

With a Lotta' Help From My Friends:
creativity and collaborative contemporary
songwriting in New Zealand / Aotearoa
2011

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

WINTEC
February 2012

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Creativity & Collaborative Contemporary Songwriting in New Zealand 2011

At the time of writing, (December 2011) four of the top five singles on the NZ charts are collaborations (NZ Top 40 Singles Chart), and even then, the only non-collaborative song *We Found Love* was written by Calvin Harris who duets on the track with Rihanna. In Billboard USA's Hot 100 of 2011, the top 10 songs are all collaborations, with the number one spot occupied by Adele's *Rolling in the Deep* which sees Adele collaborate with her producer Paul Epworth. (Billboard) This collaborative nature of pop music is not a recent phenomenon as evident in Billboard's year-end charts of 50 years ago where seven of the top 10 songs in 1961 were co-written. (Borst) However with current recording technologies' ability to quickly create and communicate ideas, there is a growing intermingling of production and songwriting, which will only increase and consolidate songwriting collaborations.

The focus of this study is on collaborative songwriting specifically in respect to New Zealand contemporary artists. Biographies of popular songwriting partnerships fill gossip magazine, featuring the artist's private lives, but little has been written about the creative process of co-writing from the practitioners' point of view. As a musician and songwriter, my strategy is to look from the inside out, rather than from the audience's outside in view at the contemporary songwriting process.

The main questions guiding this study are 'what are the elements of a commercially successful songwriting collaboration,' 'what are the benefits and

possible drawbacks of songwriting collaborations’, and ‘what is the relation of the collaborative songwriting process to commercial success?’ This leads to the study’s research question, which aims to identify and inform on emerging models of collaborative songwriting process: ‘What preferred models of collaborative songwriting are emerging in commercially successful contemporary songwriting collaborations in New Zealand 2011?’

Further to the study’s focus on the participants’ view from inside the creative process, two theoretical models provide the appropriate framework for this study. Toynbee’s *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions (2000)* provides an interpretive model of the musician’s creative process with his social authorship model. Toynbee’s concepts of field, habitus and likeliness highlight *why* creative actions are likely to occur within the particular field the artists occupy, and in view of their dispositions *how* these artists are likely to produce creative output. However, *what* the artists actually do when they create a song falls outside of Toynbee’s social authorship model.

Bennett’s article *Collaborative songwriting - the ontology of negotiated creativity in popular music studio practice (2011)* provides this *what* in his discussion of both a methodological process and also his seven-category model of the collaborative songwriting process. In view of the research question’s aim, Toynbee and Bennett’s models work together to provide a comprehensive framework for this discussion. Further to this, in the literary review section, I have used Sara Cohen’s *1991: Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making* and DeVries’s *The Rise and Fall of a Songwriting Partnership* as case

studies to discuss the relevant issues raised by Toynbee (2000) and Bennett (2011) as well as other relevant discourse. The benefit of this approach is in developing a comparative framework for this study's ethnographical findings.

Methodology

The study has been written as a qualitative research document (structured retrospective interviews with songwriters, musicians) with some quantitative research (published statistics, case studies), as well as being informed by the prevailing discourse surrounding contemporary collaborative songwriting.

As the aim of my research is to ultimately inform on best current industry practice, I conducted ethnographic face-to-face retrospective interviews with three successful contemporary New Zealand songwriters who utilise collaboration as their preferred songwriting strategy. I will define these successful songwriters as NZ musicians who have co-written, recorded and released their own original music and had entries in the Top 50 New Zealand RIANZ album and/or singles charts over the last 24 months.

Two of the interviewees were previously MAINZ students (Joel Little, Zoe Fleury), and two are regular guest speakers at MAINZ (Joel Little, Jimmy Christmas). This connection not only provided access to these successful songwriters, but an access on a level whereby productive informed discussion on artistic issues has always been the foundation of the relationships.

Interviewees were asked three main questions: describe your collaborative process; describe your relationship with the collaborator(s); and, what is the resulting songwriting split for the song(s)? The questions were designed to directly address this paper's research question of identifying emerging collaborative songwriting models. These interviewees were:

Joel Little

Joel was guitarist/vocalist/songwriter for Auckland's Goodnight Nurse from 2001-2010. The band released two studio albums, *Always and Never* (2006) which sold gold, and *Keep Me On Your Side* (2008), both reaching number five on the NZ album charts. Joel has since co-written songs for NZ band Kids Of 88, including *My House* which reached number three on the NZ charts, and *Just A little Bit*, reaching number eleven and winning Single of the Year at the 2010 NZ Music Awards. (Little, 2011)

