

Les Gillon

Live Music Playbour: a Piece of the Puzzle

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The Puzzle; can a tree grow without roots?

There are two apparently contradictory trends in the live music industry in the UK. One trend is the continuing growth of revenues from live music and increased ticket sales for concerts and music festivals. The UK Music's survey of 2017 reported that audience numbers had reached its highest ever level of 30.9 million, having risen by 3.2 million since 2015. In the UK and internationally, revenues from live music has overtaken revenues from recorded music (UK Music 2017 Report). However, the same report also found that, due to rising property values and strict licencing laws, smaller live music venues are increasingly threatened with closure and it reported a sharp fall in revenues from that part of the sector.

It is often the small venues that programme artists who play original material that are most at risk, as smaller venues turn increasingly to tribute acts and cover bands as 'safe bets' to ensure their survival. (Snapes 2018). This presents a challenge to a music industry that has always relied on these smaller venues to produce new talent and content; for example, the highly successful musician Ed Sheeran developed his act and honed his skills performing extensively on the small venue circuit, often in pubs and small clubs. In many ways, these small venues can be thought of as representing the research and development area of the music industry, not only the industry in Britain, but internationally.

For that reason it is important for the future of live music in the UK that smaller venues that are the breeding ground of new talent are able to survive. The UK live music sector has indeed seen extraordinary growth over recent years, but a tree without roots is not stable; if the activity of promoting original music in smaller venues is increasingly becoming sub-commercial, that represents not only a cultural impoverishment to communities, but a threat to the sustainability of the industry as a whole. In this chapter we will examine one possible solution to this new challenge; a solution that draws upon older traditions of live music production, consumption and participation.

There has been discussion in recent years of the role of what Julian Kücklich has called *playbour* in the games industry and Tiziana Terranova has identified as *free labour* in the wider digital economy. Terranova rejects the notion that the development of open source creative digital communities represents a challenge to capitalist relations of production; rather she describes the phenomenon as 'a mutation that is totally immanent to late capitalism, not so much a break as an intensification' (Terranova 2000: p54). This is the phenomena of consumers of digital products, particularly computer games, participating in the development of digital contents without receiving any financial reward. Christian Fuchs (2014) has argued that within a capitalist economic system this 'free labour' is a form of exploitation.

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There is a music industry parallel: in her study of the Manchester club scene, Kamila Rymajdo describes those who ~~these who~~ labour with little or no financial reward to support the music event as the *hidden worker bees* of the industry, arguing that 'the beneficiaries of this extra free labour are those at the top of the food chain, namely

the bigger venues, who draw on the cultural capital accrues by smaller venues' bookers' (Mazierska, Gillon and Rigg, Rymajdo 2018: p126). Rymajdo's analysis of the club scene might easily be applied to the music industry as a whole; the artists who, like Ed Sheeran, deliver huge ticket sales revenues, have often cut their teeth playing small venues for promoters who may struggle to break even.

In this chapter however, I will challenge the applicability of these concepts drawn from the analysis of the digital creative economy, to the work of those who labour without pay, promoting and supporting small-scale events within the live music industry. I will argue that defining all 'free labour' by reference to neo-liberal capitalist labour relations can provide only an incomplete account of the social and creative forces at play within this stratum of music promotion and production. Instead I offer an alternative account that locates this work within older pre-digital traditions of music creation, consumption and participation. It takes as its case study the Puzzle Hall Inn, known locally simply as the Puzzle, which was a very small but significant live music venue, located in an industrial area located on the outskirts of Sowerby Bridge, a small town in the Calder Valley, West Yorkshire. It is based on interviews, conducted in 2019, with people involved in trying to rescue and reopen the venue as a not-for-profit community owned enterprise.

The Calder Valley: co-operatives and communities

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Community owned enterprises, such as the one at the centre of the Puzzle rescue plan, are not an innovation in the local area. The Calder Valley region has a long history of working-class mutualism and industrial workers cooperatives. In the wake of a weavers' strike in Hebden Bridge which began in July 1906 and lasted almost two and a half years the Eaves Self-Help Manufacturing Company was a cooperative set up by the striking workers which not only manufactured cotton, but also put in place plans to build affordable housing for their members. It was following a successful model. The Hebden Bridge Fustian Manufacturing Society was a workers' co-operative that employed over 300 workers at Nutclough Mill, in Hebden Bridge. It traded from 1870 until 1918 when it was taken over by the Cooperative Wholesale Society. (Bibby 2015). These strong traditions of working-class mutualism also extend to cultural and leisure activities.

