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Knowing Fans, Knowing Music: An Exploration of Fan Interaction on Twitter

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

Music

by

Nick McCollum

Committee in charge:

Professor Nancy Guy, Chair
Professor David Borgo
Professor Eun-Young Jung

2011

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University of California, San Diego

2011

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Knowing Fans, Knowing Music: An Exploration of Fan Interaction on Twitter

by

Nick McCollum

Master of Arts in Music

University of California, San Diego, 2011

Professor Nancy Guy, Chair

In this thesis, I examine what “knowing music” means to participants in online social musicking activities, along with the role Twitter plays in this process. I compare the way I came to “know” music through social networks

with others' behaviors regarding music and social networking. Using Henry Jenkins's research framework as an aca-fan (a portmanteau word combining academic and fan), I study fan communities from the inside out.

I begin by outlining my story of coming to know the music that I do. Next, in order to identify other fan behavior, I discuss two case studies: a Josh Ritter concert I attended with people I met through Twitter and the fan community surrounding Amanda Palmer. Finally, I introduce four fans from my own online social network with whom I'm connected because of Ritter. I discuss their responses to questions about Twitter's role in their coming to "know" music.

Based on my small sampling, I find that fans identify two main forms of knowing music aside from being able to read and play it. First, they consider understanding popular music history and trends important to knowing music. Second, they form deeper connections with particular songs through thoughtful listening and understanding musicians' personalities. The fans I interviewed agree that Twitter helps greatly with the first, but those who value deeper connections with the music find that Twitter can detract from their experience of music by making it more difficult to form these connections. Their online activity is consistent with these opinions.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

ABOUT ME, HOW I GOT TO THIS POINT (IN MORE THAN 140 CHARACTERS)

I have always envied that person who knows music—whatever that means. Both words in the phrase “knowing music” are problematic: what exactly is music? What exactly does it mean to *know* it? This concept is partly what I set out to explore—both in this paper and in recent years of my life.

The music I refer to is not the scores written by the great Western composers, their recordings, nor the performance of symphonies. (Not that it can't be, but it wasn't for me.) Rather, it's the manifestation of Christopher Small's idea of musicking among my fellow Generation Y'ers: popular musicking, indie musicking; the apparent value of being the first to know about a new song or band; the use of a portable music player to regulate mood; the use of band posters to give personality to bedrooms (and their inhabitants); the contents of a 48-CD case in one's backpack or the floor of one's car contributing to their sense of identity. It's the music in everyday life so masterfully outlined by Tia DeNora.¹

Small defines musicking as “[taking] part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing,

¹ DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*.

by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.”² The term incorporates all aspects of music activity. Listeners are just as much musickers as the musicians that perform or record.

Small later points out the peculiarity of the concert audience. Many people come together as strangers to witness an event and often remain so; others come with small groups of friends but still take in the performance silently—on their own.

Of course, while this phenomenon is true for concerts of Western classical music, popular and independent music concerts are different situations. Audiences are far from quiet, not only between songs but during them as well. And, whether it be from a number of chemical substances more commonly found at these concerts than at classical concerts or simply a function of the demographic of concertgoers, people tend to be rather sociable. In fact, I don’t recall ever going to a popular or independent music concert during which I haven’t met at least one person.

This social behavior extends beyond the confines of the concert venue. The closest substitute, the live webcast of a performance, almost always has a chat window where fans can chime in from all over the world. Outside the context of concerts, these musickers value (among other things) the discovery and sharing of links to new artists and songs, the ability to make effective playlists, and tweets linking to new songs. They participate in online

² Small, *Musicking*, 9.

discussions and choose to follow people that introduce them to new music. Or so it seems. I'll explore the nature of and motivation behind online interactions more deeply later on.

Unlike those in Small's description of the classical concert, the strangers involved in popular and independent musicking seemingly want to (or feel the need to) interact. Thus, this musicking is in some way social. This is easily seen, but the nature of this socialization is difficult to categorize, as are the motivations for this socialization, which I'll call "online social musicking." So, this person that I envy is the competent social indie musicker, the meaning of which I intend to discover through this paper.

Why This (Definition of) Music?

I supposedly knew music. I studied it. I played it. I could read it and write it. I sang in musicals. I was in concert bands, jazz bands, marching bands, choirs. I was competent on more than a handful of instruments. But that was the extent of my music: institutionalized music. I knew the music that my concert band played, that my jazz band played, that my choir sang, that my class studied. And even then, in saying knew, I mean that I was familiar with its sound and maybe how to play it. I didn't know how to listen to it or, more importantly, how to live with it.

My parents paid little attention to music. As a result, my musicking practices were limited to out-of-context performance. I didn't grow up listening to popular music of their generation or any of the classics recognized as such

by mine. Until college, I would've had to rack my brain to name a handful of Beatles songs. I hadn't listened to Bob Dylan, or Johnny Cash, or Simon and Garfunkel, or any others on a list that to this day I don't even know enough to make. It was this cultural element of music that was missing—the reason why I (who played first-chair clarinet, won a jazz soloist award, made it to state in choir, received near perfect solo and ensemble competition scores, and have an honors degree in music history and theory) still felt like I didn't *know* music.

KNOWING MUSIC, KNOWING PEOPLE

I've found that, for me, music is strongly related to feelings of ostracism and inclusion. I think back to an instance in fifth grade when a fellow student tested me by asking me to name five bands—any bands. I couldn't do it. The kids that overheard the exchange got a good laugh. I felt like less of a person because I lacked the part of my personality steeped in music. I lacked a musical identity.

A couple years later, I began to realize that friend groups (at least in my school) were largely held together by common musical tastes. There was the group of Blink 182 fans, the group of 2Pac and DMX fans, the group of Dave Matthews fans, the group of NSYNC and Backstreet Boys fans. If that 48-CD case does in fact reflect a person's identity, I was a schizophrenic in need of more than a couple counseling sessions. I spent a sizable amount of money on CDs that I'm still not sure I ever liked. I made frequent trips to the record store to sell back CDs that I wasn't supposed to like as I exchanged one

potential friend group for another. Sometimes I even ended up buying them again later.

I finally began to get to know music when I started college—largely by pretending. I had decided not to try to fit into groups of friends like I had done before, but instead to let them seek me out. In doing so, I found myself with a group of like-minded people who assumed that I had similar music tastes. Each time they mentioned a band or a song, I would pretend to know what they were talking about and then do my best to remember the name and listen. Over time, the soundtracks of our activities began to resonate with me, and I found that I really did like their music. Songs became associated with activities and memories, and soon it came to be my music too.

In other words, I first came to *know*, or rather adopt, a music of my own through a process of offline social networking.³ Though it sounds simple, I found it through people with similar likes and interests, rather than by using the music to find the people.

When discussing the phenomenon of a variety of strangers coming together for a concert, Small says that “Those taking part in any musical event are to some extent self-selected in terms of their sense of who they are or of

³ In this paper, I use the term “offline social networking” to represent interactions between people that take place in person rather than online (playing recordings for friends rather than sending links, going to concerts with friends rather than sharing YouTube videos, etc.) Often, people engage in offline and online social networking with the same groups of people, so I use “networking behavior” to encompass both offline and online social networking, using the extra adjective only for comparison.

who they feel themselves to be.”⁴ Assuming this to be true, my online social musicking behavior might reveal something about who I am in relation to music—the musical identity that I lacked growing up—and the same should be true for others. What does our networking behavior reveal about how we view ourselves musically?

In addition to increasing the potential for connections among fans, online social networks have also ostensibly increased the possibilities for communication between fans and musicians. I find networking behavior most satisfying because of the gratification of "knowing" music and being able to share it with other people. I enjoy receiving positive feedback after introducing a new artist or song to a friend; similarly, I enjoy receiving suggestions about new artists and songs from friends based on my tastes. To me, it comes across as a gesture of understanding each other. Whether or not I ever communicate with the musicians themselves is of little importance to me. However, in my combination of participating in discussions and scholarly lurking,⁵ I have noticed that fans respond in great numbers to musicians' posts (and seldom receive replies), whereas they seldom respond to each other. This behavior seems strange considering the assumed social nature of online social musicking. Thus, I'm interested in what knowing music means to other online social musickers and what role(s) Twitter plays in that process.