Jimmy Christmas

Jimmy was guitarist/vocalist/songwriter with NZ band The D4 from 1998-2006. The band had their music released by Hollywood Records in the US, Infectious Records in the UK, and Flying Nun in New Zealand. The band's two albums sold in excess of 100,000 copies. Jimmy formed Luger Boa in 2008 and released their first album titled *Mutate or Die!* which charted at number ten on the NZ album charts. The band won Best Local Rock song in 2009 for the song *On My Mind* and released their second album *New Hot Nights* in May of 2011. (Christmas, 2011)

Zoe Fleury

Zoe is an NZ singer/songwriter/drummer, formerly known as Bionic Pixie, now performing as Zowie and signed with Sony Music Australia. Her debut single

Broken Machine reached number 9 on the NZ charts and received gold certification. Her latest single *Smash It* was featured on the U.S show "Pretty Little Liars" and her debut album is due for release in 2012. (Fleury, 2011)

I also conducted a face-to-face interview with:

Mike Chunn

Mike was a former bass player with New Zealand band's Split Enz and Citizen Band. He was Director of NZ Operations for Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA) 1992-2003, and is now CEO of Play It Strange Trust. (Chunn, 2011) My question to him was, 'what is your take on song authorship in contemporary original bands?' This broad question opened up other areas of relevant discussion, and again directly addresses this paper's research question by trying to identify emerging collaborative songwriting models.

Theoretical Framework

Toynbee's model of social authorship calls on sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's work and together with Bennett (2011) provides the theoretical framework for this study. Social authorship helps to demystify the songwriting process, by identifying the unique position each songwriter, complete with their own habitus, "set of traits and dispositions" (Toynbee, 2001: p. 9) occupies within a complex, field of cultural production. This field has two primary levels, superimposing the field of historically accumulated works, and the field of cultural production itself. Instability and change dominate with new artists entering and exiting the field, struggling for dominant positions. Creativity,

which Bourdieu terms possibilities, “is produced by a loose fit between fields, and between field-effects and the push of habitus.” (Toynbee, 2001: p. 10)

The songwriter is viewed as a social author, standing at the centre of a radius of creativity utilizing and selecting from a field of previously created works. The creative possibles are most densely distributed at the centre, declining along the radius: “the greater the distance from the centre the harder it is to hear.”

(Toynbee, 2000: p. 40) The model highlights what Toynbee calls the “central paradox of creativity: the need to produce difference in and through recognition.”

(Toynbee, 2001: p. 12) Implications undermine any romantic notions of authors’ “grand claims to creative inspiration” (Toynbee, 2000: p. 46) with the creative output viewed as a small creative act. Straw’s discussion of intertextuality reinforces this by stating that creation is not about “confronting a blank page” (Straw, 1999: p. 200) but building upon existing works. In this environment of constrained creative choice, the social authorship model has the potential to explain the creation of “extraordinary music.” (Toynbee, 1999: p. 66)

Toynbee’s social authorship provides a helpful model for interpreting why and how artists involve themselves in creative action. However it tells us little about the actual creative process. Bennett provides a theoretical model of the collaborative songwriting process, specifically what songwriters do when they co-write.

Bennett’s model of the collaborative songwriting process begins with the basic premise that songs usually don’t start ‘from nothing’. Further, Bennett contends there are “six (non-linear and interacting) processes at play in a co-writing environment – stimulus, approval, adaptation, negotiation, veto and consensus.”

(Bennett, 2011: p. 5) Collaborative models provide the appropriate environment for the stimulus to materialize with the subsequent processes ultimately leading to consensus. Of interest is Bennett's suggestion that in the testing of the stimulus, elements of improvisation may take place between the co-writers. It is observed that because this process is "not fully public" (2011: p. 5) this is "not true improvisation...rather a form of adaptation and "play" that may lead to approval, veto, consensus or further adaptation." (2011: p. 5)

The Musical Work and Collaboration

It is helpful to view the different ways songwriters collaborate in relation to social authorship's field of cultural production. Their position and creative process is largely formed by constraint. Stravinsky maintains "The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one's self of chains that shackle the spirit." (Stravinsky, 1947 as cited in Bennett, 2011: p. 2) Bourdieu talks about there being no possibility without constraint, while Toynbee introduces the term likeliness, a form of constraint that is more helpful in explaining "particular creative action." (Toynbee, 2000: p. 39) Likeliness, and for that matter unlikeliness, assist in identifying some possibles "that are more likely to be selected than others." (2000: p. 39)

We observe here that the musical work is constrained by many factors – the characteristics of the field, audience approval, lyrical theme, plot, tempo, time signature, song duration, and rhyme. As Bennett confirms, "it is hard to dispute that individual songs exist within a set of defined musical constraints." (Bennett,

2011: p. 2) The implication is that songs are not a universal concept. Straw illustrates this uncommon nature of songs with a discussion of disco music and the subsequent introduction of the 12-inch single where traditional elements of the song, for example vocals, “were subordinated to the maintenance of an extended, consistent instrumental sound” and “producers played a more significant role than did musicians or performers.” (Straw, 1999: p. 205)

Another example of this uncommonness is classical music, where the musical work is notes written on paper. This is the ‘ideal form’ in this classical context as it shows exactly what the composer had intended. The classical performance was judged on how well these notes were played and as Toynbee states ‘not about challenging this system so much as trying to make it work, even to enforce it.’

