

Success in the Fringe: Analysis and Guide for Independent Musicians

by

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Submitted to the Department of Arts Management

School of the Arts

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College

State University of New York

May 2019

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## **Introduction**

In today's chaotic arts and entertainment economy, it is difficult to decipher what it actually means to be successful. With a stronger focus on monetary profit as the indication of achievement within the mainstream music industry, artists who lie on the outside of the commercial arena find difficulty in defining their own achievement. The financial structure of the industry has shifted and changed the way we, as an audience, perceive an artist's viability in a hyper-critical market. With major record labels hoping to find substantial income return from their various investments, they pour all of their resources into the creation of highly-palatable artists that act as brands. These brands are then used to generate massive amounts of income that, in turn, finance the creation of other brands, thus continuing the cycle.

While the business model used by the popular music industry is successful in its own right, this financial structure can often hinder independent artists who seek to create meaningful art that may not fit into the hegemonic stadium of popular music. Due to this, it is important to exercise two fundamental principles in regards to finding success for an independent musician in the fringes of mainstream media. First, one must develop the most effective method to market and produce one's music so that they can receive ample media coverage. Second, one must distinguish the most effective way to measure their own success as an artist.

## **Success in the Fringe: Analysis and Guide for Independent Musicians**

In order to understand the modern music industry, the term, popular music, must first be defined. Popular music, of course, changes and molds according to the region and time period in which it exists. So, it is important to understand that when discussing popular music, this genre changes depending on those two factors: region and time.

In multiple surveys that were administered, this open-ended term (popular music) was translated in many ways. The most prevalent definition was that popular music is simply a money-making machine. This idea led to popular music artists recreating already-successful music that sold, over and over again, to generate revenue with the ultimate goal of turning a profit. Thus, the repetitive model of familiarity in the music industry set the standard for popular music in the economy. Where does this leave those who may not create music that fits precisely in the mold? These “independents” are constantly at battle with major record label forces in order to create a stable income. The divide between the two is ever-growing in the fringe of the music industry.

### **A Historical Analysis of the Rise of Popular Music in the United States**

Alongside innovations which increased the simplicity of printing sheet music, the rise in production of chordal instruments including the guitar, the concertina, and the piano helped spark the development of popular music with a more viable commercial value during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Randal). The most notable characteristics of popular music both during this time and the present are simplicity and less strenuous demand on the performer (Randal). At this time, early popular music and classical music were very much one and the same. However, during this time, the rise of folk music both in America and Europe led to a closer resemblance of mainstream music today (Randal). This music was often written by non-classical musicians solely for the enjoyment of both the player and listener (Randal). These early examples were meant for the home and for the average listener, garnering commercial support quickly (Randal). For an expedited popular music analysis, this historical overview will mainly cover the rise of folk music in America.

Near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ragtime and Vaudeville prevailed. This genre pushed folk music into the theatre. The end of the Civil War sparked a draw to the theatre for entertainment. Variety shows composed of music, dance, magic, comedy, and many other acts regarding the strange and bizarre began popping up across America. This phenomenon can be identified as one of the first instances of the performing arts being pushed into the American business industry. Among these Vaudeville business owners was Benjamin Keith. Keith is considered to be the father of American Vaudeville, as he oversaw the construction of The Bijou, a Vaudeville powerhouse which drew patrons from across the entire country. According to Rick Easton's dissertation on American Vaudeville:

Keith's triumph as a showman lay chiefly in his ability to bridge the gulf between notions of "high" and "low" entertainments that grew increasingly wider in the years following the Civil War. He reinforced his theatres' image of gentility by including acts from the "legitimate" stage, drawing an audience previously unavailable to variety amusements.

The Vaudeville genre eventually made its way to New York theatres, furthering the popularity of the genre (Randal). Songwriters, including Charles K. Harris, Paul Dresser, and Harry Von Tilzer, began to compose, arrange, and notate songs that were specific to the theatre (Randal).

