

5.5. “This is it!”: peak music experiences in the Brisbane indie music scene

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Abstract

A popular topic among music fans is the phenomenon of peak music experiences: particular experiences involving music that are especially memorable and even pivotal for the people involved. These epiphanies with music are sought, remembered and discussed, becoming important in the ongoing construction of taste and identity. They are therefore useful windows for research into music scenes. A case study of musicians, organisers and fans in the DIY/'indie' scene of Brisbane, Australia, finds that peak music experiences are central to their biographical narratives of inspiration, taste and motivation. They describe moments in which distinct meanings are realised and felt with an intensity that leaves an imprint, affecting future interactions. The peak music experience stories of these scene participants reveal that the core values of the Brisbane indie music scene, and the roles these values play in the construction of identities, are inseparable from the embodied pleasures of music listening.

Keywords: Brisbane, indie, peak music experiences

Introduction

One of the ways music fans talk about their relationship to music is by telling stories about specific experiences with music, which stand out from general experience as important. Certain experiences with music are remembered, for example, as especially representative, revelatory or influential. I call these “peak music experiences” and they are significant to the study of music scenes in two ways. Firstly, examining music in terms of specific experiences allows due consideration of the contextual aspects of musical practice and meaning. In this sense, peak music experiences are particularly visible instances of the continual production and reproduction of musical meanings and deeper values from moment to moment within scenes. Secondly, peak music experiences are by definition considered special, memorable and worth talking about, all of which are judgments based on cultural values. Indeed, the circulation of peak music experience stories is one way in which those values are reproduced and negotiated. Accordingly, peak music experiences offer insight, for research purposes, into the values of a scene and the means by which the scene endures and develops.

This paper looks at what the lens of peak music experiences can tell us about the indie music scene in Brisbane, Australia. A case study with participants in the scene finds that they credit particular experiences as the inspiration and ongoing motivation for their activities within the scene. Analysis of these peak music experience stories reveals cultural priorities that are largely consistent with those described in the existing literature about indie music,

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including the significance of live music, otherness, continual exploration and intimate community. However, the peak music experience stories also challenge any view of these judgments as dispassionate or merely outward signifiers of symbolic capital, “removed from the innocuous pleasures of listening” (Hibbett, 2005, p. 57). Instead, they remind us of the central importance of embodied experience, including strong feelings of pleasure, surprise and communality, to cultural association and practice. In this case at least, the pleasures of listening are far from innocuous.

Before presenting the case study, I will discuss briefly how its approach fits with existing work on experience within scenes and indie music.

Scenes, experience and indie music

The study of music scenes has focused increasingly on the lived experience of the people comprising them, recognising the variety and complexity of influences involved and the awareness and agency that people have in relation to them. The academic concept of “scenes” arose in response to the relative inflexibility of subcultures, and was distinguished from older notions of musical community partly by its capacity for internal variance and change (Straw, 1991; Bennett, 2004). At around the same time, work like Cohen’s (1991) study of amateur rock bands in Liverpool introduced ethnography as a complement to the text-based forms of analysis that had previously dominated popular music studies. The “experience-near” (Cavicchi, 1998) studies that followed have challenged a number of assumptions about the interaction between music and everyday life. Music’s meanings and effects are not inherent, but contingent and contested; likewise, people’s musical tastes and associations are not pre-determined but evolve over a lifetime, not without awareness and effort. A scene therefore comprises a disparate but entwined bundle of individual and collective trajectories. Some recent work demonstrates the utility of focusing on particular trajectories, such as hardcore fans learning and earning cultural capital through embodied experience (Driver, 2011) and ageing music fans consciously revising their scene-oriented practices over time (Tsitsos, 2012; Bennett, 2013). These stories show vividly how music scenes make and are made by their members. At this level of detail, some compelling research questions include: why and how did these people become involved in this scene? What keeps them interested? When, why and how have they changed? What else has changed as a result?