⁴ Small, *Musicking*, 41.

⁵ Lurking, as recognized by the tech community, is a form of online behavior in which participants read posts and comments in online forums but never submit comments of their own. They often don't have usernames or any other affiliation with the forum.

FRAMEWORK

In this thesis, I adopt Henry Jenkins's approach of writing as both a fan and a scholar, comparing my experience of knowing music through social networks with the experiences of others. Jenkins claims, "To me the essence of being methodologically self-conscious is to be honest about how you know what you know. And most of what I am writing about here I know from the inside out."⁶ As he does with his discussion of alt.tv.twinpeaks, the seminal online community built around in-depth discussions of the TV series, and his participation in amateur press associations, I have decided to let what I have learned as a participant in the online music culture guide my discussion—to explore it from the inside out.

Jenkins's approach is to conduct his studies as a fan first, then as an academic. In doing so, he refers to himself as an aca-fan, a portmanteau word combining academic and fan. He says that publishers initially criticized him for putting on an air, "slumming it," to try to fit in as a fan. But, if anything, he claims the opposite: "I'd lived my entire life as a fan. I could be accused of putting on airs by becoming an academic, but I scarcely could be accused of slumming it."⁷ Whether he's writing about the *Twinpeaks* community, the Star Trek community, or the slash fiction community he participates in, he includes his own blog posts and comments and treats them with the same validity as

⁶ Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*, 6.

⁷ Jenkins, "Excerpts from 'Matt Hills Interviews Henry Jenkins,'" in *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*, 13.

data as he does with the posts and comments of other fans.

In the spring of 2010, I began my first study of fans on Twitter, trying to understand what they expect from the online behavior of musicians they follow. To do so, I adopted the familiar ethnomusicological approach of immersing myself into the community (in this case, online forums, concert webcasts, and Twitter conversations). In doing this, I ignored my own network behavior and personality and became conscious of all of my tweets—in my mind, each one another step closer to inserting myself into a foreign online culture. However, rather than finding my way into a new culture, I found a way out of my own. I spent more time monitoring and molding my actions and less time focusing on the friends and musicians that had drawn me to use Twitter in the first place. My online interactions were forced, and I became frustrated with the lack of fulfillment I was getting out of my Twitter account.

I failed to realize that I was already a participant in a different online community—a community no less worthy of study. I abandoned my efforts to “slum it” in a foreign fan community and decided to look inward. In doing so, I gained access to a rich data set: my already-established offline and online social networks built upon years of interaction around music that I know and enjoy. This data set allowed me to, like Jenkins, objectively look at social artifacts from my past use of Twitter. I could further interpret them within the context of my reflections on the development of my musical self.

Understanding both my actions and motivations, I could more deeply compare

the role of social networks in my relationship with music with the roles they play in others' relationships with music.

In this thesis, I examine what knowing music means to others who participate in online social musicking activities, along with the role(s) Twitter plays in that process. I compare my coming to know music through social networks with others' opinions of music and social networking. I begin by discussing social networks as places for music, identifying music as a common driving force behind network behavior and a motivation for the creation of new networks. I then look specifically at Twitter within the collection of music social networks, briefly explaining how it works and why I find it an appropriate network to study. Afterwards, I discuss member participation in two network communities. Finally, this discussion gives rise to a focus on four people that each became a part of my offline and online networks in different ways, providing insight into their motivations for network behavior and an opportunity for comparison.

Throughout each section of this paper, I follow the same progression: personal experience (as a participant), reflection on personal experience, observation of others' behavior, and comparison.

CHAPTER II: ONLINE SOCIAL MUSICKING

BACKGROUND

Music-purchasing platforms, such as eMusic and iTunes, are also social. eMusic provides recommendations based on the downloading habits of people that download similar songs, and iTunes's relatively new Ping feature is yet another social network within the store that helps people to choose which music to buy based on the selections of their friends. And of course, everything incorporates reviews and comments by friends and strangers, triggering discussions, arguments, and discovery of new music.

Social Networks as Places for Music

Given the sheer number of music websites with social-networking features and the number of social-networking websites with music-sharing features, it seems reasonable to assume that music is a driving force of social organization. Music sites stress the idea of community. People can be friends with their favorite bands on Myspace. Fans can read musicians' personal updates on Twitter. They can create and share their favorite playlists on 8tracks and Grooveshark—all the while posting their recently played songs on Last.fm for their friends (and the rest of the world) to see.

A study by Vasant Dhar and Elaine A. Chang⁸ reveals that user-generated content (e.g., blog posts on social network sites) is positively correlated with music sales above a baseline level of activity, whereas mainstream music reviews and criticism don't share this correlation with music sales. While they are unable to prove that blog activity has a causal relationship with increased sales, they find that an increase in blog activity can often predict an increase in music sales. They note that it's possible that some additional factor may be causing both the increase in blog activity and increase in sales. They speculate while explaining the basis for their study:

Music is probably harder to describe in words than movies and books. [...] As with books, however, *interpreting* blogs and content on social networking sites about music is hard—without extensive prior knowledge about the raters, the reader doesn't know which opinions are from people who are “similar” and should therefore be weighted more heavily. However, if a large volume of blogs are writing about an album, chances are that the album has enough merit to create some buzz.⁹

While the final line provides their rationale for using the amount of blog activity (rather than the specific content or status of blogs) as a regression variable, the previous statement provides some insight into the social nature of music. Perhaps fans gravitate toward suggestions of “friends” (either in person or online) rather than critics because they view friends' suggestions as being more in line with their own specific music tastes.

⁸ Dhar and Chang, “Does Chatter Matter?” 5–6.

⁹ *Ibid.*

The creation of new music networks seems to follow in this line of reasoning. Audioscrobbler, now part of Last.fm, began (and continues under the new name) as a service that scrobbles music from any of a user's on- or offline music players. Scrobble is a neologism that means to track and post a user's listening habits for use in creating dynamic, "intelligent" playlists based on his or her algorithmically assumed tastes and those of algorithmically similar users. The service relies on a growing database of users' listening choices and thus theoretically becomes more accurate as the database (i.e., sample size) grows. Though this process is social below the surface, Last.fm also allows for a more direct social aspect. Like in most other networks, users may choose to follow others whom they think to have similar music tastes.

A few years after the 2005 merger of Audioscrobbler and Last.fm, Apple released its own similar feature within iTunes 8 (2008). Called Genius, it "scrobbles" a user's iTunes playlists and play history and creates new playlists based on what it expects the user to want to listen to. It also uses the same data (compared again to data from "similar" users) to recommend new music to the listener for purchase through the iTunes store. In 2010, Apple released the Ping feature within iTunes, claiming "there's no better way to discover new music than to find out what your friends are listening to."¹⁰ It offers features similar to Last.fm, but all within the iTunes interface.

¹⁰ "Ping," on Apple's official website, accessed November 7, 2011, <http://www.apple.com/itunes/ping/>.

Many other networks have tried to capitalize on the shift from algorithmic music suggestions to social music suggestions. Launched in 2008, 8tracks calls itself “a ‘social’ alternative to Pandora”¹¹ Pandora uses algorithms to create Internet radio stations based on user feedback (likes and dislikes of songs), whereas 8tracks allows users to create and share online “mixtapes” that other users may listen to for free online. The team believes:

handcrafted music programming trumps algorithms. Think radio in the 1970s, mixtapes in the 1980s, and DJ culture of the 1990s through today. DJs share their talent in taste making, providing exposure for artists. Listeners get a unique blend of word-of-mouth sharing and radio programming—long the trusted means for music discovery—on a global scale.¹²

As do the other networks, 8tracks recognizes social behavior as the trusted means for music discovery.

Every network has its own style or niche, but they all hold their social features in common. Thus, it is evident that music-listening and social behavior, at least online, are strongly linked.

Why Twitter?

