Popular Music (2025), 1–20
doi:10.1017/S0261143025000285

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

Negotiating Standards and Songwriting Myths in the Age of Platformisation: Sessions, Camps, and Their Functional Rules and (Media) Formats

Carsten Wernicke and Michael Ahlers

Institute of Fine Arts, Music and Education, Leuphana University, Lüneburg, Germany
Corresponding author: Carsten Wernicke; Email: carsten.wernicke@leuphana.de

Abstract

This article explores the key standards identified by songwriters, collaborative artists, and music industry representatives in the commercial pop and Schlager sectors, along with the platform-centric myths they implicitly address. We first provide a theoretical overview of collaborative songwriting and platformisation. Through original interviews and ethnographic observations, we examine two primary platform standards: streaming and social media. We emphasise the growing significance of collaborative songwriting in the streaming era, particularly through songwriting camps, and the pervasive use of social media in creative and economic contexts. Our analysis demystifies two prevalent myths. The first myth concerns the ambiguous role of intermediaries, especially publishers, who act as new service points for efficient billing and songwriting facilitation. The second myth addresses TikTok's success and its declining conversion rates for streaming.

Keywords: popular music; songwriting; platformisation; music streaming; social media

1. Introduction: Standards and myths

Standardisation and formatting of musical, technical, or economical aspects are integral to the history of popular music. It is important to remember the foundations and debates surrounding standardisation in the essay by Theodor W. Adorno (Adorno and Simpson 1941). Adorno accused popular music of embodying numerous standardisations, thereby reinforcing the long-standing dichotomy between serious and popular music within the context of critical theory. The standards of Adorno's era encompassed various elements, including form, melodic range, and harmonic aspects of popular music. He also highlighted the necessity of avoiding monotony through constant repetition. Additionally, standardisation and formatting through technical configurations were shaped by the progression of audio media. From 2-minute play times on gramophones to shellac and vinyl records, cassettes, and eventually CDs, these provided media-imposed time constraints. Radio and television further influenced popular music, with the duration of singles and their structural forms being shaped by airtime limitations. The terrestrial distribution dynamics of radio and television broadcasts also restricted signal quality, impacting music production and mastering processes (for a comprehensive discussion, see Tschmuck 2006). Commercial music television introduced playlists that could be plugged by label and publisher promotions (payola), significantly affecting consumer reception (Mol and Wijnberg 2007). These issues

became even more pronounced with the rise of digital sales and streaming platforms (Wikström 2020).

In addition to technical standards – such as the loudness specifications on streaming services (Morris 2020) – numerous myths within popular music cultures pertain to various aspects. These range from general myths surrounding star genesis and artist authentication to genre-specific and regional myths that can affect the negotiation process during song creation, as well as the distribution and reception of products, performers, and performances (Loy *et al.* 2018). Jaques Attali, in his work, follows Lévi-Strauss's assertion that in modern societies, music itself may be understood as a substitute for myths (Attali 1985, p. 28). The most widespread myths are likely those that are economically relevant or prevalent in specific contexts, often characterised by overnight sensations and rags-to-riches narratives (Kelly and McDonnell 1999). On the academic side, listeners of popular music tend to describe or interpret these myths as part of working-class narratives, even though many prominent artists emerged from British art schools (Frith and Horne 1987). Simon Frith critically observes that the analyses in cultural studies concerning subcultures are based on a 'myth of resistance through rituals' (Frith 1991, p. 179), which can obstruct further interpretations. Numerous works also exist that discuss and analyse myths surrounding nationality, ideologies, creativity, authenticity, and other significant discourses in popular music cultures.

However, in relation to the focus of this article, few well-known, scholarly processed myths have been identified; these are primarily found in the context of music production and the glorification of producers (Frith 2012; Hennion 1989; Mayhew 2017). Brett Lashua and Paul Thompson reconstruct the recording studio as a site where various myths are active and, in turn, are perpetuated in the perception of the 'creative collective' (Hennion 1983) both within the studio and at the fan level. In our study, we adopt the authors' conceptualisation of myths based on Roland Barthes and Stuart Hall:

> Myths are significant (that is, they signify, with power) in terms of how people make sense of the world. In popular music-making, myths circulate to structure sense-making in regard to musicians (mythogenic performers such as David Bowie) and spaces (mythologized studios such as Abbey Road studios [...]). Such myths point to the meaning-making capabilities of stories that are not true or false per se, but that blur the distinction between true and false, reality and illusion, as well as natural and social orders of things. (Lashua and Thompson 2016, p. 73)

This article works with original data from a selection of twenty-five interviews with songwriters, and music industry personnel and ethnographies of songwriting camps. It focuses on identifying two central standards that songwriters, collaborative artists, and music industry representatives rely on in the context of platformisation (Bonini and Magaudda 2024), and the platform-centric myths that are implicitly addressed. To achieve this, we will first provide a theoretical overview of the structures of collaborative songwriting and platformisation. Subsequently, we will discuss the two central platform standards – streaming and social media – based on interviews and ethnographic observations. From this analysis, we identified and empirically examined two central myths. It becomes very clear in the analyses how standards and platforms are currently playing an increasingly central role in numerous fields of songwriting and producing. However, some of the myths are very clearly deconstructed by the interviews and detailed perspectives from creatives and the industry combined are brought into the academic discourse.

2. Collaborative songwriting

This article focuses on group-based, or collaborative, creative processes involved in creating and producing popular music. It deliberately excludes discourses and romantic notions of a sole

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'auteur' or established concepts of genius (Shuker 2012). Popular music has long been conceived, arranged, and sold according to a division of labour. This division began with the roles of librettist, later lyricist, and composer and expanded to include arrangers, music typesetters, session musicians, producers, engineers, and specialised contributors who are now expected to provide catchy hooks and phrases as topliners within the creative collective network.

While duos predominantly produced hits during the Tin Pan Alley era in the 1920s (Shepherd 2017) and in the Brill Building in the 1960s (Inglis 2003), the number of people involved in productions who also receive credits has been steadily increasing. Collaborative songwriting in popular music has become the standard since the end of the twentieth century and particularly in the early twenty-first century, becoming increasingly differentiated. Research on this topic encompasses the creative processes (Clarke and Doffman 2017), the music production process (Wilsmore and Johnson 2022), and a specific focus on songwriting (Bennett 2011). For instance, Joe Bennett (2011, 2014) explains that there is a mutual benefit for artists and songwriters, which he labels as economically and artistically relevant in his 'svengali model'. Mühlbach and Arora (2020) even describe a new relationship between songwriters and their songs, whereby songs are seen as marketing tools for the songwriter's own branding.

A recent trend in the perception of the authors of this article is the increased professional organisation of songwriting camps. These camps are organised by individuals, but primarily by publishers, labels, or associations. Our binational research project[1] between the United Kingdom and Germany has found that the orientation, organisation, and participants of these camps can vary significantly. The offerings range from opportunities for mostly inexperienced creatives to pay for knowledge and networking to commercial camps where artists and songwriting teams are specifically assembled. The current practices of participants reflect ideas, concepts, experiences, and approaches developed, tested, and implemented by their predecessors in the so-called hit song factories, such as Sweden's Cheiron Studios writing for Backstreet Boys, Britney Spears, or Celine Dion (Seabrook 2015). However, recent forms of this creative work have changed significantly due to the now entirely digital means of production and communication (Bennett 2018), leading to global creative networks where individuals write for or with artists (Herbst *et al.* 2024).

