

## **The Hope Collective**

**Michael Mary Murphy**

Dublin Ireland was the site of practice for a live music collective (or cooperative) from 1988 to 1999. Via a series of local and international alliances the not-for-profit Hope Collective presented close to two hundred live events by overseas artists. The collective operated within the broad framework of what is characterised as DIY (do-it-yourself) punk. The case study indicates how organisations can operate in the live music sphere with practices and ideologies distinct from commercial live music promoters.

My study aims to map the overlapping 'art-worlds' (Becker, 2007) of the music industry and the 'amateur' music scenes. I am particularly interested in how these two spheres of cultural production (often presented as separate) interact with each other.

**“...how will it feel? To me? To others?” Career opportunities for artists.**

This work is part of my PhD thesis on the Irish recorded music industry. My study analyses practices in the professional music industry and the non-professional music scene. I was a participant in both. I wish to interrogate the contrasting modes of operation in these two worlds and to document interconnections between them.

I was a member of Dublin's DIY punk subculture from the early 1980s and subsequently worked with major labels. My roles included A&R person in London and New York as well as personal management where I nurtured and developed acts signed to each of the major labels: Sony, BMG, Warner, EMI, Universal, as well as Hollywood Records.

One case which will be included in my work documents the pursuit of Limerick band The Cranberries by my label and others. My approach combines interviews with the main protagonists, discourse analysis of documents and ephemera and an analysis of the Irish pop music charts following Peterson and Berger (1975).

Becker depicted the production of culture as a process involving a series of relationships. He presented this network of relationships as an 'art world'. The artist, though not acting alone, is provided with opportunities to express creativity. He wrote: 'Multitudes of small decisions get made, in a continuous dialogue with the cooperative network that makes up the art world in which the work is being made. Artists ask themselves, "If I do it this way, how will it feel? To me? To others?" (Becker 201)

**'go fucking crazy...but can you do it standing still please'. Distinctive live music practices.**

The aspiring musician requires performance opportunities to assess career possibilities. The nature of this engagement with the live music industry or scene can shape their artistic choices. For Californian band Green Day, their first tour of Europe in 1991 provided a series of such opportunities. Singer Billie Joe Armstrong stated: 'It was a huge deal for us because with the exception of Canada, it was the first time we'd toured outside of the States and played something mad like 64 dates in three months...'<sup>1</sup> In another interview he described the band's morale during this tour: 'I think all of us were scared because we didn't know what our future was going to be at all.'<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Hot Press* Dublin V. 33 # 22 November 18 2009 p 35

<sup>2</sup> <http://larrylivermore.com/?p=232> accessed March 24 2011

Green Day's immediate future involved performing in small venues. A London based agency, Mullethead Tours secured that lengthy series of European dates. It had been recently established by two women from California: Christy Colcord and Mary Jane Weatherbee. Colcord described her functions as: 'booking, tour managing, driving, selling t-shirts and providing informal counseling to many of the Bay Area's best bands.'<sup>3</sup>

One alliance formed by Mullethead was with Dublin's not-for-profit Hope Collective. Hope presented one hundred and seventy events by visiting acts between 1988 and 1999.[interviews with Niall McGuirk 2010 and 2011] The acts originated in Wales, Scotland, England, Northern Ireland, the Netherlands, the Basque region, Germany, Norway, the U.S. and Canada. The DIY (do-it-yourself) ethic maintained by the organisation meant that gigs were often undertaken for reasons other than making a profit. Not all of Hope's gigs were successful. Some provided performers with distinctive conditions. One was remembered by Green Day's singer:

"It was in this tiny room above a bar, which even by the standards of the places we'd been playing in the States was a bit of a dive. Anyway, we were about to go on when somebody, the promoter I guess, told us: 'No one's allowed to pogo or jump around 'cause if they do the floor's going to collapse.' It's the first and last time I've told a crowd to 'go fuckin' crazy...but can you do it standing still please.'"<sup>4</sup>

### **'...signs of that that cooperation.'**

Like any other act, Green Day relied on members of the 'art world' to help decide their future. The output of the live music industry or scene is socially mediated process. Despite the fetishisation of the artist, it is influenced by all of the participants. To Becker (1) 'all artistic work, like all human activity' is the result of a collaborative process. 'Through their cooperation, the art work we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be. The work always shows signs of that cooperation.' (Becker 1)

A micro-history of the Hope Collective may illuminate the functioning of the independent promoter in the music scene. Does a not-for-profit collective operate in a manner different from a commercial operation? What impact this has on the functioning of the overall popular music 'art world'?