One way in which people answer such biographical questions, for themselves and for others including researchers, is by talking about epiphanies: interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on their lives (Denzin, 1989). Epiphanies allow people to concretise otherwise abstract aspects of their self-narratives. Peak music experiences can be seen as epiphanies with music and, as such, they provide opportunities for research into music-oriented sociality. Since epiphanies are always grounded in cultural expectations and references, they can be a window into such cultural priorities and the processes that reproduce and develop them. This paper presents a case study that seeks to use peak music experiences as windows into the Brisbane indie music scene.

Indie as a category of music is “positioned at the intersection of various aesthetic, social and commercial phenomena” (Hibbett, 2005) and encompasses a “mixed bag of practical, historical and aesthetic ideologies” (Rogers, 2008). As the name derived from “independent” suggests, it is partly defined in opposition to the economic, political and aesthetic values of a perceived mainstream. This means that indie is an evolving genre. As with punk, the term has

become associated with some specific stylistic choices, such as "jangly" guitars and overtly amateur production values, but especially in this century it has been defined partly by eclecticism, embracing exotic, often non-Western musics and even commercial pop with "varying degrees of irony and revision" (Rogers, 2008).

Indie's conscious otherness and its consequent fluidity have drawn criticism and parody. In one formulation, the imagined indie music "expert" is desperate to present him or herself as possessing arcane knowledge, effortless embodied cool and prescient taste, and consequently loses or even shuns the simple (and therefore "authentic") pleasures of music. For example, a character in online comic strip *Questionable Content* asks, "What's the best way to piss off an indie rock snob?" The answer is, "Actually enjoy music" (Jacques, undated). Based on such representations, Hibbett (2005) focuses on how indie rock "opens up vast space for the management of power and the manufacturing of identities: purposes far removed from the innocuous pleasures of listening" (p. 57). He compares indie rock to Bourdieu's formulation of high art, as a field of knowledge that distinguishes itself from mass culture. Other studies, however, have drawn from ethnographic data to conclude that this is not the whole or even the main story; pleasure and, more broadly, emotion are central to indie music. Fonarow's (2006) study in England finds that indie "valorizes emotion as the wellspring of meaning" (p. 196), and its obsession with opposition actually stems from a central focus on "how an audience can have the purest possible experience of music" (p. 30). The Brisbane indie music scene is described by Rogers (2008, p. 645) as "a small, informal but close-knit network of people motivated first and foremost by the desire for intensified leisure". Based on his ethnographic work with "hobbyist" musicians, Rogers finds that the drive for distinction emphasised by Hibbett (2005) is only an aspect of their more fundamental quest for feelings of meaning and belonging. The scene provides them with opportunities for "pleasurable engagements with music as a creative canon ... and as a social binding agent" (ibid, p. 646).

Case study: peak music experiences in the Brisbane indie scene

When the present study was conducted in late 2012, the Brisbane indie music scene was recognisable as that described by Rogers; while only three of the eight venues named in that study still exist, alternative venues have continued to open in both licensed premises and DIY spaces. This case study comprised in-depth interviews with five amateur/part-time musicians who were (and at the time of writing this paper remain) active within the scene. The participants varied in their stylistic preferences, as set out along with other details in the table below, and these variations arguably are matched by subtly differing attitudes towards the broader music industry. For example, Dan² plays the most radio-friendly music and has made the most traditional career moves (such as retaining a manager and using professional recording studios), as well as working in one of the city's larger venues and in artist management. By way of contrast, Pete makes post-rock, which he self-records, and has operated a DIY venue in his spare time from his office-based career.

² The names of study participants have been changed for this publication.