(Toynbee, 2000: p. 54) This is in contrast to rock music where youths seek to “invert, subvert, turn ‘upside-down’ musical conventions.” (Cohen, 1991: p. 175)

In these examples, the constraints of the field act to dictate the form of the musical work and “this may actually increase creative opportunity.” (Bennett, 2011: p. 2)

Bennett also discusses varying constraints different songwriting collaborations invariably face. Some collaborations may be economically driven while other non-performing songwriters write for particular performers. A recent example is the Katy Perry’s single “ET” which features collaborations with three A-List, chart-topping songwriters/producers who wrote around Perry’s initial idea of alien love within the song form constraints of the three-minute pop song.

Collaborative songwriting we know is shaping the musical work, with an “apparent relationship between the mechanics of process and the characteristics

of the finished product.” (Bennett, 2011: p. 5) In the following section, we begin a more in-depth discussion of collaborative songwriting. Our starting point is to identify the elements of successful songwriting collaborations.

Elements of a Successful Collaboration

Collaborative songwriting is defined as “anyone who is involved in creating a musical work and acquires a copyright interest in it.” (Simpson, 2002: p. 217) Applying Toynbee’s social authorship theory to this definition is problematic for two reasons. First, social authorship has the potential to render all music creation as collaborative, which has a point, but is not helpful to this study’s aim of identifying emerging collaborative songwriting models. Second, collaboration necessitates more than one habitus and practical questions then arise about interaction and process between the multiple habitus.

What then are the elements of successful songwriting collaborations with this multiple habitus? Toynbee’s uses the word scene to describe where the music makers locate themselves in the creative field. Habitus and field play an important role on this location, “though it by no means rigidly determines who does what and where.” (Toynbee, 2001: p. 11) Potential collaborators find themselves rubbing shoulders, or in social authorship context, within hearing distance of like-minded individuals.

DeVries’ study examined the relationship between two novice songwriters writing songs to hopefully sell to performers. He talks about the importance of “shared common musical values” (DeVries, 2005: p. 43) and identifies “a love of

classic pop, particularly from the 1960s” (2005: p. 43) as a critical factor in their decision to collaborate. This common music goal was established early in the relationship:

The pair established that they wanted to write a body of work not for their own performance, but eventually sell to bands or solo performers. (DeVries, 2005: p. 42)

It was noted in the study that the demise of this songwriting collaboration was brought about by “the pair’s common goals and values digressed towards the end of the collaboration, hence its dissolution”. (DeVries, 2005: p. 42)

Cohen, in her study of two rock bands in Liverpool, identifies a “shared code” (Cohen, 1991: p. 189), groups of musicians creating music and relationships, debating and actively participating in their own taste group within a harsh environment of economic decline, high unemployment and a cautious recording industry.

A band could provide a means of escape where fantasies were indulged but it could also play an important social and cultural role, providing an outlet for creativity and a means by which friendships were made and maintained. (Cohen, 1991: p. 3-4)

In constructing a music style there is an implied appreciation of it, which was dependent on an “understanding of that code and a willingness to understand it.” (Cohen, 1999: p. 190)

Relevant to this discussion is the concept of expertise. ((Hass, Weisberg, & Choi, 2010) Collaborative songwriting teams are able to increase their creativity,

measured in this study's hit-ratio trends, and "develop in a fashion similar to individual composers." (2010: p. 8) This expertise-based view of creativity "has the potential to enhance educational practices." (2010: 22) Further, Toynebee writes "knowledge and skill equip them to hear unlikely possibilities away from the hub of their dispositive universe." (Toynebee, 2001: p. 12)

In summary, within a successful collaboration there exists a growth relationship between common values and goals, and expertise. Artists share common values epitomizing a scene as discussed by Toynebee. Active participation is manifested as creative goal-oriented action among the artists, or more correctly, creative interaction. The clarity, strength and process of continual defining and redefining of these common values and goals is crucial to the ongoing existence of the collaboration. Collaborators acquire knowledge and develop skills through their interactions within the ever-changing field, moving in and around scenes as their evolving cultural output materializes, "mobilizing their accumulated capital" (Toynebee, 2000: p. 36) and again redefining their position. It becomes apparent with social authorship modeling that multiple habitus interaction is a normal state of human social interaction albeit within the numerous fields of cultural production of everyday life.