The Hope Collective's philosophy and practice was initially influenced and inspired by a number of music acts: English bands Crass and Flux of Pink Indians, local Dublin band The Pleasure Cell and subsequently by Washington D.C. DIY advocates Fugazi. Therefore it must be interrogated in light of the sociological discourses about punk rock and counter-culture.

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/blogs/ccolcord/bios#ixzz18lnib7UX> Accessed Dec 21 2010

<sup>4</sup> *Hot Press* Dublin V. 33 # 22 November 18 2009 p 35

In 2001 Theodore Roszak explained his rationale for coining the phrase 'counter-culture' in 1968. He described it as: 'the rebellion against certain essential elements of industrial society'. His 1973 book *The Making of a Counter Culture* makes an explicit claim about the intergenerational aspects of that 'rebellion' (Roszak 1973, 183): 'For it is the young, in their desperate need to grow up sanely amid an insane environment, who hunger for lively alternatives.' Sarah Thornton (1996, 164) described how both Young and Hebdige presented youth subcultures as 'progressive side of the political arena'. A number of my interviews so far indicate that this study belongs in that side of the arena.

Laing (1985) identified two aspects of the social construction of punk ideology and practice particularly relevant to this specific microhistory. He sought a geographically inclusive narrative to explain the musical diffusion; the input of cultural consumers and producers outside England needed to be addressed: 'What did Scots, Welsh, Irish and North American people have to do with the process?' (Laing 1985, vi). He also acknowledged the influence of the band Crass in propagating a 'self-proclaimed anarchist politics' more 'significant' than the 'fascist' leanings of some early punk groups. (Laing 1985, 112)

Eighteen years later Clark (2003) engaged with both these themes. To him, punk advanced a 'do-it-yourself' practice where 'culture could be produced with less capitalism, more autonomy, and more anonymity' (Clark: 231). It achieved this after abandoning 'its dog collars and Union Jacks'(Clark: 229). The latter was a subcultural symbol with a distinctive resonance to the groups whose inclusion Laing advocated. Campbell's work on second-generation Irish musicians in England describes the resonance of those symbols even to residents of the country. Johnny Marr, guitar player with Manchester band The Smiths described the strength of his feelings about the Union Jack: 'I've always hated that flag', it was 'a sign of aggression towards immigrants'.<sup>5</sup> The early ephemera of punk were often culturally repellent symbols to inhabitants outside England.

One example of this occurred when the Hope collective hosted a band from Wales. The Welsh language punk band Anhrefn found common cause with the Irish DIY punk movement. They felt an affinity with independent Ireland and other non-Anglo regions. Visiting Ireland and being exposed to its culture was important to them.<sup>6</sup> Later they brought the band Negu Gorriak (accompanied by singer Manu Chao according to McGuirk) from the Basque region with them on a tour of Ireland.

Clark also acknowledged the influence of Crass. Their work was part of what he described as 'a vast litter of anarchism' advancing 'a social form which anticipates and outmanoeuvres the dominance of corporate-capitalism. (2003: 224) While Hope may not comply with this definition completely, some its practices belong within Clark's framework. Many of Hope's modes of operations derived from its founder, Niall McGuirk's background in the DIY fanzine subculture.

---

<sup>5</sup> Sean Campbell *Irish Blood, English Heart: Second-generation Irish musicians in England* (Cork: University Press, 2011) p 121

<sup>6</sup> [contemporary conversations between the band and the author]

## Fanzine interaction

McGuirk began to interact with overseas musicians when he produced his first fanzine *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* This ran for five issues and was followed by another fanzine, *Sketch*. Later a fanzine combining local football with independent music, *No Way Referee* was created before McGuirk produced a free-sheet (the fanzines had been offered for sale) entitled *React*.