Launched in 2006, Twitter is a microblogging service that allows users to send short, timely updates, originally prompted by the question What are you doing. Twitter has since changed this prompt to What’s happening, reflecting a change in use as the network has matured. Updates are limited to 140 characters (a limit imposed by text messages), but they may contain

¹¹ Quote from the 8tracks app description in the iPhone App Store. See Appendix I.

¹² “About,” on 8tracks’s official website, accessed November 7, 2011, <http://8tracks.com/about>.

hyperlinks to websites with photos, full stories, or full blog posts. Thus, the short updates can serve as “sales pitches” for the linked content, trying to convince potential readers that it’s worth a click and a few minutes.

Updates also take the form of conversations. Users may direct questions or comments to others by typing an @ symbol followed by another user’s handle in a tweet. Twitter then alerts the other user of the mention. Alternatively, users may retweet a tweet, or post it again, with or without commenting on it.

Among the various social networks, I have decided to focus on Twitter for personal and practical reasons. Twitter allows for both connections between fans and musicians and connections among fans. Its ability to act as a powerful news aggregator for both friends’ and music updates was its first major draw for me. I still find it the easiest way to keep abreast of music news while also keeping in touch with friends.

It is also relatively easy, or in other words, culturally acceptable, to contact people out of the blue on Twitter, whereas such actions aren’t always looked upon as favorable or aren’t as fruitful on other networks. For instance, Facebook culture, having started out relatively private (i.e., limited to university friend groups) doesn’t welcome out-of-the-blue friend requests as freely as Twitter does. In Twitter culture, following someone out-of-the-blue is how people meet each other. Some of the most common ways to find new users to follow are the following:

- Someone a user follows retweets something and that user finds the retweeted user to be worth following.
- A user sees a followee reply to an unknown person and decides to join the conversation or follow the new person because of the conversation content.
- A user searches for a term such as, “San Diego songwriter,” that appears in another person’s firehose or short biography.
- Follow Friday or other hashtags link people together.

This is all possible because, unlike other large networks such as Facebook, all of the content on Twitter is public.¹³ Everyone’s biography and past tweets are searchable, allowing prospective followers to more easily find people they are interested in.

Knowing Fans, Knowing Musicians

I mentioned earlier that music and social behavior are strongly linked. This behavior takes the form of interactions among fans of musicians and interactions between fans and musicians. Interactions among fans can include conversations about musicians, sharing links to performance videos, sharing links to new songs, and mentioning new artists to friends, among other things. A study by Chen and Chellappa shows that music sampling (listening to tracks before buying) on MySpace Music has a significant positive effect on music sales.¹⁴ Thus, such sharing of links among fans is beneficial to artists (or to the record companies that own the artists’ rights), assuming the MySpace

¹³ Twitter provides users the option to set their profiles to private, which allows only followers to see a user’s firehose and requires prospective followers to gain approval from the user. But this is the exception rather than the norm.

¹⁴ Chen and Chellappa, “Music Sales and Online User Activity.”

results hold true for songs streaming on other networks as well.

Musicians and record companies, therefore, have an incentive to create “buzz” around their music. I won’t address why musicians participate in online discussions for another study, but I will look at fans’ decisions to interact with musicians.

Many studies have been conducted for marketing purposes to try to understand Internet users’ motivations for their online behavior, and many others study the advertising power of social networks. I’ll outline some of these below, as they also provide some insight into the social-ness of music-consumption activity. Most people seem to be guided by a need to find trustworthy communities. In order to track users’ behavior, Benevenuto et al. examined clickstream data from a social network aggregator.¹⁵ The clickstream data allowed them to view “silent” information, such as browsing and page views, in addition to visible activities, such as posts and comments. They looked at how frequently the users logged on and how long they continued using the networks; they examined the paths users took from one network activity to another; and they compared the clickstream data with visible user content.

In doing so, they found that the majority of user activity involved browsing profiles. In addition, when considering browsing activity alongside visible interactions, they found that “the number of friends a user interacts with

¹⁵ Benevenuto et al., “Characterizing User Behavior.”

increases by an order of magnitude, compared to only considering visible interactions.”¹⁶ Finally, they found that users don’t limit their interaction to their pages and their immediate friends’ pages, but they also have significant interactions (albeit “silent”) with friends of friends. In other words, the vast majority of online social network activity is lurking, and not always lurking on pages of people whom the lurkers know. When considering only visible activities, Benevenuto et al found that public scrapbook messaging (posting messages that anyone can see to users’ profiles) heavily outweighed the use of private messaging features. Of course, their study is limited to network users who use the aggregator, and it is limited to the networks the aggregator aggregates (LinkedIn, Orkut, Hi5, and MySpace).

Hennig-Thurau et al. find that “consumers’ desire for social interaction, desire for economic incentives, their concern for other consumers, and the potential to enhance their own self-worth are the primary factors leading to [electronic word-of-mouth] behavior.”¹⁷ They looked at the frequency with which users visited opinion platforms and the number of comments that reviewers left and regressed this data with survey results regarding reviewers’ motivations.

Smith et al. find, in a study of restaurant recommendations, that people prefer the recommendations of peers to the recommendations of

¹⁶ Ibid., 50.

¹⁷ Hennig-Thurau et al., “Electronic Word-Of-Mouth.”

professional critics.¹⁸ For their test, participants were told to pick a restaurant for either a party (“hedonic” purpose) or an office lunch (“utilitarian” purpose) and were presented with a search database mimicking an online search interface. On the first page of this database, they were presented with an expert recommendation, a peer recommendation, and an ability to search the restaurant database. They were also given information about the peer in the form of a short bio, from which they could gauge credibility and similarity (to the study participant). They were told that the expert was the Executive Chef of *Gourmet* magazine. After the test, participants provided feedback about the process.

This recommendation study shows that, for the most part, participants value peer suggestions more than expert suggestions and expert suggestions more than ads. However, participants’ choices were more influenced by expert suggestions when making utilitarian choices than when making hedonic choices. And, peers that the participants viewed as similar had a stronger effect on participants’ hedonic decisions than they did on utilitarian decisions.

It also raises an interesting question regarding music, which demands further study. For some, music serves a distinct purpose, such as mood regulation, whereas for others, music is purely for entertainment.

¹⁸ Donnavieve Smith et al., “Online Peer and Editorial Recommendations.”

Does the location at which someone fits in the purpose/pleasure continuum affect the way he or she values peer and expert music recommendations?

A study by Pedelty and Keefe, entitled "A Content Analysis of Music Fan Blogs,"¹⁹ reaches the unsurprising conclusion that fans of politically charged music tend to more frequently have politically charged discussions on fan blogs than fans of music that isn't politically charged. However, Pedelty and Keefe discovered no evidence of causality. So, they don't know if the music makes the fans more political or if more political people are drawn to the music. More interesting, however, and somewhat contradictory, is that they cite studies about the Beatles's "Revolution" and Barry McQuire's "Eve of Destruction," among others, to say that people react more to the image of a band, feelings of the era, and the mood and tone of the music than they do to the lyrics. In other words, people identify with how the bands make them (and their friends) feel as opposed to what the bands make them think. Nevertheless, it allows for the possibility that politically interested fans may be more inclined to listen to politically charged music, regardless of whether or not the fans and band have similar political views, because they enjoy the discussions of the resulting fan communities.

Extending the results of these studies to music leads to the suggestion that people may be willing to look to loose connections for passive music suggestions, for example, finding a band mentioned on the profile of an

¹⁹ Pedelty and Keefe, "Political Pop, Political Fans?"

unknown friend of a friend; to accept suggestions from people they view as either similar or experts, depending on their music tastes; to help identify bands that they believe others will like; and to identify with fan communities based on the feel or collective perception of a band.

CASE STUDIES

In the following section, I examine two cases of my online social musicking behavior in order to compare my intentions and actions with those of other fans. First, I discuss a Josh Ritter concert on June 22, 2010, to which I organized a group of people to go together through Twitter. Josh Ritter is a singer-songwriter from Idaho, and one of the first popular musicians I actively listened to. Many of my close friends are also fans of Ritter's music.