Name, m/f, age	Education	Employment	Main scene activities
Dan, M, 26	University (drama); TAFE (music business)	Music venue bookings manager; artist manager; public service clerical (part- time)	Solo guitarist/singer (acoustic/country) Artist manager Venue bookings manager
Martin, M, 33	University (arts/law)	Coffee shop barista	Guitarist/backing singer in indie band (AOR)
Nick, M, 26	University (arts)	High-school teacher	Singer/guitarist in indie band (grunge/rock) Solo singer/guitarist (lo-fi)
Pete, M, 34	University	Office work (community sector)	Guitarist/singer in indie band (post-rock) Recording/mixing engineer Label/venue manager
Sally, F, 30	University (psych/law)	Office work (community sector)	Keyboard player/singer/drummer in indie band (noise/experimental/rock)

Table 1 - Case study participants

“Getting involved”: peak music experiences as inspiration

The research interviews fell naturally into a biographical format, prompted by such funnelling questions as, “Do you remember when you became as interested in music as you are today?” Each of the participants separated their introduction to the practical side of music-making, such as learning to play an instrument under the influence of family or friends, from a strongly felt aspiration to “get involved” in music or the scene, which usually came later.

Pete: [G]etting more involved in music probably means that I had an idea of what that would be like, and I’d seen, I’d been to gigs and I’d seen people who were involved in music, and they, like there was just, I think there was a sense of going “Oh that’s my crew, you know that’s, it resonates, that’s sort of what I wanna... wanna be doing.”

Sally: ...it was just like really sort of going to see other bands perform and thinking, I wanna, I wanna make music too and I wanna be part of this process.

An outcome of this burgeoning desire was a shift in social networks, as new bandmates and friends were found. Entries into scene relationships and scene practices sometimes involved separations from previous networks, as illustrated in Sally’s description of her band’s first public performance in Brisbane:

...[a music promoter wrote on our] Myspace page at the time and he wrote, you know, “How come we’ve never met?” (*laughs*)[...] and he put on a show for us, and also a bunch of other bands, and we just all of a sudden met all of these other people in Brisbane involved in music and art, we had no idea existed. Before that time it was just you know the four of us [...] we were just like, pretty mind-blown by the fact that there was that kind of scene in Brisbane (*laughs*). [...] We invited all of our friends to that first show, and I remember I looked up and, they just looked horrified. It was really harsh noise. Like ear-bleeding kind of stuff.

Friends could be sources of cultural knowledge, for example by recommending new bands, but the reverse is also true as cultural preferences drove the search for new relationships with “like minded people”.

Nick: Yeah, I mean, for me mostly it’s, um, it’s been goin’ to shows and becoming more a part of a music community as well. [...] And that’s been... I think, maybe, for me, something that,

um, music was an avenue to, as well. So, it's like, um, to find like minded people, who enjoy that experience who can talk – you know wanna talk about that kinda thing, as well as hearing the music.

The study participants wanted to get involved with the indie music scene because they believed that its values resonated, which at a practical level meant that it would be a place to find like minded people. There may be countless ways in which discourse in and around the scene communicates these values. However, in some cases the study participants pinpoint their attraction to peak music experiences, which "set off my musical tangent" (Dan), "blew my young mind" (Martin), "changed my life" (Sally) or were a "big kick-along" (Nick).

Nick: ...and when I saw 'em [the Pixies at the V Festival 2007] I was like, (whispered) 'Whoa', like, this is, this is it! After that I was like, 'I love this and I wanna, like, get involved in that and do this', yeah. [...] I might have been talking about it but I don't think I was actually playing at that time. It was definitely one of the big... kick-alongs to get myself organised and get into it.

Dan: ...when I picked up the guitar and started writing music was when I first saw John Butler, of all people. So, um, so that – I always remember that moment as being a big, like, seeing him at um, I think Woodford Folk Festival. When I was about 15? 16?... And it just... set off my musical tangent. [...] That was when I first said, 'Okay I wanna learn the guitar'.

At least in retrospect, these memorable experiences have become iconic of the no doubt longer and more subtle processes of attraction and motivation. They are moments in which values seem to have been revealed, recognised and strongly felt. Examining these musical epiphanies can reveal to us what is valued by these people and the culture with which they identify, which is the Brisbane indie music scene (as they understand it). The following sections consider some of the priorities that emerge from these various peak music experience stories.