The first issue of *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* contained an interview with Crass. This is consistent with Clark's representation of the English anarchist group as pivotal in the D.I.Y. movement. The band's Penny Rimbaud supplied hand written responses to McGuirk's questions via post. Other acts interviewed for the fanzines included Flux of Pink Indians, The Damned, New Model Army, Billy Bragg, The Housemartins, The Redskins, The Men They Couldn't Hang, The Pogues and The Wedding Present. Maximum Rocknroll magazine's editor Tim Yohannan put a forty five minute tape recording of his answers into the post. Dublin acts like Paranoid Visions and The Pleasure Cell were interviewed face-to-face.

Articles about political issues such as animal rights were included. Artists were questioned about their principles. McGuirk explained why he addressed these issues with artists:

“For me music was never just about entertainment. It was a way of maybe effecting change. So it just made sense to ask those kinds of questions. And also around that time the miners were on strike, so it was quite a political time. It would have been soon after the riots in England. A lot of bands were political anyway. That would have been the kind of stuff I was interested in knowing about. It just seemed the right thing to do.”<sup>7</sup>

Artists were also challenged about their commercial practices. McGuirk did not exclude acts on major labels from his publications (as he would subsequently do with the Hope Collective) yet he questioned their business decisions:

“I remember writing to New Model Army because they played in the TV Club and I was giving out to them because it was £5 to see them: “this is disgraceful”. Then they wrote back and said “well maybe we can talk about it when we're in Dublin”. And then [I] went and interviewed them and asked them the question. They gave a perfectly reasonable answer I suppose, but it's not something I would dream of doing now.”<sup>8</sup>

McGuirk also entered into correspondence with other fanzine writers. In a number of cases fanzines were traded, with each writer agreeing to sell the other's publication. Print runs according to McGuirk's recollections were between fifty and two hundred and fifty copies of each issue. He became aware of a Dublin fanzine *Alternative Sounds* when he won a cassette in a

---

<sup>7</sup> recorded interview with author March 21 2011

<sup>8</sup> recorded interview with author March 21 2011

competition on a pirate radio station. The DJ told him he wrote a fanzine. Its D.I.Y. aesthetic appealed to McGuirk. He decided 'anyone really can do this fanzine lark'.<sup>9</sup>

### **The difference with Hope**

The Hope Collective differed from standard profit driven promoters in a number of practices: it attempted where possible to provide alcohol-free and all-ages entertainment; artists were hosted in homes rather than in paid accommodation; no contracts were issued, all deals were made on the basis of trust; bands were selected purely on the criteria that they requested help from Hope in playing shows in Ireland; shows were not promoted by acts from the Republic of Ireland, they were only invited to participate in gigs to raise money for charitable causes; the cooperative refused to work with artists on major recording labels; the members of the cooperative paid admission like everyone else attending the gigs. These practices should not be viewed as utopian even if they deviate from standard music industry practice. Because Hope did not control its own venues it was reliant on alliances with commercial establishments

Clark (2005, 1) is explicit in his analysis of the operation of punk collectives reliant on alliances within standard modern neo-liberal economies. He described them as 'parasites on capitalist business', dependent and at times compromised by this dependency. Commercial music venues and their standard practices are anathema to subcultural resistance. 'When a subculture is bathed in alcohol at a club, centered on reverence for musician's...its ability to resist and be autonomous is in jeopardy.

McGuirk experienced this compromise when his band Not Our World played in Trinity College Dublin. An advertising banner for Guinness hung in the stage area; McGuirk wanted it removed. When an argument ensued which he didn't win he resolved: 'I don't ever want to be involved in a gig that has an alcohol industry banner'.<sup>10</sup> When the Hope Collective presented a gig by Bis, Bikini Kill and Team Dresch in Dublin they encountered the marketing campaign of a major alcohol company.