Second, I discuss the Twitter community surrounding Amanda Palmer as a contrasting example. Palmer is a songwriter and performance artist, who became famous through her membership in the Dresden Dolls and is very active on online social networks. Unlike the case with Ritter, I discovered Palmer when I first began interviewing fans about music and online social networks. Thus, my connection to her has always been research-oriented rather than fan-oriented.

I find the most rewarding aspects of online social musicking to be the ability to meet new people because of my music tastes and the ability to find out about new music that I like because of these new connections. I have little interest in interacting with the musicians themselves, even though online

social networks may provide this opportunity. This behavior is consistent with my offline musicking behavior as well. I have no interest in meeting musicians or talking to them after concerts. Although I form (sometimes deep) connections with someone's music, I don't form such connections with the musician.

Josh Ritter Concert²⁰

In the summer of 2010, I coordinated a trip to a Josh Ritter concert in Solana Beach with two people that I had met on Twitter (specifically for the occasion).²¹ To do so, I conducted a search of San Diego Twitter users that had at some point mentioned Ritter in one of their tweets. I found two and sent them both the following message approximately one month before the concert: "@Davest010 @buffynerdgirl I'm in the mood for randomness: saw that you're San Diego @joshritter fans. Are you going to his show on the 22nd?"²² Both responded, and a conversation about the upcoming concert ensued. Initial comments were filled with excitement, but the conversations ended each time when the prospect of actually meeting at the show came up.

Buffy responded first, "@enjayem Indeed! Been a fan for years but this

²⁰ From this section on, I quote many individual tweets, most of which are replies (@ messages). For ease of reading, I have omitted the @HANDLE construction unless it's unclear to whom the messages are directed. Also, due to Twitter's character limit and people's carelessness, many tweets have abbreviated spellings or spelling errors or lack punctuation. Although frustrating, this is commonplace on Twitter, so I have decided not to use "sic" on any of these errors.

²¹ Ritter's music is the first I "got to know," learning of it my freshman year of college, and it remains my favorite. I mention more about this later on.

²² <http://twitter.com/#!/enjayem/status/14745714669>, May 25, 2010.

will be my first show! Very much looking forward to it.”²³ I replied, “@buffynerdgirl You're in for a treat! Saw him in Chicago last summer before moving to SD. I've never seen someone look so excited performing”²⁴ She continued the conversation, “Excellent! Just saw Nada Surf at Belly Up and the sound is phenomenal. One of the best venues in town. So intimate, too!”²⁵

At this point, I tried to point the conversation in the direction of my initial intent, finding people interested in going to the concert with me. “I like the sound of that. Can't wait! Do you know a group of people heading up there? I don't know many local Ritter fans yet”²⁶ She responded about a potential carpool, but my next comment ended the conversation, “Cool. I'm all for a carpool if you guys are. How far north is it?”²⁷

Dave responded later, “@enjajem @buffynerdgirl I'll definitely be there. I've seen him live about four or five times. First saw him open for Sarah Harmer.”²⁸ He then responded to Buffy's reply to me, “@buffynerdgirl Nada Surf was at the Belly Up?!? How did I miss that? <sigh>”²⁹ He began by talking about the concert but then switched to other interests, “@buffynerdgirl So, I see you're a Buffy fan...are you also a Browncoat? :)”³⁰ (The term Browncoats refers to fans of the short-lived sci-fi series *Firefly*.) She replied, but the

²³ <http://twitter.com/#!/buffynerdgirl/status/14746561660>, May 25, 2010.

²⁴ <http://twitter.com/#!/enjajem/status/14748177120>, May 26, 2010.

²⁵ <http://twitter.com/#!/buffynerdgirl/status/14748339543>, May 26, 2010.

²⁶ <http://twitter.com/#!/enjajem/status/14748579069>, May 26, 2010.

²⁷ <http://twitter.com/#!/enjajem/status/14787522773>, May 26, 2010.

²⁸ <http://twitter.com/#!/Davest010/status/14770327916>, May 26, 2010.

²⁹ <http://twitter.com/#!/Davest010/status/14770441392>, May 26, 2010.

³⁰ <http://twitter.com/#!/Davest010/status/14770902666>, May 26, 2010.

conversation ended after Dave's next comment, "I have friends who are *serious* fans, but I'm nowhere near as obsessive."³¹

Despite the initial flurry of interaction and excitement, we made no concrete plans to meet up at the concert. Following my lead, Dave sent a message to another local Josh Ritter fan, but he received no response.

"@ksusananderson Hello fellow Josh Ritter fan. :) Are you going to the show at the Belly Up in June?"³²

After the initial interactions, our communication subsided. A couple days later, I sent Dave a link to a video of Ritter and his wife playing music together: "beautifully apropos of our discussion yesterday:

<http://bit.ly/9Zddg4>"³³ He responded, "Nice...thx for the link! Didn't know that Josh was married last year...I'm definitely going to check out Dawn's music now."³⁴ We said nothing further.

Dave responded to a couple non-music-related tweets from Buffy, but again the interaction was short lived. Buffy tweeted at 5:43 in the morning (to nobody in particular), "I should probably squash my home-at-5AM habit."³⁵

Dave responded a half hour later: "Nah...who needs sleep?"³⁶ A couple days later, she tweeted (again to nobody in particular), "Just told someone sitting next to me at my training that I do competitive trivia professionally. It's

³¹ <http://twitter.com/#!/Davest010/status/14887055143>, May 27, 2010.

³² <http://twitter.com/#!/Davest010/status/14788350428>, May 26, 2010.

³³ <http://twitter.com/#!/enjayem/status/14940293303>, May 28, 2010.

³⁴ <http://twitter.com/#!/Davest010/status/14957933057>, May 28, 2010.

³⁵ <http://twitter.com/#!/buffynerdgirl/status/14972351035>, May 29, 2010.

³⁶ <http://twitter.com/#!/Davest010/status/14974200888>, May 29, 2010.

serious.”³⁷ Dave responded, “You should check out Pub Quiz at Dublin Square on Tuesdays. Not going this week, but we're always looking for competition :)”³⁸ Neither of these conversations amounted to anything more.

Only a few days before the show, I finally made plans to meet Dave there. We exchanged our phone numbers via direct message on Twitter and arranged to meet in line. When I arrived at the venue, I could immediately pick him out in line from the red hair I recognized from his Twitter avatar. I walked up, introduced myself, and took the spot he saved for me at the front of the line. Despite the seeming reluctance to arrange to actually *meet* at the concert, our extroverted personalities made it seem like we had been friends for a while. We chatted about how we came to know Ritter’s music and eagerly made friends with the people in line next to us, as if the concert could only happen to a collective rather than a group of individuals.

While waiting for the show to begin and between songs, we of course shared ideas of other music to check out, and we discovered other common interests, namely strategy board games. We decided that we would have to get together again after the concert to hang out. This was a common progression at the concert: finding out how others came to know Ritter’s music, sharing suggestions of other music to check out, and then searching for other common interests—a progression that parallels that of the interactions online.

³⁷ <http://twitter.com/#!/buffynerdgirl/status/15219474227>, June 1, 2010.

³⁸ <http://twitter.com/#!/Davest010/status/15220796945>, June 1, 2010.

After the show, we met Jen, who tangentially knew Buffy and had read our tweets leading up to the show. She also went to the show alone. She posted a link to one of Ritter's music videos prior to the show, but she didn't interact with us much other than to tell us that she would be at the concert. Still, she was excited to see us and mingle with us after the show. Like Dave, she also mentioned getting together again later on. According to Jen, Buffy was at the concert, but she didn't come over to meet us after the show.

In the following months, I ended up spending time with Dave again, but any attempts to meet up with Jen fell through. I'll return to this later when I discuss Jen's and Dave's motivations for their online social musicking behaviors.