Of interest to our study is that individuals appear to move together as a collaborative vehicle, sometimes in a direction contrary to their own individual taste preferences, challenging personal taste positions therefore building both expertise and collaborative identity within the particular field. Cohen talks about "the band and its sound existed as a thing in itself over and above the individual personalities that comprise and produced it." (Cohen, 1991: p. 187) Therefore,

the ability of these multiple habitus to interact creatively is likely to be a function of moving together when selecting possibles.

Collaborative Songwriting Models

In the following section, Bennett identifies seven collaborative songwriting partnership categories. (Bennett, 2011)

- **Nashville.** Typical pen and paper, minimal technology, usually two writers.
- **Factory.** Usually a studio location with staff songwriters, examples include Tin Pan Alley and Xenomania.
- **Svengali.** Katy Perry is an example where professional songwriters with a “prior track record of hits” co-write with the artist.
- **Demarcation.** Elton John and Bernie Taupin, Bert Bacharach and Hal David, provide two examples where specific creative roles are allocated.
- **Jamming.** Band members usually bring riffs to a rehearsal and songs are formed.
- **Top-line writing.** “A completed backing track is supplied by a producer to a top-line writer who will supply melody and lyric.”
(Bennett, 2011: p. 4)
- **Asynchronicity.** An example would be online collaboration where co-writers work separately on a multi-track audio file without clear roles.

Within these categories are stimulus material that “usually provide a starting point for the creative process.” (Bennett, 2011: p. 5) The assumption here is that songs just don’t happen, or are created “from nothing.” (2011: p. 5) As Bennett outlines, the Nashville writers usually turn up with “a number of titles” (2011: p. 5), bands write songs based around a riff and technology is included in many contemporary collaborations with drum loops and computer generated backing tracks.

In reference to social authorship theory, the concepts of field and likeliness are relevant to this discussion. Specifically as an example, within the field of rock, what are the most likely processes bands use to create their original songs? The Jamming category appears to be the most likely possible. Cohen’s study of two alternate rock bands confirms this selection, where “the process of composition and rehearsal within a rock band was developed and learned together by all band members.” (Cohen, 1991: p. 192)

The most likely selection for non performing songwriters is the Nashville category as DeVries talks about his songwriters setting “aside three hours each Tuesday morning to write together.” (DeVries, 2005: p. 41) Both songwriters had written songs and ideas that they brought along to the sessions. The Jamming category was also used when “the pair started writing from scratch.” (2005: p. 47) “Throwing ideas at one another, singing over a chord sequence, or just humming over a chord sequence” (2005: p. 47) was a description typifying these jams.

Listening to other music played a significant role in creating songs in both studies. Cohen found that “music was discussed and listened to at parties, gigs, in

pubs, in each other's flats, and wherever else they happened to be." (Cohen, 1991: p. 28) while DeVries stated "the pair used sound recordings as examples in their songwriting sessions." (DeVries, 2005: p. 43)

Within these examples, elements of demarcation filtered into both the Jamming and Nashville categories. Implicit in the habitus "is the way it disposes musician-agents to play, write, record or perform in a particular way." (Toynbee, 1991: p. 36) As the songwriting process developed, the individual's dominant strategies emerged and collaborations "played on the strengths and offset the weaknesses of co-writers." (DeVries, 2005: p. 46) This developing discussion provides the focus for the next section.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Collaboration

As discussed above, the collaborators strengths and weaknesses became evident as the songwriting process progressed. DeVries states "Acknowledgement of these traits allowed the pair to focus on their shared goals and values in the songwriting collaborations." (DeVries, 2005: p. 46)

Collaborators can add knowledge, experience and strength where the other is weak. In reference to social authorship, songwriting partners can hear and select possibilities that may be outside your creative space and therefore inaudible to you. Burt Bacharach states that his longtime songwriting partner Hal David "always knew how to put words in the right place." (Zollo, 1997 as cited in DeVries, 2005: p. 46) One of the songwriters in DeVries study stated:

It's all about coming to terms with the parts of your songwriting that aren't strong and letting the other person strengthen them, make them better. (DeVries, 2005: p. 47)

In the musical context, collaborative songwriting "can lead to a superior song which could not have been written without all those parties involved." (DeVries, 2005: p. 47) Bennett's discussion of "editorial veto" (Bennett, 2011: p. 3) illustrates how these superior songs are created with the actions of manifestation and communication of ideas implicit to this process. This "instant audience effect, combined with the fact that more ideas can be generated" (2011: p. 3) makes possible the required environment for the creation of this superior song.