To date, only a few studies have provided an insider's perspective on these mostly exclusive and publicly invisible spaces (Hiltunen 2021; Tolstad 2023). While academic work often focuses on the organisational aspects of creative processes, it pays less attention to the influence of formats and platforms. In general, it can be stated that songwriting camps typically consist of collaborative writing sessions limited to a few days, where three individuals in different roles (topliner, songwriter, and producer/tracker) develop both musical and lyrical ideas together in a studio environment. These ideas are then recorded and produced to at least a demo quality. The roles may change, but often not within a single session; rather, they shift between sessions. The writing occurs either based on a briefing or with the artists present, on-site or virtually. In concluding listening sessions, the material is collectively reviewed before it is selected, either by the participants themselves or by publishers and labels, before being pitched, produced, and ultimately exploited.

3. Platformisation between reception and production

Qian Zhang and Keith Negus discuss platforms concerning the classification of the live and streaming economies of the twenty-first century in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic:

[1]This work was funded by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council (Grant No. AH/X002276/1) and the German Research Foundation (Grant No. 508326423).

> platforms are designed with subterranean functionality that allows the channelling of information, and a propensity to prompt and direct human actions. Platforms intervene by moderating, selecting, gatekeeping, and curating the distribution and circulation of what has come to be generically called 'content' [...]. As platformization integrates previously discrete activities, the boundaries between platforms and public infrastructures have become increasingly porous, platforms are more and more a part of our everyday lives. (Zhang and Negus 2021, pp. 544–45)

Several studies have already highlighted how logistical-informational networks operating behind platforms increasingly penetrate the everyday consumption practices of users, resulting in new power structures, aesthetics, and ultimately new business models through progressive processes of market integration and concentration (Jansson 2023; Morrow *et al.* 2022). On the reception side, more recent works indicate that music listeners can experience flow even in TikTok videos, which are greatly shortened in time and form, as well as when streaming music in playlists on platforms, moving away from a previous focus on the pop single (Loepthien 2023). Meaning is actively created in these contexts. Conversely, research focused on the relatively new phenomenon of 'cultural omnivores' and cultural hybridity in mainstream music productions, with an emphasis on users, adopts a more critical perspective: Omnivores are typically playlist listeners who exhibit increasingly less differentiated tastes in preferred genres or artists. In these analyses, platforms and formats such as podcasts are recognised as new cultural intermediaries with significant influence. Moreover, Marxist critiques of the music industry are evident in these analyses, where attention is given primarily to new symbolic varieties of capital while simultaneously identifying familiar hegemonic models in platformisation (Barna 2020).

Several studies have shown that de-intermediation – the ability of an economic entity to separate individual tasks or functions from a value chain or network and manage them independently – has led to restructuring in the field of cultural industries (Nieborg and Poell 2018; van Dijck *et al.* 2018). Technologies such as user interfaces, network structures, and algorithms are primarily employed to reformulate cultural production accordingly (Benghozi and Paris 2016; Duffy *et al.* 2019; Magaudda and Solaroli 2020). However, it is questionable to what extent the structural changes associated with this phenomenon truly have long-term effects or whether some of the anticipated changes are merely products of myth. As Zhang and Negus (2024) have shown for the Sinophone popular music industry, platforms even have the ability to become intermediaries themselves, as their staff now carry out the work that planners at labels did in the 1980s and 1990s.

Research on the relationships between musical creativity, music production and distribution, and the platforms involved is still lacking. While older works on the political economy of streaming exist (Scherzinger 2019), there are only a few references to new hegemonies and the impact of recommendation algorithms on creative processes. However, convincing empirical data is absent to support the often-pointed descriptions of 'algorithmic songwriters' (Labarca 2021).

In the taxonomy proposed by Dolata and Schrape (2023, p. 350), the platforms significant for songwriting can be categorised into social spaces (such as Instagram, TikTok, and Zoom) and consumption spaces (such as Spotify and Splice). These social and consumption spaces permeate all stages of the songwriting process, as well as during reception. However, this does not imply that every platform must integrate every songwriting process, or vice versa. Depending on the services offered and the range of functions, only specific processes may hold importance. For instance, while Spotify plays a key role before, during, and after the writing process in the areas of research, reference, production, optimisation, and monetisation of the product, specialised platforms like Splice and Zoom are particularly important

during the writing phase. Conversely, platforms like Instagram and TikTok can also play significant roles in preparing, executing, and monetising the songwriting process.

Research in music education even attributes distinct roles to these platforms, significantly influencing the reconstructed processes of songwriting in the amateur sector: 'Three entangled actors become effective: the short video format of the platform, the recommendation algorithm, and the TikTok community as co-author in creative practices' (Haenisch *et al.* 2023, p. 305). New standards have emerged from these conditions and transformations. These standards primarily emphasise the roles of social media and streaming services as central intermediaries in the dynamic between experience and attention economies. The extent to which these standards have also transformed songwriting as a collaborative creative process gives rise to various myths and serves as the starting point of this article.

4. Sampling and method

The following analysis is based on semi-structured interviews and supplemented by ethnographic observations from three industry-organised songwriting camps. These camps were structured either as 'writing with an artist' (Eurovision Song Contest (ESC), hip-hop/pop/electronic dance music (EDM)) or 'writing for an artist' (German Schlager). The interviews were conducted between March 2023 and August 2024. The documented camps took place between May and September 2024.

The interview dataset consists of twenty-five interviews featuring relevant statements selected from a total of forty-four interviews (twenty-nine male and fifteen female). This 2:1 gender ratio is consistent throughout the entire sample, on both the German and the UK sides. The striking gender disproportion regarding the interviewees is not, however, to be regarded as a peculiarity of sampling, but rather concerns a peculiarity of the Western popular music industry in general, which is still heavily male-dominated. According to Ying Zhen (2023), women in the United States make up only one-third (35%) of the population of musicians, based on a dataset of 263,438 musicians collected by the American Community Survey (ACS). Zhen and ACS make a differentiation between classical and popular musicians. Despite this, for English-speaking countries in general, as well as German-speaking countries, no comparable data in terms of representativeness are available so far. However, the proportion of women in major British and German music-specific organisations may also indicate a similar imbalance, suggesting that the imbalance is even more pronounced here. For example, in 2016, only 15% of the members of the British Performance Rights Organisation (PRO) Performing Right Society (PRS) were women (Gross 2016). In one of the interviews in her study, Melanie Ptatscheck (2024, pp. 303–4) confronts a member of the German Association of Songwriters (VERSO) with the observation that of the 135 registered members, only 20 could be read as female based on their names, which also represents a quota of only 15%. She also reveals that the male networks that result from that perpetuate their structures by applying (unconscious) gender-homomorphic recruiting strategies. In the meantime, however, VERSO appears not only to have grown even more significantly, but the proportion of women has also nearly doubled. Even though progress has been made in this regard also with VERSO having a female co-chair, we still cannot speak of parity here either. The German Music Information Centre (MIZ) reports that in 2019, of the 6,280 registered freelance musicians in the field of popular music (excluding jazz) in the German Artists' Social Security Fund (KSK), only 800 (13%) were female (Melodiva 2019). There are also other studies indicating a gender disproportion in terms of female authorship in German Top-100 single charts, membership of the German PRO Gema, and female musicians performing at music festivals (Schäfer 2022), as well as perceived and experienced gender-specific inequality of opportunities (Keychange 2024). Against this background, the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285 Published online by Cambridge University Press

apparent gender imbalance of the sample is relativised to a realistic reflection of the current gender reality in the music industry.

The corpus of forty-four interviews includes thirty-two interviews from the German-speaking region, encompassing Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (indicated by the prefix 'DACH' in quotations). Additionally, there are seven interviews from the United Kingdom (abbreviated as 'UK'), three from Australia ('AU'), and two from the United States ('US'). These data were collected as part of the UK partner project.