"That sense of passion": the importance of live music

Many of the peak music experiences described by the participants in this study take place in the live setting. A number of their youthful memories are set in music festivals, which are one of the few "all-ages" rock music performance spaces. Martin provides a vivid description of a festival experience to which he attributed his drive to form his first band:

Tumbleweed were like a revelation. I remember watching them, the crowd was just *seething*. People, there were people *moshing*, I'd never really seen a proper... rock band before. [...] But um, their frontman - you know? – he was so cool, just sort of, this goofy dance that he did shamelessly. [...] Yeah, the fact that he was sort of dancing and singing, and were just sort of tight and sort of rocked. There was like this light show that it had. And it was just sort of, the whole thing like sort of – it seemed sort of more like a 60s, 70s rock show than the other stuff. [...] Like yeah, it was exciting to be in the crowd and, ah, jumping along and stuff. And the crowd was big.

Here the actions of both the performers and the audience were crucial. Martin's reference to "jumping along" with the seething crowd exemplifies a factor common to many of the participants' peak music experience stories: communality; literally being a part of something. The references to traditional "rock show" performance values may seem at odds with the well-known indie values of unpretentious authenticity and unmediated self-expression (Hibbett, 2005, Fonarow 2006). Martin did go on to explain that Tumbleweed were an early gateway band whose "dumb riffs" he moved beyond as he investigated what he called the "indie canon" (for example, The Go-Betweens), and this path was a common one among the

study participants. However, the significance of showmanship may be that it actually emphasised the “realness” of the event, by making it more than just a recitation of songs:

Dan: ...[John Butler’s performance] wasn’t that standard, punk band – I’d seen so many punk bands over the years they’d come out and play their songs and they’d walk back off stage. There was a big element in his music of improvisation and, you know, using different instruments and they’d always have like some big drum jam in the middle of their set. [...] And it was, it wasn’t just some guy walking on, or some four guys walking on stage and playing, playing their songs and walking off again you know, like, um, it was kind of like I guess it was more considered than a lot of the music I’d seen and it was sort of more intricate, and it was more – and like, I dunno, I guess it appealed to me. And it was always, like, in those days as well, still now, like it was very emotional.

Accordingly, stagecraft and musicianship are not necessarily contrasted with authenticity. Instead, demonstrative performers, as opposed to those who simply play their songs and “walk back off”, might be seen to possess the crucial emotional presence described by Fonarow as “beingness” (2006, p. 192).

In these formative concert experiences, cultural values were acted out in exaggerated ways by both performers and audiences, making them revelatory for the young participants and providing an opportunity to become, literally, involved. Through these interactions, the participants learnt to associate particular values with certain music and learnt ways of acting them out, showing how a single experience can have a significant, enduring effect. Nick expressly acknowledged this process of learning through experience:

It’s definitely, um, for me, when you go to, the live shows. And that – you get that sense of passion I suppose that you don’t get when you listen to it on, ah, recorded. I feel that if you see a band live, and then you come home and listen to them afterwards, you get much more of a feel for it, for what it’s kinda about. So once I started going to see live shows that’s when I got into music a lot more.

These peak music experiences were described in ways that emphasised the intense feelings associated with them, with references to excitement, passion and emotion. As Ahmed (2004) notes, it is through intensifications of feeling that people recognise and attribute meaning to objects, people and themselves, so that meaning is mediated by feeling. Accordingly, it may be that these peak music experiences are memorable and their meanings endure because they are associated with the strongest feelings.

