'That's the experience': Jazz musicians in 'emerging adulthood' and their ambivalence to precarious work

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Abstract

Precarious employment is an important consequence of structural changes in labour markets. Precarity has had profound effects on young workers in particular, often disrupting the process of 'emerging adulthood'. This paper looks at precarious employment in the creative sectors, specifically among jazz musicians. It explores their experiences of, and attitudes towards, precarity. It shows how participants sought to manage and sometimes embrace precarity as part of the life course, but also argues that this managed embrace was dependent on factors such as family background.

Keywords

Adulthood, creative work, jazz musicians, precarious employment

Introduction

Young workers attract particular interest in studies of labour markets and employment. They are often considered to be typical labour market 'outsiders', suffering disproportionately from unemployment, and vulnerable to precarious working conditions (Furlong & Cartmel, 2006; Kretsos, 2010). Their transitions into employment are often fraught with difficulty in finding stable and well-paid jobs (MacDonald et al, 2005). While economic studies may define an *a priori* 'youth' age range which can be used to gauge the effects of age against variables such as productivity (e.g. Skirbekk, 2004), sociological perspectives on youth employment are more interested in the processes involved in labour market integration (Brzinsky-Fay, 2007; Wyn & White, 2000). Given that stable employment has been considered a hallmark of adulthood (Cuconato, 2011), increased work uncertainty may therefore provoke significant changes in life course patterns.

These developments have encouraged a focus on the way in which economic and social factors produce divergent trajectories and inequalities among young workers. Post-modern approaches have emerged highlighting the role of individual agency in these transitions, as Fordist collectivist institutions falter (Neilson & Rossiter, 2008; Wyn & White, 2000). Nonetheless, the apparent 'individualisation' of youth labour market transitions has not replaced traditional forms of social integration and the influence of institutions such as the family or the state. Rather, it has introduced more risk into the pathways leading from them (Beck, 1992).

This paper looks at jazz musicians in London, exploring how their experiences of labour market precarity and transitions to adulthood are affected both by their own agency and by structural factors. We examine participants' responses to the process of labour market integration, and to unstable working conditions, in the context of London's jazz scene. We selected a 'creative sector' study because, given the many features that make it attractive to young workers, it constitutes an especially rich setting in which to consider 'emerging adulthood'. Moreover, creative workers have to navigate a range of tensions in the development of their careers, as they seek to cultivate their

own artistic voice while simultaneously managing work instability (Lingo & Tepper, 2013). Our research will show that these tensions impact on their attitudes towards precarious work. We make three main points. Firstly, our participants frequently accepted precarity and sometimes even saw it as something to be embraced. Secondly, they made explicit connections between this embrace and their own transitions to adulthood. Thirdly, their ability to do this was highly dependent on structural resources, in particular their socio-economic family backgrounds.

The paper is organised as follows. The first section provides theoretical background to the issue of precarious employment among young workers. There follows a section contextualising our case study. After a discussion of methods, there are three empirical sections discussing participants' attitudes to precarity, its role in life course transitions, and the support networks upon which they rely.

Precarity and transitions to adulthood

Precarious work has been extensively studied in recent years, and is particularly associated with the loss of employment and collective organising capabilities following the breakdown of the post-War economic order (Barchiesi, 2011; Kalleberg, 2012; Standing, 2011). Not surprisingly, therefore, there is a burgeoning literature on precarious work in various disciplines, including labour economics, sociology, management and industrial relations, among others. This growth is partly attributable to a combination of various political-economic factors including welfare state retrenchment and structural reforms to labour markets (Greer & Doellgast, 2013). But to analyse fully it the connections between economic, institutional and social realms have to be understood, including factors such as family and other social networks (McDowell et al, 2009; Ranci, 2010). For example, Castel's (2000) work conceptualises work and social networks as two distinct sources of stability, and posits the existence of a 'disaffiliated' class that lacks access to both. Hence the extent to which labour market precarity is problematic depends on a range of other social factors (Gentile, 2011).

