for the economy.² Artists are driven to create based on their value-sets and are only in the economy where necessary to support their art. In cultural economics the source event is often reinforced by the property rights of a copyright, although this is not always necessarily the case. The economy, within which is embedded the state, provides the (scarce) resources necessary for artistic production.³

Illustration 1



The creation of artistic value

Klamer (2016) presents the competing values as seen from the perspective of the artist where the dominant sphere is that of Culture (C) or art, Illustration 2.⁴ C is where artistic ideals (values) are realized. C in our case is the field of music production where the artist pursues their practice within the given set of rules in order to gain distinction in the field. For example as discussed in the next section on the production function for music, “authenticity” is a shared value in art and is realized in the Cultural sphere.

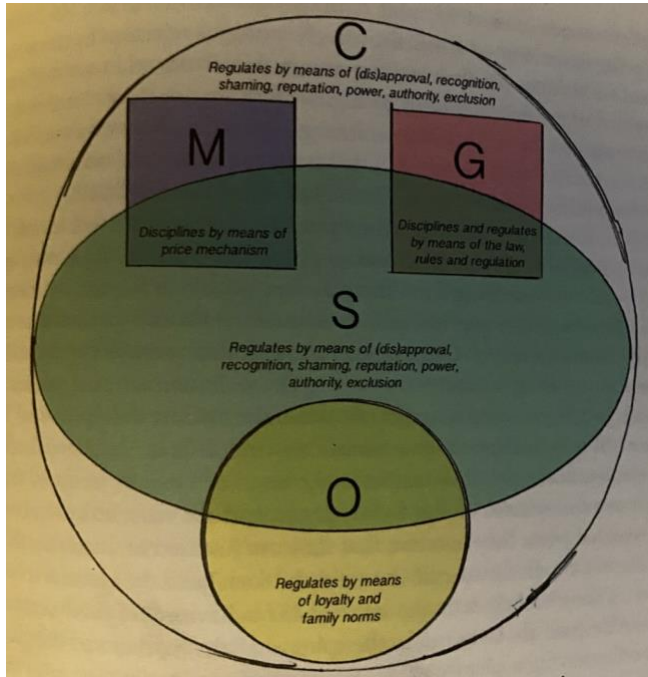
¹ From ideas found in Hutter (1996).

² Bourdieu, “who not only argued that economic factors influenced culture, but also that knowledge of the arts and other knowledge stands for cultural capital that is needed for the accumulation of economic capital” (Klamer 2016, 16).

³ A thriving economy is necessary for a thriving welfare state.

⁴ Quotes from Klamer (2016) unless stated otherwise.

Illustration 2.⁵



The practice of an artist is influenced by many alternative forms of value, from transcendental, personal and social values to financial benefits, which are traded-off subjectively during the production process in relation to the differing values found in the different spheres. Each sphere is its own system of control and regulation within which the artist navigates. After the predominant C (driven artist perspective) we next find the *Oikos* (O) which is our home and personal lives. We might also say this is sacred or personal space and where life as an artist is validated. The artist, “first has to convince himself to do his art and to make sacrifices doing so, like taking a meaningless job and forsaking a larger income”. The Market (M) and Governance (G) spheres are the “two standard logics” (129) and are the most commonly understood spheres. “The market is where private goods are traded. G provides public goods” (129).⁶

The Social sphere (S), which is based on the logic of the willingness to contribute, is where the artist creates value through social interaction with those in other spheres. “In this sphere they get others interested and involved, they persuade or seduce others to contribute their time, emotion and intellect, and maybe even money (in the form of gifts).” S is where serendipity and entrepreneurship occurs. If the practice itself becomes valuable in relation to other forms of value, the practice itself becomes a higher-order good, a praxis.

⁵ From Klamer (2016, 143).

⁶ See Cogan (2017) for a history and consequences of entitlement programs in the US as an example of the ever-expanding definition of public good.

Entangled political economy

Where we differ from Klamer (2016) is that we are modeling the Governance and Market spheres as overlapping with each other in what has become known as entangled political economy. It is from the Market where Governance draws its resources in that the state has a monopoly on legal coercion (Weber 1919). In our state theory based on Weber's definition of the state, public choice and fiscal sociology there is a dynamic where the state (G) has existential reasons to grow its discretionary power (Weber et al. 2024). This is exemplified by Churchill's "never let a good crisis go to waste". We see this growth of the state during the covid era as predicted and as documented for earlier episodes in US economic history by Higgs (2013).⁷ In Illustration 2 we can visualize how an enlarged Governance sphere would crowd-out activity in the Social sphere.

Bourdieu (1984) describes how those with more educational and therefore cultural capital are the dominant (distinct) class in society and how cultural production tends to reinforce this dominant class. We describe this cultural production as a system of images which create, reinforce or contest individual perceptions of the good or the valuable in society (Weber et al. 2024). In our state theory, due to the imperfect information found in representative democracy, we would expect the state to create images which support the state's position on an issue and to suppress images which are counter to the state's message. We find this imaging during the covid era. We find in the final section of this research that there is reaction against the state's mandates as the G sphere overextends its social contract and pushes the boundaries of legitimacy.⁸

2. Artist values and a social production function for music

The entry-point to our study of values in the field of music production is the work of Samuel Cameron (2015) who introduces a social production function for music. It is clear that the proposed production function is a thought-experiment rather than something which can be quantified, in that the variables are subjective and the relationship between the variables is tacit knowledge.⁹ "It is unlikely that a typical mathematical form such as the Cobb-Douglas (or more general multiplicative constant elasticity) model would adequately capture the relationships here due to threshold effects, synergy and lexicographic relations which may vary across production units".¹⁰

⁷ Attempts to contain the economic effects of the global pandemic in 2020 reinvigorated projects to use state power to regulate market forces. One of the outcomes was a global tax deal proposed in 2021 the *Financial Times* called "the first fundamental change to the system of cross-border taxation in a century" (Slobodian 2024, 50).