“From a place that none of the other bands were from”: the feeling of difference

All of the participants talked about moving on from their early indie-related tastes, with bands acting as gateways to more obscure or specific music. Pete recalled a peak music experience that revealed to him how his “crew” was partly defined by difference, when he saw Sonic Youth perform at the Livid Festival in 1998:

[There were] a lot of people there but it was an interesting kind of experience because, you know a third of them were just having their minds blown and I was in that third but another, you know, another third were wishing that they’d play something from *Goo* [1990, Sonic Youth’s first major-label album and a commercial high-point], and then another third were just there for a look and were just going, ‘What the fuck is going on?’, because it was this sort of, amazing, like my feeling from that was just going, ‘I have no idea what they’re doing’. Like it was just like, just, it was, I’m sure the acid was helping but it just seemed like they were

kind of from a place that none of the other bands at that festival were from [...] I think that at a certain point, that difference was what I came to really value as a criteri[on] in music.

This story bears out the academic definition of indie as an oppositional culture that consciously styles itself as an "other". However, in talking about their peak music experiences, the study participants spoke of their affinities for different music not as coldly calculated, but as strongly felt. Pete found the Sonic Youth performance bewildering and therefore "amazing", demonstrating Barthes' concept of *jouissance*, an unsettling experience (used by Laing (1985) to explain the shock value of punk rock). His visceral experience of difference continued when the community radio station 4zzzfm, heard in the cab home, played more of Sonic Youth's music:

Pete: "Anagrama"? Yeah, those kind of, SYR [record label, used by the band to self-release a series of experimental works] kind of um, yeah lengthy noise improvisations, and I was just, still sort of buzzing along, and I got out of the cab and sat in my car, for like an hour, just having this really intimate kind of experience of noise, really, for the first time. Yeah I think that evening was really pivotal in a lot of ways to the way that I, what I became hungry for, and what I enjoyed, and, you know I think that came into – I guess it was like moving away from form and, you know, pop writing and song structure, and getting more into texture.

Sally emphasised, more than any other participant, her youthful (and continuing) desire to "explore music and...get to the outer limits of what was out there". She told a story in which a malfunctioning playback of an already outré piece of music, in a youthful context of friends and drug use, created a pleasurable experience:

I remember one time um, we were in Byron Bay and we'd gone, like – it was in 2002, and we went down to, um, Splendour in the Grass [music festival] (*laughs*) and um, we were, we were taking ecstasy as well as um, as marijuana (*laughs*) and um, we were hanging in the hotel room and we'd just smoked like, a lot, and we were actually listening to *Bitches Brew* by Miles Davis (*laughs*) funnily enough. And then after about an hour, or maybe more, we realised (*laughs*) the CD had been skipping and it was playing the same one minute, like (*laughs*) it had been, like we were just like... I dunno, you know, we just kinda thought it was (*laughs*) an amazing one minute of music.

Through these stories, the participants show that their appreciation comes naturally for music that some would find "difficult". Such comfort with high art concepts can be a marker of cultural capital. Importantly, however, the appreciation the participants evince is not cool and intellectual, but associated with direct and embodied pleasure. Their stories emphasise feelings of surprise, bewilderment, awe and enthusiasm, as opposed to critical distance and reason-based judgment, in the appraisal of this music. The telling of peak music experience stories in ways that highlight these feelings shows that for these music fans in the Brisbane indie music scene, the value of "difference" is not divorced from the pleasures of listening. Rather, for them, music's meaning and value are inseparable from the embodied experience of music, even in the case of music that involves high art methods like formal experimentation. Scene members become aware of their affinity for scene values like "difference", and thus their belonging to the scene, through the strong feelings produced by musical experiences.

“A thing that I’ve been missing out on”: exploration and openness

Know that the coolest indie rock band is someone nobody has heard of and is on a label that doesn’t even exist yet.
 - “Soyouwanna Fake Being an Indie Rock Expert?”, quoted in Hibbett (2005)

A much-parodied aspect of indie music culture is the privileging of the new and unknown, with the constant acquisition of new music betraying the shallowness of the indie fan’s connection to music generally. It is suggested that the real motivation is not to enjoy listening to the music, but to display symbolic capital. Some of the study participants’ comments are consistent with the view of indie rock as a field of knowledge. For example, Pete recalled buying two “gateway” indie albums in his teens (by Pavement and Gaslight Radio) after reading reviews that “in hindsight sounded like something I wanted to like”, and Martin wondered whether he was “triggered” by Tumbleweed and not the headline act, the Hoodoo Gurus, because the former had “more cool cachet”.