Precarity is especially prevalent among young people, who increasingly have to negotiate a set of risks that were largely unknown to their parents (Furlong & Cartmel, 2006; Standing, 2011). This applies not just to those in lower-skilled work. Relatively highly-skilled young workers are increasingly exposed to the risk of unemployment and social marginalisation (Barley & Kunda, 2004). Consequently, literature has developed around the idea of 'emerging adulthood', engaging with the prolongation of transitions to adulthood among 18-34 year olds (Bynner, 2005; Chisholm & Hurrelmann, 1995; Clark, 2007). For example, while many have commented on the relatively early home-leaving age of young British workers (Aassve et al, 2002; Billari & Liefbroer, 2010), recent scholarship has suggested an extension of 'semi-dependency' on their parents (Berrington et al, 2009; Heath et al, 2008). Indeed, increased difficulty in leaving home, or the increased need to return to it following an initial departure, has given rise to discussion of the 'boomerang generation' (Stone et al, 2013).

These points indicate a continued emphasis on social institutions such as the family in coping with labour market instability, and arguably conflict with other sociological trends emphasising an increasing 'individualisation' within societies. The latter has gone hand-in-hand with the growing emphasis on risk and insecurity in modern capitalism (Bauman, 1998; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990; Sennett, 2000). Certainly, precarity may be seen as reflecting the transition from the Keynesian emphasis on stability and integration, to a global economy in which the individual's connection to kinship and public support networks is weakened (Ranci, 2010) and post-War collective solidarities 'melt into air' (Lash & Urry, 1987). Others tie precarity to an ideological turn towards 'individualisation and personal responsibility for work' (Kalleberg, 2009:3). This theme of apparent individualisation has wide-ranging implications. Standing (2011:66), for example, argues that young workers increasingly 'reject the labourism of stable full-time jobs', craving instead to 'work on their own' outside of traditional collective structures. Wyn and White (2000) show how concepts like skill have been reconfigured to denote the ability to cope as an individual in an unstable labour market.

But these themes of individualisation may merely obscure, rather than reduce, the importance of collective categories in shaping life chances. Structural divisions in society continue to shape expectations and the form that the life course takes (Bynner & Roberts, 1991; Evans & Furlong, 1997). This is Furlong and Cartmel's (2006) 'epistemological fallacy': that circumstances that appear to individualise people in fact remain rooted in societal structures. Differences such as class background remain central to an understanding of emerging adulthood and labour market integration. Accordingly, as we present our data, we will argue that while we do see a significant 'individualisation' in the attitudes of jazz musicians to work and the life-course, their capacity to manage and embrace this individualisation is highly dependent on other support networks, primarily family.

Creative work and precarity

There is a burgeoning literature on creative work, and due to space constraints we offer only a brief discussion here as context for our case study. Labour process-derived discussions of 'creative labour' (Smith & McKinlay, 2009) observe important definitional problems. Work outside of 'creative' sectors such as music, media or theatre is not inevitably 'uncreative', and commercial requirements within those fields may also constrain 'creativity'. More important for our purposes are the relatively well-documented characteristics of jobs like music which make them an especially interesting lens through which to view the themes of precarity and the life course.

Firstly, creative work is disproportionately populated by young workers (Gibson, 2003; McRobbie, 2002). Moreover, it is also characterised by precarious working arrangements- typically in the guise of 'portfolio' employment (Gill, 2002). Consequently creative work, especially music, is characterised by multiple short-term projects with various employers or clients. In the case of music in particular, workers may subsidise or manage this precarity by undertaking varying quantities of stabler employment (often teaching) (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010). This makes it a particularly interesting case, given the possibility for the simultaneous cultivation of unpredictable gigging engagements

alongside more reliable income streams (Umney & Kretsos, 2013). Unions in these professions tend to be weak, typically providing services such as insurance and legal advice rather than collectively regulating conditions of work (Heery et al, 2004; Saundry et al, 2007). However, while these points may partially explain why low pay is common in creative work, they are not the whole story. Creative workers themselves are often fatalistic about working conditions (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009). In the case of jazz in particular, this fatalism may reflect their attitude to work itself, where pay and conditions are not necessarily seen as indicative of job quality, and where poorly-remunerated work may be prioritised if it affords greater creative autonomy (Stebbins, 1968; Umney & Kretsos, 2013). The tolerance of low pay also reflects the need to grease the wheels of the creative industry's 'economy of favours' (Ursell, 2000), especially in settings such as jazz where the creation of social ties is paramount (Dowd & Pinheiro, 2013).