⁸ State censorship is unstable. The powerful surround themselves with sycophants who won't deliver the truth with the result being a divergence between state and social values. Democratic governance may be a pendulum swing between authoritarianism and populism (Weber 2019).

⁹ See Shaikh (2018) for a critique of the use of the production function in neo-classical economics.

¹⁰ Quotes here are from Cameron (2015) pages 73-85 unless otherwise specified.

Cameron starts with the neoclassical production function found in “basic microeconomic theory”.

$$Q = f(K, L) \quad (1)$$

Where Q is output, K is capital and L is labor. For a given state of technology and knowledge, equal and measurable units of both K and L mixed in production result in constant or diminishing returns. For example in the early digital revolution the output was contained in technology leading to the CD in 1982 and internet download piracy beginning in the early 2000s, then internet streaming creates a new technology with new knowledge. Along with this comes a vast reduction in the costs for the production, distribution and consumption of music. Capital is substituted for labor during this technological change. Labor is measured in “effort units” rather than time as in the strict neoclassical model.

However this basic model misses natural resources including human capital such as the innate talent of the artist, which is analogous to land as a natural resource. “A musical production unit will contain different individuals who have diverse endowments and acquired human capital. They may also have financial capital such as instruments or transport or rehearsal facilities.” It is from here that gains through trade and the specialization of labor within the production unit are realized. The neoclassical model misses the change agent (in our case, the driven artist-entrepreneur) in its logic.

Cameron (2015) introduces the “augmented” SAD production function for music which we are calling a social production function because it attempts to capture the values realized through the social interaction and implicit knowledge creation of the cultural production process. It is these augmented variables which we begin with as the values assumed to be held by musicians as we use our survey to test the validity of Cameron’s proposal.

$$Q = f(K, L, S, A, D). \quad (2)$$

Where S is serendipity, A is authenticity and D is drugs (or stimulants). For Cameron serendipity appears to be the ‘happy accident’ or the lucky mistakes which occur during the creative process and gives examples such as Brian Eno seeming to have the Svengali-like ability to produce hits, Lennon and McCartney borrowing song titles from Ringo’s quips, and the fact that Ray Davies couldn’t play other people’s songs so became lucky, or successful,¹¹ through writing his own.

Serendipity may be limited by technology. “Software studios tend to predetermine activity to a certain degree as creators are offered a substantial ‘buffet’ of ready made options which limit the scope for beneficial accidents. This does not prevent any individual from behaving in an

¹¹ In our survey process the term “successful” is purposefully left undefined in that measures of success are necessarily subjective in our methodological approach (Weber et al. 2024).

exploratory manner, on purpose to induce serendipity, but its overall tendency is to limit the typical person's choice to a narrow range." For example (Cameron 2016) describes research which shows that songs which have the main hook within the first 30 seconds are more likely to be picked up in an algorithm for creating preferences on internet music platforms.

Serendipity

The description of serendipity so far is too thin for our uses in the study of the field and we believe that a fuller definition which can help describe human action is more helpful. Serendipity occurs in Klamer (2016)'s Social sphere. It is here that we can use the language of entrepreneurship. Artists are driven within their field and seek valorization in exchange with others. Some of this cultural production is successful and some of it is not. This form of serendipity is analogous to the market discovery process. Artists or artist-as-entrepreneur (at the risk of 'selling-out') are "aware" of potential opportunities to realize value and entrepreneurs are considered to be more risk-taking than the general populace.

Successful artists are able to understand and manage Knightian uncertainty and use this uncertainty to create forms of value.¹² This is accomplished through the coordination of plans with others in the cultural sphere through explicit or implicit contract, again some plans succeed and some fail. It is this cumulative practice and experience which allows the creation of higher-order values. It is not just good luck which brings artistic success, rather it is purposeful alertness and action which creates this 'luck' through the coordination of plans to help manage an unknown and unknowable future. The discovery allowing for innovation in the arts might also be known as divine intervention or the creative spark. In discussing political economy, we propose that those valuing serendipity more than their peers are more likely to value a spontaneous order which allows this form of value, serendipity, to be realized (Weber et al. 2024).

Authenticity

Authenticity is what is considered real or genuine or honest. "Whether something is genuine or not is ultimately a value judgement" (Cameron 2015, 36) and is realized in Klamer (2016)'s Cultural sphere. With the development of musicology, radio, charts, labels and now big data emerges genres or subfields of musical types and associated cultural gatekeepers. How the musical artist conforms to these categories is also a question of authenticity. Independent music distributor CD Baby lists 22 genres of music from Avant Garde to World. The Folk genre has 45

¹² Knightian uncertainty is based on Knight (1921). Knight finds that forward-looking behavior is based upon expectations of risk and uncertainty. Expectations are formed from experiences in the past. Risk is the idea that economic returns to future actions can be based upon some probabilistic distribution of past actions and related outcomes. We can call risk for simplicity sake "known unknowns." Uncertainty is different than risk and outcomes are not predictable based on past actions. For Knight entrepreneurial action in light of uncertainty, or acting in the face of "unknown unknowns," is what earns a profit. This notion of profit is different than neo-classical equilibrium models which can only account for a "normal" profit based on risk. Entrepreneurial action and creative destruction cannot be adequately modeled with data from the past (Weber et al. 2024, 48 fn4)

subgenres from Acid Folk to Urban Folk and the Avant Garde genre has 23 subgenres from Atonal to Tape Music (see Appendix).¹³

The practice of authenticity is what leads to tribal affiliation and insider-outsider status. Cameron (2015) discusses the Byrd's "Sweetheart of the Radio" (1969) where the album was recorded in Nashville to seek authenticity (as so many do) but was "unpopular both with the mainstream and the traditional country music fraternity" (109). If you don't have authenticity you might go to Jamaica or Nashville to try to buy it. We also find that the beginning of the end of the idea of ethnicity or race as a signal of authenticity starts with the crossover appeal of disco in the 1970s.