“Well it was Heineken Music Week or something in Dublin. But we'd booked Charlie's separately and we walked in and in the venue there was just bunting with Heineken. And we just thought 'what's this got to do with Bis, Bikini Kill and Team Dresch on a Saturday afternoon?... That was an all-ages gig. So I want around and took the bunting down. The manager of the bar was like 'what are you doing man?' I said 'it's not sponsored' and if had been sponsored we wouldn't have put on the gig. So we took it down.”<sup>11</sup>

### **from 'glorious amateurism' to 'multi-billion-dollar corporations'**

---

<sup>9</sup> recorded interview with author March 21 2011

<sup>10</sup> interview Feb 14 2011 with Niall McGuirk

<sup>11</sup> interview Feb 14 2011 with Niall McGuirk

The venues used by Hope also hosted commercial gigs, although Hope endeavoured to avoid being 'bathed in alcohol'. The way of conducting business was different yet in most respects a casual audience member would have noted few distinguishing features. McGuirk described the Hope attitude:

...it was 'always address people coming in' and when they were leaving, 'always say goodbye to people and thanks.' And try to even...we went through a phase where we'd give out popcorn and sweets and stuff just to make it seem like: 'listen, ye's aren't just consumers at the gig – we're not promoters, we're all just people together.'<sup>12</sup>

The theorisation of live music presentation emanating from not-for-profit collective activity for 'contribution' rather than 'profit' has an interesting history. For example Long (2001, 31) described the professional achievements of English composer Vaughan Williams as emanating from 'well-oiled network' and as part of a drive to 'further the democratisation of English society'. When the collective goal is not solely dedicated to making a profit, social reasons can explain the perseverance of the enterprise. Bayton (1988) found that friendship was highlighted rather than focus on output for women musicians in her study.

Most studies of the live music industry naturally concentrate on the activities of commercial concerns. Professionalism and standard industry practice are often combined in a formula revolving around venues serving alcohol. Irishman Feargal Sharkey, formerly the singer with the Undertones, described in February 2011 the benefits of live music in terms of economic and societal benefits. His publication was sponsored by the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers. While lauding Britain's musicians and music entrepreneurs he advanced the claim that aspiring artists are still typically supported by: 'the "traditional" music industry, whether in the shape of a manager, a label, a publisher, or a combination of the three.'<sup>13</sup>

Frith cites *Music Week's* designation of the UK industry as a journey from 'glorious amateurism' to 'multi-billion-dollar corporations'. He also represents the increasing importance of live music for both social intercourse and the negotiation of collective identities. He depicts the commodification of the live music experience as inevitable: "where there are social desires, there will be entrepreneurs—promoters, ready, at a price, to meet them." (Frith 2007, p 14)

The Hope Collective example may provide a challenge to that commercial inevitability. This extreme case arose from a unique set of historical and sociological conditions, yet confirms the existence of entrepreneurs with social rather than financial goals. Thornton (1999) defined entrepreneurship as the 'creation of new organizations which occurs as a context-dependent social and economic process'. These organizations may perform similar functions yet the socially focused organization may empower a different constituency than the profit-driven enterprise.

---

<sup>12</sup> interview with Niall McGuirk June 26 2010

<sup>13</sup> Feargal Sharkey *The New Statesman* February 21 2011 supplement 'Socialising in Modern Britain' 'Let Musicians Play' p 6

A microhistory of a not-for-profit organisation may render more inclusive Frith's analysis of promoters 'at a price' fulfilling the social needs of the audience. When profit is not the motive, the 'price' may transform into a 'contribution' to the social life of a public. This may also lead to an expansion of another of Frith's concepts: live music as a site of social intercourse and the negotiation of collective identities. Remove the profit motive and artists may experience a different dynamic in their social intercourse; collective identities may form in a different manner. The Hope case study may assist in the interrogation of this concept.

### **The Hope Case**

Laing (1970, 30) presented the industry as 'deeply conservative' underpinned by the assumption that the future will resemble the past. Innovations often originated outside the epicentre of the music industry: 'Only after a nudge does the industry embrace innovation'. Fruitful analysis of the industry could include acknowledgement of the influence of the DIY scenes in small countries like Ireland.