Hence, creative work can yield a wealth of data concerning young workers' experiences of precarious employment. Importantly, for such workers, the question is rarely simply one of 'coping' with precarity. Rather, the positive attraction of this kind of work for young workers must be recognised. As McRobbie (2002) shows, the 'utopian' bypassing of 'normal' working life is an important allure; and according to some, a key desire of the 'precariat' in general (Standing, 2011). Work structures, particularly in creative sector jobs, cannot be analyzed in a vacuum, but as the outcome of interplay between economic and cultural constructs. For example, precarious creative work is rendered attractive by ideological factors such as the notion of 'cool jobs' (Neff et al, 2005). Our data will show that music is once again a strong exemplary case, where participants are often motivated by sheer enjoyment of the work. Interestingly, some writers have construed music scenes as highly communitarian, enabling collaboration based on shared passion, and thus highly resistant to the encroachment of instrumentalist business perspectives (Coulson, 2012). Hence it would be wrong to see musicians as victims of a lack of labour market integration. The idea of being an 'outsider'- or part of a group of outsiders- in relation to the formalised labour market can be a motivating factor in itself.

To use labour process-derived terminology, the hallmark of 'creative labour' is the (partial) breakdown of the separation of conception and execution that defines the capitalist wage relationship (Smith & McKinlay, 2009). Given that it is organised around spontaneous small-group improvisation, jazz is a particularly vivid example of creative labour, and we were keen to use it to explore the idea of individual freedom through work. One may speculate that jazz, so often based around virtuosity, can represent a means to reclaim some degree of creative agency on an individual level, even if others have shown that the emancipatory potential of creative work tends to be undermined in a neoliberal setting (Banks, 2006). As we show in the following sections, our participants held complex and ambivalent- but sometimes strikingly positive- attitudes to the connections between precarity and their own individual development as artists. Nonetheless, we show that these observations cannot be separated from a class analysis, and that other forms of stability such as family support are important facilitating factors.

Data and Methods

This research is based on interviews with 30 musicians working in London collected between December 2011 and December 2012, plus follow-up interviews with 14 participants to revisit themes that emerged over the course of the research. Our sample focused on jazz musicians, but note that this does not mean that all interviewees earned a living playing exclusively jazz; the number of people in this category would be tiny. Rather, our interviewees were almost all professional musicians who had had formal education in jazz, excepting one who had been educated in classical music but who had since become involved in jazz. All had developed 'portfolio' working lives which included various other things; typically teaching, or playing in other settings such as 'function' gigs (i.e. private parties) and musical theatre. The vast majority continued to play jazz gigs wherever possible, though most had also diversified stylistically. Of the 30 participants, all but four fell into the 25-35 age range. One was younger (23), and three were in their late 30s or early 40s.

As this age range indicates, our selection procedure was based around snowball sampling from an initial starting point of two contacts, and did not seek to identify musicians that fit into an age range defined *a priori*. Instead, we tried to speak to musicians who were in the process of establishing themselves on the London music scene, or in some cases those that had recently moved away after attempts to do so, without specific consideration of age. The important thing, therefore, was to interview those at an early stage in their careers, transitioning from education to established professionals. Frequently, this included musicians who had studied elsewhere and had, after spending some years saving money or preparing, relocated to begin afresh in London. Given London's status as undisputed capital of the UK's jazz scene, the move there is a critical step in building a career for many musicians, which can be undertaken at different ages. To work to a pre-defined age range would therefore have been unduly restrictive.

Interviews were typically 1-2 hours long. Initial questions probed the empirical nature and organisation of participants' employment, but particular focus was placed on their experiences of precarious work and their attitudes towards it, specifically within the transition from new scene entrant to established musician. Hence, in the minority of cases where musicians above the 25-35 range were contacted, interviews took a heavily biographical focus, asking participants to narrate their experiences and reflect on this process. Therefore we consider that our sample is well placed to address the issues surrounding 'emerging adulthood' and precarious work discussed above.