Authenticity, "is an interesting element in economic terms as it would, again [like serendipity, current author] seem paradoxical to try to learn or manufacture it" (2015, 80). Cameron believes that the lack of musical skills (the noble savage¹⁴) is an insincere measure of authenticity and gives examples of the specialization of labor where artists work with those more skilled and experienced than they are in the field in order to realize a musical work. (We have already mentioned Eno, who ironically called himself a "non-musician"). Kid Congo Powers describes the process of creation in the innovative late 1970s punk rock subfield in Los Angeles. Those who knew how to play instruments taught the others and it was usually the untrained who had the better ideas (Powers 2022).¹⁵

Drugs

Drugs, or stimulants, are either part of the creative process or an occupation hazard, or perhaps more realistically a combination of both.

Drugs constitute a serious issue for the economic analysis of the musical production unit as to what they actually are. Are they some kind of capital, which in conjunction with labor and recording equipment etc, generate the output? Or are they an unfortunate externality of the market which has become ritualized and institutionalized? (Cameron 2015, 81).

The choice of stimulants or none at all may be a shared value in the cultural production process, both among the musical artists and with their audience. Cameron (2015) gives the specific example of the psychedelic music of the 1960s and the "so-called 'cocaine albums' of the 1970s where successful artists suddenly produce a very poor work because of their distorted

¹³ We did not ask in our survey into which genre(s) respondents' music production fell as this would have subtracted from the subjective nature of the survey and would be too time-consuming in response. We would expect musicians to innovate with different genres and collaborations after the external shock of the covid era.

¹⁴ "The idea that authenticity is enhanced by lack of formal skills is a useful form of rhetoric for those seeking to enter the market, as it means they can't be barred on grounds of ineptitude" (Cameron 2015, 80).

¹⁵ Kid Congo Powers (nee Brian Tristan) is said to have the best resume in rock music, contributing to the Gun Club, the Cramps and Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds.

perceptions” (81). The Clash fell apart because the drummer is using drugs which the others are not (Temple 2007).

We can also use the ‘straight edge’ of the Washington, DC punk rock music in the early 1980s as an example where the choice of stimulants is none at all. In the ska movement in Jamaica in the early 1960s the stimulant of choice was Red Stripe beer, later cannabis became a sacrament (and a political statement) for many of the reggae musicians in the late 1960s and 1970s. Club and rave music of the 1990s through today includes the use of MDMA. Drugs can also be a proxy for the myth of the tortured artist and madness and might proxy artists with physical or mental disabilities (Weber et al. 2024). In our survey we set up questioning the use of drugs (stimulants) as an ordinal (relative) value much as we do serendipity and authenticity.

3. Values and our survey process

We purposely established our survey process to be one of reflection on craft and practice and the original intention was to make the survey require only about 5 minutes time.¹⁶ The idea was in snowball survey methodology to make the survey interesting enough and with little relative opportunity cost so that the responder might want to pass the survey along to their peers. The covid era event provides a good opportunity for reflection due to the structural changes which are occurring in the field due to the state mandates. Musical artists are having to reinterrogate the field and this requires entrepreneurial pivots due to the curtailment of in-person collaborations, including performance and teaching.¹⁷

Instead of using objective criteria such as being a member a music labor union, peer-recognition, prizes or grants, percentage of livelihood earned from music, time spent on the practice, etc., we decided to use the subjective method of self-definition to determine the category of “musician”. Responses with “0” (zero) years are not included in the results, Illustration 3.

¹⁶ The survey was conducted using surveymonkey.com and was open January through August 2022. There were 34 questions mostly ordinal in nature with an average completion time of 7.5 minutes. We had 115 respondents to our survey, with a 99% response rate. No paid advertising or lists were used to find respondents, nor was there any financial incentive to take the survey. Our survey was meant to be a compliment to the 2018 Music Industry Research Association (MIRA) survey which uses GRAMMY members and takes about 30 minutes to complete (Weber et al. 2024).

¹⁷ About 40% of respondents to the MIRA survey earned income from music teaching during 2017 with a median amount earned of US\$4,000. About 80% earn income from live performance (\$5,400) other than religious performance and about 38% (\$8,000) earn income from performing in “church, choir, other religion” (Weber et al 2024).

The key findings related to the SAD production function for music are shown in Illustration 5. The majority of respondents believe that serendipity and authenticity are extremely or very important in the success of a musician. We also find that a majority use stimulants in the creative process. We cannot refute the proposed SAD social production function for music.

Illustration 5.

Table 5.1 Subjective Importance of Serendipity and Authenticity in the Success of a Musician

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

Table 5.2 Subjective Importance of Drugs in the Creative Process of a Musician

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

4. How do values relate to practice?

The survey is conducted January to August 2022. President Trump declares a National Emergency on March 13, 2020, which is continued by President Biden until April 11, 2023. In perspective Madison Square Garden holds its first concert in June 2021 after 15 months of being closed during the covid era. Questions 10 and 11 of the survey relate to the respondent’s mental and economic health during the crisis caused by the mandates, Illustration 6.

Illustration 6.

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

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

We compare how those holding certain practice values and other attributes are related to subjective well-being during the covid era. As expected we find that those who value serendipity more are doing worse creatively relative to the peer group in that mandates reduce the spontaneous order under which serendipity occurs. Only those who value labor unions more than their peers fare worse creatively in the covid era, Illustration 7.

Illustration 7.

Table 5.4 Results on Subjective Well-Being During the Covid Era

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

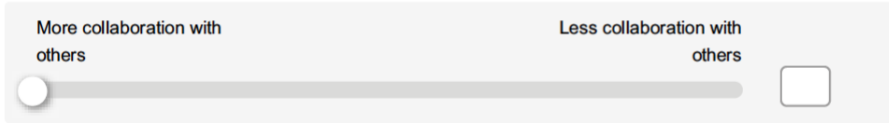
Those who value authenticity and entrepreneurship more than their peers are doing worse economically than peers, this no doubt due to the limited interpersonal interaction needed to realize these values. Those who value union membership more than the peer group believe they are doing worse than their peers economically by a wide margin.²⁰ We also observe that those who value drugs (stimulants) in the creative process more than their peers find themselves more creative during the covid era. This may be due to those who value this attribute of their practice are more used to dealing with uncertainty and are better able to react to the covid-era mandates.