However, the peak music experience stories of the study participants show that for them, seeking out new music is not (just) a search for distinction but, to a large extent, a search for transcendent experience:

Interviewer: What do you think it is about hearing something new and different that you haven’t heard before that you like?

Sally: Um, well yeah, it’s kind of exciting, it’s you know it’s adrenaline or something.

By way of example, Sally told of getting into “Hindustani classical stuff... like Bhimsen Joshi”, and a trip to Indonesia in which she witnessed “all-night gamelan jams” by “old masters”, which was “totally incredible”. Like Pete, she valued the feeling of bewilderment:

...they all have this repertoire of hundreds of songs and they’re all kind of scored but, they can just make it up and change it, and the pace, the tempo will speed up and slow down and, you have no idea like, it’s very hard to follow what’s going on.

The study participants revealed that they would sometimes go to great lengths in seeking particular kinds of musical experience. This is what Hennion (2001) calls “setting up the correct passivity” for a particular experience. He demonstrates this concept using both music listeners and drug users, on the basis that both seek particular outcomes from their engagements with objects and use special settings, rituals and modes of attention to create the best chance of achieving the desired result. On that basis it is unsurprising that in the present study, the active search for transcendent musical experience is demonstrated most clearly in anecdotes about using drugs with music. An influential experience recalled by Pete is:

...driving around in my mate’s Datsun Stanza listening to OK Computer [Radiohead, 1997, “within a week or two of its release”] on acid. Um, taking turns to drive so you know, the other two of us could be in the back, sort of heads on the speakers and... I think that sort of connected pretty deeply too.

The aim of such elaborate set-ups was to “listen to how far we can hear into this music”, which is quite the opposite of the shallow, appearance-based connection that the parodied indie hipster has with music. The search for embodied pleasure from music is also revealed in those stories told by the participants in which they had a peak music experience by chance, which challenged their preconceptions and opened new avenues for their search. These

chance moments in the participants' taste trajectories stand in contrast to the tortuous aesthetic guidelines followed by the parodied indie hipster:

Martin: I remember in [my housemate] Ed's bedroom one time, he had like, um, he had *Loveless* [1991, by Irish guitar band My Bloody Valentine] playing super loud, and... I'd never really listened to it before, kind of thought it sounded a little bit tinny and noisy when I'd previously heard it. So I never gave it the time. But he just, he had it cranked in his room, and it was a nice day, and his bay windows were open, and um, it was just – yeah I just thought that sounded amazing, and um, it sort of changed my sensibility a bit straight away. Just by opening my ears to harsher sounds that can also be really immersive and beautiful.

Thus a chance encounter with music in a particular context changed Martin's sensibility and opened his ears to that music, even though he had heard it before and was aware of the high critical esteem in which the album was held ("if anything it just gave me more of a belief in music writers as taste-makers"). Similarly, it was a chance experience dependent very much on its context that led Nick, who had previously held a song's lyrics to be essential to his enjoyment, to appreciate instrumental music like violin-led band The Dirty Three:

Nick: ...we were driving down to Sydney and Melbourne, to play there last, we were driving along this road and, you know, it's kinda like the same style of road and, you know just, limitless plains kinda thing, and we listened to um... Water Music? I'm not sure -

Interviewer: Oh um, *Ocean Songs*?

Nick: *Ocean Songs*. From The Dirty Three, as the sun was setting, and it's like, you know, here's something that I've never experienced before and it was like 'Whoa', you know, um, this is a whole kind of thing that I haven't been listening to that I've been missing out on and it's a- it's amazing, so I can remember at that exact point when the sun was setting in this landscape and it was like, it just summed up the landscape it was amazing. And then so I've been listening to a bit more of that and, and really getting into it.