The remainder of the article explores this interview data, continuing as follows. First, we discuss the ambivalence of our participants to precarious work, illustrating how it was tolerated and sometimes embraced. Second, we show how participants sought to manage this precarity in contextualise it within their life course. Finally, we highlight the importance of family socio-economic background that mitigates the effect of precarity and renders possible participants' embrace of it.

'If I enjoy something, I don't worry about the money so much': Attitudes towards precarity

An obvious but important starting point when discussing musicians' working lives is that almost all participants entered the music profession because of the desire to play music. For many, this was a passion outweighing other concerns; a point made most straightforwardly in the quote from 'Rob' (27, saxophone) that heads this section. Those participants moving to London after studying elsewhere typically explained this transition not in terms of economic opportunity, but because of the quality of London's music scene. This enjoyment may take precedence over the desire for well-remunerated and stable work. Stephen (28, bass) refers here to his experiences of low-paid restaurant gigs: 'I find generally if musicians are free, they want to go and play. They don't mind [low fees and informal working arrangements]… It's nice, you know, spending an evening in a restaurant… and doing some playing'. Similarly, Rachel (23, trombone) speaks about unpaid work with one of her bands: 'you're around great players and you're learning, even if you're not getting any money'.

It was universal among participants that the desire to play increased tolerance of low-paid and informal work. More strongly, for many participants the experience of playing the kind of music that they want to play is something for which these material concerns are worth sacrificing. Participants often invoked an inevitable need to lower material expectations, in order to enable 'creative' work to be undertaken regularly. For some, when performing 'original' projects (i.e. a participant's own creative output rather than functions or musical theatre), work stability is a luxury one has little right to expect.

> 'Everyone knows when starting an original project that you have to be into the project because there ain't going to be any monetary reward... That's why we're into music. We were doing that stuff for fun when we were learning music' (Harry, 26, trumpet)

More bluntly:

> 'The way I see it is that you just do it at your own risk. If you get ripped off on a gig then you just don't do a gig with that guy again. You don't use that agent, you don't use whoever it is again, you know? That's the experience' (Bryan, 28, bass)

This raises the question of whether participants considered playing jazz as 'work' at all. When asked about future goals, Rob (27, saxophone) replied 'that's funny, because when you ask about career objectives it makes it sound like work!' This ambiguous line between work and enjoyment is reflected in the following quote from Bryan:

> 'There's a big blur between what I do for work and what I do for fun… If you don't practice, it's over really. There's no point being a musician if you don't practice… When I have time off in the evenings, I practice. So literally all day Tuesday I'll be practicing. If I wasn't here [at the interview] now I'd be practicing. So I really see that as being the single most important part of being a musician even though it's not actually earning me any money'

This participant's income came either from teaching or performing function gigs by rote. The only music he pushed himself to practice for were his original projects, which constituted a negligible fragment of his total income. Hence the largest chunk of his working time is spent developing his own capabilities, even though this has little bearing on his earning power.

As many participants saw 'original' jazz performance as only ambiguously 'work', so they drew a firm line separating their own creative activities from 'normal' work. For instance, many expressed a strong aversion to the idea of music as a 'trade'. Participants who had undertaken more regularised kinds of music work such as musical theatre often recalled feeling out-of-step with older colleagues who they felt adopted this outlook. Rob, for example, recalled being berated by colleagues for practicing during scheduled breaks while doing pantomime. Edward (27, saxophone) recounts his experiences playing on cruise ships:

> 'The majority of people on there had been there 20 years- nobody seemed to be passionate about music. And I can't imagine any of those characters at any point being passionate about music! There was no passion left in them about what they were doing. It almost felt like a trade rather than a passion'

This view was not universal. Some participants dismissed this critique of music as a trade, viewing the perceived 'backs to the audience' attitude of some jazz performers as a self-indulgent barrier to self-sufficiency. We return to this point below.

This prioritisation of creative activity over financial stability was a regular interview theme, but it is not simply that musicians enjoy playing music and resist its conversion into a 'trade'. This was undoubtedly a recurrent theme, but a second one was the pursuit of music as reflecting a desire for variety over regularity. 'Having a balance is key for me- I couldn't do a 9-5 sitting in front of a computer screen' (Ryan, 27, saxophone). 'In the last two months I've done a lot of house gigs, played with orchestras, done quartet gigs, done an Indian music concert. And I love having that variety, and I just feel as long as I have variety I'll be happy' (Anna, 26, saxophone). Simon (28, guitar) described being attracted to a 'precarious' existence and suggested that if he found himself in a more regularised job, 'I would feel like I was missing something'.