Originality is a reoccurring theme in the research, and in the context of this discussion, a primary benefit. Cohen talks about "the quest for originality" (Cohen, 1991: p. 187) in hitting the right formula within the national music scene. DeVries states that his songwriters "valued originality" (DeVries, 2005: p. 47) and it was about "providing a new twist." (2005: p. 48) Frith observes, "Young rock bands and musicians put the highest value on originality and self-expression, on music as a means of defining one's individual identity." (Frith, 1992 as cited in DeVries, 2005: p. 47-48)

In this drive to stand out from the crowd, the process of selecting more unlikely possibilities as a strategy Toynbee suggests is the skill to reference these back to some "existing conventions." (Toynbee, 1999: p. 40) In this regard, one of DeVries songwriters in his own quest for originality cites Radiohead, "they made it their own, they put their own stamp on the music. And people loved it."

(DeVries, 2005: p. 48) This process confirms Toynbee's previously identified "central paradox of creativity" (Toynbee, 2001: p. 12) discussed earlier where this drive for originality exists in an environment "in and through recognition." (2001: p. 12)

In an interesting article, the concept of "songwriting loafing" (Pettijohn II & Ahmed, 2010) is examined within a quantitative study of Billboard charts. The study found that collaborative teams were just as likely as individual songwriters to write a number one hit. However, the idea of individuals contributing less and in effect, being less creative within a group environment is a possible drawback of collaboration. Is this also a possible reflection of the individual collaborators' visions being compromised within a group, thereby "producing a lower quality song?" (2010: p. 2)

Bennett also raises the issue of a potential loss of income through splitting the songwriting income, although "many songwriters have taken the decision that the benefits of collaboration outweigh the loss of income." (Bennett, 2011: p. 7) In weighing up the pros and cons, Bennett concludes "Despite the many changes in the means of production of popular music in the last 60 years, the practice of distributed and shared creativity in songwriting continues to thrive as one of its defining forces." (2011: p. 7)

Findings and Discussion

This section analyses the study's collaborative songwriting processes with reference to social authorship theory. Also referenced are Bennett's seven songwriting collaboration categories and his theoretic model of the collaborative songwriting process.

Kids of 88

Joel Little and Sam McCarthy worked together for three years as performers and songwriters in Goodnight Nurse (2007-2010). They both are currently writing songs for the pop rock duo Kids of 88, of which Sam is a member. Joel is not a member of Kids of 88, although he does play guitar with them at times. The pair is also involved in writing collaboratively for other commercial projects.

Sam is the guy who makes the tracks. He does the sitting in front of the computer. (Little, 2011)

The constraints of the highly evolved pop rock field within the limits of home studios' assistive technologies are acknowledged and understood by these two experienced musicians. As discussed, the individual's dominant strategies emerge as strengths and weaknesses are identified. Joel here highlights a demarcation of roles, which reflects their own dispositions, skills and contributions within the collaboration.

Sam and I have a slightly different relationship with songwriting, because we write a lot of songs and not just for Kids of 88, commercials, theme songs. (Little, 2011)

What this suggests is because the pair collaborates on other commercial projects, there are multiple fields in action. Common values and goals however exist across these fields. Writing songs for a pop rock act, plus writing for a variety of commercial projects does not conflict with the common values and goals of being open and creative to create the best songs, whatever the song's form may be. Pop music is considered to be "truly market driven," (Bennett, 2011: p. 1) as is any commercial venture, so there is little apparent conflict.

Songs are created and recorded in a computer-based home studio at Sam's house.

Sam came up with the original idea (My House). He was recording at home and trying to see if he could make a song in that particular style. He sent the little chorus idea to me via email, and I thought this was hilarious. I'll come round tomorrow and finish it off. (Little, 2011)

There are two stimuli evident in Sam's creation of the original idea. The use of computer technology is identified where a "temporary backing track" (Bennett, 2011: p. 5) is created "over which to try ideas" (2011: p. 5) and this is done as Joel discusses 'in a particular style.' (Little, 2011) The idea was created, mixed and then emailed to Joel who could listen, approve, get ideas, and 'come round tomorrow,' (Little, 2011) adapt and finish the song. Within this creative collaborative process, the goal was stated as:

Capturing the energy and the feel of that particular type of music was the goal. (Little, 2011)

The songwriting process was quick and intuitive, which aligns with the shared goal. The use of computer technology becomes the “invisible writer” (Bennett, 2011: p. 5) where song ideas can be quickly created, communicated and either approved or adapted through negotiation.