A new breed of publishers, concentrating on popular music, succeeded in making sheet music sales of a million or more copies relatively common, beginning with Harris' "After the Ball" of 1892 (Randal). By the 1910s and 20s, a slightly younger and even more talented group of songwriters, led by Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Cole Porter, and Richard

Rodgers, had assumed the leadership of American popular song (Randal). These songwriters would lead America into its golden age of popular song composition.

New technological innovations during this time aided the production and distribution of popular music. Innovations such as the phonograph and the player piano (Randal), aided the production and distribution of popular music during this time. These innovations would forever change the way society consumed music. Commercialization of popular music became more tangible as consumers were able to bring new auditory experiences into the comfort of their own homes (Randal).

Commercialized phonograph labels began producing and releasing music of all popular genres during this time, including Blues and Jazz (Randal). This indubitably helped to develop popular music as a whole, rapidly leading to more innovations. The newfound ability to distribute music through the phonograph allowed white audiences the chance to both listen and appropriate the genres (Randal). Popularity of the Blues and of Jazz would increase exponentially throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, leading to its development both musically and commercially (Randal). According to The Harvard Dictionary of Music, “by the 1930s big band jazz...had become the most popular idiom of the day” (Randal).

This usurpation of commercial dominance is a prime example of the cyclical pattern between mainstream and fringe genres and, perhaps, one of the most notable examples of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that lead to even further development of popular music. It is also important to understand the significance of this pattern according to the dynamics of regional bias. The societal opinion of what is considered mainstream will differ according to the area being examined.

World War II lead to an increase in the complexity of various recording technologies, leading to better distribution and a higher commercial value of recorded music (Randal).

## The Folk Revival 1950's-Present

In the 1950s, a resurgence of popular folk music began to occur in the United States. This movement was led by artists including: The Weavers, The Kingston Trio, The Highway Men, Simon and Garfunkel, The Rooftop Singers, Peter Paul & Mary, and many more. While Folk music has existed throughout the history of America, it is important to understand the significance of this event in examining the current climate of popular music. The definition of folk music lies at the forefront of this significance. This type of music can be described in many different ways, but, most importantly, folk music is the embodiment of American history.

Lyrically, folk music tells stories about the current time period. Lyrically, folk music tells stories about the current time period, providing snapshots of secular life within that timeframe. Ronald D. Cohen defines a folk ballad in his book, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society*, “as not just a story song with roots in the misty European past but as a breathing representation of the living common folk” (Cohen).

The peak of the Folk revival was during the 60's with artists such as Bob Dylan and Joan Boaz. This marked a transformation of Folk Music as something more widely accepted by the general public. Folk was then pushed to the forefront of activist demonstration in objection of the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. In an excerpt from Cohen's book, *Rainbow Quest*, he describes the Folk scene during the 60's:

Folk music could be heard at campus rallies and also on television. CBS-TV daringly attempted an unusual one hour Folk Sound USA show, sponsored by Revlon in June 1960... The new aficionados will haggle of the merits of Earl Scruggs' three-fingered banjo-picking technique as rabidly as jazzmen debate the far-out trumpet playing of Miles Davis (Cohen).

The death of Woodie Guthrie in 1967 signaled the end of the Folk revival period, but did not end the revival of folk as a whole (Cohen). Folk music progressed until it reached its current point today in which modern folk musicians shape and bend the genre to their own liking. However, popular music also gleaned many of its characteristics from Folk music, such as: song structure, melody, chord progressions, and lyrical development. Even though Folk was the popular music of the 60's, it can still be seen influencing many popular genres today.

### **Record Deals and Independent Musicians**

With record labels (both major and independent) growing in numbers all sorts of genres began being produced with more prominence. For the first time, this gave consumers the ability to choose what music they believed deserved their monetary compensation (Randal). There are many characteristics that can be highlighted when examining the reason behind the fact that fringe music is not received as enthusiastically as mainstream music. This category includes musicians who lie outside of the arena of major record labels. These artists may either be signed to smaller labels or even choose to remain independent from labels, entirely. That being said, in general, the influx of record labels has led to more music being both produced and consumed. However, Independent labels continue to struggle against Major labels as Major labels are producing more commercially-viable products. This relationship created an industry that is solely based on consumption and monetary gain.