The interviews were conducted with A&R managers, label and publishing house owners, camp organisers from collecting societies, editors at publishing houses, songwriters, session producers, camp conveners, and participants. Some interview participants hold hybrid roles; for example, they may be both participants and conveners/organisers or remain artistically active as songwriters and/or producers while also being label/publisher owners or representatives. All songwriting interviewees are commercially successful in their respective fields. Among them are award-winning artists and songwriters experienced in the ESC, all of them ranging from pop, urban, and EDM to Schlager. The interviews also included representatives of PROs, along with a creative director from the synchronisation sector. The interviews were conducted via both in-person and video conferences, and they were recorded, transcribed, and subsequently returned to the interviewees for communicative validation or pseudonymised upfront. The average duration is 71 minutes. Ethnographic data were also collected in the form of field diaries, notes, and memos. All data have been pseudonymised and handled in accordance with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2015) through an iterative process of coding and sampling. This approach allowed for the continuous development and deepening of emerging topics and new areas of interest as new interview data were collected. Interviewees were categorised into three areas:

(1) artists (ART),
(2) business (BUS), and
(3) education (EDU).

Thus, the interview code for each interview consists of the region and the aforementioned categorisation, as well as an abbreviation for gender, whereby male (m) and female (f) could be distinguished here.

For those with hybrid roles, they were assigned to the area most central to the research project. In consultation with the interviewees, an assignment to the binary gender category was made. However, this served mainly to promote diversity during the sampling of participants.

All interview data are stored and analysed together in a MaxQDA file, which includes paragraph numbers in the transcripts. These paragraph numbers are referenced below as positions within the interviews. The research team held regular coding sessions throughout the analysis process to discuss varying interests, evaluation strategies, data collection methods, and preliminary findings from the United Kingdom and Germany.

All quotes from DACH interviews with non-English interviewees were translated to make it easier for readers. This does not apply to DACH-ART11, who is an English native speaker with permanent residence in Germany.

5. Standard 1: Feed the beast

Spotify's influence on songwriting should not be underestimated (Hesmondhalgh 2021; Labarca 2021). According to the interviewees, collaborative songwriting is becoming increasingly important for contemporary songwriters, largely due to Spotify's role and its impact on the music industry.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> Everybody wants to work with new people all the time because we also have a workload these days of songs that must be released to somehow feed this Spotify juggernaut so that it is satisfied. You have to release constantly these days. A lot of people just say, "Oh my God, how am I supposed to conjure up a whole album here in a month or two?" Yes, sure, co-write. Let's do some kind of camp with some writers. Boom. And then, within a week, you have an album to work with. (DACH-ART05m, pos. 24)

The increased frequency of songwriting camps aligns with the music industry's general drive to accelerate and diversify processes, which is viewed critically:

> Set ups change and budgets have changed to rule this kind of thing, and I think a lot more at the whim of, the labels are a lot more at the whim of immediacy and Spotify and the falsehood of streaming, basically. Not falsehood of it. But yes, The Emperor's New Clothes sort of with that. (DACH-ART11m, pos. 70)

But the reason for the increasing output of new music is economic. It has become more difficult to earn money as a songwriter (DACH-ART02m, pos. 42). This situation is related to the changed royalty structure following the transition from physical media to streaming (Towse 2020). As a result, songwriters face an increased workload:

> Because of the current situation with Spotify, the royalties are not as lucrative as they were in the days of CDs. In other words, the amount of money is a lot less. And you have to write a lot more to somehow reach a level of income that you can really live on. (DACH-ART05m, pos. 90)

Consequently, songwriters are now seeking master points to enhance their share of the royalties (DACH-ART02m, pos. 38, 162). However, due to the oligopoly of major companies, songwriters remain vulnerable to their negotiating power: 'Whenever the author share on Spotify increases, the master share becomes smaller, and you can't really negate these conflicts of interest among the big publishers or major record companies]' (DACH-BUS05m, pos. 33).

This situation makes songwriting partnerships more appealing, as collaborations between established artists can reach broader consumer groups. While collaborations could be very beneficial – such as enhancing a song's success through co-branding (Ordanini *et al.* 2018) – they seem to be becoming increasingly challenging, according to an A&R representative from a medium-sized, integrated publisher-label company:

> Collaborations, in addition to all the things you see out there, are as much about the artistic aspects as they are about the politics. It rarely happens smoothly that two people write together in a session, and then a song emerges that works for both profiles. You don't just say, "Hey, we both benefit from this; you get my fan base and vice versa". Typically, it doesn't happen that way. Technically, it's also complicated; by the time the EP is delivered, you'd have to squeeze the song in somewhere, which might not fit with the overall campaign planning or the story you want to tell. (DACH-BUS10m, pos. 81)

Spotify is also the tool that songwriters and session producers use to prepare for writing by listening to the latest releases from the artists they are writing for or with. From this information, sketches are sometimes created to take into the writing session. At the observed songwriting camps, participants often sent each other links to Spotify playlists or the respective artist's page via WhatsApp at the beginning of a writing session to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reference songs. Some artists have even been criticised for replacing the descriptive text of a brief for a write with the current most successful tracks on Spotify. One songwriter mentioned, 'I always find that a little silly because they could just as easily write, "Write a song that makes me money"' (DACH-BUS15m, pos. 37).

Additionally, during a German Schlager camp, it was evident that Spotify served as an important reference tool to circumvent the obvious. One artist described himself as 'commercially cool' and stated he wanted 'hits, hits, hits', which the writers perceived negatively in subsequent sessions. They noted, for instance, that the artist had a low number of monthly listeners on Spotify and pointed out that his last single had also underperformed. One team even questioned the artist's integrity, arguing that many songs from his recent album borrowed too heavily from successful hits of previous decades. They played the artist's song on Spotify alongside the original to illustrate this point. Spotify allowed for instantaneous verification of these concerns, which would have required more effort or shared specialised knowledge among all parties without streaming platforms.

Throughout all the observed songwriting camps, Spotify was frequently utilised for another purpose during writing sessions. At various points in discussions, reference songs were accessed and listened to on Spotify to clarify ideas or provide emphasis. Bennett (2014, p. 228) has noted that the suspicion of plagiarism can serve as a veto reason for a songwriting idea during the writing process, which was confirmed by the ethnographies conducted. As already observed by Bennett, these vetoes often manifested as 'proposing alternatives' (Bennett 2014, p. 234). The team's internal rejection of the artist in the Schlager camps was an exception, as it only pertained to the completed songs prior to the camp. The way the songwriters interacted with each other mirrored the behaviour noted in Bennett's observations. For young artists, Spotify necessitates the immediate establishment of a portfolio of songs rather than releasing them gradually. This approach requires a higher initial investment, such as hiring more successful songwriters. One underlying reason for this is economic in nature and somewhat tautological:

> You have to create more content on Spotify, because [...] of course I would promote a song as a single, but with that song, I would also release six other songs. You don't have to make a big deal about it; rather, these songs should have a consistent style and vibe, so that fans who come to your Spotify page, because they like the single, can already hear more of your music, because that also generates revenue. (DACH-ART05m, pos. 28)

Simultaneously, having a rich portfolio of songs allows for greater listener engagement, ultimately converting listeners into fans:

> So, the more they can listen to, the greater the chance they have of becoming a fan. When you hear a song, you might listen to it once, then visit the Spotify page and listen to that song 1, 2, 3, or 4 times, and then you're gone. But if you have 6, 10, or even 100 songs available, they're more likely to become a fan because they can explore and enjoy more of your music. [...] They might even share it with their friends. (DACH-ART05m, pos. 28)

From a strategic standpoint, the portfolio and the listener numbers generated from it become essential factors in converting this development into live performances or securing record deals:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> If you're not fully established in the business yet, you also have significantly more opportunities, for example, with concert promoters and bookers. When they visit your page and see: "Wow, [...] this artist has already released ten or 20 songs. They can actually go on tour". [...] Record companies are also more interested because they can assess: "Okay, how is all this stuff developing?" (DACH-ART05m, pos. 28)

However, this conversion ratio becomes problematic when an artist's song ends up on the 'wrong' playlists, and streaming numbers do not stem from an engaged fanbase.