In general, I noticed a desire of concertgoers to experience the music as a collective rather than individually. Anyone that I met who went to the concert alone gladly welcomed conversations about Ritter's music and shared associations they had with his songs. And the groups of friends there similarly reached out to others. Like I first noticed in grade school, music and inclusion go hand in hand. This begs the question of why everyone was so hesitant to use Twitter to arrange to meet at the show when they clearly wanted to experience the show socially. While I have no clear answer, the later interview section should provide some insight into this behavior.

Amanda Palmer

As a contrast to my network of Josh Ritter fans, I also decided to look at

interactions between Amanda Palmer and her fans and interactions among her fans in response to her posts.

Why Amanda Palmer? She has come up often in my research and interviews about interactions between musicians and fans. In addition to keeping a personal blog and sharing many details about her creative process there and on Twitter, she also frequently communicates with fans both online and in person, announcing private concerts to Twitter followers and seeking advice at various stops along her tours. For instance, I interviewed one Palmer fan who lent her a keyboard to practice on and provided her with restaurant recommendations when she performed in San Diego. Furthermore, her album *Who Killed Amanda Palmer?* is a reference to the *Twin Peaks* television series that created in-depth and heated discussions among online fan communities (discussed by Jenkins), which centered around the series's main question, Who killed Laura Palmer? Thus, Palmer has likened the show's fan community with hers, demonstrating more similarities than the name alone suggests. As fans of the show often discussed in great length various clues (or what they thought were clues), Palmer's fans also participate in discussions online using cryptic hashtags that only dedicated fans would know.

Also, although I discovered Palmer through conversations between friends on social networks, I feel no strong connections to her music like I do to other music that I discover in similar ways, even despite her many "connections" to her fans. Therefore, she provides an interesting contrast to

my network tied to Josh Ritter, which developed naturally.

Twin Peaks is a short-lived television series that aired in the early 1990s. The first season focused on solving the mystery of who killed Laura Palmer. Because of its many clues and plot-twists, it sparked a seminal online discussion forum.³⁹ In the forums, fans discussed the mystery after thoroughly watching and re-watching recorded episodes and consulting their journals and notes. I will quote Jenkins at length, as his observations of the early 1990s Net discussions are still apropos nearly twenty years later. According to him,

All of the participants saw the group as involved in a communal enterprise. Entries often began with “Did anyone else see...” or “Am I the only one who thought...” suggesting a felt need to confirm one’s own produced meanings through conversation with a larger community of readers, or often, “I can’t believe I’m the first one to comment on this,” implying that their own knowledge must already be the common property of the group as well as staking out a claim for their own superior knowledge of the shared narrative.⁴⁰

Amanda Palmer’s Twitter followers similarly seek approval of their tweets, often mentioning her to ask questions or respond to her many queries. They seldom receive responses from her, but it isn’t surprising to find many retweets by like-minded fans. Jenkins continues:

Several contributors vowed that “we can solve this if we all put our minds to it,” invoking a kind of collective problem solving quite common in technical fields. Netters frequently began new entries with extensive quotation from previous contributors’ letters. While this was sometimes to “flame” or criticize what

³⁹ Jenkins, “Do You Enjoy Making the Rest of Us Feel Stupid?” chap. 5 in *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*, 115–133.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

someone had written, more often, it was so that they could add new insights directly into the body of the previously circulating text.⁴¹

This collective or “hive” mind is like that which Twitter has become. Chris, a member of my Twitter network whom I’ll discuss later, regularly uses Twitter to crowdsource⁴² playlists. He posts a tweet requesting song suggestions (and occasionally provides a genre or mood prompt), and then aggregates them into a playlist, which he shares with his followers. Occasionally Palmer will crowdsource her Twitter followers with lighthearted games, including asking fans to change words in familiar song titles to make them humorous. In one such example, she used the hashtag #changehearttobuttsongs and had fans tweet familiar song titles with the word “butt” substituted for “heart.” She and other fans then retweeted those she found particularly humorous.

Unsurprisingly, each of Palmer’s tweets regularly gets retweeted multiple times, but more surprisingly, fans also retweet tweets of other fans they don’t know, occasionally with comments or attempts to improve song-title submissions.⁴³ That fans retweet or comment on tweets by strangers suggests that they are actively seeking out the ideas of other fans outside their regular social circles. In other words, something that would otherwise be passive and individual (reading updates from a musician) becomes active—not to mention

⁴¹ Ibid., 122–123.

⁴² To crowdsource something is to submit a recommendation request to a list of followers in order to create something with the “collective” recommendation.

⁴³ I assume that two fans don’t know each other when neither follows the other on Twitter.

creative—and collectively consumed.

Jenkins elaborates on this idea, discussing the necessity of both the individual nature of the activity and the collective response:

Many of the net contributors watched the series alone, concerned that those who were not initiated within the *Twin Peaks* fan community would [...] disrupt their initial experience of the episode with foolish questions or inane chatter. However, as soon as the episode was completed, they would log onto the net to discuss the events with those already fully initiated into the game, those who shared their passion for breaking the code. *Watching the program required their full and uninterrupted attention, but the broadcast was not complete until they had a chance to discuss it with others* (emphasis mine).⁴⁴

In his study of the *Twin Peaks* community, Jenkins discovered a new model of consumption. He claims that a mystery had never before been consumed so publicly. This public consumption allows fans to identify with one another for support when working towards a common goal. Having a large community sharing an interest validates that interest for each of the group members.

Much of Palmer's online presence is geared towards giving her followers something to talk or wonder about. Her song-title games are only one such example. She also tweets photos of costume ideas from backstage, providing her fans fodder for discussion. She performs what she calls "ninja gigs," for which she tweets (usually the day of the event) the time and place of a free concert. Occasionally she even surprises fans by filming a music video during a ninja gig. This provides an added incentive for her fans to pay

⁴⁴ Jenkins, "Do You Enjoy," 123.

attention to her whereabouts, lest they miss a chance for an intimate free concert and a chance to be on camera. This results in much discussion when she hints about gigs cryptically. Finally, Palmer uses hashtags to “hang out” online with her followers. One such example is #LOFNOTC (the “losers of Friday night on their computers”). On May 15, 2009, Palmer posted a tweet calling the losers of Friday night to order. This sparked a flurry of responses, and she ended up spending the evening tweeting back and forth with her followers, designing a tee shirt with a slogan submitted by one lucky follower, and putting it up for sale that very night. She has a transcript of all of the activities archived on her blog.⁴⁵ The LOFNOTC have continued to gather on a semi-regular basis since that night over two years ago.

Jenkins finds, “The technology of the net allows what might previously have been private meditations to become the basis for social interaction.”⁴⁶ This is true not only of the *Twin Peaks* community, but also that surrounding Palmer. Twitter allows fans reading updates from Palmer to share their interactions with other fans and to collectively interpret what she has to say.

However, this tightening of fan groups also has downsides for outsiders, namely the exclusion of those who don’t understand the lingo or aren’t familiar with past discussions. Jenkins discusses barriers to entry into the *Twin Peaks* community, citing less-invested users who wonder if others

⁴⁵ “Twitter & the Beautiful Losers,” on Amanda Palmer’s official website, accessed November 7, 2011, <http://blog.amandapalmer.net/post/111667948/twitter-the-beautiful-losers-lofnotc>.

⁴⁶ Jenkins, “Do You Enjoy,” 124.

are trying to make them feel stupid. Similarly, in the Palmer community, newcomers regularly tweet asking what cryptic hashtags like #LOFNOTC stand for and seldom receive a response.

While Twitter provides opportunities for fans to consume things collectively, it also allows the public consuming block to become more informed, thus making it more difficult for the uninitiated to join in the public consumption. In a sense, fans need to be “practicing fans” if they would like to continue following a musician like Palmer.

Despite the amount of interaction among Palmer’s fan community, there is still a discrepancy between the number of fans that respond to each other and those who respond to her posts. While one of her tweets may generate a hundred responses, responses between fans are rare (though less so than for other musicians) and often short lived.

For example, Dave (from the Ritter concert) once had a short discussion with Jonathon Chiou (a Palmer follower whom he didn’t know) about Palmer and venues in response to one of her tweets. Palmer tweeted:⁴⁷ “this generation will be remembered as returning to the source. instead of over-hyped stars; lots of working class artists.”