The region is one in which, traditions of not-for-profit music activities and co-operative community activities are deeply embedded. One of those traditions is the brass band movement. Stephen Etheridge notes that in West Yorkshire between 1860-1914, there were at least 241 brass bands (Etheridge 2012: p39). With the de-industrialisation of the region, the number of brass bands has of course decreased since that high-water mark, but the brass band tradition is still a strong in West Yorkshire. The small town of Brighouse, just five miles from Sowerby Bridge is the home of the Brighouse and Rastrick Brass Band, one of the most successful and highly regarded bands in the country. The band was formed in 1881 by means of public donations and has supported itself by public subscription and its own fundraising activities continuously since that time.

Although the Victorian brass band movement was strongly supported by the owners of mills and collieries, particularly by those who wished to encourage temperance

among their workforce, it would be wrong to see the movement as purely an expression of 19th century capitalist philanthropic paternalism. Its growth ran in parallel to the growth of the Trades union and labour movement and reflected and reinforced that growing sense of industrial solidarity.

This ethos was reflected in more structured working-class arenas. In 1912 Sam Midgley gave a lecture to the Bradford Branch of the Independent Labour Party and argued that music assisted in building emotional bonds between individuals, eventually influencing social harmony and municipal pride. (Etheridge 2012: p43)

Choral societies share a similar history in the West Yorkshire area, growing out of the working-class self-improvement and educational movements such as the Mechanics Institutes. Despite their amateur status, the brass bands and the choral societies of West Yorkshire achieved professional standards and notable successes. Huddersfield Choral Society, located just nine miles from the Puzzle Hall Inn, is still regarded as one of the best choirs in the UK and has regularly collaborated with leading musicians and composers since its foundation in 1836.

Some professionals made their talents available to the poorer sections of the community by providing cheap class lessons at public institutions. The Mechanics Institute was especially important in this sense. Many northern choral singers, including Alfred Halstead of the Huddersfield Choral Society, a carter by profession and regarded by many as one of the finest male altos of the nineteenth century, gained their grounding in this way. (Russell 1987: p134)

A few miles west along the Calder Valley from the Puzzle Hall Inn is highly successful of example of a not for profit live music venue, the Hebden Bridge Trades Club. The club has frequently made the finals of the NME Small Venue of the Year Awards and has hosted artists such as Patti Smith, Natalie Merchant, Laura Marling, Loudon Wainwright III, KT Tunstall, The Unthanks, Marc Almond, Julian Cope, Fairport Convention and the Sleaford Mods.

As its name suggests, the Trades Club was also a product of the labour movement, having been established by a group of local trades unions in the 1920s by means of a penny per week levy on union members. It fell into disuse with the decline of the cotton industry until it was rescued by local branches of the Labour Party. From 1982 the venue was leased to the Trades Club Social Club which operated it as an independent socialist members club, which alongside the music programme hosts community activities, political events and fundraisers for local and international campaigns. In recent years it has been formally constituted as a members' co-operative. That this venue finds its roots in the labour movement and its constitution in common ownership, is consistent with the culture and history of the Calder Valley.

Nor is the Trades Club unique as a co-operatively run, non-commercial promoter of original music in the Calder Valley. The Doghouse, based 7 miles away in Halifax, is another not-for-profit music promoter run by volunteers. The Doghouse has been operating since 2005 and in that time has staged over 300 gigs including

touring UK and international acts such as John Grant, Low, the Lovely Eggs, the Unthanks, the Courteeners, Efterklang, Robin Guthrie and I Am Kloot.