> There's a problem with Spotify. For artists with 10 million or 20 million streams, it is commonplace that they don't play gigs, and nobody shows up because they lack a fanbase. Their streams are reaching, you know, random shops or whatever. (DACH-ART11m, pos. 232)

Prey (2020) discusses how Spotify channels its platform power as an intermediary between the music market, the advertising market, and the finance market, leveraging its 'curational power' – though not without friction. Despite the profitability of playlists, there are conflicting interests among the markets involved, which can adversely affect the playlists themselves. A rather unfortunate consequence of this development is Spotify's employment of 'fake artists'. To minimise the royalties paid to publishers and labels, Spotify has hired its own songwriters to create royalty-free music for mood playlists (Prey *et al.* 2020, p. 86).

From an aesthetic point of view, playlists can also pose challenges for songwriters. One songwriter notes that especially in pop music co-writes, there is a risk of focusing too much on getting onto Spotify playlists, leading to the creation of 'generic music' that conforms to playlist conventions. 'But even this four-chord song needs something unique to have an identity and a signature' (DACH-ART01f, pos. 28).

Conversely, playlists can facilitate an artist's creative process. One interviewee describes self-curated playlists featuring the music of the artist they wish to collaborate with – along with thematic playlists – as 'a good trigger', serving as background music for breaks and lunches during songwriting camps (US-ART19m, pos. 36). He particularly highlights the 'billions club' playlist on Spotify, which includes only songs with at least 1 billion streams. Furthermore, Spotify has become the production standard in the sync sector to avoid creating merely 'production music', paralleling the status of playlist music as just individual background music.

In summary, Spotify's influence is evident in the social dynamics of songwriting camps and the increase in collaborations. While it serves as a useful reference tool, concerns have emerged regarding the pressure for constant releases, the shifting royalty structures, and the prevalence of generic music. Additionally, the transition from streaming success to building engaged fan bases and live performances presents further challenges in the modern music landscape.

6. Standard 2: Social media

Social media repeatedly emerges in the interviews as a crucial tool intended to create viral moments. Prey (2020) demonstrates how Spotify promoted playlists, albums, and songs using Twitter to actively influence user listening behaviour. Very early in the production chain, prior to actual distribution (Wikström 2020, pp. 164–73), the extensive utilisation of social media starts with publishing companies. Their strategy appears to be twofold: communicating internally within the music industry and, indirectly, about the artists for whom they are writing, targeting the intended audience. In this regard, Wickström's (2021) assertion that 'the publishing segment [...] has almost no direct contact with the music

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285 Published online by Cambridge University Press

audience' (p. 62) is not incorrect, as it reflects more of a multiplier effect for the participating writers and artists. This is particularly evident in the context of songwriting camps.

On the one hand, communication about songwriting camps is aimed at their own writers. One publisher articulated:

> The good vibes that we would be putting out as a publisher, as far as like: "We're doing this for you. We do this for our writers, we do this to help get everyone to that next level". And then you have your Instagram content and moments from the camp as well. I look at it as a no-brainer. And it also doesn't mean you need to spend $10,000, to do a camp. I just like to put these on where it's a unique place. It's done properly. (US-ART19m, pos. 76)

On the other hand, visibility on social media enhances the reputation of the camp's organiser within the broader music industry. According to the Head of Operations at an international publisher with a branch in Germany, camps set against 'Instagrammable' backdrops or featuring top-tier artists help publishers build a symbolic reputation in the music industry, thereby increasing the company's attractiveness to writers:

> It makes us a much more appealing partner for potential signings compared to other publishers who may hold these camps more frequently, but don't communicate them as well to the outside world via social media. Stories emerge from an [anonymous] camp where the entire music industry is talking about it. For instance, if we manage to have an [iconic German artist] attend our camp – someone every writer in Germany would love to work with – then we'll likely receive 25 to 30 phone calls afterward from others asking, [...] "Can we send one of our writers or a producer next time? We would be willing to contribute to the camp's costs". And yes, we love that, and it creates a ripple effect, prompting inquiries from writers at other publishers: "Hey, why can't my publisher do something like this for me?" (DACH-BUS08m, pos. 20)

As previously mentioned, the financing of the camp should not be underestimated when it comes to communication about the camp. An important additional source of income for camps is sponsorship, such as for food, drinks, and musical instruments. Sponsors hope to gain visibility through their contributions:

> Sponsors expect that stories and other content will include their products, whether it's drinks or food on the table. Ultimately, it's just a marketing strategy for these companies. A company like Red Bull already sponsors many events in the creative and music fields. Other beverage companies do something similar, seeking visibility at the camp, since it reflects well for them to sponsor a songwriting camp featuring artist XY. (DACH-BUS09m, pos. 116)

Consequently, it is not surprising that some publishers who view their songwriting camp business primarily as hosting online camps – with the sterile grid look of Zoom – disagree on the importance of social media, stating, '[b]ecause a lot of what we're doing is behind the scenes, to be honest' (DACH-ART15m, pos. 68).

However, it is common for songwriting camps to create two Dropbox folders: one for the songs and another for social media content. This setup allows participants to gain an overall view of the social media material, which they would not have otherwise, and helps them develop a personal marketing strategy:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> If someone's taking photos or videos, they'll just upload them to one social media Dropbox and feel free to share. Because I could be doing a piano part here and someone's filming me. And instead of just texting me the video, they'll just put it up on Dropbox. So, it's like a communal kind of share. Someone will capture great content of the entire group. And it's just easy to share it with everyone on one Dropbox. (US-ART19m, pos. 104)

Depending on the organiser of the camp and the general camp policy, the corresponding content was sometimes produced in ritualised formats. At the Schlager camp, for example, the artist moved from group to group at the beginning of the writing sessions, having his picture taken with each respective writing team. At an ESC camp, a staff member changed constantly between the writing rooms specifically for content production and sometimes interrupted the sessions for group pictures. Since these were writing sessions for ESC entries, special rules applied. For instance, according to the European Broadcasting Union regulations for ESC 2024, songs and parts of songs intended for participation must be 'original and must not have been released and/or publicly performed in part or in full before 1 September 2023 (the "release date")'.[2] These rules will be adjusted accordingly each subsequent year, with the release lock updated. If parts or the whole song are released in whole or in part before September 1, 'the song would be dead for ESC' (BUS14f, pos. 162).

In another observed camp, however, social media content was only produced during breaks. For this purpose, a sponsored delivery of 'fun instruments' like Otamatones from a German online music instrument retailer was staged in exchange for high-quality gear for creatives. At this camp, social media even became a disruptive factor for ethnography, leading to its cancellation due to a leak. Although the leak was not caused by the ethnographer, the trust between the songwriters and external attendees was permanently damaged.