Moreover, many participants suggested highly individualistic reasons for pursuing music careers. This 'individualism' came through in two ways. Firstly, a very common theme was the desire for self-improvement; to push oneself, in contrast with the stagnation that participants associated with more regularised work. Important here is the move all participants had made to London (save the native-Londoner minority). As noted, this was typically explained as a desire to expose oneself to a higher-calibre music scene, and in some cases forcing oneself out of local comfort zones. Terry (32, guitar) had cornered the jazz market in his home town, but felt that his development as a player had stalled and could only be rekindled with 'The Fear' involved in starting from scratch on the periphery of the London scene. Similarly, Oliver (29, bass) said:

> 'You think you can easily stay in [my hometown]: do a bit of teaching, some gigs at [the local jazz venues], now and again. And I though "God, I could end up being 40 and never have tried anything else". Because it's so comfortable… That idea of getting to forty- married,

house, a bit of teaching… That was such a difference from when I was younger and watching Queen: Live at Wembley. And I wanted to go for that'

Another interviewee (Noel, 33, bass) had made substantial sacrifices for this transition, giving up a stable conservatoire teaching job and selling his house, to rent in London while trying to accumulate paid gigs.

Occasionally, this idea of pushing oneself hardened into more explicit individualism. Richard (28, drums) spoke enthusiastically about the 'meritocratic' nature of music, in which (as opposed to 'normal' jobs) it was impossible to get away with mediocrity as part of a wider organisation. This suggests the second sense in which the attraction to music was individualistic: the desire for self-direction, and ownership of a particular artistic project.

'The ultimate goal is to make money doing my own thing. And the one major thing that's happened to me this year… was that I have started getting paid for doing gigs that are basically completely improvised. They're totally me. And that's never really happened to me before' (Bryan, 28, bass)

'When you do a function gig you think "has this pushed me forward as an artist? Has it increased my profile as a performing musician?"… If you do a function you get nothing from that. Whereas if you do a quartet gig down at the local to only five people, but you'll think "that's me, that's my name". You're doing creative gigs under your name. Even if you're not playing to other people, you have an output as an artist' (Harry, 26, trumpet)

Therefore various factors explain the acceptance and even embrace of precarious employment for our participants. Firstly, the idea of music as a passion to which material stability must be sacrificed. Secondly, the aversion to the stifling idea of music as a 'normal trade'. Thirdly, the desire for challenge and self-direction, which led to the rejection of more regularised kinds of music work such as functions and theatre where better employment conditions tend to be found. Hence participants

may prioritise the risks which supposedly catalyse individual development over regularity and security. This latter point is less universal and should not be overstated: the next section considers nuances, showing how participants contextualised precarity within the life course.

'Money perpetuates my existence, and that's ok as long as I'm playing good music': The managed embrace of precarity

For participants there was often a conscious decision to be made about the balance between 'creative' and stable employment. While many prioritised the former, a minority were unwilling to do so. Ben (29, guitar) states:

> 'I made a decision at college to make sure I could earn a living out of it… I've cut off most of my creative side mostly because of time and because of being exhausted. It's something I'd like to get back into, but I'm more than happy making a living wage out of what I'm doing' (Ben, 29, guitar)

Most participants sought to mitigate precarity to some degree, and this led down various paths. Most commonly, it involved increasing amounts of teaching, or other music jobs which were typically seen as less creatively fulfilling such as functions and musical theatre. One participant (Eric, 28, saxophone) found his precarity unbearable and was seeking to leave music altogether:

> 'I worry endlessly. I've got health problems as a result… anxiety… chronic tension headaches. All that sort of stuff, because you're constantly just stressed about every aspect of your financial security. And it's not just your job, it's also your passion. And the whole thing gets into one massive whirlwind, and it can be very, very soul-destroying… Today I've sold my Apple laptop for £600 because I need it to get through March. So I'm now in a position where at 28 I own nothing- I've got nothing. I've still got some debt! But when I was 21 I owned a house, and some other stuff… I've even sold saxes! I've got two saxes, I used to have five. And it's gone to keeping me alive'

Consequently, Eric was trying to 'downgrade' music from a career to mere interest: 'I've got to treat it more as a hobby, and if it flourishes, then great'.