We are also interested in how those with differing values as to what contributes to the success of a musician are able to react to the externally-mandated changes in the field. Our hypotheses would tell us that driven artists (musicians) will seek new forms of collaboration with others due to the mandates preventing in-person collaboration within the field, however we know that this adaptability only comes with a lag time. Our first question in this series is about (alternative) collaborations, Illustration 8.

²⁰ It is relevant to note that only 7% (8/115), Illustration 7, of respondents value labor unions in the success of a musician, yet as we find later, 25% of our respondents are members of music-oriented labor unions.

Illustration 8.

24. What type of entrepreneurial “pivots” have occurred in your craft during the covid era?



We find that our respondents believe they are collaborating less during the covid era, although the results are perhaps not as bad as we might think given the mandates in certain places, Illustration 9. Those who value labor unions more towards subjectively-determined success as a musician are collaborating less than others.

Illustration 9.²¹

Are you collaborating more or less with others during the covid era?		
All respondents		
("0" = Better, "100" = Worse)	60	
[# of respondents]	[115]	
Those replying labor unions are	57	
"not so" or "not at all" important	[95]	
Those valuing labor unions	70	
	[25]	

Specifically with the curtailment of live music, streaming becomes a substitute. However this pivot might come at the expense of artistic creativity in that musicians who are used to live collaboration for inspiration and composition have less ability for this spontaneous interaction. We frame this research question as found in Illustration 10. We keep in mind that streaming has been the growing platform for the way recorded music is consumed, and this trend is accelerated with the covid era. Some musicians may already have a first-mover advantage in certain technologies prior to the covid era.

²¹ Results subsequent to Weber et al. (2024).

Illustration 10.



Musician respondents are both streaming more and have more time for creativity during the covid era, except for those valuing unions more than their peers who have less time for creativity, Illustration 11.²² We also find that those who value drugs (stimulants) in the creative process more than their peers are streaming more than their peers but this seems to come at a cost of less time for creativity.

Illustration 11.

Illustration 5.3 Questions on Practice “Pivots” During the Covid Era

Table 5.5 Responses on Practice “Pivots” During Covid Era

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

²² For example union orchestral musicians have less possibilities for entrepreneurial pivots during the covid era, though there is a bailout for the consecrated performing arts sector during the covid era. The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC receives \$100M in federal covid ‘relief’ and *Hamilton* receives \$30M (Weber et al. 2024).

After the series of questions about values, attitudes and behaviors as described above we ask the respondents if they have anything else they would like to add to the research, Illustration 12. About half of the respondents write narrative responses (63 of 115). These responses can give context to the aggregated survey findings.

Illustration 12.

30. Describe any other changes in your craft that have occurred during the covid era.



What follows is a sample of the narrative responses received chronologically during the 8 months the survey was open. I'll include the first 10 and the last 10 responses received, Illustration 13.²³

Illustration 13.

- 1) I bought a house at the start of the Covid pandemic, which allowed me the ability to record music at home with more flexibility than when I was previously living in shared spaces with offsite rehearsal/recording spaces
- 2) Started a realtime, online only band using Jamulus.io. Learned Reaper.fm to enhance the sound
- 3) Learned how to video stream using OBS
- 4) Success is not the same as artistic success please note
- 5) I switched careers and don't play much music anymore
- 6) Working from home makes the work space and creative space the same, and interferes with the writing and exploration process
- 7) Doing band practice via zoom. Not entirely ideal. . . . Loss of band members due to Covid and/or life circumstances in direct result of Covid. Financial hardship. Job insecurity. Depression and heightened anxiety
- 8) Zoom lesson/coaching
- 9) Collaborating with others is challenging as I don't want to jam virtually at all.
- 10) I began teaching high school full time. Stable pay but less time for performance and practice
- 11) Live performance on hold for two years. Not confident it will be possible to get my band together after so long. I am not confident our old sources of work will be available again. I think it will be difficult for older musicians to get audiences back
- 12) I write more songs that have nothing to do with my performing genre and they sit unplayed.
- 13) There is a lot of uncertainty as to what will actually happen, what will get canceled, who will be sick last minute. So there is a big need for being flexible
- 14) My music has become more introspective and negative

²³ For the full set of narrative responses see Weber et al. (2024).

- 15) Increase in private music lessons, since the schools are in/out
- 16) less contact less inspiration
- 17) A lot more writing and home recording
- 18) Focusing on building a recording studio and digging into engineering and mixing
- 19) I have other problems with deaths in the family and illness. Have no time or inspiration at the moment
- 20) The bulk of my business evaporated

These comments coincide with the other survey responses and our earlier discussion about the competing spheres of action. Some musicians have been better able to “pivot” during the exigencies of the covid era than have others depending on their own circumstances and how they have developed their practice. We find how the loss of in-person collaboration in the Social sphere has effected art production in the Cultural sphere and personal well-being in the *Oikos*. We find that the economy of the artist is perhaps hit harder during the covid era than is the creativity of the artist. The precariousness of the artist (musician)’s need to have outside employment to support their art is shown during the covid era “event”. The Governance sphere determines essential and inessential categories of industrial organization in the Market sphere and related state support.²⁴

5. Research questions in cultural economics

A common result in cultural economics is that art education has little or no effect on art income but that education leads to more non-art income (Throsby 1994, Alper & Wassall 2006). See Illustration 14.²⁵

²⁴ In Weber (2013) I discuss replacing the existing federal corporate and social welfare programs with a universal basic income as being budget-neutral. This in response to the public outcry of Wall Street bailouts during the 2008 financial crisis. If this would have occurred before the financial crisis then individuals would have been better able to manage the crisis without state crisis measures. This same logic holds doubly true for the covid era.