During writing sessions, participants also utilise social media for external communication. Many of the observed writing sessions began with participants following each other on Instagram. Young artists at an ESC camp felt encouraged to post content during the writing sessions. It was noticeable that all sessions were very intensive, with only a few short breaks. However, these sessions were sometimes completely interrupted by social media breaks. These breaks were used exclusively by the artists, some of whom posted unrelated stories. One artist had a special obligation in this regard, as she had recently achieved a moderate reach as a micro-influencer and, accordingly, faced high posting pressure. The extent to which influencers are generally under constant pressure to post and adapt to the requirements and changes of platform infrastructures has been illustrated by Arriagada and Ibáñez (2020) in their study of Chilean fashion influencers. Stress therefore arises from interruptions to self-marketing tasks. Their occurrence can be seen as a reference to

> new regimes of visibility, where understanding and navigating algorithmic recommendations and digital platform curation is found to be important to succeed, along with the necessity of conforming to normative forms of self-expression and engagement. (Olaussen 2024)

The assessment of the reach of songwriters and producers compared to artists among the interviewees is not entirely clear. While a German songwriter active in Asia noted, 'I'm not a big name on social media, especially not as a songwriter' (DACH-ART10f, pos. 201), the A&R representative from a major publisher mentioned that songwriters and producers now have

[2] https://eurovision.tv/about/rules (accessed 27 September 2024).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285 Published online by Cambridge University Press

good reach (DACH-BUS09m, pos. 116). However, for another producer with several eight- to nine-digit streams on Spotify, the quality of followers particularly matters. He connects this to a certain social market value within the songwriter community:

> Yes, well, of course you always post where you're going somewhere great. It may sound a bit harsh, but I do think there is a kind of social value in the songwriting scene, a kind of social market value. And if some cool A&R follows you and sees that you're at a different songwriting camp every week and your life is just sunshine and roses, then I do think that it has a kind of halo effect, a radiance that makes them think that you're a better songwriter per se. It's just a lot of self-promotion, a lot of outward focus. I think it's kind of important to be active and post something at least once in a while. (DACH-ART14m, pos. 379)

This is linked to the fundamental realisation that songwriting camps, in particular, not only are organised in an output-oriented manner but also serve as an important networking opportunity for songwriters. This aspect goes beyond the creative benefits of increased heterogeneity and diversity within one's writing network (Herbst *et al.* 2024; Nasta *et al.* 2016). It also encompasses the economic and symbolic advantages that arise from participation. As one interviewee noted,

> even if nothing comes of it, people can say on their Instagram stories and in the bar: "Oh, look, I was in the running for *artist* too". The nice thing is that we live in a world where most people don't ask, "And what about the product?" They just say, "Super cool that you did that". In that moment, it's just the watered-down version of "I made a cut at *artist*", then it's "at least I went to the camp". (DACH-BUS15m, pos. 41)

This symbolic capital is particularly significant, given that songwriters are aware that publishers use social media as a scouting and communication tool. Many interviewees confirmed that their communications today primarily occur via social media, particularly Instagram, which is also used to seek potential collaborations among songwriters. Only official communications, such as those regarding contractual conditions, are still handled via email. Facebook appears to play a diminishing role; during an ethnography, one songwriter pejoratively referred to it as a 'boomer medium'.

Our data reveal that social media is integral to the modern music industry, facilitating communication, marketing, scouting, and networking. Songwriting camps serve as both creative spaces and networking opportunities, cultivating symbolic capital that is amplified through social media. This highlights the intricate dynamics of audience engagement, follower quality, and platform choice within the industry.

7. Myth 1: Self-marketing substitutes old industry practices

The first myth we address concerns the notion that self-marketing through social media could completely replace established players in the music industry. Jones (2021) demonstrates that in DIY music scenes, which have a long history of deviation from cultural hegemonic structures, the neoliberal nature of social media actors plays a problematic role. Furthermore, Haynes and Marshall (2018) argue that for independent artists signed to independent labels, the benefits of social media for career development have often been overstated.

In the Dutch music industry, Everts *et al.* (2021) found that young artists invest approximately 60% of their working time in entrepreneurial tasks. However, these artists differ in the core values that guide their actions. Everts *et al.* (2021, pp. 107–10) categorise these

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285 Published online by Cambridge University Press

values into 'Pop as an Art', 'Pop as a Business', and 'Pop as a Hobby'. Notably, musicians who align with the value of 'Pop as a Business' tend to hold a strong belief 'that they themselves are responsible for creating their success' (Everts *et al.* 2021, p. 109).

Consequently, the role of publishers has evolved from being merely a source of advances to becoming service providers that offer tailored services for artists. The industry has shifted towards requiring speed in creative work and talent discovery, as well as attractive deal constructs that create genuine spaces for enabling songs and collaborations. As one A&R from an independent publisher noted, 'In the past, a publisher served more like a bank where you went to get an advance. Today, speed in the creative process and in discovering talent is crucial' (DACH-BUS08m, pos. 10).

This perspective contrasts with that of an A&R from a major publisher, who emphasises the role of the publisher as a mere back office for artists:

> Artists are now much more autonomous than they used to be. In the past, they depended on connections, but social media has changed that. With more and more activities happening in Berlin, artists are already well-networked with one another, and exciting things are happening. (DACH-BUS09m, pos. 124)

Interestingly, Everts *et al.* (2021, p. 105) found low levels of social media activity among the young artists researched in their study. However, the extent to which this relates to their success remains unexplored. At least among the songwriters in our study, it can be concluded that self-marketing on common platforms rarely, if ever, reaches the level of nano- or micro-influencers. However, this does not mean that publishers or labels will now provide special assistance, especially during the early stages of an artist's career. Major publishers and labels tend to have a relatively poor mentoring ratio relative to the number of artists and songwriters they represent. The statement made by the major publisher's A&R should be understood in this context. Furthermore, as demonstrated earlier, publishers and labels primarily utilise social media to scout talent rather than to support their existing artists.

Nonetheless, the need for publishers and labels persists, largely due to the problematic billing practices of streaming services. A songwriter encapsulates her feelings on this issue, stating, 'I mean, I have a management team, I have lawyers, and the publisher. I also rely on the publisher to ensure that all royalties are collected. But personally, I don't really notice this. Unfortunately, I have to trust them' (DACH-ART10f, pos. 172–73).

Independent publishers, in particular, emphasise accurate billing and the organisation of songwriting sessions as their core responsibilities:

> For us, it is essential to maintain clean administration and billing, while remaining responsive to the creative side at all times. We organise sessions and, if necessary, ensure that songs not used for an artist's project are offered to external acts if there are promising combinations and exciting targets for them. (BUS10m, pos. 17)

In line with this, the founder of another independent publisher characterises his company's services as 'modular' (DACH-BUS15m, pos. 5). This means that rather than offering standard products and uniform contracts, they provide tailor-made solutions. While it is essential to recognise that such statements may also be part of the typical marketing strategy of these companies, the current role of publishers as intermediaries for billing and songwriting facilitation cannot be dismissed.

A former vice president of a leading imprint at a major label offers another perspective that critiques the standard use of social media in the industry. He argues that social media no longer fosters genuine connections between audiences and artists:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> It's actually just profiles communicating with each other, not real people, and two needs are somehow getting lost in the shuffle: the fan's need for genuine participation and the artist's need for direct feedback from followers who are interested in their work instead of merely engaging out of pop-cultural or voyeuristic interest. (DACH-BUS05m, pos. 21)

He identifies a significant marketing challenge on social media, noting that platforms no longer differentiate between followers and true fans. This culminates in the troubling issue that artist content is given equal weight to other types of content.

> If the algorithm is addressing only a portion of the followers, it no longer works. Today, there are hardly any platforms where you can reasonably look up an artist's tour schedule. The homepage, of course, is no longer maintained in that way. Not every artist – especially not younger ones – has a homepage anymore. This leads to situations where, for instance, you announce a tour that sells out, and then four or five weeks later, fans contact you asking, 'When are you coming on tour?' You realize that they simply haven't been informed; they haven't noticed. This occurs because the algorithm can't distinguish between a fan and a follower. This creates a problem. (DACH-BUS05m, pos. 21)

The extent to which Spotify has recently adopted this function by specifying tour dates remains to be investigated. So far, Spotify's transition to what is termed the 'auxiliary service phase' has only been examined in relation to podcasts, vodcasts, and audiobooks (Kiberg and Spilker 2023).