This self-contained aspect of contemporary collaborative songwriting particularly in the field of pop music, acts to shape the song form, as “process affects product.” (Bennett, 2011: p. 6) Within the constraints of computer-based recording, loop songs are the prevalent creative output, “songs where the entire harmony consists of three or four chords played in 2, 4 or 8-bar loop.” (2011: p. 5) Musicians and songwriters who would traditionally learn musical instruments (guitar, piano, drums) are expanding their possibilities as concepts of the musical work evolve. They are selecting the purchase of laptops and recording software as prices continue to fall while performance and specifications increase with each new update. Further, multi-track recording software has become easy to use and less complex in response to the computer market’s demands for new simple ways to organize and professionally edit the large amounts of media individuals acquire.

In respect to social authorship, it is evident that both the field and habitus continue to evolve in response to these technological developments and the relative ease of acquiring and using these assistive technologies.

The way that we write with Kids of 88 is that we build the track as we come up with the ideas, so by the end of the day you have a fully-fledged out song that you can play. (Little, 2011)

There exists a culture of authenticity in this process. Some music genres, rock and singer-songwriter mainly, are suspicious of divisions of musical labour (songwriters, arrangers, vocalists, session musicians, producers), which “get in the way of the direct expression of authentic thoughts and feelings.” (Keightly, 2001: p. 134) Keightly makes his central point that performers who overcome this division of labour “demonstrate an organic expressivity, through a unity of creation and communication, of origination and performance.” (2001: p. 134) Current recording technology not only provides an authentic platform for this organic expressivity, but this process is becoming the preferred songwriting methodology. The energy and feel of that initial creative moment is built on and becomes the genesis of the final sound, the recording the listener ends up hearing. There’s no demo, no watering down of the original idea, no re-recording in a better studio as was the strategy of the 80s and 90s, where the object was to reproduce the original recording in a higher fidelity format.

Kids of 88’s second single involved a similar process.

With *Just a Little Bit* it took a little bit longer. Initially we thought maybe we’ll just do *My House* and then it did so well, let’s try and make some other songs. Sam had the basis of the track and then we started building it from there. The idea behind that one was that we were trying to fit as many orgasm sounds into a song as we possibly could. (Little, 2011)

The stimuli and process are much the same for *Just A Little Bit*. The primary use of a computer, a music style based on the success of the previous song, plus the title encapsulating the idea for the song is evident here. Also, the pair’s drive for

originality in the use of the stimulus, the many orgasm sounds, which relate to Toynbee's earlier suggestion that the more unlikely possibilities are referenced back to existing conventions. Previous examples of such a strategy include Rod Stewart's *Tonight's the Night*, Donna Summer's *Love to Love You Baby*, and Lil' Louis's *French Kiss*.

So we built the chorus and got it to flow. The most important thing was just doing what was natural and not thinking about it too much, not second-guessing things. We just did it to see if it would sound good and it did, so we carried on. (Little, 2011)

The ease of manifesting and trying out ideas as they flowed is important here. Technology has allowed the recording studio to become "the primary site of musical creation rather than that of mere reproduction." (Shumway, 1999: p. 191)

The songwriting process throughout fits Bennett's demarcation model where creative roles are evident. However, the implementation of this model is asynchronistic, where "co-writers work separately and iteratively" (Bennett, 2011: p. 4)

In reference to the expertise model of creativity (Hass, Weisberg, & Choi, 2010), the assumption is that Kids of 88's singles would each be more successful than the previous. However, this is not the case. The debut single *My House* reached #3 on the NZ charts, while the second *Just A Little Bit* reached #11. A more reasoned explanation might focus on concepts of unpredictability, over exposure and the short attention span characterising the pop market. However,

considered in a longer-term time frame, when compared to Goodnight Nurse, Kids of 88 songs have been more successful in the NZ charts, therefore reaffirming the expertise model of creativity.

Luger Boa

Interviewee Jimmy Christmas and writing partner Barry Palmer, have collaborated since 2008, writing on both Luger Boa albums. Barry, who was a member of iconic Australian band 'Hunters & Collectors', is an experienced, award-winning songwriter and producer.

I write the tunes and the melodies and stuff like that, and he's got a really good sense of arrangement and we obviously see things eye to eye. He's really good with drum patterns. It just really frees up the writing process. (Christmas, 2011)

In this discussion, demarcation clearly exists within the creative roles, again highlighting Toynbee's references to habitus and the particular way musicians are disposed to play and record. In this relationship, Jimmy is very much the songwriter and his partner Barry assumes more of a producer's role, which allows Jimmy to focus on the songwriting process. The process described throughout fits Bennett's demarcation model where creative roles are evident. However, as with Kids of 88, the implementation is asynchronistic as well. Referencing Bennett's methods model, Jimmy introduces the songs as the initial stimulus, which Barry adapts by arranging these ideas in a computer based recording system utilizing his drum programming skills to lay the arrangement

down. Cohen talks about how technology can stand “in the way of their honest music-making.” (Cohen, 1991: p. 179) The shared code of both common values and goals counters this possibility where Jimmy feels the pair ‘see things eye to eye.’ (Christmas, 2011)

In the following, the different processes are highlighted from the first to the second album.