²⁵ Note that we did not ask the respondents their education attainment level rather if formal education is important in the success of a musical artist: a value consideration in ordinal measure rather than a statement in cardinal measure.

Illustration 14.

Table 5.10 Education and Music and Non-Music Income

	<i>Respondents Declaring that Education is Not</i>	<i>Respondents Declaring that Education Is</i>
	<i>Extremely or Very Important in Success</i>	<i>Extremely or Very Important in Success</i>
# of respondents	93	21
1. Average income	\$55,000	\$38,000
2. Music income only	\$8,000	\$8,000
3. Non-music income (1-2)	\$47,000	\$30,000
% of income which is non- music income (3/1)	86%	79%

Our results verify that those who value formal education more than their peers have lower average income than their peers. However we can't confirm that valuing education more leads to more non-art income in that those who value education less also have a greater percentage of non-art income. This is consistent with Bourdieu (1984) on distinction and cultural capital in that those who value educational capital more value economic capital less.

We also find distinction in the results shown in Illustration 15 where those who value education more are more likely to receive grants and loans from the state as have more social distinction and therefore are closer to the field of power or the dominant class.²⁶ We also find that labor union members value education and entrepreneurship less than their peers.²⁷

Illustration 15.

Table 5.6 Funding Sources by Practice Value-Type During Covid Era

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

²⁶ We note that the ratio of those valuing education to the those who do not is about the same as the Pareto Power Rule.

²⁷ Thank you to Jermaine Toney for comments on an earlier draft of this research including pointing out that 25% of our respondents (probably mostly NYC-based though we did not ask) are members of a music-oriented labor union whereas the US national average unionization rate is 10% in 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf>

One result is that we might find that those with more formal education are likely to stay in the arts for a longer period of time (see, Bille and Jensen 2018). We can confirm this finding, Illustration 16. The average number of years our respondents have practiced in the field is 28 years. When we divide this into two tranches, we find the average years of practice are 6 and 35 years respectively. We find that 46% of those in the less experienced tranche value education as “not so important” or “not at all important” while only 39% of the more experienced musicians do not value education. Those longer in the field tend to value education more.

Illustration 16.

Table 5.9 Education and Longevity as a Musician

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

We use the survey question, “How much do you agree with this statement, *Good art can come from bad times?*” as a proxy for creative optimism during the covid era, Illustration 17. We find that a large majority of self-defined musicians agree or strongly agree with the statement, reiterating an optimistic nature for the artist / musician / entrepreneur. We find that those who value unions more are more pessimistic during the covid era as might be expected given the previous results related to creative and economic well-being. Those who value unions more value entrepreneurship less and therefore might be less able to ‘pivot’ in cultural production during the covid-era or other mandates.

Illustration 17.

Table 5.3 Creative Optimism and Union Membership

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

6. Art (music) and wealth

In the Introduction we discuss the relationship between art and the economy. We now ask the question where does the economic wealth come from to provide the necessary resources for the art plays leading to creative origination. See Illustration 18.

Illustration 18.

19. Please check the box which best relates to your income situation.

- I earn *all* of my income from creating music
- I earn *most* of my income from creating music
- It is about half and half
- I earn *all* my income not related to music creativity
- I earn *most* of my income not related to music creativity
- I am mostly supported by a family member or a patron

We find that about 10% of our musician respondents earn all of their income from music and that about 4% have most of their income from family or patron, Illustration 19. This means that about 86% of respondents work in non-music fields for income. We find that almost 22% of respondents earn no income from music yet still consider themselves musicians.

Illustration 19.²⁸

	<u>Respondents</u>	<u>%</u>
All of income from music	11	9.6%
Most of income from music	13	11.4%
Half and half	10	8.8%
All income not music	25	21.9%
Most income not music	51	44.7%
Mostly supported by family member or patron	4	3.5%
	114	100%

The findings in Illustrations 19 help to delineate how our snowball survey method survey differs from the compliment Musical Industry Research Association (MIRA) survey of 2018 (Weber et al. 2024). Standard studies of artists use data generated from state surveys such as the census or use members of professional organizations as the respondent universe. For example MIRA surveys GRAMMY members and also potential respondents from a paid list-service based on SIC (NIAC) codes. The main problem with this approach is that there is selection bias. Only those musicians who have “made it” are surveyed, leaving out the many who practice music as an avocation for love (praxis) rather than a professional vocation (job or occupation).

²⁸ Illustration based on data from author, not included in Weber et al. (2024).

This approach undercounts the universe of musicians in society because as noted many artists work for others to the point where needed to subsidize their own work.²⁹ This means that the census or labor survey will place the respondent in that industrial classification code rather than as a musician. Another survey bias is that musicians are seen to be independent and therefore maybe less willing to take surveys in the first place. “Musicians are an exceptionally mobile and elusive population” (Madden 2004).

We can juxtapose our snowball survey method with the standard industrial organizational approach in that we are more interested in artist self-definition, attitudes and values than in comparing one professionally-designated and managed sector with another. For example the MIRA survey screens out those who do not or are not interested in making the majority of their income as a professional musician. This is about 80% of our snowball survey method respondents. As we will discuss in the next section this undercounts the long tail of music production, distribution and consumption.

The underlying pre-analytical visions of those who practice industrial organization economics might be to help policy-makers organize and manage the economy.³⁰ However the results of our survey show that those who value unions more are worse-off during the covid era. We propose that arts practioners might prefer a spontaneous order rather than an organized economy. “Serendipity is problematic in organized markets” (Cameron 2016, 6).

7. The music field during covid era and beyond

In this section we revisit the findings identified in Weber et al. (2024) during the covid era as they appear today. The mandates, the lockdowns to “flatten the curve”, require a change in practice. As noted previously our survey respondents reply that they are streaming more during the covid era and for the most part have more time for creativity. At the same time we know that increased on-line activity leads to positive spillovers into in-person live performance so we would expect to see an accelerated growth of live music after the covid-era mandates are lifted.