For the interviewee who represents the business side, it is clear that social media is not the right ecosystem for music due to the lack of gatekeepers to filter content. However, he believes this issue does not stem from a desire to restore the old industry, which he sees as an inglorious amalgamation of PROs and major company oligopolies; rather, it is linked to the self-interests of social media companies. These companies do not promote art; instead, they aim to sell personalised advertising (Dolata and Schrape 2023, p. 351). Accordingly, he points out that it is no secret among music industry executives that the measurement of success on social media does not reflect reality:

> The problem, of course, is that when I evaluate the platform to which I have previously given money for advertising, if the efficiency measurement is based on data I have not collected myself but the company behind the platform, then... yes, that is certainly the case – it is platform economics [...]. This data is also partly manipulated, in the sense that it is obscured by a lot of fuss and minutiae. At the end of the day, a marketer can see whether their sales have increased during the campaign period and can measure that after the campaign ends. However, the data that Facebook and Google provide in this case is very questionable. But everyone knows this, and everyone plays along because it remains the most effective tool. (DACH-BUS05m, pos. 87–89)

Ultimately, this perception emphasises that intermediaries must genuinely act as advocates for the artists.

8. Myth 2: It's all about TikTokability and conversion

Managing music promotion on TikTok presents unique challenges. Over the past few years, TikTok has emerged as a significant force in the music industry, fundamentally changing how hits are produced and marketed (Cirisano 2020). Research by Watson *et al.* (2023)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285 Published online by Cambridge University Press

demonstrates a correlation between an artist's follower count and the royalties they receive from streaming. Consequently, TikTok is increasingly used to test musical hooks and toplines due to its instant feedback capabilities, according to a major publisher A&R:

> There are many who create song sketches first. They develop a beat and design a topline for it. In this particular artist's case, he starts with the hooks, then considers which one he prefers before testing it on TikTok to gauge its reception. After that, he continues working on the song. [...] Sometimes the quality isn't ideal, but it's sufficient to determine whether the song resonates with audiences. (DACH-BUS09m, pos. 36)

For songwriters who primarily work as topliners, TikTok's strength lies in its role as a zeitgeist medium:

> That's why TikTok is so immediate and successful; you can create a chorus, post it on TikTok, and see if it resonates. Are many people engaging with it? That's a sign for you: "Ah, okay, this topic might currently resonate with people, and I can finalize the song". (DACH-ART05m, pos. 104)

He also describes artist careers that have developed directly from TikTok successes: 'Some artists wrote these four lines and are now playing at major festivals. They built entire careers off just those four lines or one viral song on TikTok' (DACH-ART05m, pos. 28). Additionally, TikTok is now organising its own songwriting camps to generate content,[3] likely influenced by its reliance on platform success and relationships with major labels. This culminated in tensions between TikTok and Universal Music Group.[4] Although such practices have likely been in place for some time, an Australian Prudential Regulation Authority representative confirmed:

> In the middle of last year, we did a writing camp with TikTok. It was the first time that we collaborated with TikTok. And that was more of a commercial arrangement where we were both invited to a conference in South Australia. So, we got together and thought: "Well, it's a great opportunity. We're both there. We should put something on together". So sometimes we partner in that way as well. (AU-BUS17m, pos. 100)

Some interviewees have questioned that platforms like TikTok produce disintermediation (Yuan 2024). Recently, it has been observed that TikTok may not function as effectively as it once did as a disintermediation agent. A producer associated with an established German 'urban' music publisher and label notes that the company's business model must be adapted accordingly. Previously, the company had specialised primarily in TikTok artists for the German and European 'urban' market:

> I think they're moving away from the temptation to do that a bit, because TikTok in general hasn't been such a good benchmark anymore. Some songs have an extremely high number of creations, but then not as many streams as they used to. That means you can't calculate it as well as before. (DACH-ART04m, pos. 27)

This sentiment is echoed by the A&R representative of another independent publisher-label company:

[3] https://www.tiktok.com/discover/how-to-join-a-songwriting-camp (accessed 27 September 2024).

[4] https://www.musicbusinessworldwide.com/confirmed-all-of-universal-music-groups-music-will-be-removed-by-tiktok-in-the-coming-days/ (accessed 27 September 2024).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> For me as a music manager, it doesn't matter if someone has a million followers on TikTok, because that has to be transferred to Spotify, which is incredibly difficult for a lot of people. The days of someone being exciting just because they're on TikTok are over, and that's a good thing. (DACH-BUS10m, pos. 130)

A creative director from an advertising music company, who was previously signed to a major label in the pop sector and had been groomed for TikTok appeal, also questions why A&Rs fail to grasp the platform's intrinsic logic and attempt to generalise individual successes across a broader population of artists:

> Sorry to say it like that, but it really annoyed me that somehow the marketing department said "Yes, Nina Chuba, Nina Chuba; that broke on TikTok". And then I was like, "Yes, but look how the song broke". That wasn't a Nina Chuba video. That was a video by a 14- or 15-year-old who was just using the song. It was just the zeitgeist of the moment. You can't plan that. (DACH-BUS16m, pos. 112)

For this artist, this illustrates the lack of imagination among major label A&Rs:

> Always this A&R talk: "Yes, you must ensure that you write songs that are TikTok-compatible during songwriting camps or when you're writing in sessions". And then I ask: "What are TikTok-compatible songs?" "Yes, a cool, strong hook that you can use in different contexts. Like a drop, a transition that's kind of fun and energetic. And a quiet and loud part". Applause. So, a hook that I can remember. Yes, every pop song ever. This is not TikTokable. This is just a good song. (DACH-BUS16m, pos. 112)

He underpins the unpredictability of success with his own experiences from another artist's project. Organic spikes in the streams of one song resulted from its random virality within beach videos and regular remixes by a YouTube creator. It was this unique combination that drove success for that particular song rather than an abstract notion of TikTokability (DACH-BUS16m, pos. 112). As a result, he questions why parts of the music industry still prioritise TikTok when it fails to convert into Spotify streams (DACH-BUS16m, pos. 112). He concludes that the easiest way to succeed on TikTok is to first produce relevant musical content. He cites Madonna as an example, noting that she has followers across every platform because she is already famous (DACH-BUS16m, pos. 114).

Another issue regarding TikTok is the challenge for songwriters to monetise their work. This concern arises from the practice of posting hooks and toplines, as mentioned earlier. For songwriters and session producers, this practice can devalue their product since parts of the song become accessible before the official release. Consequently, artists should always receive compensation:

> A pitch song intended solely for pitching should never be released, because why would Lady Gaga choose it if it's already available on the internet? The song's value diminishes. I expect artists to seek permission first, and I would ask for a promise of release in return. Even if they say they've released it but don't want it anymore, why should another artist want it if it's already somehow devalued? (DACH-ART14m, pos. 381)

9. Concluding thoughts

This article deals with recent developments in the context of the standardisation and formatting of popular music in the environment of the currently influential platform economies. It was assumed that this has a serious impact on the creative processes and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the resulting products of music creation and distribution. Case studies were analysed on the basis of our own empirical data to verify these.

The interviews and ethnographies have shown that contemporary songwriting is influenced by a wide variety of platforms and services: Spotify has a significant impact on the music industry and songwriting. The platform necessitates the constant release of new music to meet its streaming requirements. This continuous production has altered the way songwriters collaborate, leading to more teamwork and the institutionalisation of songwriting camps. Collaborations between artists can also expand their audience reach and generate higher royalties for songwriters.