It would be excessively bleak to characterise this kind of distress as the outcome of trying to reconcile the irreconcilable; i.e. creative passion and work. Many other interviewees, when asked about career objectives, described wanting to mitigate the more negative elements of precarity and maintain its supposedly positive ones. This attitude is again summarised in the quote from Ewan (33, bass) that heads this section. Noel (33, bass) had 'trimmed' his secure teaching job, to the point where it provided a basic 'safety net' to maximise opportunities for gigging. It is in this sense that the issue of emerging adulthood becomes relevant. 'I didn't come to London to save, I came to play music. So if I have a roof over my head and live a bit precariously, that's fine for now. You have to do it while you're still young' (Simon, 28, guitar).

Hence participants' longer-term objectives were frequently to achieve just enough economic stability to enable the pursuit of creative projects.

> 'The only economic objective I can see myself having is that I could have enough for a deposit on a flat in Zone 2-3 of London, but that seems almost unachievable. I don't want to earn shedloads of cash. I'm not money-oriented. If I was I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing. I want to keep doing what I'm doing. And to be doing creative projects where I have creative control' (Edward, 27, saxophone)

Consequently participants were conscious that, as they got older, their approaches to music may alter. Here Dan (26, saxophone) was asked about the prospects of a mortgage and children:

> 'I'd rather not think about it! I'd have to change. Now I don't have responsibilities and only myself to provide for. I'd have to rely on money more. So doing the originals stuff and not taking money from the gigs- I couldn't do that. Yesterday I spent all day working on getting

gigs- I couldn't do that... I do want all of that stuff at some point. I'll cross that bridge when it comes to it. If I have to hustle for more function gigs, so be it'

Again, it must be emphasised that the prospect of stable work is not necessarily an attraction; potentially quite the reverse. The notion of 'stability' assumed pejorative overtones for some interviewees. Alex (27, trumpet), had attempted regular work in the house band in a West End show:

'It was so boring. It ruins you as a musician. I really think [you have to] take other opportunities to play real music with real people that isn't just playing the exact same notes every night for five years... It isn't my idea of why I became a musician. And the guys that do it tend to be married with kids and jobs, needing financial security. If you don't have those obligations you're not required to do it. As soon as you get a mortgage or kids, suddenly you're thinking- I should probably find something more stable and higher income'

Terry (33, guitar) provides a particularly vivid example, where 'stability' seems to be synonymous with the subordination of one's own vision in someone else's service.

'I was doing loads of teaching in [my hometown] so I'd saved a fair amount, but had got quite pissed off with the whole teaching thing. I thought: "If I'm going to move up here I'm going to do it properly"... I know some people that really hate teaching... I find it reasonably pleasant, it doesn't grate with me, but you can see your life slip away doing that because you know that the only progress that's going to be made is your students'' (Terry, 33, guitar)

We should be precise about how regularised activity such as teaching fits into participants' working lives. While undoubtedly the case for some, it would be far too general to say that these jobs were only ever seen as a necessary evil. Various interviewees, for example, gained great professional satisfaction from teaching, or from the precise execution of complex theatrical charts. A common theme, however, was that this was not musicians' *raison d'etre* and should support but never

replace self-directed original projects. Many participants were by no means keen to reach 'adulthood emancipation' and some had given up its supposed tenets (e.g. home ownership) to enter a new, risk-laden phase. Moreover, participants tended not to envision clear 'transitions' to adulthood stability, but rather the managed cultivation of reliable resources such as teaching work, to prolong elements of precarity into the future. This reflects a profound 'individualisation' in one sense: while settings like musical theatre have comparatively strong collective regulation of conditions, the most salient question about these kinds of work for participants was typically the extent to which they should figure in their own individual balancing of regularity and precarity.

