

Embracing Enterprise? The Professionalization and Competitive Strategies of Local 'Guitar Heroes' in Toronto

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The working lives of contemporary independent musicians are fraught with risk and uncertainty. These individuals are responsible for a complex range of tasks, earn low incomes, experience forms of spatial and temporal fragmentation and face fierce competition from local and global firms. Yet, the psychic rewards associated with creative employment compel musicians to remain in the labor market, practice self-exploitation and develop innovative strategies to compete and survive. To date, however, little is known about these risk mediation strategies and how they may differ from those used by their counterparts in other industries. Drawing on 65 interviews with independent musicians and key informants in Toronto, this presentation will outline a set of interrelated organizational, spatial and business strategies. In particular, it will demonstrate that independent musicians are exchanging their bohemian identities and spatial preferences for professional personas and banal live/work spaces in the suburbs. By extension, the presentation will examine how musicians are reworking the ways in which they value and practice networking. Examples of how musicians 'get help' from skilled collaborators to overcome the demands of independent music production and what McRobbie calls the 'corrosion of creativity' will also be provided. Finally, this presentation will highlight some of the innovative marketing strategies that independent musicians use to differentiate and sell their products in a hyper-competitive and alternative-laden marketplace.