Among other things, this experience led Nick to become a fan of a Brisbane instrumental band with a similar aesthetic to the Dirty Three. These stories of growing through experience are consistent with Driver's (2011) findings about hardcore fans learning and earning cultural capital through embodied experience such as their presence at gigs. However, the focus here is not on amassing the symbolic capital associated with cultural competency but on developing techniques for deriving pleasure and insight from music.

Going to gigs: intimate communality and staying motivated

While a number of the participants' early, inspirational experiences with music occurred in the relative anonymity of festival crowds, their current practice within the Brisbane indie music scene occurs within a more intimate context.

Nick: You could go with one friend to the Hi Fi [a large, licensed venue] and just watch the show and not talk to anyone, or you could go to something at the Waiting Room [a small, unlicensed, venue in a house] and know a whole lot of people and talk to them.

This is, in part, a necessity of music-making within the scene. As Rogers (2008, p. 644) notes, "face-to-face informal networking gatekeeps and governs the indie live circuit", or as one of his interviewees puts it: "You've got to go to gigs to get gigs". However, Nick sees this as a positive end in itself, as he enjoys "meeting the people, and um, going to the gigs, and,

you know, swappin' stories, swappin' songs". This is consistent with Fonarow's (1997, p. 364) finding that "an emotional feeling of community and connectedness" between musicians and audiences is central to indie music.

Pete, in a quote presented earlier, noted how getting involved in the scene was motivated partly by a desire to socialise with an imagined set of people. However, he later emphasised that his motivation to stay active within the scene was not social achievement but transcendent moments of pleasure:

...with [our DIY venue] we went on a journey of going "This is *awesome!*" and then, kind of, towards the end going (*breathlessly*) "Fuuck," (*laughs*) "I'm tired, I don't wanna go!" [...] and in the end, like it just seems like it always comes back full circle to those same experiences of enjoyment that you started with in, like you know as a teen, those things that, when you really enjoy playing music or putting something on like that's, that's all there is, like there's not a lot of the other aspects that you thought were gonna be there, I dunno.

[...] maybe a better way to say it is that you can lose, you can lose enjoyment in some of those pursuits of social, like of, ah, yeah, of what you thought you wanted. And the only way to kind of sustain it is to, um, come back to that feeling that you had as a kid of you know, really seeking out just what you really enjoy. [...] at many stages it feels like you have to drop the things that aren't authentic and keep going back to that really fundamental... [...] and it can be really hard to do that though, like sometimes you've gotta fight through, there can be barriers to getting back to that, and I think the best... the best musicians seem to be the ones who really live in that space, pretty much all the time of just loving the hell out of what they're doing.

These comments are consistent with the findings of Kahn-Harris (2004) and Tsitsos (2012) that when being an extreme metal or punk fan becomes mundane and routine, the connection to the scene can be rejuvenated by particular experiences of music through the body. These findings show sustained commitment to musical practice as more than a marker of abstract distinction; it is bound up with feeling and especially pleasure. One reason people participate in the Brisbane indie music scene is to create and recreate peak music experiences through which they feel their connection to music, feel their belonging to the scene and find out something about themselves.

Conclusion

Peak music experiences, as epiphanies, are windows into the cultural values of a scene. The case study presented here provides insight into the Brisbane indie music scene by considering the peak music experiences that the research participants credit with their own inspiration, motivation and influence. An analysis of these experiences confirms that, as reported elsewhere, indie music culture values the live setting, difference, exploration and intimate communality. However, these values are not, as suggested by parodies of "hipster" indie music fans, mere markers of distinction "removed from the innocuous pleasures of listening" (Hibbett, 2005, p. 57). Instead, the peak music experiences of the research participants reveal that the values and practices that define the Brisbane indie music scene are inseparable from the embodied pleasures of musical practice, and those pleasures are far from innocuous.

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