The commercial music industry is predominantly controlled by three key major record labels with monetary control over a vast majority of the global music economy. Holding an estimated 62.4% of global music sales in 2016, Universal Music Group, Warner Music Group, and Sony Music Entertainment are at the forefront of the global, modern-day music industry



(Lesser). Because these three Major labels have predominant control of the market, independent labels are often pushed aside, and they struggle financially in the modern, mainstream music economy.

Before discussing record deals and their monetary consequences, recognizing how a label operates and functions is a necessary requirement. In essence, the record label is the fiscal dynamo that handles all aspects of the process of album creation and marketing. In a major record label such as Sony and Warner Music Group, artists are provided all of the necessary resources in order to produce a successful album. The label provides: recording and mixing services, marketing, tour management and, in some instances, compositional support for artists who are in need of pre-written songs or instrumental arrangements of their original works. The support from a major record label allows for the artist to take on fewer responsibilities and have a firmer chance at making a larger monetary gain with their releases.

Independent record labels are not able to provide the same level of support to artists who sign deals. The independents may be able to offer distribution and marketing help but require artists to record on their own. While a small investment may be made in order for the artist to record, it is often financially insufficient to provide a high-quality recording at the same caliber of Major-record label output.

In today's music industry, record labels have had to change and mold in order to maintain financial gain in a changing, capitalist climate. In the early 2000s, Major-record labels saw a dramatic revenue loss in album sales (Okorocho). In order to maintain relevancy in this New, internet-driven society they were forced to adapt for survival. Thus, the 360 deal was born. Before the 360 deal was considered, record label deals only allowed for labels to share in income derived solely from record sales (Okorocho). Other aspects, including publishing, touring, and

merchandising, were not subject to percentage gain on behalf of the record labels (Okorochoa). The 360 deal essentially allows labels the opportunity to take a percentage of all aspects regarding the artist's career in order to increase revenue (Okorochoa).

The deal itself varies from artist to artist, however, they follow the same principles. The artists allow the label to manufacture and distribute records in exchange for a small percentage of the income from royalties (Okorochoa). This principle has been a strong grounding point in record label deals of all kind. However, when artists sign onto a 360 deal, the label is entitled to 10-35% of revenue created from: publishing, touring, merchandising, motion picture acting, and sponsorship money (Okorochoa). While this is a common practice in independent labels, most deals are passive, allowing the artist to maintain ownership rights. Although, in the major record label hegemony, 360 deals are often active, meaning that an artist's rights are under complete control by the label (Okorochoa).

This shift into the 360 deal changed the entire economic structure of the music industry. With a decline in album sales, revenue focus was placed onto the brand personality of artists. Essentially, the modern music industry is less about music and more about the brand viability of the artist (Okorochoa).

## **Streaming**

In the modern music economy, music streaming through platforms, such as Spotify and Pandora, is the main focus of major record labels in regards to significant album revenue (As opposed to physical album sales which includes CDs, Tapes and Vinyl) Since 2007, physical album sales have seen a dramatic decrease with the rise of digital sales. Because of this, further emphasis on streaming began to shift the sales focus of labels.

Spotify was founded in 2006 by CEO Daniel Ek and Martin Lorentzon, launching in the U.S in 2011. With Spotify, users are offered two options, the first being a basic free account that allows the user to listen to playlists and albums while connected to internet servers. The premium account allows users to listen to specific songs offline at an affordable monthly rate (“Music for Everyone”).