Social media, especially Instagram, also plays a crucial role in the music industry and songwriting. Publishing companies utilise these platforms to communicate with songwriters and artists, as well as to promote their songwriting camps. These camps are often funded by sponsors who expect visibility on social media in return. Additionally, artists may require breaks during intensive songwriting sessions to post their own content regularly. Much of the communication among artists occurs via social media, facilitating potential collaborations. The exchange on social media is also vital for scouting and communication between songwriters and publishers, enhancing the symbolic capital of songwriters.

However, myths persist in various sub-areas of the creative collective and the music industry. Through our data and insights into the processes and relationships among individuals, some myths can be understood in a more nuanced way and classified within the contexts of songwriting and creative work. Although the origins of these myths are not always clear, the interests and themes of the post-global music industry of the twenty-first century are often evident within them.

Our research has demonstrated that self-promotion via social media cannot entirely supplement established actors in the music industry. Publishers and labels remain crucial, particularly as a counterbalance to the flawed accounting practices of streaming services. Publishers have thus evolved from 'banks' to service providers offering bespoke solutions for artists and songwriters.

However, these metaphors are not always unambiguous. This becomes evident when considering that contracts with publishers transfer exclusive rights to trade in the created artefacts for several years, thereby removing them from direct exploitation by the creatives and thus preventing the generation of direct capital. A further challenge arises from the fact that artists can decide on their own position in dealing with the collaboratively created productions: on the one hand, they can use publishers to maintain an overview and ultimately rely on their networks. But in doing so, they enter into a financial dependency. Alternatively, they can take on these tasks of self-organisation and bookkeeping themselves, engaging in a form of self-empowerment within the platform economies of the twenty-first century.

Regarding the second myth, it has been shown that success on TikTok does not necessarily translate into streaming success. It even appears that this conversion is becoming increasingly difficult. This is particularly problematic in that hooks and toplines tested on TikTok may, in the worst case, diminish value for songwriters prior to an official release.

Overall, the presented case studies and analyses have revealed a complex network of dependencies between new and established intermediaries and their specific agencies. Many songwriting practices today are interwoven with various platforms. Simple answers to questions about the impact on the quality of productions or assumptions about marketability and commerciality, however, cannot be provided.

Our contribution raises awareness of the effects of platforms on the working practices of songwriters. Simultaneously, it demonstrates the complex interactions between platform-related marketing, myths, and songwriting realities.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285 Published online by Cambridge University Press

References

Adorno, T.W., and Simpson, G. 1941. 'On popular music', *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 9, pp. 17–48

Arriagada, A., and Ibáñez, F. 2020. '"You need at least one picture daily, if not, you're dead": content creators and platform evolution in the social media ecology', *Social Media + Society*, 6, pp. 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120944624

Attali, J. 1985. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press)

Barna, E. 2020. 'The relentless rise of the poptimist omnivore: taste, symbolic power, and the digitization of the music industries', in *Popular Music, Technology, and the Changing Media Ecosystem: From Cassettes to Stream*, ed. T. Tofalvy and E. Barna (Cham, Springer), pp. 79–95

Benghozi, P.-J., and Paris, T. 2016. 'The cultural economy in the digital age: a revolution in intermediation?', *City, Culture and Society*, 7, pp. 75–80. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ccs.2015.12.005

Bennett, J. 2011. 'Collaborative songwriting: the ontology of negotiated creativity in popular music studio practice', *Journal on the Art of Record Production*, 5. https://www.arpjournal.com/asarpwp/collaborative-songwriting-%E2%80%93-the-ontology-of-negotiated-creativity-in-popular-music-studio-practice

Bennett, J. 2014. '*Constraint, creativity, copyright and collaboration in popular songwriting teams*', Ph.D. thesis, University of Surrey

Bennett, J. 2018. 'Songwriting, digital audio workstations, and the Internet', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Creative Process in Music*, ed. N. Donin (Oxford, Oxford University Press), 1–24

Bonini, T., and Magaudda, P. 2024. *Platformed! How Streaming, Algorithms and Artificial Intelligence Are Shaping Music Cultures* (Cham, Springer)

Charmaz, K. 2015. 'Grounded theory', in *Qualitative Psychology: A practical Guide to Research Methods*, ed. J.D. Smith (London, Sage), pp. 53–84

Cirisano, T. 2020. 'TikTok is rewriting how hits get made'. https://www.billboard.com/pro/tik-tok-app-biggest-music-hits-2020-analysis/

Clarke, E.F., and Doffman, M. (eds.) 2017. *Distributed Creativity: Collaboration and Improvisation in Contemporary Music* (New York, Oxford University Press)

Dolata, U., and Schrape, J.-F. 2023. 'Politische Ökonomie und Regulierung digitaler Plattformen', in *Theorien des digitalen Kapitalismus. Arbeit, Ökonomie, Politik und Subjekt*, ed. T. Carstensen, S. Schaupp, and S. Sevignani (Berlin, Suhrkamp), pp. 344–63

Duffy, B.E., Poell, T., and Nieborg, D.B. 2019. 'Platform practices in the cultural industries: creativity, labor, and citizenship', *Social Media + Society*, 5, pp. 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1177/205630511987967

Everts, R., Hitters, E., and Berkers, P. 2021. 'The working life of musicians: mapping the work activities and values of early-career pop musicians in the Dutch music industry', *Creative Industries Journal*, 15, pp. 97–117. https://doi.org/10.1080/17510694.2021.1899499

Frith, S. 1991. 'The cultural study of popular music', in *Cultural Studies*, ed. L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, and P. Treichler (New York, Routledge), pp. 174–86

Frith, S. 2012. 'The place of the producer in the discourse of rock', in *The Art of Record Production: An Introductory Reader for a New Academic Field*, ed. S. Frith and S. Zagorski-Thomas (Farnham, Routledge), pp. 207–22

Frith, S., and Horne, H. 1987. *Art Into Pop* (London, Methuen)

Gross, S.A. 2016. 'Let's talk about sex: tender trouble in the music industry'. https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/item/q9zv1/let-s-talk-about-sex-gender-trouble-in-the-music-industry

Haenisch, M., Godau, M., Barreiro, J., Maxelon, D., and Neuhausen, T. 2023. 'Die Plattformisierung des Songwritings. Musik erfinden unter Bedingungen des short video turn am Beispiel von TikTok', in *44. Jahresband des Arbeitskreises Musikpädagogische Forschung / 44th Yearbook of the German Association for Research in Music Education*, ed. M. Göllner, J. Honnens, V. Krupp, L. Oravec, and S. Schmid (Münster, Waxmann), pp. 305–21

Haynes, J., and Marshall, L. 2018. 'Beats and tweets: social media in the careers of independent musicians', *New Media & Society*, 20, pp. 1973–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817711404

Hennion, A. 1983. 'The production of success: an antimusicology of the pop song', *Popular Music*, 3, pp. 159–93

Hennion, A. 1989. 'An intermediary between production and consumption: the producer of popular music', *Science, Technology & Human Values*, 14, pp. 400–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/016224398901400405

Herbst, J.-P., Ahlers, M., and Barber, S. 2024. '"The song factories have closed!": songwriting camps as spaces of collaborative creativity in the post-industrial age', *Creative Industries Journal*, pp. 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/17510694.2024.2366163

Hesmondhalgh, D. 2021. 'Is music streaming bad for musicians? Problems of evidence and argument', *New Media & Society*, 23, pp. 3593–615. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820953541

Hiltunen, R. 2021. 'Foresightfulness in the creation of pop music: songwriters' insights, attitudes and actions', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Helsinki