Recorded music

According to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), recorded music revenues reach its lowest point worldwide in 2014 with \$13B due to pirating on the internet. In 2023 revenues are \$29B.³¹ This recovery in revenues is mostly due to increases in advertising- and subscription-based recorded music streaming which has had remarkable rates of growth, Illustration 20. The growth in streaming slows before the covid era with as expected an increase

²⁹ Lower monetary income is supplemented by the “psychic” income of an artist being identified with their work.

³⁰ The ‘planned’ economy of the post-war welfare-state is the historical accumulation of the ‘war socialism’ during the Great War which continues through the New Deal, WWII (Higgs 1987, Barber 1985, 1996) and today as witnessed by the industrial organization in response to covid-19. See Tribe (2022) for the development of economics as an elite science of experts juxtaposed with the discussion tradition of political economy.

³¹ 2023 is the first year that recorded music sales have reached their 1999 peak (IFPI).

during the covid era. We see the downward trend continue in the post covid era to a more 'sustainable' level.

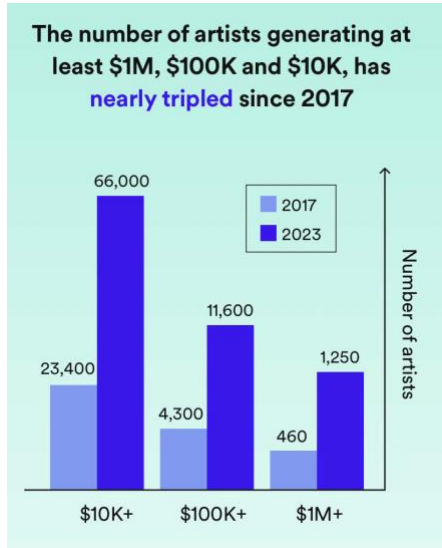
Illustration 20.³²

Increase in streaming revenues from previous year			
2018	41%		
2019	24%		
2020	18%		
2021	24%		
2022	11%		
2023	10%		

Spotify is the largest music streaming service worldwide. During the covid era Spotify reported how streaming is lessening the superstar effects in music. In 2000 the top 50 artists accounted for 25% of the streams in the United States whereas in 2021 this was down to 12% showing more wealth being created on the long tail (Weber et al. 2024). We see the longer-term trend in Illustration 21 where we find that more artists on the long tail are gaining more revenues since before the covid era through today. Most musicians may still have to work 'day jobs' but the opportunity for increased economic income through the internet economy as a general technology has increased the long tail relative to the orthodox normal distribution, which is shown again to be a more narrow definition of the field.

³² Data from IFPI annual reports available on-line. Illustrations in this section are subsequent to Weber et al. (2024) unless stated otherwise.

Illustration 21.³³



Live streaming

There is an important market segue between live music and recorded streaming, which is live streaming. Live streaming creates the ability to earn monopoly rents by staging an “event”. For example in May 2020 during the lockdowns BTS, the Korean pop group, stage a live-streaming event which has more than 750,000 pay and attend the live event on-line, netting the group \$20 million. Smaller live music venues also stage their own live streaming events quickly after the lockdowns (Weber et al. 2024).³⁴ During March through August 2020 live streaming increases 300%.³⁵ Pollstar begins tracking live music streams in November 2020.³⁶ This is consistent with our survey findings of musician entrepreneurial pivots during the covid era substituting into on-line creativity from in-person performance and collaboration.

³³ Source: <https://loudandclear.byspotify.com>. We keep in mind that Spotify has an incentive to show more equal distribution of revenues, and an increasing share of revenues going to artists, to avoid appearing as a monopolist. In Spotify’s most recent Loud and Clear report for 2023 activity we learn that for the first time the revenues earned by independent artists equaled that of the Big 4 (EMI, Sony Music Entertainment, Universal Music Group, and Warner Music Group), about \$4.5B each.

³⁴ Of course both opera and the Grateful Dead had been live-streaming to theatres for decades. The first YouTube Live stream was in 2008.

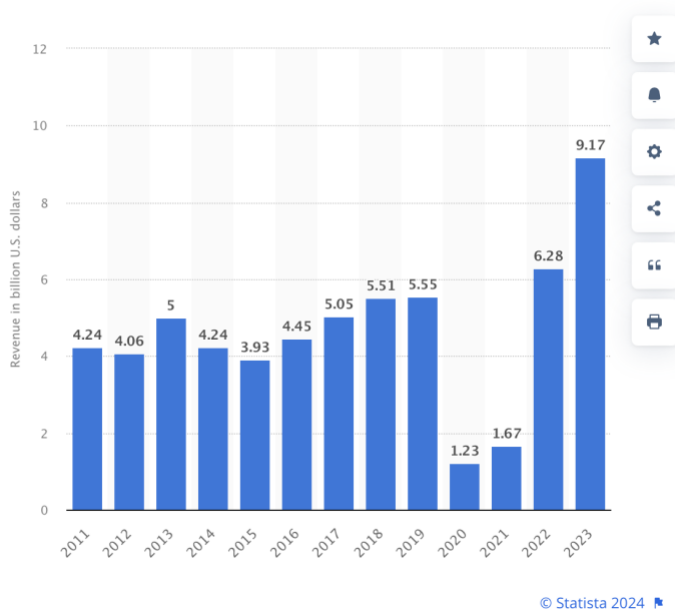
³⁵ <https://castr.com/blog/history-of-live-streaming/>. This includes video games.

³⁶ As discussed in detail in Weber et al. (2024) Pollstar and other data providers may only capture the normal distribution and not the long tail. For example in tracking live music revenues, Pollstar reports only those venues holding 2,000 or more people. This overstates superstar effects.