Although the dawn of streaming occurred during the evolution of the 360 deal, labels are the sole beneficiaries of the new technology. Record labels began to turn to streaming in order to increase revenue after the steep declination of album sales. The three majors began to acquire equity in Spotify and, in return, they reduced royalty rates paid to the artists when music is streamed. This means that the artists will make significantly less than the label, itself, for the consumption of their own music. The sale of shares and equity in Spotify allow the record labels to make significant gains at the expense of artists (Lesser). Bryan Lesser further examines the payout scheme in his paper, *Record Labels Shot The Artists*:

*Spotify has reported a general payment scheme in which it takes its monthly revenue (from advertising and subscriptions) and multiplies it by the artist's total streams that month. Then it divides that number by the total number of Spotify streams. Then, 70% of the computed result goes to the master recording and publishing rights holders. After that, the portion gets multiplied by the artist's royalty rate in the record contract.*

On average, an independent artist on Spotify that has roughly one million streams would see a payout of an estimated \$0.004891 per song (Lesser). Due to deals between the major three record labels and streaming services, artists are forced to agree to a smaller percentage of revenue per

stream (Lesser). While this impacts artists signed to major labels, the impact on smaller, independent artists is insurmountable.

### **The Do It Yourself Industry**

The rise of 360 deals and the Major label domination of the music industry have led to a new faction in the independent field of music. With the general anxiety created by record labels, many independent artists have turned to their own network of DIY musicians. Members of this group take on all aspects of the commercial music process: writing, recording, mixing, promotion, sales, marketing, and whatever else may be required in order to turn a profit from their music. The DIY musician is becoming a popular choice for up-and-coming independent musicians and has become more possible over time with the development of new recording software and technology.

Around 2010, musicians began the steady departure from record labels in favor of an environment that is controlled completely by the artist. Home studios began popping up across the nation as these independents began building their own music career without the aid from a multi-million dollar record label. There are many reasons a musician may want to avoid signing with a record label. In an interview with singer-songwriter, Abby McCarthy, she states her reasoning for siding with the DIY scene:

*Commercial/popular music is a money-making machine, to put it quite simply.*

*There is not a lot of soul that goes into it. The reason music hasn't changed very much in a while is because they realized what worked and what was successful, and they just try to recreate it over and over, regurgitating the same sonic tactics in order to capture their audience. Because people respond to the familiar, this*

*has been a successful strategy for commercial music. It is really difficult for anyone to challenge that method, because radio stations don't want to take risks and have people switch off their channel.*

With accessibility to new and improved production software including: Logic, Cubase, Protools, Etc., musicians started creating music that competed with a majority of the major label output. It does not end here, however, pioneers create a business with their music. Upon completion of a track or album, artists began the process of promotion and outreach in order to see a profit from their labors. With social media tools such as: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, artists reach out in order to gain followers, and, therefore, monetary support (Crowdfunding).

Distribution was perhaps the most difficult aspect of the process to solve. With this problem on the forefront, many entrepreneurs began creating digital media outlets that allowed artists to distribute and license their music without going through a label of any kind. At a nominal fee, artists are now able to place their music on digital media streaming sites including: iTunes, Spotify, Amazon Music, and many more, without the hassle of negotiating deals with labels. Today, there are many distribution services including: CD Baby, Tune-Core, and Record Union. The creation of these services solidified the workflow and career opportunities of many DIY Musicians in the industry (Herstand).

Despite the ample resources now available to musicians, it is still difficult to create a career that can compete with one provided by Major-record labels. Part of the reason behind this is a lack of information accessible to the independent artist on how to succeed in the modern music industry. The second part of this paper will examine the ways an artist can stand out among a wide assembly of competitors.

## Success in the Fringe

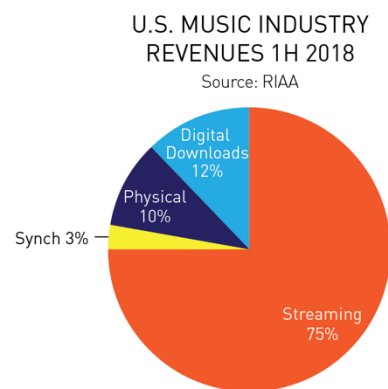
To understand how to succeed in the music industry outside of the societally-conceived mainstream arena, we must first identify what success is. Success in music is a personal valuation that can only be determined by the artist, themselves. However, this step in the process of music production is essential in order to identify specific goals that are both attainable and realistic. When looking at the music industry, attention is often focused specifically on numerical data from various sources including: streams, social media interactions, album sales, ticket and merch sales, etc.