The standardised tropes of live music presentation meant that distinctions between the Hope cooperative shows and commercial gigs were relatively small. One major difference was in their approach to the sharing of knowledge and the encouragement of participation from groups often under-represented in music promotion. When financial gain is not the sole reason for an organisation, the discourse can involve community and life skills can be highlighted. The philosophy of the organisation was stated with hindsight as: '...enthusiasm for what you wanted to do, the will to do it yourself, the ability to learn as you went and the capacity to share with other like-minded people.' (McGuirk 2002)

In terms of being a gatekeeper to the independent art world, and the art world of the Irish music industry, this notion of shared learning presented an invitation to others. Hope encouraged attendees to become involved. Their intention was to de-construct the divisions between artist, promoter and audience.

The notion of inclusiveness was part of the Hope Collective philosophy. Alliances were formed with cooperatives in Belfast as well as small independent promoters in Cork, Kilkenny and New Ross. In the initial stages of Hope (1988-1994) McGuirk played a leadership role in the organisation. During the second stage of the operation (1995-1999) the group functioned as a co-operative. The promotion of all-female group Inside Out was viewed as an opportunity to inspire female musicians. McGuirk stated:

"If Inside Out could be used as an influence for more women to get involved then great. Doing the main organising of 'Hope' gigs at this stage were 4 people: 2 men + 2 women. Quite a few women went to



the gigs but it seemed they played a less active role (if doing more than listening makes one more active of course)."<sup>14</sup>

The Hope Collective was capable of generating money from its concert promotions. Yet many of their gigs failed to break even. No contracts were ever exchanged with artists. The Hope Collective offered to cover expenses of bands travelling to Ireland, deducted expenses and gave any profits to the band. When the money was counted for the McGonagle's show by US band Fugazi a profit of £1,400 was realized. McGuirk presented this to Fugazi's Ian McKaye. The American singer refused to take the full amount: "how about we take £550 and you use the rest to do other things."<sup>15</sup>

The money was used to start a 'Hope' fund which covered expenses on gigs that failed to break even. The Hope group in its initial stages operated as an ad-hocracy (Toffler 1970) with a flexible organic organisational structure. While McGuirk's role certainly conforms to Weber's concept of a charismatic leader, yet his orientation was to eschew power. If Hope is presented as the type of organisation that could benefit the modern live music industry the distinctions between it and commercial promoters should be clearly identified.

### **Whose Life Is It Anyway?**

The Hope practice placed them in the gift economy. Their relationships involved a different set of relationships than would be found in the commercial live music industry. The organisation came into being when Manchester band The Membranes came to Ireland. The band's singer, John Robb, was also a music journalist: consequently he came into contact with a great number of musicians. He told other bands about his experiences and encouraged them to get in touch with Niall. While McGuirk selected the bands purely on the basis of them asking for help to perform in Ireland, his social network from his fanzine writing acted as a filter of sorts.

Hope's lack of its own venue (in contrast, the Belfast gig collective Warzone controlled its performance spaces) required fostering alliances with club managers. This involved relationships ranging from veterans of the Irish music scene, a biker gang, the semi-state bus company, the Communist Party, Dublin colleges and universities as well as both the Church of Ireland and the Catholic Church. These relationships are fruitful sites to investigate the power groups of Irish society.

The importance of Hope's alliances was highlighted when the SFX (St Francis Xavier) Hall was selected to host a concert by Fugazi. By 1990 the band was big enough to sell out the 1,300 capacity hall. Trinity College via its entertainments officer negotiated the venue rental with its Jesuit owners. The college also engaged lawyers when an attempt was made to break that

---

<sup>14</sup> McGuirk 2002 p 46

<sup>15</sup> McGuirk 2002 p 21

agreement. Objections were raised when the concert ticket provided information about birth control. It is unlikely Hope could have covered such legal expenses. Without this socially constructed alliance the event may have been cancelled.