Live music

The literature shows positive spillover effects from on-line music consumption to attendance at concert performances (see Handke 2013 for a survey). In addition we would expect “irrational exuberance” in both supply and demand for the authenticity and serendipity of in person performance after the covid era interventions create disequilibrium in live music markets. Illustration 22 shows the rapid increase in live musical performance since the covid era.

Illustration 22. Music tour gross revenues from 2011 to 2023 worldwide³⁷



The increase in in-person performance may also be a reaction to the de-personalized digitization of music production and distribution and which may tend toward content rather than art. David Bowie said, “Music itself is going to become like running water or electricity...You’d better be prepared for doing a lot of touring because that’s really the only unique situation that’s left” (Krueger 2019, 8-9). This has become known as the Bowie Theory.

Patronage and crowdfunding

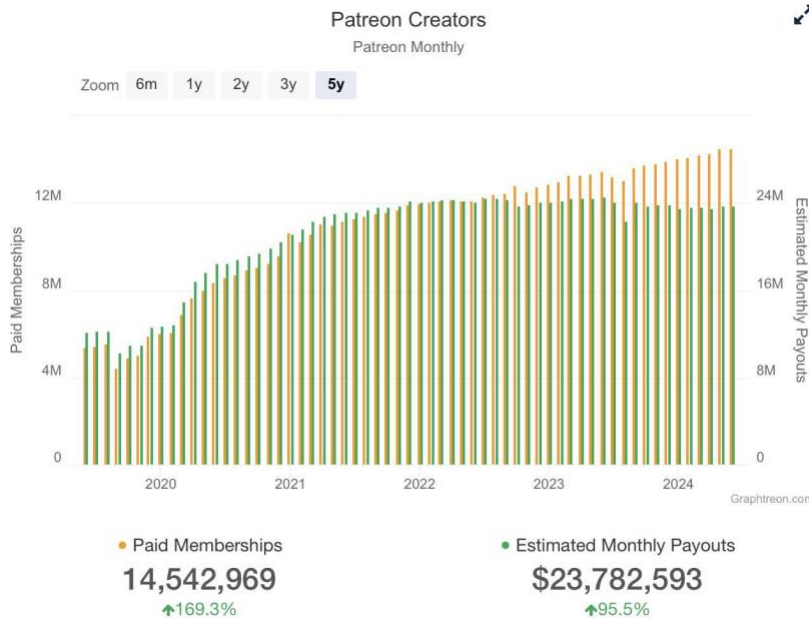
In Weber et al. (2024) we find that philanthropic crowdfunding increases during the covid era and becomes more localized. We might expect this to be the case as people with empathy react to the hardships faced by those deemed inessential in a local and decentralized manner in the Social sphere.³⁸ We also propose that the covid era may be over culturally in April 2022 in that Patreon donations peak then as people begin to realize that the pandemic has become

³⁷ Graph from statistica.com

³⁸ We show that instances of voluntary cooperation to prevent the spread of covid occurs before the state mandates (Weber et al. 2024).

endemic, as the mandates are either overturned, ignored or unenforced and as people are substituting back into live in-person performance.³⁹ In Illustration 23 we find this to be the case in that longer term trends continue to show that Patreon payouts to artists peak in the covid era although the platform has increased the number of those interested in participating since the covid era.

Illustration 23.⁴⁰



8. The intersecting Governance and Market spheres

As discussed in the Introduction we find that the Governance and Market spheres are entangled in the United States. This entanglement takes different forms in different locations. For example it is common short-hand to refer to “over-taxed and over regulated” states as Blue states or counties controlled by Democrats and “under-taxed and under-regulated” states as Red states or counties controlled by Republicans. Whichever euphemism is correct might be determined by those voting with their feet. The decennial 2020 US Census shows a pattern of migration from Blue counties and state to Red counties and states and this accelerates with the covid era. States in the southern USA have accounted for most of the population growth in the US from 2020 to 2023, with Texas and Florida accounting for 70% of the growth.⁴¹

³⁹ As mentioned above the US national covid health emergency, and the additional powers that this gives the state, is not declared over by the US President until April 2023.

⁴⁰ Graph from <https://graphtreon.com/patreon-stats>

⁴¹ <https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2024-01-16/population-growth-patterns-paint-grim-picture-for-democrats>

The situation of New York City helps describes the state-of-play during the remaking of the American landscape as accelerated with the covid era, Illustration 24. During the 20 years before the covid era the US population is growing almost twice as quickly as the NYC population. During the 2020-2022 covid years the city loses almost 5% of its population relative to the rest of the country.⁴²

Illustration 24: Population and change in population, 2000-2022⁴³

	<u>2000</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2022</u>
USA	281,421,906	331,449,520	333,287,557
		17.78%	0.55%
NYC	8,008,278	8,804,190	8,335,897
		9.94%	-5.32%

We also find that people are becoming alienated from the two-party system in the USA and are becoming increasingly politically independent, Illustration 25. The decreases in Democrat relative to Republican party affiliation coincides with the population pattern changes in the USA. This demographic shift accelerates during the post covid era.⁴⁴ As we find from our snowball method survey musicians prefer a spontaneous order relative to one of state control. Given the population and voter affiliation shifts, this seems to hold true with the general population. Republican geographical regions may be “undertaxed and under-regulated” and therefore attracting people relative to Democratic regions, but they are also complicit in the federal lockdowns, mandates and special interest ‘emergency’ state spending at the federal level during the covid era.

⁴² The last time the NYC has had such an out-migration was during the city’s fiscal crisis between 1970 and 1980 (from 8 to 7 million population), https://www.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/planning-level/nyc-population/historical-population/nyc_total_pop_1900-2010.pdf. This also corresponds with the period of renaissance in the downtown art habitus in NYC, again good art coming from bad times.

⁴³ <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/osdc/pdf/report-15-2024.pdf>. In addition in NYC as in other major cities in the USA the work from home covid era mandate is carried over into the post covid era where public transportation ridership and commercial office utilization remain depressed as remote and hybrid work become the norm in many firms and state offices (see Weber 2024).