While goals focusing on numerical data are important elements to consider while creating content, individual goals should also include more personal aspirations that are important to the artist in their growth.

Overall, the most challenging goals to set are those having to do with numerical data. At first, while creating practical goals in regards to streaming and sales it is common for rising independent musicians to

set their sights incredibly high. This inevitably sets the artist up for failure and not only leads to personal defeat, but to a major career setback. According to the mid-year revenue report for 2018 from the Recording Industry Association of America, streaming accounted for 75 percent of music sales, with only 22 percent coming from both physical album and digital album sales (Figure 1, RIAA).

Another goal to set in regards to overall sales is what is known as brand revenue. This type of income is based on sales having to do with the artists identity which can include:



*Figure 1*

merchandise sales, ad revenue, fan funding, grants, etc. (MIDEM). As an independent musician, merchandise sales can be your greatest tool in both promotion and income development. Popular merchandise items include: t-shirts, buttons, stickers, mugs, guitar picks, and lighters. Creativity in what an artist offers in regards to merchandise will increase the likelihood of making a greater revenue impact. When developing a merchandise strategy, it is important to understand your budget. As an independent musician, this budget will be coming from your own income and can potentially be a drastic hit if not managed effectively.

While an artist can handmake each item, it is often complex and not cost-effective. There are now multiple platforms that can be utilized in order to both produce and distribute merchandise. Companies such as Merchly, offer various merchandise options at a budget line that is more attainable for independent musicians. Merchandise can be designed either by the artist or, for an additional price, can be designed by the company. Once you are able to create merchandise that both establishes your brand and stays well within your budget, you can then begin making sales (Merch.ly). While artists can sell merchandise at shows, they can also either sell and distribute on their own via their personal website. Other options may include platforms such as Threadless, in which fans can purchase directly from the platform's website instead of through the artist. With this option the cost for individual merchandise will increase, but it will allow the artist flexibility in that they would not have to pay for bulk orders in order to sell as an individual.

Another important source of revenue for specific purposes, such as album recording, is fan fundraising. With fan funding or crowdfunding, musicians can receive monetary support for notable events in their career with the use of platforms such as Kickstarter and Indiegogo. While this not only leads to revenue generation for a specific purpose, it also acts as a means to both

promote and interact with your audience. With crowdfunding, you can offer different tiers of donations with different benefits. Crowdfunding can be extremely successful if done correctly and has funded albums and tours for artists including: Amanda Palmer, Maria Schneider, and The Libertines (7 of the most successful).

However, Crowdfunding poses its own challenges. When creating a crowdfunding campaign, it is important to consider a few factors. Firstly, there are three different methods of crowdfunding, and each one has its own pros and cons. The purpose of crowdfunding will determine the best platform to use for the campaign. The first type is known as donation-based crowdfunding. This includes platforms such as Indiegogo, Kickstarter and Gofundme. The idea of donation-based crowdfunding involves contributors donating money which is used for furthering the artists venture (such as album recording). The second method is debt crowdfunding. This includes platforms such as Prosper and LendingClub. These platforms are based on the idea of peer-to-peer lending, in which investors pool funds in order to pay for wider needs. Investors are paid back monthly at high interest rates. The third method is equity crowdfunding. With this method, stocks are traded in order to fund the various endeavors of the project or entity as a whole (Cremades).

With every crowdfunding platform comes varied pros and cons. Finding platforms with higher success rates and lower interest rates will work better for artists. Most likely, donation-based crowdfunding will be the most beneficial method for starting artists with very little risk. However, using other platforms that are based on debt and equity crowdfunding methods may present a higher return percentage. Or, however, these platforms will most likely take a higher percentage out of the artists overall crowdfunded revenue (Cremades).