On the first record there wasn't a band so all the parts were played by me - me and Barry put it together. For this record I wanted it to be more a band playing together in a room. So we got the songs all into shape, got most of the parts and took the band out to Revolver, lived together for 10 days and recorded everything, tracked everything live. (Christmas, 2011)

Jimmy and collaborator Barry wrote, recorded and produced the first album *Mutate or Die!* Luger Boa's second album acknowledges this “contemporary, temporary, temporal nature of rock music...(which) means that individuals experience a feeling of having grown out of particular styles,” (Cohen, 1991: p. 188-189) and there's an “emphasis upon development.” (1991: p. 187) Toynbee discusses the production of possibilities in the field of works, and the “historical accretion of cultural work done.” (Toynbee, 2000: p. 38) These references to the progressive and developmental nature of a band sound had its possible beginnings in the experiences of the necessary formation of a band to assume the role of Luger Boa *the band*, to play live, and promote the songs on the first album. Jimmy and Barry however collaborated together as they had on the first album

and “got the songs all into shape, got most of the parts” (Christmas, 2011) before going into the studio with the band whose role was then to:

Use their colours to populate the songs. (Christmas, 2011)

The process described involves Luger Boa band members overdubbing or replacing the sounds initially created and recorded by Jimmy and Barry.

So there were parts of that where the guys in the band weren't writing the songs. Some parts they were playing what was required for the song and then there's parts, for example, Ryan came up with the intro riff for a song called 'Paralyse' which is a really cool signature riff, so that became the start of the song and it identifies that song, so Ryan is entitled to a writing credit. It's something that happened in the process but made the song really good.

(Christmas, 2011)

Within this last comment, a central creative distinction is highlighted. Is the band member disposed to replicate an already existing part therefore confirming consensus, or create a new part by introducing a new stimulus, or even adapting the original idea? As Mike Chunn states, “are you one of the composers or an arranger?” (Chunn, 2011) Jimmy identifies this more complex task of assessing the value of the part. The criteria here is based on “being a really cool signature riff” (Christmas, 2011) and whether or not the musical part “made the song really good.” (Christmas, 2011) This reaffirms the collaborators' central shared goal of “making good music together.” Band members may create riffs as in the above example, but is the value of that part or riff crucial enough to receive a co-

writing credit? Are there models existing that can aid this assessment? Mike Chunn comes up with an innovative strategy.

You can interpret them live but if you're going to make a record that is translated into a cover version, in the main should be deemed the compositional aspects of the original. (Chunn, 2011)

Mike succinctly provides criteria in his model for assessing value by differentiating composition and arrangement. Through the process of recording a cover version of a song, all the musical elements that are recorded are considered crucial to the song's identity and therefore part of the composition. Although the direction of this discussion is outside this study's view of the creative process, shifting to the audiences' outside in analysis, it does highlight the introduced complexities of third parties assessing contributions. The point here is that when collaborators share common goals and values relevant to an identified music style, a higher level of empathetic communication is established. This level of communication should hope to positively impact on the creative process itself and any subsequent collaboration model discussions. Consensus between the collaborators is preferable to any third party ruling when disputes occur.

In regard to Luger Boa, both Jimmy and Barry's experiences have disposed the pair to a willingness to understand their shared code of making good music. Experience has taught these collaborators what really is important when making good music.

Zowie

In comparison to the other two interviewees, Zoe Fleury is a relatively new popular music artist who started writing songs from a drummer's perspective.

Generally how I used to write, I'd have the beat because drumming is what I studied. (Fleury, 2011)

Her recording and publishing companies then organised songwriting and recording sessions with more experienced and commercially successful writers.

Co-writing is something I really like doing. With the record most of the tracks have been co-written with me and one other or maybe two others, and every single session has been really different.

(Fleury, 2011)

In the following, Zoe discusses the songwriting process for the single 'Bite Back.'

For instance 'Bite Back' which is one of my singles I did in LA with one other guy Timmy Anderson. I was really mad about something and had this title that automatically had this mood that I wanted to go for, it kinda started from there. And he was like, check out this crazy lo-fi beat that he already had, and I was like what if have this driving bass down underneath it? I was like, stop, stop, stop, don't do anything more. I've got all the lyrics and melody already, so it was pretty much all with drums and a bass line and I had all the melody worked around that, and just feeding off each other. (Fleury, 2011)

The above interview illustrates Bennett's model where stimulus material is introduced by Zoe, and with the process of approval, adaption or veto, consensus is reached.

