

Mapping the story of DIY LK: Documenting the progression and impact of a local music community

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The term 'DIY' as it is understood in this context, originated from the 1970s punk movement; "DIY is not just complaining about what is, but actually doing something different" (Duncombe 1997, p.117). In early 2017, bands Cruiser, Casavettes and Anna's Anchor who had met through a series of music events formed the collective now known as 'DIY LK' (Do It Yourself Limerick). According to the collective's biography "'DIY LK' is a Limerick based independent music collective which was established in 2017, with the aim of putting on shows by local, national and international alternative acts" (DIY LK 2017). 'DIY LK' in its early stages was modelled after two older Limerick music scenes, 'AMC' (Aspersion Music Collective) and 'Out On A Limb Records'. Also an influence at the time was the Limerick hip-hop scene, which in 2016 was gaining momentum; "it seemed to have a very 'DIY' aspect to it...the way people collaborated was very locally minded...we could see how that was growing and wanted to replicate that but more for bands and guitar music" (Gerard Devine of Cruiser, 2019).

As a member of this community I realised that the development of the collective was not being recorded or collected in any way. This was identified as a priority for the group and initially led me to this research, of which the purpose is to document the progression and impact of 'DIY LK'. This research engages in qualitative methods using interviews as a primary method of data collection. Fieldnotes from participation in 'DIY LK' events are also used, as well as other collected materials. A total of seven participants were interviewed. All participants are currently active in 'DIY LK'. The interviews included questions on topics such as: musical context/setting, involvement with DIY music and the impact of 'DIY LK' on careers and social lives. As the interviews occurred, repeated findings and themes were noted as concepts and later grouped categorically (Corbin and Strauss 1990). Three categories which emerged were 'Culture', 'Community' and 'DIY Ethics'. I compared the views of my participants relating to these categories to existing academic literature and used the findings to inform this research.

Culture

In the past scholars have referred to 'DIY' as a means of creating culture instead of consuming artificial culture intended to be sold to the masses (Baker 2018; Duncombe 1997). This is based on the idea that regardless of professional experience or skill level anyone can become a "cultural producer" (Beaver 2012, p33). Duncombe maintains that "doing it yourself is at once a critique of the dominant mode of passive consumer culture and something far more important: the active creation of an alternative culture" (Duncombe 1997, p.117). In the case of 'DIY LK', a music scene was created in which financial gain was not a motivating factor, and instead the group favoured accessibility and community involvement. This "resistance expressed culturally" led to an engenderment of solidarity, and created a

“shared set of norms and values” (Duncombe 2007, p.490) within the group. The collective chose to abandon the “current norm of buying and following” and chose to “do-it-themselves as a cultural practice” (Duncombe 2007, p.498). This shared expression of resistance through culture, led to the progression of Community in the collective (Duncombe 2007).

Community

In the context of DIY practice, community is defined as a group or groups of people who “share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wengwer 2006, cited in Baker 2018). In ‘DIY’ communities, skills are gained and shared by competent members, through a mutual engagement with collective learning (Baker 2018; Wenger 2000 in Baker 2018). This is a critical part of what allows ‘DIY LK’ to progress as a collective. When ‘DIY LK’ was founded, early shows relied heavily on founding bands Cruiser, Casavettes and Anna’s Anchor for their experience, as the group was small and skill sets varied. Training within the group became a large part of the character of ‘DIY LK’; “It’s that culture of, if someone wants to learn I’ll show them how to do it” (Chris Quigley of Cruiser 2019). It is a constant rotation of skills being gained and shared by competent collective members with the intention of mutually engaging and progressing as a community (Baker 2018; Wenger 2000 in Baker 2018).

DIY Ethics

Part of what allows ‘DIY LK’ to progress as a community, is that the collective is non-profit and it holds itself to the ‘DIY Ethic’. ‘DIY’ music scenes are associated with a particular ethic of “prioritizing creative control, authenticity, and community over mass appeal, musicianship, and profit” (Haenfler 2018, p.177). Chris (Cruiser) maintains that profit is “gruellingly not the right reason” (Chris Quigley of Cruiser 2019) to put on shows, “it’s not about personal gain, it’s really about believing in what we’re doing and trying to achieve that” (Mike Hennessy of Casavettes 2020). ‘DIY ethic as understood by ‘DIY LK’ contrasts with “mainstream capitalist promoters” (Haenfler 2018, p.182) and is “in conflict with...unethical practices” (Chrysagis 2016, p.290), which are considered to be “not paying bands...displaying a general lack of care towards bands...and, crucially, showing disregard towards the bands’ music” (Chrysagis 2016, p.290). Part of understanding the ‘DIY’ ethic, is understanding that “there’s a million things anyone can do on the day on a gig” (Chris Quigley of Cruiser, 2019); it’s about having a hands-on approach and a drive to see things through to completion. This ethos has grown ‘DIY LK’ from a small group to a much larger collective in which everyone is willing to do their part and take a hands-on approach to the work.

Conclusion

‘DIY LK’ is a collective which was founded out of necessity and adopted a culture in which money and success are not motivating factors. This culture drew people together through a set of shared values, which prioritise creative control and ethical practices. The interviews show that the ethic of ‘DIY LK’ impacts the surrounding community, and because of this is

now part of a wider national community of ‘DIY’ scenes in Ireland. After ‘DIY LK’ had been established other DIY communities began to form in other cities such as ‘Sizable Bear Promotions’ in Belfast, ‘Teletext Records’ in Cork and ‘MadDog Promotions’ in Dublin to name but a few. The members of all of these collectives are “bound together by their collective understanding” of what DIY community is “and they hold each other accountable” (Wenger 2000, cited in Baker 2018). Members of these communities, particularly ‘DIY LK’, share a passion for music which “isn’t focused on selling tickets” (Mike Hennessy of Casavettes, 2019) and a ‘DIY’ ethic which is not always widely accepted by the larger music community. “What I think we have managed to do in Limerick is make a micro-community where things are not measured by the amount of people that come in the door” (Mike Hennessy of Casavettes, 2020).

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