In an effort to identify successful individual goals, numerous artists were surveyed in the fields of music production, composition, and performance. All of the artists surveyed are both unsigned and

freelance, working as their own management team. Out of thirty surveys sent out, I received responses from one-third of those surveyed. The survey consisted of five simple questions. The first two questions establish what exactly the artist does in regards to content creation. The third question asks how the artist defines success in regards to their own career. The fourth question asks if the artist feels that their image of career success seems attainable. The final question establishes the obstacles an independent artist might face on their path to success.

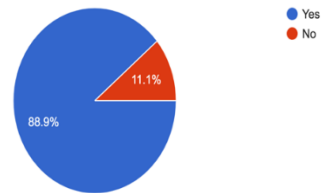
Overall, the artists surveyed had realistic goals that were attainable. The definition of success for some of the independent artists surveyed included:

“Creating honest art that impacts people. Having an audience is part of this as this is what allows art to be impactful. I would also say being able to survive from music related jobs (not being homeless or starving) is part of my idea of success.”  
and

“I think success would be achieved in my career if I can make a living solely off of my songs and performances. Having lots of money isn’t important to me, but as long as I can live off of what I make from music, I will consider myself successful.”

Most of the answers from artists on this particular question revolved around the idea of creating a sustainable career that provides both the necessary means to survive and a moderate appreciation

Do you feel that your vision of success is attainable?  
9 responses



from their audience in regards to their art. Again, creating realistic expectations and goals is again the first step in identifying a successful career path for an artist.

The next question, represented by following graph, shows that 88.9% of those surveyed believe that their own vision of success is attainable. However, despite realistic goal-setting, it is also important to understand specific goals that may get in the way of success. Of those surveyed five artists responded to the question regarding the identification of potential obstacles. While most answers addressed issues regarding self-motivation, funding, and support, one answer and addressed an issue which plagues all independent artists today. Taken directly from the survey:

Especially because of the lack of legislation protecting songwriters for royalties paid from Spotify, Apple Music, etc. and the amount of money and rights that record labels take from artists these days, it is much too difficult to be independent, and if you are signed, you sign your life and creative license away. There is no winning at this game with the power dynamic that exists between labels/streaming services and artists  
(Survey).

While this answer identifies a significant problem, it renders the issue void of resolution. When identifying potential obstacles, it is also important to also identify potential solutions to these obstacles.

Personal goals should reflect your passions and interests. Choosing objectives that you, as an artist, are passionate about will communicate both your drive and brand identity to your audience base. When starting out it may help to examine other artists and how they defined their careers. A potential artist to examine for career guidance is Joan Baez, who was heavily popular during the 1960s folk revival period, alongside artists like Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, and Odetta Holmes. With the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War at the forefront of politics during

the 60's and 70's, many musicians began pushing towards political allegory to garner support for these movements.

Baez was, and continues to be, a strong political force in the world of music. While she experienced great success in album sales and Grammy nominations, she is a great example of an artist that curated goals specifically based upon her passions.

### **Audience Building and Branding**

The first piece of advice is that small goals are more easily attainable than larger ones. Given that this is a straightforward statement, many artists still fail at this. Building audience support at a slower rate works better in the long term. Audience-building is often a daunting, albeit necessary, task for rising independent artists. Networking within this field is a vital component of audience-building. Creating connections with others in the field: be it other musicians, producers, or even photographers, will help aid the artist in furthering their career. Collaborating with other musicians is also a great strategy to help build support. Not only will you be able to call on the artist for help in the future, but you both will begin to share audience support due to consistent collaborations. Increased networking within the music industry will increase the artist's reputation leading them to more lucrative opportunities in the future.

In my opinion, the best way to gain audience support is through face-to-face interactions with potential fans. The best way to achieve this is to play live shows at appropriate venues. After establishing a proper and professional-looking electronic press kit, email, and social media account, artists then can reach out to venues in order to fill slots. Audience building, however, is not achieved through simply playing a set and leaving; it's about what the artist does after the

show. Interaction is key when gaining new fans. Establishing a rapport with potential fans will encourage them to follow and hopefully share the artist's music with friends, family, etc.