'There's lots of double-barrelled names in the London jazz scene'[1]: Class dimensions

The preceding section showed how musicians seek a balance between stability and precarity. This balance must be negotiated individually, depending on participants' prioritisation of creative autonomy and tolerance for risk. But individual responses to these variables are closely connected to socio-economic factors: primarily family background. Most participants had depended at various points on family support, facilitating the continuation of their careers. This support is critical from a very young age. Many participants had begun learning their instruments while in primary school, and hence parental encouragement and resources were essential. Firstly, they can provide a conducive environment for picking up an instrument, as Mark (26, drums) describes:

> [I have] always played music, because there were a lot of musicians in my family, so it was pretty much present straight away… So I started playing Tupperware boxes, and I always had pretend kits for ages, and then my dad brought me a real drum set when I was six... But before that it was just singing nursery rhymes, singing lots with my brother and sister. So, at six my sister would have already been playing trumpet so I would have been performing with her, and my brother was a trombonist'

The investment of family resources (both finances and time) is also critical:

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[1] Quote from Connor (33, bass).

'My mum made an absolutely gigantic investment in my musical learning. All at the same time I was having lessons in piano and guitar and viola and tuba, and singing, and theory… And going on all these different summer camps, playing in bands, this kind of stuff. Ferrying you kids about the place, buying all these instruments' (Terry, 33, guitar)

Participants had typically spent well over a decade practicing their instruments to develop the necessary playing capabilities, and the great majority therefore perceived this early encouragement as having been invaluable. This support frequently continued as they pursued music through Higher Education, which provides not just education but also networks critical to future success. This applies to participants self-identifying as both middle and working class. In our sample the latter was a small minority, and it seems likely that this need for intensive parental support constitutes an important entry barrier to music for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Family support was not confined to early and Higher education. For many participants, it remained important as they built careers. One interviewee, whose father had also been a professional musician, referred to his parents 'understanding the way of life… They've never wanted me not to give music a go through pressures and financial strains' (Chris, 28, drums). The potential for parental support affords underlying security. 'If I went a month without making any money, I know that I won't be living on the streets. At the very [worst] I could move back home' (Dan, 26, saxophone). While most did not call on these resources regularly, many had depended on them in the early stages of their careers, as they devoted their time to the unpaid labour of building networks. Parental support may also be needed in dealing with unexpected contingencies. One participant was forced into financial problems after being the victim of car crime, and another had had a regular residency cancelled at short notice. Parents, however, are not the only source of support. One of the very few interviewees that was engaged referred to his dilemmas between musical objectives and the development of a family:

'I think I'm going to have to make sacrifices. I've tried talking about it with [my fiancé] but she doesn't want to hear it. She just says "you need to do whatever you need to do". I think she feels like she doesn't want to be the one to have to rein in my career' (Bryan, 28, bass)

Familial safety nets enabled many participants to immerse themselves more fully in establishing themselves creatively, and to some extent stave off the necessity for regularised work that may disrupt this pursuit. Of course, almost all participants found other ways of providing stability-typically teaching one or two days per week. But given the importance of family, it is unsurprising that various interviewees remarked on the perceived dominance of the jazz scene by people from affluent backgrounds. 'I really only know one or two working class musicians. Especially in London it's a very white, middle class thing' (Harry, 26, trumpet). See also the following exchange with Stan (33, bass):

'Stan: I can think of numerous examples of jazz musicians from wealthy families. There's a lot of affluent "artist" types, and to be honest I probably count among that number. I'm lucky enough that I actually inherited a fair bit of money that I spent on a flat. My dad helped me buy the rest of the flat. So I hardly have any outgoings in terms of rent. But I do actually earn money from rent by owning the flat.

Interviewer: That enables you to pursue what you want to do a bit more?

Stan: Yeah. There are a lot of musicians in that situation.'

One of the older interviewees (David, 40s, guitar) had taught for many years and described being struck by the increasing numbers of students entering the profession from elite private institutions, reflecting the expanding provision of jazz education and the codification of an academic jazz syllabus (Whyton, 2006). As might be expected from sociological literature linking class background with confidence (Filippin and Paccagnella, 2012; Zhang and Postiglione, 2001), David observed a strikingly different attitude among these students; more self-assured and, notably for our purposes, more

disposed to themselves as artists than with establishing themselves in a stable 'trade'. Others have also noted the importance of educational provision in shaping social capital for jazz musicians (Dowd & Pinheiro, 2013).