Inglis, I. 2003. '"Some kind of wonderful": the creative legacy of the Brill Building', *American Music*, 21, pp. 214–35
Jansson, A. 2023. 'Beyond the platform: music streaming as a site of logistical and symbolic struggle', *New Media & Society*, 25, pp. 3203–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211036356
Jones, E. 2021. *DIY Music and the Politics of Social Media* (New York, Bloomsbury).
Kelly, K., and McDonnell, E. 1999. *Stars Don't Stand Still in the Sky: Music and Myth* (New York, New York University Press)
Keychange. 2024. 'Studie zur Geschlechtervielfalt im Deutschen Musikmarkt. Ergebnisbericht'. https://bdkv.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/2024_09_Ergebnisbericht_Keychange_2024.pdf
Kiberg, H., and Spilker, H. 2023. 'One more turn after the algorithmic turn? Spotify's colonization of the online audio space', *Popular Music and Society*, 46, pp. 151–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2023.2184160
Labarca, U.H. 2021. 'Music streaming and its consequences within the dynamics of power, consumption and creation', *Teknokultura: Revista de Cultura Digital y Movimientos Sociales*, 18, pp. 3–12
Lashua, B., and Thompson, P. 2016. 'Producing Music, Producing Myth?Creativity in Recording Studios', *IASPM@-Journal*, 6(2), pp. 70–90, https://doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871
Loepthien, T. 2023. 'Flow im Stream: Das Erleben von Flow beim Hören gestreamter Musik über das Internet', in *Musik und Internet. Aktuelle Phänomene populärer Kulturen*, ed. P. Moormann and N. Ruth (Wiesbaden, Springer VS), pp. 45–47
Loy, S., Rickwood, J., and Bennett, S. 2018. 'Popular music, stars and stardom: definitions, discourses, interpretations', in *Popular Music, Stars and Stardom*, ed. S. Loy, J. Rickwood, and S. Bennett (Acton, ANU Press), pp. 1–20
Magaudda, P., and Solaroli, M. 2020. 'Platform studies and digital cultural industries', *Sociologica*, 14, pp. 267–93. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11957
Mayhew, E. 2017. 'Positioning the producer: gender divisions in creative labour and value', in *Music, Space and Place*, ed. A. Bennett (New York, Routledge), pp. 149–62
Melodiva. 2019. 'Neue Zahlen, altes Problem – MIZ veröffentlicht Statistik zum Einkommen von Musiker*innen'. https://www.melodiva.de/news/neue-zahlen-altes-problem-miz-veroeffentlicht-statistik-zum-einkommen-von-musikerinnen/
Mol, J.M., and Wijnberg, N.M. 2007. 'Competition, selection and rock and roll: the economics of payola and authenticity', *Journal of Economic Issues*, 41, pp. 701–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/00213624.2007.11507056
Morris, J.W. 2020. 'Music platforms and the optimization of culture', *Social Media + Society*, 6/3, pp. 1–10
Morrow, G., Nordgård, D., and Tschmuck, P. (eds.) 2022. *Rethinking the Music: Business Music Contexts, Rights, Data, and COVID-19* (Cham, Springer)
Mühlbach, S., and Arora, P. 2020. 'Behind the music: how labor changed for musicians through the subscription economy', *First Monday*, 25. https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v25i4.10382
Nasta, L., Pirolo, L., and Wikström, P. 2016. 'Diversity in creative teams: a theoretical framework and a research methodology for the analysis of the music industry', *Creative Industries Journal*, 9, pp. 97–106. https://doi.org/10.1080/17510694.2016.1154653
Nieborg, D.B., and Poell, T. 2018. 'The platformization of cultural production: theorizing the contingent cultural commodity', *New Media & Society*, 20, pp. 4275–92. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818769694
Olaussen, M.V. 2024. 'The rhythms of platformization: exploring algorithmic influence on the practices of music artists', Master's thesis, University of Bergen
Ordanini, A., Nunes, J.C., and Nanni, A. 2018. 'The featuring phenomenon in music: how combining artists of different genres increases a song's popularity', *Marketing Letters*, 29, pp. 485–99. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-018-9476-3
Prey, R. 2020. 'Locating power in platformization: music streaming playlists and curatorial power', *Social Media + Society*, 6, pp. 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120933291
Prey, R., Esteve Del Valle, M., and Zwerwer, L. 2020. 'Platform pop: disentangling Spotify's intermediary role in the music industry', *Information, Communication & Society*, 25, pp. 74–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1761859
Ptatscheck, M. 2024. '"Sometimes it feels like being in a parallel world": life worlds and (gendered) challenges of women songwriters in Germany', in *'Parallelgesellschaften' in populärer Musik? Abgrenzungen – Annhäherungen – Perspektiven*, ed. R. von Appen, S. Chaker, M. Huber, and S. Prieske (Bielefeld, transcript), pp. 291–314
Schäfer, A. (2022). 'Gender in music – Charts, Werke und Festivalbühnen'. https://www.malisastiftung.org/studien/gender-in-music-charts-werke-und-festivalbhnen
Scherzinger, M. 2019. 'The political economy of streaming', in *The Cambridge Companion to Music in Digital Culture*, ed. N. Cook, M.M. Ingalls, and D. Trippett (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), pp. 274–97
Seabrook, J. 2015. *The Song Machine: Inside the Hit Factory* (New York, W. W. Norton & Company)
Shepherd, J. 2017. *Tin Pan Alley* (New York, Routledge)
Shuker, R. (2012). *Popular Music Culture: The Key Concepts* (New York, Routledge)

Tolstad, I.M. 2023. '"Bring your A-game and leave your ego at the door!" Songwriting Camps as sites for the (re-)production of practice-based knowledge', *IASPM Journal*, 13, pp. 7–25. https://doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871(2023)v13i1.2en

Towse, R. 2020. 'Dealing with digital: the economic organisation of streamed music', *Media, Culture & Society*, 42, pp. 1461–78

Tschmuck, P. 2006. *Creativity and Innovation in the Music Industry* (Dordrecht, Springer)

Van Dijck, J., Poell, T., and de Waal, M. 2018. *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World* (New York, Oxford University Press)

Watson, A., Watson, J.B., and Tompkins, L. 2023. 'Does social media pay for music artists? Quantitative evidence on the co-evolution of social media, streaming and live music', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 16, pp. 32–46 https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2022.2087720

Wikström, P. 2020. *The Music Industry: Music in the Cloud* (Cambridge, Polity Press).

Wickström, D.-E. 2021. Musik in Zirkulation — Digitalisierung, Globalisierung, Kulturelle Aneignung'., in *Musikwirtschaft im Zeitalter der Digitalisierung*, ed. A. Endreß, and H. Wandjo (Baden-Baden, Nomos), pp. 219–234.

Wilsmore, R., and Johnson, C. 2022. *Coproduction: Collaboration in Music Production* (New York, Routledge)

Yuan, J.E. 2024. 'Making virtual celebrity: platformization and intermediation in digital cultural production', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 28/1, pp. 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/13678779241230564

Zhang, Q., and Negus, K. 2021. 'Stages, Platforms, Streams: The Economies and Industries of Live Music after Digitalization', *Popular Music and Society*, 44(5), pp. 539–557, https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2021.1921909

Zhang, Q., and Negus, K. 2024. 'From cultural intermediaries to platform adaptors: the transformation of music planning and artist acquisition in the Chinese music industry', *New Media & Society*, pp. 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241232086

Zhen, Y. 2023. 'Gender and racial discrimination in the U.S. music industry', *The American Economist*, 68, pp. 45–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/05694345221092958

Cite this article: Wernicke, C., and Ahlers, M. 2025. 'Negotiating Standards and Songwriting Myths in the Age of Platformisation: Sessions, Camps, and Their Functional Rules and (Media) Formats'. *Popular Music* 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143025000285