Music of the People: sSessions, cClubs and cConcerts

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It is perhaps unsurprising that, although 'folk music' is a very loosely defined genre, stretching from traditional material to modern original songs, its connotation of being the 'music of the people' has frequently led to it being produced outside the industrial and commercial structures of the music business. Folk music is played in a range of contexts in the Calder Valley and I will give examples of there distinct varieties of public music making: the folk club, the folk concert and the folk session.

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Folk clubs are non-profit making co-operative ventures that are also historically connected to the left and to the labour movement, due at least in part to the efforts of the Workers' Music Association which had been founded in 1936 by the Communist Party of Great Britain. In 1956 Alex Eaton, who had previously been member of the Young Communist League choir, set up the Topic Folk Club in nearby Bradford, that first folk club to be set up outside London and still the longest-running folk club in the United Kingdom. The club was named after Topic Records, set up in 1939 as an offshoot the Workers Music Association and which had become by the 1950s a leading outlet for British folk music. (Eaton 1990).

Folk and acoustic music concerts are promoted locally by BGR, a not-for-profit organisation set up by a group of friends, initially to put on a single concert by Steve Knightley of the explicitly leftist folk group Show of Hands, whose unorthodox touring practice was designed to encourage amateur promoters. Knightley wanted to play village halls and small rural venues in order to contribute to a rekindling of the community spirit that was a central theme of his song writing. The founders of BGR staged the gig at Wadsworth Community Centre in Hebden Bridge in June 2014 and since that time have gone on to promote regular gigs at the venue, featuring touring artists with a national profile.

A folk session is distinguished from a performance in that it is created by (and often mainly for) the group of musicians, mainly amateur, who choose to turn up and play. Such sessions are usually open and welcoming to all comers. The musicians are not paid, but sometimes are treated to a beer by the licensee. The folk session is a regular occurrence at the Fox and Goose in Hebden Bridge, whose model of a community owned pub, bought out and run on democratic lines by its regular customers, became a model for the rescue of the Puzzle Hall Inn.

–The twentieth English folk music revival owed much to the communist composer Alan Bush who, in 1936 founded the Workers' Music Association. Bush argued at that time that 'brass bands, though exclusively working-class, had as yet made no contribution to the 'class struggle', and that working-class choral organisations had only recently started to embrace a political role'. (Bullivant 2017: p65) The music released on the Topic label and that performed in the Bradford folk club that took its name from it, was both musicologically and ideologically the 'music of the people'.

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And yet by the 1960s there was a clear and increasingly important crossover between the British folk club scene and the commercial music industry. Many artists, both from the UK and the United States forged their early careers on vibrant but the

relatively impoverished British folk club circuit. The record producer Joe Boyd recalls seeing Paul Simon perform at the Troubadour coffee house in Earl's Court in 1965;

After the gig, Simon told me he had made a record in New York with his friend Artie from Forest Hills and to his alarm, their producer had overdubbed a cheesy drum track on one of their songs. Now he was being summoned back to promote its release as a single. Paul loved his flat in London and his folk club circuit and was reluctant to leave. The song was *The Sound of Silence* and the folk clubs of England never saw him again. (Boyd 2017: 171)

As Boyd notes, Simon was not the only folk club performer whose career took a similar trajectory. A few years before, Bob Dylan had travelled the same folk club circuit, as did many British performers who would later fill concert halls and establish themselves as major recording artists. It was the Topic label that released many of those British artists such as Martin Carthy, Dick Gaughan, the Watsons, Shirley Collins, June Tabor and Martin Simpson. As those artists moved from performing in back rooms of pubs to performing on international concert tours, so Topic records went from being an agitprop instrument of the Communist Party of Great Britain to becoming an established music industry player and an influential shaper of the burgeoning British folk music scene.

'A Safe Haven'

The direct connection between the Topic label and the Puzzle ~~Hall Inn~~ was recalled by Geoff Amos, a key figure in both the music history of the Puzzle and in its rescue by the community. Amos was born in Sowerby Bridge and had his first drink in the Puzzle in 1962. He is able to account for the development of the Puzzle as a venue from its beginnings. In the 1980s the Puzzle became popular with musicians, but there were no music performances held there. "People say that the Puzzle was always a music pub but they're wrong. It was always a big talking pub," said Amos. AmosHe recalls that the first music played in the pub was a folk session.