The second aspect of my career that I've learned the most from is the idea of branding. There are many articles depicting the most effective ways to brand oneself as an artist, with lists and guides showing artists exactly what to do, step by step. However, I eventually found that these methods were ineffective and felt ingenuine to myself and my art. While discussing branding, it is important to understand what will work and feel most genuine in regards to the artist and their work.

Branding is where the artist defines who they are, what they do, and what they stand for. For example, clearly stating on social media the genre of the artist's music helps to identify in which spectrum of the music industry they reside. Creating genre around the artist's personality is also vital in branding. Deciding whether the artist would like to be displayed in darker lighting only or with darker imagery around sites and images would depict a darker brand personality. Branding is also the place to establish the artist's goals and motivations behind their art. For me, political motivation and activism is a driving force behind my music. Therefore, it is a constant factor in both my branding and social media outreach.

Audience building and branding go hand-in-hand for all artists. Some artists are successful in these fields, while others lack necessary material in these areas. For example, Vulfpeck, an American Funk group, excels in the areas of branding and audience building. The group places emphasis on their DIY nature, with roughly hewn together music videos and similarly characteristic social media posts. Perhaps one of their most unique features is their approach to audience-building and fan involvement. Not only do they engage with fans during shows, but they also continually encourage interaction off-stage. For example, in an attempt to

fund a tour that would be completely free for all concertgoers in 2014, the band released a completely silent album on Spotify titled *Sleepify*. Vulfpeck encouraged their fans to stream this album in order to generate royalties to fund the tour. This approach to funding amassed more than \$18,000 solely from royalties from the silent album (Gensler). The group creatively and effectively turned fan involvement into a source of revenue.

Another artist that brands herself well is Courtney Barnett, a rising singer-songwriter. Her eclectic approach to songwriting awarded her high praise early on in her career. For Barnett, her success lies in her authenticity (in the way she both interacts with her fans through social media and during live performances). A true DIY musician, she founded Milk Records in 2012 and released two EPs that launched her into the forefront of the Australian songwriting scene. Her merchandise and record artworks also feature her own handiwork (Goodman). The level of authenticity in the way Barnett brands herself has garnered her a wide audience base in many countries.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the independent artist will still be forced to compete with major record labels and signed artists. However, it is not impossible to find success in the independent sector of the music industry. It is important to hone your craft in order to produce music of the same caliber and quality of that being produced by major record labels and artists. You must also brand yourself, and network and conduct audience outreach to the best of your ability to further your career to a point of steady audience gain.

As an aspiring musician myself, I am continually forced to create goals that are achievable and that do not diverge from my artistic statement. Identifying success for myself,

however, is difficult nonetheless. With the music industry's idea of success being controlled exclusively by sales, it is challenging to create goals that better align with my morals and brand. Tackling this question of success has led me to multiple realizations about my own career path.

Music can be a full-time career, but only with appropriate consideration of common business practices. Ultimately, you should be creating music about which you are passionate. Your music will promote itself when you present it with the same tenacity that you used to create it. Building an audience that becomes entangled in the web that you created is possibly one of the most important goals of any musician's career and should remain the forefront of your marketing tactics and artistic endeavors.

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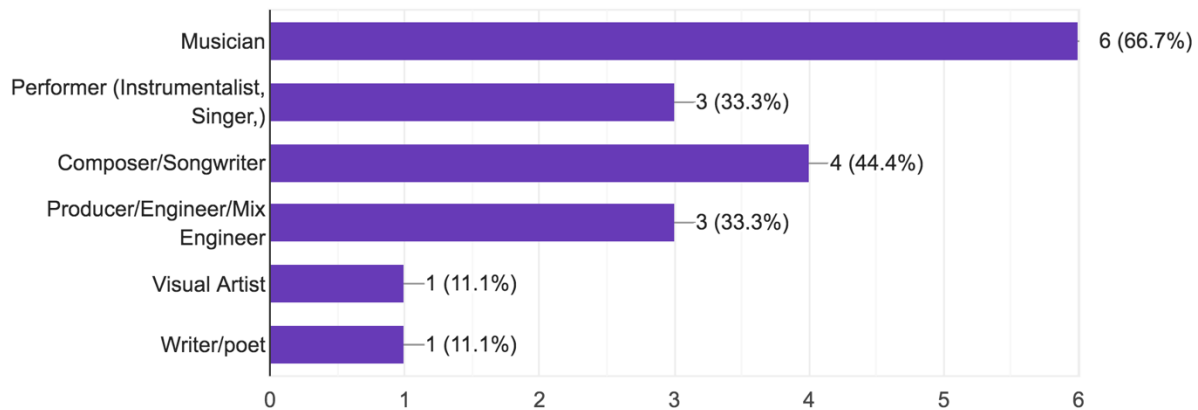
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## Appendix