⁴⁷ I have reproduced the conversation as it appears on Twitter, not correcting any of the punctuation or spelling errors typically present in short, quickly composed tweets. These individual tweets are available at the following URLs, respectively:
<http://twitter.com/#!/amandapalmer/status/54209487594196994>;
<http://twitter.com/#!/amandapalmer/status/54214948338941952>;
<http://twitter.com/#!/Davest010/status/54215465618247680>;
<http://twitter.com/#!/Davest010/status/54217130534637568>;
<http://twitter.com/#!/ChiouOnThis/status/54218982969966592>.

@ChiouOnThis responded and got a response back from Palmer: “we don't need to agree. thats the beauty. RT @ChiouOnThis you, Arcade Fire, lots of other Canuck bands come to mind, who else fits the bill?”

Dave also responded to Palmer but didn't hear back: “@amandapalmer Yes!! All the artists I listen to play in coffee-houses, bars, and small theatres. Or on the beach. Or in my living room.” He also responded to Chiou, received one reply, and that was the end of the conversation.

Dave: “@ChiouOnThis There's great music to be found, it just takes some effort. Start with local stuff...you'll find hidden gems! @amandapalmer”

Chiou: “@Davest010 @amandapalmer very true, I need to start seeing local shows again. WHEN DID I GET SO OLD AND UNCOOL?!”

While this interaction demonstrates the acceptability of talking to strangers within Twitter, it's also an example of the limited interaction among Twitter users. Such interactions seldom become anything more than chance interactions.

For me, the Palmer community provides an example of social-ness without requiring the emotional ties to the music. While many fans likely do have ties to the music itself, Palmer's persona and online activity also serve as objects around which fans can unite. Unlike with Ritter, where the emotional ties were there first and formed a basis for the social ties, the social interactions in the Palmer community didn't necessarily require the music first.

Summary

In both cases, fans actively seek communication with each other, but they don't seem to desire any continued connection. This is the case in both offline and online social networking behaviors, as evidenced by the difficulty in arranging an actual meeting at the concert, the halfhearted failed attempts at getting together again after the concert, and the limited interactions on Twitter between Palmer fans with similar interests. Even though I was able to meet up with Dave again, it wasn't until almost a year after we met.

In each case, the online and offline social musicking activities also have solitary elements. All of the people that I met at the Josh Ritter concert because of Twitter had gone to the show alone. Similarly, fans participate in online activities surrounding Palmer alone, engaging more so with a vast collective than with other individuals (not much different from a concert).

MY NETWORK OF RITTER FANS

Finally, I explore what it means to know music and how Twitter contributes to that process for four people whom I met in *my* process of coming to know music. Our relationships have progressed from either starting in person and ending up on Twitter, starting on Twitter and then continuing in person, or starting on Twitter and remaining on Twitter. When asking them what it means to know music, I did so without any context or direction, since I hoped to garner unbiased responses.

Chris

Chris and I met in college (2006) in a class about writing for new media (blogs, Web installations, etc.) Shortly after we met, he lent me a copy of Josh Ritter's (then) latest album, *The Animal Years* (2006). Our friendship began through music, and he has influenced my musical tastes immensely. If I went to a concert, I went with him. If I heard a new song, it was probably from his suggestion. Now we keep in touch mainly through Twitter and Grooveshark, where we share news of musical discoveries and newly created playlists. Our friendship began in person but is now mostly on Twitter.

Chris describes two forms of knowing music: knowing what's out there and having a deep understanding of a particular piece of music or song. While he values both, he explains that his enjoyment of music would be impossible without the latter, which he describes as knowing the "sounds and the effort, to know the twists and turns of the melody and the key change, to understand oblique references to works past."⁴⁸ He provided an example:

I can listen to a song like Death Cab for Cutie's "I Will Possess Your Heart" and tell you how the repetition and growth of the beginning of the song gives context to the lyrics that [the lyrics are] lacking without. That song is about a very possessive love, a very selfish desire bordering on stalking. The repetitive melody builds and builds until the lyrics unfold the story that has been slowly layered already.

He says that knowing music only comes by examining and repeatedly listening

⁴⁸ All quotes from Chris come from personal interviews conducted in the spring of 2011.

to songs. He doesn't disparage people who make less-informed taste judgments, but he believes they are selling themselves short. "To me, that's knowing music on a [much different level] than not knowing the lyrics to a song you profess as your favorite. That doesn't mean it's not your favorite, it just means you're perhaps not knowing the full song."

He often refers to the "integrity" or "authenticity" of music as being the most important factor, but at the same time, he has little concern for the musicians themselves. Though this seems contradictory, he explains that he appreciates music in its truest sense when he attends performances, and that he only cares about the musicians inasmuch as they "are visibly dedicated to their craft or the performance." He continues, "If you can reach out, touch the sound, feel the notes, that is more authentic than a recording. To know an artist is to know their music; I view music to be a great expression of the soul of a person."

Despite this connection he develops with musicians through their music, he stresses that he has little concern for them otherwise. "Who cares how much you know them outside their music? It'd be like arguing that you understand Van Gogh less because you don't know how he took his tea. Art is art is art." This is reflected in his music-related Twitter behavior; he follows musicians for concert announcements and project updates, but otherwise uses it only to share comments and links to songs with friends.

When I asked him how he developed his tastes in music, he wittily responded “girls.” After further questioning, he said “a lot of it is from stuff my mom played when I was a kid...and my dad...and my grandparents.” He continued, “Some stuff I loved, some stuff I hated,” but he stressed that his family set the foundation for his musical tastes and that he didn’t get into music heavily on his own until his senior year of high school and the beginning of college.

During his senior year, he exchanged CDs with his cousins in Ireland, and this led him to discover Damien Rice and the Frames, who both started out in Ireland in the 1990s. “Damien Rice's *O* was 200% emotionally charged. He put everything into it and you could tell.” He calls it “the first album to rock [his] world.” Again, he identified the musician’s connection to his music (and a personal identification with the musician’s emotions) as the main reason why he likes the music.

He continued to name other songs suggested by others that ended up heavily influencing his life: “Transatlanticism” by Death Cab for Cutie, “Cannonball” by Damien Rice, “Hide and Seek” by Imogen Heap, and “The Scientist” by Coldplay. Each time, he identified a connection with the musicians’ emotions as what drew him to the songs.

Until that interview, having known him for six years as a seasoned DJ and someone with a (*good*) playlist for every occasion, I had assumed him to have well-defined music tastes for many years, but he assured me that he only

began to deviate from the mainstream and develop his own tastes during college—under the influence of others. In each stage of his musical development, he identified family, friends, or strangers as having the greatest impact. His development of a musical identity was (and still is) a practice of social musicking. According to him, recommendations are better than all other forms of discovering new music combined.

Chris is the one who introduced me to Twitter. When he did so, he pointed out how it could work in the context of music: the possibility of understanding musicians' projects more deeply and the possibility of sharing new discoveries. While he originally was excited about the possibility of communicating directly with musicians when Twitter was much smaller (he remembers an instance in which Colin Meloy of the Decemberists replied to one of his Twitter messages), he now expects three things from it: "finding out when shows are, finding out when new music is released, and getting referred to new music."

According to him, "music and Twitter are hand in hand." He finds Twitter better than other networks in terms of discovering music because "Twitter is about intentional sharing. It maintains some of that 'hey man, listen to this song' interaction from 'real life.'" He compares this intentional sharing to networks like Grooveshark and Last.fm that provide recommendations based on others' listening patterns or simply show users what their friends listened to.

He also claims that “Twitter has more serendipity than Facebook,” acknowledging that it’s much easier to contact people out of the blue about music than it is on Facebook. Like me, he has met several people at shows because of Twitter and Foursquare.