"In the early eighties the licensees hosted a little folk night on Mondays and it was a bit of a session. It got a lift occasionally because Bill Leader moved up here and lived locally." As a record producer, Bill Leader had worked for the Topic label on many of their most important and influential recordings. Amos recalls, "He had a little studio at the bottom of his house and if they had a gap in recording, he'd bring them down to the pub for a drink and they'd play."

Ann James started frequenting the Puzzle in the early 1980s, "Back then the music on offer was a Monday evening get together of jamming folk musicians of all abilities. It was well known amongst those in the folk trade and respected names including Mike Harding would drop in." Bill Leader's connection with Topic Records and later the Transatlantic label led to artists with national reputations playing in a tiny pub in a small town in Calderdale. This example of industry connections bringing in professional artists to play in the Puzzle at little or no cost was one that was later echoed in the live jazz events staged by Amos himself.

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Goeff Amos had extensive music industry experience involved tour managing major acts and running international jazz festivals including Bath, Bradford, Brecon, Cheltenham, Glasgow, South Bank, and Hallam Radio in Sheffield, as well as working with local authorities producing concert series, instrumental and vocal workshops. He also promoted many performances of theatre and music in the local area, including an early gig by Simply Red in Sowerby Bridge in 1985.

Amos was asked to put on a jazz festival in the pub yard in the early 1990s, “I’d said, ‘I’ll only do you one, because this is how I earn my living,’” but on the back of that successful festival, along with trumpet player Pete Martin, he set up the weekly jazz series ‘Jazz Live’ at the Puzzle ~~Hall Inn~~ in 1992. In the years that followed, ‘Jazz Live’ at the Puzzle hosted 850 jazz concerts, featured over 4250 artists and was listed in *The Times* as one of the top ten small jazz venues in the UK.

Amos and Martin ~~ran~~ chose to run ‘Jazz Live’ on Tuesday evenings in the Puzzle, because of the availability of the musicians: “We worked out that Tuesday would be best, because they’re probably free. Some of the musicians had come across me in festival situations and obviously with Pete being involved there was a trust element there.”

Although the gig paid only £50 in the early days it was immediately popular with the players. “It took off like a house on fire. The musicians loved it. To play to a full house where the front row is literally a foot away... there’s no hiding place.” As a result, the night attracted musicians of a high calibre and from outside the local area. Another reason that musicians were willing to play for low fees was that the organisers were happy to replace them if got a more lucrative engagement. “I always said ‘you don’t owe us a gig; as long as you ring us up we can sort it.’ We could always cobble something together. That’s the beauty of jazz.”

We were picking up musicians who were up and coming, the cream of the North of England, and then moving on. They loved to play, partly because of that audience thing, there was a real frisson between them and the audience. And also I wasn’t a ‘jazz policeman’: you come here and play what you play. They could come with new material, try it out in front of an audience before going on tour or pre-recording. We always said, ‘you come and you do what you do’. If you want to try something different it’s fine, get on with it. No-one was making any money, but they were happy to come from the North-east, from Manchester, from South Yorkshire. It’s because they’d found a safe haven.

As the reputation of the venue grew, Amos and Martin were able to attract musicians on national and international tour, staging concerts by Gary Boyle, John Etheridge, The European Jazz Quartet, Michael Cretu, Asaf Sirkis, Mike Geller and other artists from the USA and Europe.

The booking of such prominent players also led to the venue attracting audiences from further afield:

It started off fairly local, but very quickly we were getting people from Cheshire, Manchester, Rochdale, up from Doncaster, some people came

down from Ripon... We'd obviously touched a nerve-, because they wouldn't have been travelling that distance if they could have got that stuff at home.

As a commercial venture 'Jazz Night' at the Puzzle made no sense. Amos calculates that over the 15 years it ran, he subsidised it to the tune of over £26,000, topping up fees, putting up touring artists in his own home and feeding them dinner and breakfast. Aside from the small fee provided by the pub and the collection from the audience, the only other financial support was a small sum from Jazz North and its precursor organization for marketing and publicity, but as the venue had no separate performance space they could not charge admission and the size of the venue limited the takings at the bar: "I once put on a ticketed event on in there to try to test the capacity. We got to 75 people and you couldn't move".