Participants were often critical of this state of affairs; the 'insanely middle class' demography of the jazz scene (Mark, 26, drums). One recurrent way in which this criticism manifested was via the stereotype of the self-indulgent jazz musician, afforded the luxury of pursuing individual creative goals at the expense of the attributes required by more rounded professional musicians: self-promotion, organisation, and skills such as accurate sight-reading. Mark (26, drums) refers to 'that jazz attitude of playing with backs to the audience, playing what they want, you can guarantee their parents are worth a bit of money'. In this sense, socio-economic background was very closely connected with musicians' ability to stave off the need for stability at the apparent expense of individual artistic development.

Our interviews reveal the ambivalence of precarity among jazz musicians. It is often seen as an inevitable corollary of pursuing a passion for music that cannot be satisfied through 'normal' work. This attitude may strengthen into the belief that, in various ways, the absence of stability is something to embrace. This can reflect strikingly 'individualistic' elements, most notably a belief in individual self-improvement and ownership of a creative identity. But this embrace should not be overstated. Many participants anticipated the need to find stable work later in their lives, although they did not always see this as something to look forward to. Hence emerging adulthood, for most participants, involves the continuing management of precarity on an individual basis, rather than a transition to stability. Very few participants could be said to strive for the latter, even if many saw it as integral to adulthood. But, equally important is the fact that this management of precarity is highly dependent on sources of security outside work- typically the family. In this sense, structural socio-economic divisions are reproduced in the jazz scene despite, or even because of, the 'individualisation' within it.

Discussion and conclusions

This article has made three points about the ambivalence of young jazz musicians to precarious work. Firstly, they tolerate and even embrace precarity. Secondly, that the boundaries between stability and precarity are blurred, as musicians use balanced quantities of stable work to support otherwise precarious careers, rather than simply moving from precarity to stability over the life course. Thirdly, that their ability to do this is facilitated by socio-economic factors. It remains to discuss the implications of these findings.

Broadly, our research highlights the ambivalence of 'individualisation' among young workers. To some extent it is sharply evident. Some referred to the 'meritocracy' of music, but only a small minority revelled in this competitive element. For the majority, there was a widespread desire to develop creative projects outside of regularised work settings, and this led to individuals making quite personal decisions about the balance between different sources of work. Our interviews, moreover, reveal an important paradox. Many participants were highly critical of capitalist working relationships, and fiercely resisted the separation of conception and execution. But this 'bohemian' critique of capitalism renders them particularly 'exploitable' under capitalist rules, because it leads them to reject the socialisation at work enabling contestation of instability and low pay.

Clearly, analysis of precarity and the life course make little sense without considering issues of socio-economic background. Evidently many participants had embraced at least some aspects of precarious work, and on some level this reflects individualisation. As noted, among jazz musicians we may also speak of a generational divide, with participants tending to encounter older workers predominantly in more regimented work environments where collective representation is much more strongly rooted (see also Umney & Kretsos, 2013). But family background is arguably more important still, with the presence of parents with the wherewithal to support participants through education and career-building indicating the continued importance of class. Our qualitative research here suggests the hypothesis that we are likely to see an increasing class divide in jazz, as the

profession becomes harder and harder for those without these resources to access. Hence our participants are not necessarily in the 'precariat': their working lives are precarious, but they are not 'disaffiliated' in Castell's (2000) sense. Our research therefore re-emphasises the importance of connections between different dimensions of precarity: stability in one realm can throw a very different light on precarity in another.

Finally, our findings are also relevant to wider debates in the creative sectors. They offer a useful cross-fertilisation between creative sector studies and wider sociological work on precarity. The concept of precarity is evidently of critical importance in creative work, but in the eyes of creative workers is likely to have an ambivalent role. It has to be considered in its broadest form, encompassing non-work factors, to make sense. Moreover, a key question is the ability of creative workers to tolerate potentially unending periods of work precarity, and this constitutes a factor limiting working class participation in the arts, as well as going some way to explaining trade union weakness in the sector. Beyond broader characterisations of the relative union-unfriendliness of younger people, we show that the objectives of unions and young workers in the creative sector-specifically their respective views on work stability- may be contradictory.

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