### **‘We'll make it ourselves.’ Beyond DIY.**

The Hope Cooperative produced two artefacts in addition to its live performances. One was a 12” single featuring four Dublin bands, the other was a book. This volume featured the history of the cooperative as recalled by Niall McGuirk as well as vegan recipes from many of the artists who performed at Hope promotions. One copy was bought in a record shop in Bray, county Wicklow by a teenager on his way home from school. He recalled his impression:

“So I took the book home with me and I read it and a lot of it just resonated – like this is: ‘wow I can do the gigs myself.’ I had kind of been at gigs in Kilcoole [a town in county Wicklow] already. But this was seeing - it was a step guide to how somebody did it and their starting points and how it grew. And literally how I put on my first gig was doing exactly what Niall had written about, which was ringing up every venue in *Hot Press* yearbook.”<sup>16</sup>

Dylan Haskins described the process as a 'direct arc from reading the book to wanting to organise an event, to meeting the people that helped me organise the event and then asking Niall to be a part of that.'<sup>17</sup> The idea of collaborative action appealed to him in particular:

It was definitely a big inspiration, just to see that people were doing this in Dublin, and to think ‘that would be great.’ And especially the idea of collective, that was probably where I first read about a ‘gig collective’ and stuff like that.<sup>18</sup>

It would be somewhat speculative to infer any correlation between Haskins' later campaign for elected office in Ireland and his work in the Dublin DIY scene. Yet it demonstrates the network links between the music subculture or art world and society at large. Clark (2003, 9) determines that subcultures can now represent a formidable opponent to corporations instead of merely providing them with marketable commodities.

Haskins' artefact, a documentary about DIY culture entitled 'Roll Up Your Sleeves' discusses the DIY philosophy and ethic. The trailer for the documentary features a voice-over from McGuirk: 'If you've got something to complain about, then you've got something to do. There's no point in complaining about something if you're not going to do something about it.'<sup>19</sup> The film quotes Ian MacKaye from Fugazi on DIY: 'What was attractive to me about it was the idea of creating something. Just to create your own community. We'll make it ourselves. We don't need anybody to approve it. We're just going to do it.'

---

<sup>16</sup> interview with the author January 22 2010

<sup>17</sup> interview with the author January 22 2010

<sup>18</sup> interview with the author January 22 2010

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alOex97EIRY> Accessed February 24 2011

## Conclusion

This process of 'we'll make it ourselves', particularly when combined with the efforts of other individuals and groups, can impact both the music scene and the music industry. This case demonstrates that non-professional actors provided many opportunities for developing artists. Although Clark (2005) sees certain subcultures as 'parasites' on capitalist institutions they may also function at a symbiotic level. By providing opportunities for musicians who later sign to major labels or work with commercial promoters the subculture provides a service for those capitalist institutions. Its contribution is literally incalculable and in some respects it is viewed with suspicion by the parent culture. Some acts may thrive in this milieu and fulfil their artistic goals there. Yet the subculture may also represent the best means of nurturing certain acts who are thus rendered more commodifiable to the major labels. Some of these 'parasites' may also (perhaps unwillingly and unknowingly) provide blood transfusions to the hosts.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bayton, Mavis *How Women Become Musicians* (1988) in Frith and Goodwin (eds)

Becker, Howard *Art Worlds (25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition)* Berkeley University of California Press, 2007

Campbell, Sean *Irish Blood, English Heart: Second-generation Irish musicians in England* (Cork: University Press, 2011) p 121

Clark, Dylan "The Death and Life of Punk, The Last Subculture" in David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl (eds), *The Post-Subcultures Reader*. (Oxford: Berg, 2003)

Clark, Dylan 2005. "Walker Cells and Subcultural Resistance" *Peace Review* (DATE ISSUE!!)

Frith, Simon 'Live Music Matters' *Scottish Music Review* Vol 1 No 1 2007

Hennion, Antoine 'The Production of Success: An Antimusicology of the Pop Song' [1983] in Frith and Goodwin (eds) *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (London: Routledge, 1990)

Laing, Dave *Sound of the City* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970)

Laing, Dave *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock* (Milton Keynes: Open University, 1985)

Long, Norman *The Power of Music: Issues of Agency and Social Practice* (Wageningen University, 2001)

McGuirk, Niall *Document: A Story of Hope* (Donnycarney, Dublin: Hope Publishing, 2002)

Roszak, Theodore *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber, 1973)

Sharkey, Feargal *The New Statesman* February 21 2011 supplement 'Socialising in Modern Britain' 'Let Musicians Play'

Thornton, Patricia 'The Sociology of Entrepreneurship' *Annual Review of Sociology* 1999 25: 19-46

Thornton, Sarah *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Hanover NH: Wesleyan, 1996)