A change of licensee led to Amos ending 'Jazz Night' in 2008. The new licensee disliked the music and the fact that many of the jazz fans would drive to the venue from some distance away and so not be inclined to spend money over the bar. Amos also concedes that there was by that time more competition both for audiences and for musicians.

We were caught out by our own success. People would travel in and say, 'Well if these lads can do it, we can do it.' And I would end up mentoring them, so there were other jazz nights springing up on the back of what we were doing.

The mentoring process that occurred within 'Jazz Night' at the Puzzle was not confined to the development of fledgling jazz promoters. It was also occurring within the musical community that centred on the venue. Amos recalls that the audiences for the Tuesday night gigs were not confined to avid jazz fans:

Locally we got some young rockers coming in and I'd say, 'check out this guitarist or drummer, you don't have to like the music'. Some didn't and some did, but they came regularly because they'd realise these guys are brilliant, like gods. There was an informal education thing going on and they'd ask about mouthpieces, strings, etcetera and the jazz guys would of course give generously.

Pete, a blues and rock guitar player now involved in the rescue of the Puzzle [Hall Inn](#), confirms this from his own experience. He first went to Puzzle in the early 1990s when he had been asked to play guitar for a fellow musician at a gig on a Saturday evening. He remembers feeling welcomed by the community within the pub and later became a regular customer and performer.

I was persuaded against my will to go down to the jazz night on Tuesday and that was a complete revelation. Apart from a few exceptions like Django Reinhardt I'd never really got into much jazz but went down for the Tuesday jazz sessions and it was like an epiphany.

Pete also got advice from Amos after change of licensee in 1996. By this time the music offering had expanded with rock and alternative bands on Saturdays, young

up and coming bands on Thursdays, acoustic sessions, open mic nights and poetry events.

The new licensee had no experience of running a music venue and she asked Pete to run the Saturday night gigs. He found it easy to book bands because 'everyone wanted to play the Puzzle'.

Musician Jenny Bromley also notes that musical education aspect of the Puzzle:

More often than not the people who went in the pub accepted the fact that it wouldn't always be their taste in music, but they'd go along to support it and try and be open to it. I also think there was a mutual agreement between the audience and the musicians that certainly, from my point of view I could go down there and listen to something and it would open my mind to something different, a type of music I hadn't come across before, or I hadn't considered listening to before. It would educate me.

That open eclecticism was maintained as the Puzzle developed as a venue, other promoters and bookers developed new events, there were music festivals on the spring and summer bank holiday weekends and the outdoor area was equipped with a purpose made stage and a built in P.A. system.

'Be a Piece of the Puzzle'

Despite the popularity of the Puzzle, the venue was one of a number owned by a pub company or 'pubco', which made the decision to close it down in January 2016. The final licensee had left the Puzzle in at the end of 2015, after the pubco refused his request for building work and improvements to the property. Pete describes the closure as being "like the heart of Sowerby Bridge had been ripped out".

~~Current member of the board~~ Jenny Bromley recalls, "For quite a while after it closed everybody was just in mourning and not really thinking that there was anything we could do about it." But gradually through conversation meetings and social media a rescue plan began to be discussed. A public meeting was held in April 2017 which established a community group called 'Friends of Puzzle Hall Inn', from which a steering group was formed to assess the feasibility of rescuing the venue.

Sam Irvine, whose family were licensees of the Puzzle in the 1990s, had the venue listed as an asset of community value (ACV) with the local council and entered on to the register in July 2017. The ACV legislation meant there would be a six-month moratorium ~~of on the~~ sale, during which time it could only be sold for the use of the community.

This created a window of opportunity to buy the venue for the community, by means of crowdfunding. The steering group received support from Hannah Nadim who had been a leading figure in the community group that had taken over the Fox and

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Goose pub in Hebden Bridge in 2014. They had established a Community Benefit Society and issued a share offer to raise the funds from regular customers and run it as a co-operative. A series of fundraising events were staged in local venues to raise awareness and raise funds for the Puzzle project. Musicians performed without taking a fee or expenses and those events raised several thousand pounds. The group created the slogan 'Be A Piece of The Puzzle' along with a jigsaw puzzle piece logo to publicise the community share offer.