### Which option(s) closes resembles your artistic field? (You can Choose more than one)

9 responses



### What do you do exactly? How and what do you create? 9 responses

Recording/Mixing/Live engineer

I create ways to make musicians feel more comfortable on and off stage. I create movement through music.

I write orchestral folk punk songs with heavy focus on lyrical content. I create by focusing on set themes that fit in with the context of the rest of my work, and try to create a clear narrative in a performance/album/project.

I play the drums in a variety of musical situations and do photography for fun.

I am a singer/songwriter, composer, and multi-instrumentalist. I write emotional folk music

I work on guitars and electronics, as well as engineer recordings

I write pop music, Loud EDM, trap and occasionally experimental and noise music, mostly through the use of DAWs, synthesizers, and my voice

I am a singer-songwriter in the genre of alternative pop.

Singer-songwriter; I write alternative pop music

### How would you define success as it pertains to your own artistic career? 9 responses

Being able to work full time on projects that I'm passionate about

Success is anything that brings you joy and makes you feel alive. As my own artistic career, my success has looked much different than I thought it would. But it's more satisfying than anything I can imagine.

Being able to make art and have people care enough to receive money for it.

Ultimately unimportant

Creating honest art that impacts people. Having an audience is part of this as this is what allows art to be impactful. I would also say being able to survive from music related jobs (not being homeless or starving) is part of my idea of success.

Make enough money to live comfy and have all the project cars I want ~~~

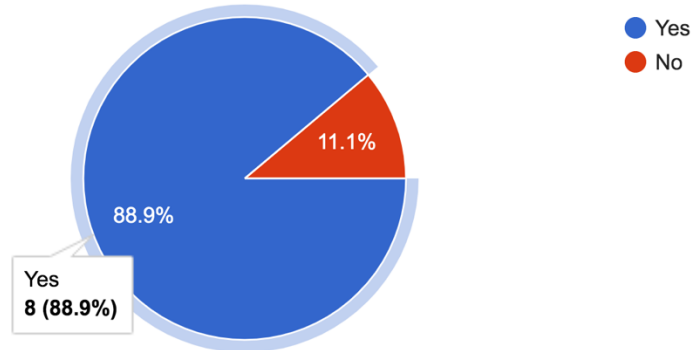
Having a solid fanbase and the ability to turn heads from people who aren't die-hard fans

I think success would be achieved in my career if I can make a living solely off of my songs and performances. Having lots of money isn't important to me, but as long as I can live off of what I make from music, I will consider myself successful. Oh, and I also hope to be happy.

As long as I can make a living solely off of my music and performances, I will be successful in my own eyes.

## Do you feel that your vision of success is attainable?

9 responses



## If not, what is your biggest obstacle in reaching your vision? 5 responses

My biggest obstacle is student loans and the amount of money I pour into those instead of my own career.

Industry

Lack of motivation, support, and funds

I answer "Yes" idealistically, but my biggest obstacle currently is myself when it comes to motivation and knowing exactly what will gain me an audience. I enjoy making music more than I like promoting it.

Especially because of the lack of legislation protecting songwriters for royalties paid from Spotify, Apple Music, etc. and the amount of money and rights that record labels take from artists these days, it is much too difficult to be independent, and if you are signed, you sign your life and creative license away. There is no winning at this game with the power dynamic that exists between labels/streaming services and artists.