Yet, while he appreciates the many advantages online social musicking provides in terms of meeting people, sharing songs, and developing tastes, he also acknowledges the negative aspects. For instance, “the desire to know [what music is available] outweighs the desire [to know] what was intended by the artist. We’ve become so addicted to new that we forego authenticity for urgency.” Thus, while network behavior enhances the social element of his musicking activity—as he takes full advantage of the opportunities: crowdsourcing playlists, creating virtual DJ sessions, and sharing and discovering as much as possible—he doesn’t let go of the emotional element, the need to sit down and really get to know something rather than find out what’s next. This, no matter how much he can find out about musicians through Twitter or other networks, only happens with repeated listening and ultimately attending performances.

Once close friends, we now remain connected mostly through music and Twitter. We’ll go months without any interaction other than sharing a song online. But in some way, because of his and my identification with the music, that’s enough to maintain an emotional connection. And if either of us posts anything about Josh Ritter, the other almost always responds within a matter

of minutes.

Jen

Jen and I met through Twitter and then in person as part of my Josh Ritter concert experiment. Since the concert, we have kept in touch with Twitter through occasional messages or mentions. These few messages tend to focus on sharing music (and videos) or half-hearted attempts at hanging out again. We did have another plan to go to another concert shortly after the Ritter concert, but plans fell through. It wasn't until almost a year later that we did end up attending two more concerts together.

When I asked her about knowing music, she mentioned two forms: "to be able to play music and understand notes and rhythms and tones" and "knowing what exists out there as music."⁴⁹ She said nothing of the personal connection with the music itself that Chris had deemed crucial to his experience of music. Yet her behavior seems to suggest that knowing musicians personally is more important to her than "knowing what exists out there as music" or knowing what's new in the music world. In her online social musicking behavior, as well as her concert behavior, she exhibits behavior patterns that contradict the idea of using music to form social connections. I'll discuss two later concerts that we attended together in conjunction with information I gathered from personal interviews with her about her musicking activity.

⁴⁹ All quotes from Jen come from personal interviews conducted in the spring of 2011.

In the months following the Josh Ritter concert, Jen, Dave, and I made several attempts to arrange to spend time together again. However, while Dave and I got together on multiple occasions outside the context of music, plans with Jen always centered on concerts and frequently fell through. This leads me to wonder whether it has to do with differences in personalities or differences in expectations from music activities.

In spring 2011, she invited me to a Gregory Alan Isakov concert on April 24; she said she knew him from when she lived in Colorado. I looked up his music online and quickly fell in love with it, so I decided to go. Since it was plausible that she knew him personally, as they both lived in the same part of Colorado, I expected that we would be meeting with him before or after the show while they caught up.

I arrived at the venue first and, as most indie social musickers do, met the people around me near the end of line. After a few phone calls, I found out that she was running late, so I made my way in when the doors opened and saved her one of the last available seats. I ended up taking a seat near the back of the fifty-person venue so that we could sit together rather than taking an individual seat up front. When she arrived, she hastily said hello and made her way up front to find a closer seat. I assumed that Greg had saved her some seats up front.

When she returned, she told me that there might be seats to the side of the stage, but that the sound might not be as good. I told her that I'd rather not

risk losing my seat to gamble for a seat up front in such a small venue, especially with inferior sound quality, but she decided to move closer.

I met up with her again after the show while people were leaving and she was waiting to talk to Greg. When I introduced myself to him and thanked him for a good show, I discovered that he only vaguely remembered her as the girl who ran the merchandise table for another small band in the same part of Colorado.

At this point, I discovered that by knowing musicians, she means that she has formed personal connections with them through their music. She has a desire to be close to the musicians—both personally and locationally—and this has an impact on her appreciation of their music.

A few months later, Jen, Dave, and I met up again for another Josh Ritter performance. Again, I met Dave in line before the show. And again, we only saw her later in the night, near the end of the show. We all bought a package of general admission tickets together (we had to leave her ticket at will call), but although she came to the show “with us,” she mostly came to the show for herself.

When she discusses how she discovers new music, she consistently refers to an individual process first, citing suggestions from others last. “What I do know [about music] I have discovered through attending shows, using online music services (like Last.fm and Pandora), and asking my friends what to listen to.” Later in the interview, she again cited “research on my own plus

friends who have good judgment, in my opinion. I have a few friends who work in the music industry (whether locally or largely) and they tell me about bands once in a while.” For her, personal recommendations are always last. And even though she has friends in the industry, this behavior is still only occasional.

These opinions correlate well with her Twitter activity. Only once since I’ve known her has she recommended a musician to me (her mention of Isakov). Instead, her music-related Twitter activity focuses predominantly on saying what she’s listening to and occasionally why or how it makes her feel. Rather than being socially driven, her online social musicking behavior is personally driven with only the potential for interaction. She continues about her discovery process: “Twitter plays a little bit of a role. I like to see what other people are listening to. I follow bands on Twitter, too, and sometimes that’s the only way I know they’re playing or releasing an album.” Again, she likes to *see* what others are listening to rather than to actively participate in discussions about music. In other words, she usually engages in a process of lurking in order to find new music.

As evident from her concert behavior, she appreciates forming (one- or two-way) personal connections with the musicians. Her decision to sit beside the stage (behind the speakers) during the Isakov concert testifies to the fact that her desire to be close to the musicians trumps her desire for good sound. Her repeated claims of knowing “Greg” similarly reflect this need for personal

connections with the music and musicians. Ironically, despite these views, she does not interact with musicians on Twitter.

She hasn't met many like-minded fans through Twitter since she doesn't expect to. She only plans to meet people through Twitter "if they are local and belong to the tech community [her profession] or show interest in the tech community," in which context she has met plenty of people through Twitter. In all, she is not averse to meeting people online, but the situation doesn't correlate with her specific musical goals.

Dave

Dave was the other of the two people whom I met through the Josh Ritter concert. Unlike the case with Jen, we ended up seeing each other again afterwards to play a game of Settlers of Catan, a mutual interest we discovered during the show, among other occasions. He is also an Amanda Palmer fan and regularly mentions her in tweets, even though he has never gotten a response.

When asked about knowing music, he responded like Chris, saying, "I feel music pretty deeply. When I'm listening to a song that really is in line with what I'm looking for, I feel it deep down, and it puts my mind in a different place."⁵⁰ He continues, "I like to go see live music. I like to go see a concert and get close to the artist and get to know the artist if at all possible." Yet he

⁵⁰ All quotes from Dave come from personal interviews conducted in the spring of 2011.

refers to this closeness in a different sense than Jen does. He acknowledges that getting close to an artist isn't entirely possible, but he recognizes it as a type of Romantic ideal in truly appreciating music. The focus is more on the process of getting close to the artist than the goal of knowing the artist in person.

He expands on this idea, citing Marian Call as a musician that he does know (she once played a concert in his living room). He says of knowing the musicians,

That just adds a whole different kind of dimension to it. I think that the contact that we're able to have with artists even if it is just through a [computer] keyboard adds another dimension to the relationship. I'm always glad when I see that an artist that I enjoy is active on something like Twitter—even if it's just something like postings about when they're playing shows. I'll reply and say, "Oh, when are you coming to San Diego?" and every once and again I get a reply back.

He says this without the slightest bit of discouragement in his voice. He never expects to receive a response, but he values the opportunity for one as an enhancement of the musical experience.

For most of his life, his musical activity has been social; when it hasn't, he noted that it lacked a social element that should have been there. He mentions someone in an online hiking group in New England as being completely responsible for forming his musical tastes. "Two weeks after we met, she invited me to go to the New Haven Folk Festival. Until then, I listened to classic rock mostly, but I was hungry for something different; I just didn't

know what it was.” He continues, “When we went to the folk festival, I discovered this whole genre of music that I didn’t even know existed. I immediately asked her, ‘Who else? Who else is out there?’” Later on, he discovered Josh Ritter’s music through a group of gaming friends.

Recently, music has been less social for him. He says that he’s always excited to find something new, but rather than relying on recommendations of others, he uses Pandora and other services that provide recommendations based on aggregate listening behaviors. He did the same thing with Napster when that was the only way to obtain music online; he would search for an artist and then look at whom else the person who listened to that artist listened to.