There was an urgent need to ~~order~~ write a business plan and issue the share offer document and Netty Berry, a member of the steering group asked a Puzzle regular, [Joscelyns](#) Owens, who was the Managing Director and owner of a large local veterinary practice to help. After initially thinking that writing the business plan might be something she could complete in a weekend, [Jocelyns](#) Owens soon discovered the scale of the task, the need for a share offer document, grant applications, financial and legal requirements. The task was enormous and involved a much greater commitment of time than she had imagined, but she found herself drawn into the project. [She confessed:](#)

I don't want to sound like it's a completely altruistic thing because we all get something out of it. I wanted to do it because it was the right thing to do and I wanted to give back but I got rewards that I didn't expect or anticipate or imagine and I'm so grateful that Netty asked me to help because it really helped me through a difficult time. As I got into it, I realised I was sat round a table with a group of friends and acquaintances who all had something to contribute and I suddenly realised that I had something to contribute. I didn't realise how much I knew, how much I had to offer and at the time I was I was very isolated for various reasons. I had no self-confidence, I'd lost all my self-esteem and I didn't feel like I belonged anywhere and then all of a sudden this disparate group of people felt I had something to contribute and just being part of that was massively important to me at the time.

In researching ~~the social~~ the social needs of the area for the grant applications she found that social isolation was an issue across many demographics in the local area and using the venue as a social hub became an integral part of the business plan. The business plan showed that the group needed to raise £350,000 with a combination of share investors and match funding from grant and loans. The project won the support of Key Fund, a Yorkshire based social entrepreneurship programme developed in response to the collapse of heavy industries such as coal and steel, the Plunkett Foundation, which supports common ownership of community assets and Big Society Capital, a government initiative that uses money from dormant bank accounts to finance charities and social enterprises. But all of this and loans funding was dependant on the success of the share offer which needed to raise £150,000. [JossJocelyn](#) Owens remember that the deadlines were very tight.

People pulled all-nighters to get the share offer out. People in the funding bodies were 'pulling it out of the bag', unpaid in their own time because they believed in what we were doing, and they were passionate about community ownership.

Despite the tightness of the deadlines, she never doubted that the target would be reached through the crowdfunding campaign, despite the fact that most people would be likely to go for the minimum investment of £300.

I was absolutely convinced that the share offer would be successful. I believe in the people round here and I believed we had a fantastic story. And the response was overwhelming; within 24 hours we'd ticked over the hundred grand mark.

The effort was indeed successful; the crowdfunding campaign raised £269,300 in the space of two months from 219 individual investors¹. The venue was purchased by that group of its former customers, promoters and performers and the Puzzle Hall is now owned by the community and audiences it once served, with a commitment to reopen as a not-for-profit music venue and community hub. Since the purchase, the number of people buying shares in the Puzzle has steadily grown and stands at over 300 and it has an active Facebook presence with over 5,500 followers, despite having been a venue with a capacity of no more than 750. For that reason, Geoff Amos calls it "the unicorn of the licenced trade".

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The project has involved a large number of participants being willing not only to contribute to the funds for the purchase of the venue, but also prepared to commit to work on the project without pay. As Jenny Bromley pointed out the building itself was in a state of such disrepair at the time of purchase that it was clear the venue would take well over a year to get up and running. The need for unpaid labour did not end with the purchase of the venue.

It was a derelict ruin, a hovel of a place and it needed completely stripping out, so a member of the Board led some volunteers to completely clear out the building. They had some building experience, that's their trade, and they've gone down and spent a huge amount of time filling skips and dragging out carpets and plaster.

[Jess Jocelyn](#) Owens also points to the wide range of skills available within the community that could be brought to bear on the project, but also to the way those skills developed to meet the demands of the project:

Everybody had something different to contribute and that's what's really good about being part of a community. You don't know what people have got to contribute because they're just people you meet down the pub, have a drink with, have fun with. The other good thing was yes, I'm bringing skills but I'm also learning skills.