⁴⁴ Correspondingly we have been witnessing more voting districts adopt ranked choice voting.

Illustration 25.⁴⁵

	2012	2016	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Presidential Election Popular Vote:	Obama/Romney	Clinton/Trump		Biden/Trump				Harris/Trump?
Democrat	51%	48%		51%				
Republican	47%	46%		47%				
Gallop Poll Party Affiliation:								
Democrat	35%	31%	31%	31%	27%	26%	23%	23%
Republican	30%	27%	30%	30%	31%	31%	29%	25%
Independent	33%	36%	38%	38%	41%	41%	40%	51%

9. Conclusion

In our research we use the covid era as an historical “event” to help uncover the values of people who consider themselves musicians. Using the snowball method survey process we find evidence for the SAD social production function for music (Cameron 2015, 2016) where serendipity and authenticity as well as the use of drugs (stimulants) are valued in the music production and consumption process. We also find the expected entrepreneurial ‘pivots’ on the part of artistically-driven musicians during the covid era towards decentralized streaming and an accelerated market for live music after the lockdowns and mandates. We reiterate findings that education or social capital is more important than economic capital for distinction in the arts. We also observe that musicians, and perhaps the general public, prefer a spontaneous order more than an increased governance sphere. This finding is based on population movements and voter affiliation patterns in the United States before, during and after the covid era. Good art can come from bad times, but if (economic) bad times are indefinite good art cannot flourish indefinitely.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Illustration 25 is updated version of that found in Weber et al (2024). The 2024 party affiliation is from early July 2024 whereas as the rest of the polling numbers are from early November each year to correspond with the Presidential elections. See, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/15370/party-affiliation.aspx>

⁴⁶ Fitch downgrades the risk rating for US government long-term borrowings in August 2023.

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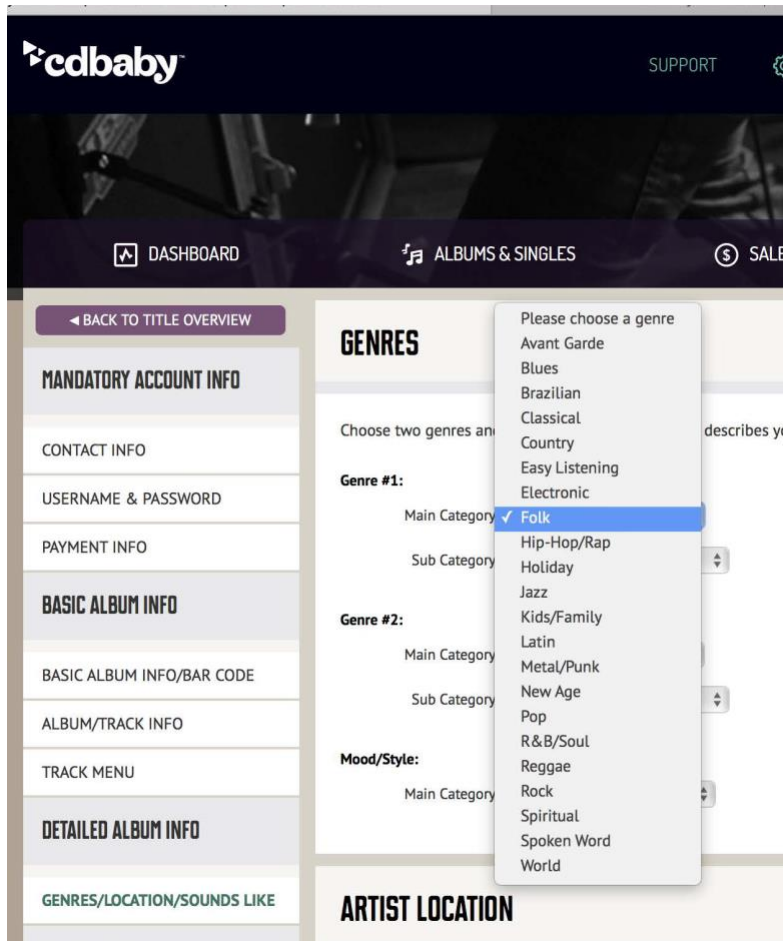
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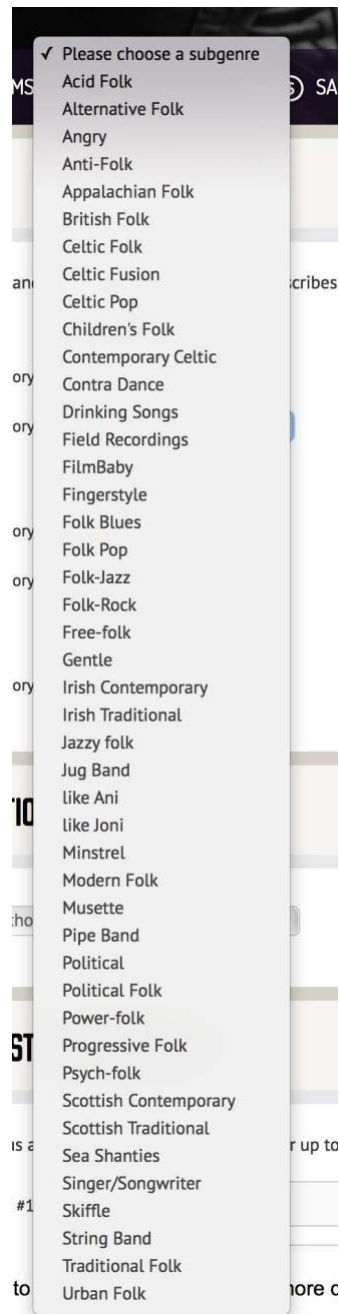
Appendix⁴⁷

Main Genres



⁴⁷ Screenprints by author from cdbaby.com, March 2023.

Folk Subgenres



Avant Garde Subgenres