When asked about why the more directly social part was no longer there, he responded,

Part of it is that I don’t know a lot of people here who like the music that I like. Most of the friends-in-music that I have are back home in New Hampshire. We do converse about it. If somebody finds a new artist, they’ll let me know. I haven’t found those circles of friends yet who are into the same kinds of music.

For this reason, he was surprised that he hadn’t met anyone other than me through Twitter. He had to pause for a while before he could verify that I was the only one. There was another person whom he had met in the conversations leading up to the first Ritter concert, but these plans (like many others) never materialized. He considers meeting like-minded fans on Twitter a good possibility that he should perhaps pursue more actively.

He didn't have any expectations about the first Josh Ritter concert, regarding meeting people and especially spending time together afterwards. He likens Twitter to sitting next to someone on an airplane. "You meet someone on an airplane. It's a totally random connection. You sit next to them—I had a great conversation with someone on a plane the other day—and then you file off the plane and you go your separate ways." He continues the analogy, mentioning the possibility of exchanging business cards to keep in touch should the need arises, but for the large part he considers the interactions short lived.

Because of his willingness and openness to meeting people online (the hiking group, a gaming group, meeting me at the concert), his initial reluctance to commit to going to the concert together seems like a contradiction. It wasn't until later that I discovered that the hesitation was only due to the fact that he was waiting to find out if someone else he had met online was interested in going with him as a date.

Jarett

Jarett and I have never met in person. We both regularly read each other's tweets and have conversed briefly on Twitter about Ritter and other music (when I received an unsolicited message from him about one of my tweets). He is also an Amanda Palmer fan, who, like Dave, sends messages to her despite not having gotten a response. I know him only through Twitter, and our connection is largely due to shared music tastes and shared network

members.

Like Jen, Jarett provides two ideas of what it means to know music: “whether or not you have a command of current cutting-edge trends as well as a solid foundation in what we think of as the history of popular music” and whether someone knows music theory and can read a staff.⁵¹ He did not mention the need for a deeper connection to the music that Chris and Dave point out.

He acknowledges a social component of music explicitly as he describes the formation of his music tastes: “I had a couple of awakenings musically; the first was when I entered high school. This was kind of hilarious because all the people I knew were grunge rockers or metalheads, and that stuff makes up a tiny fraction of what I listen to now.” College was a similar situation where his friends influenced his music tastes. “So there’s this social component to it, surely,” he adds. After college, he got Sirius Satellite Radio. “A lot of that was self driven, so it wasn’t so much of an outside influence.” He admits the social component of music in terms of forming tastes, but he says nothing of a social *experience* of music (that which is indispensable for Chris). This attitude is consistent with his behavior on Twitter. He says very little about music on Twitter. When he does, he spends less time sharing music suggestions and ideas than he does participating in discussions about music

⁵¹ All quotes from Jarett come from personal interviews conducted in the spring of 2011.

and pop culture or games like those of Amanda Palmer.

CHAPTER III: CONCLUSION

From the Josh Ritter concert experiment, I discovered that fans come together around the music (considering the large number of people who came alone), using it as glue that allows for collective musical experience. In the case of Amanda Palmer's fans, largely due to Palmer's online activity, the community is so strong of a network that it has barriers to entry.

Through the discussions with four people in my social network, I found various ideas about what knowing music means. Jen and Jarett both identified an understanding of current trends and an ability to play and read music as what it means to know music. Chris and Dave took it a step further. In addition to identifying knowing current trends as one aspect of knowing music, they both expressed a need for a deeper connection to the music in order to fully "know" it. Chris described this as fully understanding a particular piece or song, and Dave referred to it as feeling it deeply, which can be supplemented by knowing the musician.

Though they each had different definitions of what it means, Chris, Jen, Dave, and Jarett all expressed a desire to know music, especially in terms of understanding current trends. To varying degrees, this always had a social component. Chris and Dave consider recommendations of others to be an ideal means of discovering new music, and they identify deep understanding

of music as a primary goal. On the other hand, Jen and Jarett experience music on a more personal plane, but they still occasionally resort to others for suggestions. These opinions are consistent with their behaviors on and off Twitter, and given this information, it isn't surprising that Chris and Dave are more willing and likely to meet and have extended contact with people they meet online.

Twitter plays an important role in terms of fans knowing what music is available. For Jen and Jarett, this is one of the main elements of knowing music. According to Jenkins, "Knowledge gains currency through its circulation on the net, and so there is a compulsion to be the first to circulate new information and to be among the first to possess it."⁵² Twitter has enabled this behavior allowing fans to very quickly and easily discover new music. While this is a good thing for those that value understanding current trends, Chris would call this compulsive consumption unhealthy, as this desire for more and more knowledge prevents people from taking the time to truly understand the music that they like.

This paper doesn't examine the social aspects of knowing music for those who don't participate in online social networks. An interesting follow-up would examine whether or not people who don't participate in online networks value the social components of music in the same way as those who do participate. Despite its growing popularity, there appears to be a stigma

⁵² Jenkins, "Do You Enjoy," 125.

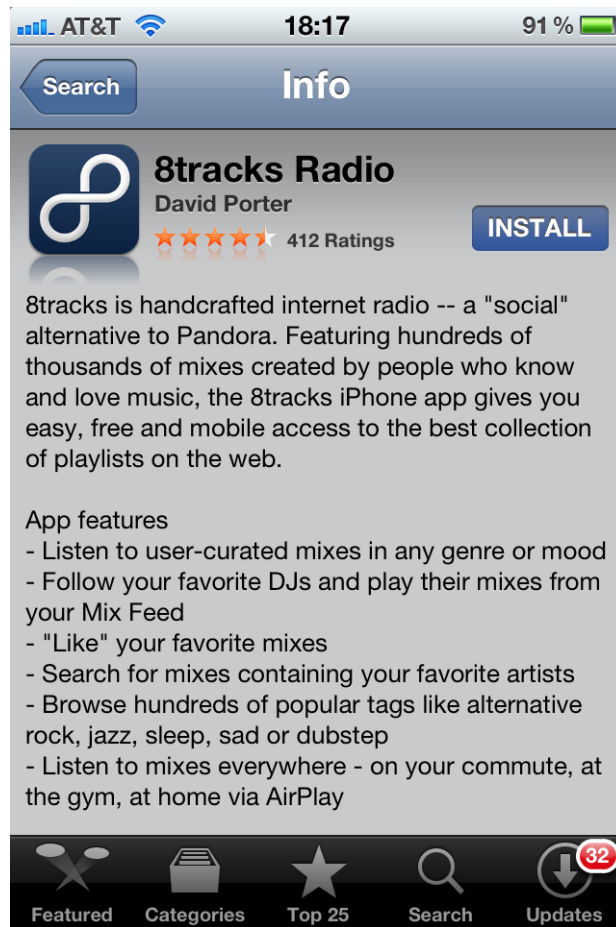
associated with online participation. For two quarters at UCSD, I used a Twitter handle as a classroom tool in hopes of stimulating more discussion in my popular music classes and to observe potential discussions of music on Twitter. Each time I asked my students if they used Twitter (to judge interest), only one or two (reluctantly) raised their hands. After class, more students who were already active on Twitter (and who did not admit to being Twitter users) began to follow the class account. I'm not sure of the effectiveness of using the handle as a classroom tool, as only once did someone comment about music, thanking me for posting a link to a song that he liked.

This stigma associated with Twitter may also have an effect when teasing out the overall behavior patterns of users. It's likely that what is acceptable on Twitter is very different from what is acceptable on other types of networks. Thus, people drawn to one network over another likely have different online social musicking behaviors and expectations.

I have discovered that I'm not unique in my social discovery of music: in my formation of tastes being almost completely the consequence of others' actions. Even people like Chris, whom I had expected to have firmly engrained ideas about music, not only influence but also are *influenced by* the hive mind of collective music tastes within social networks.

APPENDIX I

Screenshot of the main page of the 8tracks iPhone app within the App Store, taken November 7, 2011.



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