Jenny Bromley herself became more fully involved after the successful buy out of the venue, despite initially feeling that would involve too much of a commitment.

At that time, I didn't believe I had time to be actively involved, because I was juggling three bands and a full-time day job, but the people who got involved were a few of my very close friends, who incidentally I've met

¹ [In furtherance of full disclosure, I was one of those who answered that call to 'Be a Piece of the Puzzle'.](#)

through the Puzzle; my entire circle of friends now, the people I see regularly are people from the Puzzle. There was a small team of people who were trying to get things organised, so I said "I'll just do the minutes and type them up. Then I became more involved as others had to drop out and because I love my friends and I love the Puzzle and I didn't want to see this project fail, I thought I had to get involved and I wanted to get involved and I did. I joined the Board of Directors and packed in one of my bands. This week I've spent about 12 hours working on the Puzzle and that's probably about average for the other people on the board as well. Times fifteen months.

"A Mutual Agreement between the Audience and the Musicians"

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Directors and supporters of the Puzzle rescue tell remarkably similar personal stories about ~~the of~~ the inclusive and nurturing nature of the venue. Debbie moved to Sowerby Bridge in 2003 while at university "I heard about this quirky pub where all the ~~weirdos ierdes~~ and socialists go and I thought I would find it, I immediately fell in love with the place on my first visit after walking into a music night. I was made to feel really included by the regulars". She later got a job working behind the bar on the music nights and became one of the early organisers of the rescue bid.

Ann James first visited the Puzzle in around 1982 when she was in a relationship with someone who lived in Sowerby Bridge:

One Friday night, having missed a bus to Halifax, we thought we'd wait it out in the nearest pub which happened to be the Puzzle. The atmosphere was so friendly and buzzing, we made it our regular. And though the relationship that first brought me to Sowerby Bridge ended, The Puzzle and me stayed tight.

One member actively involved in the rescue talked of an early experience of the Puzzle community being one in which the landlady at the time and regulars of the pub protected her from an abusive ex-partner. "I didn't even ask them, and I didn't even know how anybody knew to be honest. And somehow nobody made me feel like they were intruding in my business. People didn't ask questions. I didn't feel judged."

Jess Jocelyn Owens' affection for the Puzzle came from her early experience as a single parent working long hours building up her practice and feeling relatively isolated:

I could turn up last minute and always be welcomed with a smile into a safe community of fun, creative, eclectic, sometimes slightly eccentric, supportive people. For me it was the essence of Sowerby Bridge and the reason I later moved into the area.

After studying at Hull University Jenny Bromley returned to Sowerby Bridge in 2009 and was introduced to the Puzzle by her friend and fellow musician Netty Berry. Netty had started performing at the open mic nights and she told Jenny what a really

friendly session it was and persuaded her to go. The folk singer Gareth Scott was running the night “I played a song and he got me to play another to close the night”. Jenny Bromley and Gareth Scott went on to form the band A Rookery and Scott is now a member of the successful folk vocal group Kimber’s Men, along with Jenny’s father, the bass singer John Bromley

Many of the supporters of the project, both musicians and audience members expressed a dissatisfaction with the experience of seeing touring acts in larger venues. Andy Greaves also dislikes seeing acts in large concert venues, “I don’t tend to like big gigs, they are too impersonal for me, particular ones in football stadiums which are meant for watching football in, or rugby or whatever”.

Pete the blues guitarist agrees, “Going to see major band gigs has become a very rare event for me...they have gone for mega stadium gigs where the band is cut off from the audience.” He appreciates having had the opportunity see to performances by the high calibre musicians who played the Puzzle early in their careers:

The quality of the music was so high that some of the bands and artists who played in the Puzzle have since gone on to play the very mega stadium gigs I have just been slagging off. I am just so grateful that I was able to see them in that setting when I had the chance.

For him, as for many, intimacy of the venue provided a more intense experience than can be obtained in a large venue

The really brilliant thing about the Puzzle was the intimacy of the place. The band were right there in front of you, so close you could see the beads of sweat on their brow and if like me you were a guitar nerd, follow the chords they were playing.