This partnership falls into Bennett's Svengali category where the artist co-writes with a 'star' producer "who may have collaborated with a large number of others." (Bennett, 2011: p. 4) Another previous example is Katy Perry's "ET" co-written with three professional song doctors with "a prior track record of hits." (Bennett, 2011: p. 4) Bennett provides James Blunt's hit "You're Beautiful" as another example, also co-written (Hewson, 2009 as cited in Bennett, 2011: p. 4) with professional songwriters.

Zoe had effectively written the song prior to the collaboration, having not just the title, but lyrics and melody as well. Her collaborator was acting as a producer. Negus discusses the way producers have become auteur figures, by making recording "a form of composition in itself." (Negus, 1992 as cited in Shuker, 1998: p. 209) Shuker makes the point that producers "have played a major role in many contemporary pop and rock chart successes," (Shuker, 1998: p. 209) and "are a new type of star figure in music." (1998: p. 209)

Broken Machine. That was a co-write with Justin Pilbrow from Elemenio P. That might have been my first song I think, with a co-write. That song, we were listening to a crazy chord progression and we were like, that should be the hook of the song. We were just walking around the park, down Victoria Park market and we were talking about straight kinda electronic beats and so we put one in. (Fleury, 2011)

Again, the Svengali model is illustrated here where Zoe co-writes with a more experienced songwriter. The stimulus is a crazy chord progression, which develops with the idea of an electronic beat. The informal ideas session, outside

at a park, highlights the very different dispositions of possible writing partners.

This difference is explored further in the following.

We were from quite different things, he was like pop punk, where I was more industrial pop. (Fleury, 2011)

This perceived difference, selecting possibles further away from the centre of the creative space further illustrates the quest for originality by unlikely selections.

Within this process the 'unlikeliness' was referenced back to existing conventions, in this case the different musical backgrounds and associated genres. Toynebee states that in such circumstances the "unlikely selection of possibles will none the less be conventional." (Toynebee, 2000: p. 39)

There's something about co-writing, there's just so many ideas that you'd never think of without that other person being in the room, or with their influence. (Fleury, 2011)

In this discussion a primary benefit of co-writing is highlighted. Ideas that are outside the circumference of Zoe's creative space where "possibles cannot be heard" (Toynebee, 2000: p. 40) can be selected, as these possibles are your partner's creative possibles.

Also interesting in this final comment, where Zoe identifies a successful songwriting relationship has a qualitative rather than a quantitative quality. This is important within our discussion of songwriting models as it directly identifies the problem of assessing value.

Sometimes it the opposite, you feel you've done everything and they're just twiddling their thumbs, but then they come up with one thing and that finishes the song. (Fleury, 2011)

Conclusion

Songwriters strive to write great songs. Collaboration has the potential to realize this objective through the primary benefit of musically going where you wouldn't go yourself. Your co-writer hears ideas that you normally wouldn't. What's more, contemporary song doctors and collaborators are fast becoming masters of technology and with this merging of songwriting and production, songwriting is a back-and-forth process of manifestation, communication and updating of ideas. The co-writers' traditional role as an instant audience has been enhanced by these instant demos, where something 'real' is created for approval or adaption throughout the collaborative process.

However, commercially successful songwriting collaboration involves not just skills and a desire to co-write, but also a respect for the field of works. This implication that such songwriters are essentially fans introduces notions of authenticity where understanding and appreciation of the art form is the commonly held shared code. Songwriters, artists and even the audience understand the entertainment value of pop music, but this hardly means that commercially successful songwriters are 'faking it' when it comes to their art.

Popular music with its Darwinist survival of the fittest nature creates an environment where commercially successful songs are the most audible and the most visible. These songs we have observed, are predominantly collaborative in their creation. Are then commercially unsuccessful songs, evaluated by their lack of chart success and YouTube views, less collaborative in their process? Is collaboration more likely to achieve commercial success than a solo venture? Although the questions posed are worthy of further research, what this study has

identified is an acknowledgement of the benefits of writing songs with like-minded people.

When songwriters do successfully collaborate, their writing partners are strong in areas where they are weak. Inexperienced co-write with experienced, technologically challenged co-write with masters of the recording process.

However the benefits are mutual; the experienced songwriter is invigorated by the new artist's fresh, innovative ideas, just as the production guru requires a song to perform magic on. These collaborative songwriting models are functions of the required stimulus needed to create songs. When co-writing commercially successful songs there exists a willingness to understand the field of works, and also to work within the many and varied constraints that exist in the field.

Collaboration is very much a normal human activity. This normalizing of the songwriting process continues to shape and define what we understand to be a great song.

Interviews

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