This seems to be particularly the view of audience members who are also musicians. Andy Greaves notes the value of seeing an act in an intimate venue: “I like to get close up to the musicians and see the nuances of their playing styles.” But he also comments on other benefits of seeing performers in the Puzzle, rather than on a concert stage in that it affords a chance to hear music that is less likely to conform to expectations:

I’m also seeing someone less well known in all probability than someone I’d see at a really big gig, something a bit more unusual, maybe less well established and fresher - or a well-established artist doing something different from what they’re generally well known for.

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Jenny Bromley argues that the open-minded nature of the Puzzle audience led to a climate of creative freedom. "I think that the place just nurtured that feeling amongst people and also attracted a lot of musicians, not only to perform, but to go and listen." This sense of the lack of barrier between audience and performer was important to many involved with the Puzzle: as Jenny Bromley notes, the musicians and the audience were sometimes interchangeable.

A band would finish, and you'd want to go and talk to them and it's very easy because you were just nearly touching their nose when you were watching them a minute ago. And then they become your mates and come down and want to watch other bands and it's just this self-perpetuating thing of bands becoming audience becoming bands and then band members joining other bands and bringing other people. It's the circle of Puzzle musician life that never seems to end.

A Solution to the Puzzle

In this chapter I have presented the rescue of the Puzzle as an example of the creation of a community owned, cooperatively run not-for-profit music venue. I have suggested that such venues could provide a solution to an issue facing the music industry: the loss of small and medium sized venues. In doing so I am aware that the Puzzle rescue is by no means a typical example, nor one that could be achieved in every community; it was in many ways extraordinary. Everything about the project was ill-starred: the venue was tiny, it had been closed for over a year and it had become semi-derelict in that time. Yet the rescue bid has been remarkably successful. It is for good reason that Geoff Amos described the Puzzle as 'the unicorn of the licenced trade'.

The success of the project depended on a number of factors peculiar to the venue. Although the Puzzle was located in a run-down industrial area, its history as a venue conferred upon it a cultural significance within the local community (and a wider music community) that was disproportionate to its size or its capacity to generate revenue. As a result, the cultural draw it exerted enabled the project to enlist the voluntary support of people with a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience in business, local government, the licenced trade, the construction industry, the cultural sector, charitable and other funding bodies. But if the Puzzle itself is a 'unicorn' it nonetheless inhabits an environment of not-for-profit music that is well populated by less exotic beasts. Traditions of working class co-operative cultural activities, rooted in the history of the labour movement, are still alive and well in the Calder Valley and beyond. The voluntarism that established the brass bands and choirs of the 19th century and the created the folk music clubs of the 20th century, continues to support and sustain the small venues of the 21st century.

Throughout its existence as a venue, the success of the Puzzle was always dependent on free labour. Promoters like Amos and Martin made nothing from their work, and as for the musicians, fees sometimes barely covered their expenses. In the rescuing of the venue, that free labour has multiplied exponentially and looks set to continue into the future. The directors of the project are all unpaid and the

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rebuilding of the venue depends of the work of ~~volunteers~~ volunteers. It is clear that there are diametrically different ways in which such 'free labour' can be characterised; as indicative of the exploitative nature of the industry or as an example of non-hierarchical mutualism in action.

The labour, time and money that members of the community have invested in the project falls into a different category of engagement than ~~those that~~ commonly recognised within the commercial norms of the music industry: where labour is exchanged for a wage, which then perhaps may perhaps be used to purchase music that has been commodified for its exchange value. Instead, those who work for the benefit of the Puzzle ~~of the~~ and its community, speak of receiving benefits that are more direct and more profound. In discovering those benefits, the Puzzle project is continuing a tradition of common ownership and collaboration that has deep roots in local culture.

The disruptive technological changes that transformed the music industry from one whose prime source of revenue was the sale of recorded ed music to one for whom the live music experience was the principal revenue generators swept away decades of industry practice. It led to new and innovative business models being developed, but it also cleared space for older forms to regain a foothold in the ecology of music making. In the community that has grown around Puzzle, the creation and enjoyment of music culture resists commodification, escapes commercial industry norms and achieves sustainability by other means.

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