

Impact case study (REF3)

| | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Institution: 10007140 Birmingham City University | | |
| Unit of Assessment: 34 – Media and Cultural Studies | | |
| Title of case study: Sodajerker: Generating new knowledge about songwriting and changing creative practice. | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2011 – 2020 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): | Role(s) (e.g. job title): | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: |
| Dr Simon Barber | Senior Research Fellow | 2010 to present |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 09/13 – 12/20 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |
| 1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) | | |
| <p>This practice-led research has used the podcast medium to enhance knowledge and change creative practice for a global audience of songwriters and music fans. This impact was achieved by encouraging some of Western popular music's greatest songwriters, including Sir Paul McCartney and Paul Simon, to share insights into their working processes, which engaged songwriters and music fans around the world in discourses related to the art and craft of songwriting. Across 187 episodes, the podcast has amassed more than 3,000,000 downloads. It has also generated a series of offline events; notably at The Meltdown Festival (2019), and a radio documentary for BBC World Service (2016).</p> | | |
| 2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) See paragraphs | | |
| <p>Barber's research engages with songwriting as a cornerstone of the business and culture of popular music. His work examines the creative process of songwriting in detail, aware that songs provide the material for commercial exploitation within the music industries, and the music that soundtracks our lives. As Barber argues in his published work, the academic understanding of the art and craft of songwriting is too often mythologised and framed in reductively romantic terms (R03). Barber's work set out to explore how songwriters produce songs as well as the (often inadequate) ways songwriting is understood by both songwriters and audiences (R04, R05).</p> <p>By demonstrating and then engaging with these gaps in collective knowledge, Dr Barber developed interventions that have resonated with audiences within and outside of the academy (R01, R02, R06). In particular, his work has addressed questions of how songwriters develop their creative practice, and how they build and sustain careers in the music industries. Through this work, Dr Barber has emerged as the global research leader in an entirely new field of work, recognised when he received an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Research Network Grant (2019-2020) to develop the field of Songwriting Studies (R02) through network events and the establishment of a dedicated journal.</p> <p>His original research methodology focusses on the long-form narrative possibilities afforded by the podcast medium and the new aural cultures that surround it (R01). Using the <i>Sodajerker On Songwriting</i> podcast as part of the songwriting duo Sodajerker, he explores in depth niche topics related to songwriting which are not enabled by music journalism or extant academic approaches focused on song form. The podcast medium also enables, as a key pathway to impact, dissemination to a global audience through a free, on-demand, and increasingly popular entertainment format (R01). Dr Barber's interviews with 181 professional songwriters (and 6 bonus episodes) have produced a unique body of primary research material comprising over 150 hours of audio content (R01).</p> <p>Barber utilises what is one of the world's most comprehensive archives of songwriter interviews (R01), to draw on the insights provided by the expertise of the world's leading songwriters. This allows him to address gaps in existing knowledge, including: the multitude of ways in which songs are created or written (R03); songwriters' relationships with other music industries</p> | | |

Impact case study (REF3)

stakeholders, including record labels and managers (R05); and how songwriters sustain careers and creativity over time (R04).

The evidence held in this archive has formed the basis for a range of articles (R03, R04) for prestigious peer reviewed journals, book chapters (R05) in key edited collections that mark out this new field, and conference papers (R06) that engage the wider field of popular music, media and cultural studies. This work produced critical insights that have addressed gaps in existing knowledge and helped Barber establish a new field of study, recognised for its innovation and significance by the award of an AHRC Network Grant (R02). The immediate scale of the Songwriting Studies Research Network is impressive, with a world-wide membership of 303 amateur and professional songwriters, music industry stakeholders, and academics. Through the network, Barber has led research events and symposia (R02) and developed an Open Access publication, *The Songwriting Studies Journal*, (R02) to disseminate new work in the field.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Media

R01 - The Sodajerker Podcast, www.sodajerker.com/podcast

Grants

R02 - AHRC Network Funding, 2019, £27,131.

Journal Articles

R03 - Barber, S. and Long, P. (2015) Voicing Passion: The Emotional Economy of Songwriting. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 18 no. 2, April 2015, pp: 142-157. DOI (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1367549414563298>)

R04 - Barber, S. and Long, P. (2017) Conceptualizing Creativity and Strategy in the Work of Professional Songwriters, *Popular Music & Society*, Vol. 40 no. 5, August 16, 2017. pp: 556-572. DOI (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03007766.2017.1351134>)

Book Chapters

R05 - Barber, S (2016) The Brill Building and the Creative Labor of the Professional Songwriter, in Williams, K., and Williams, J. (eds) *The Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter*, Cambridge University Press, 25 Feb, 2016, pp 67-77. DOI (<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/cambridge-companion-to-the-singersongwriter/brill-building-and-the-creative-labour-of-the-professional-songwriter/39448A0DEC975E788918B513DE7E835E>)

Conference Papers

R06 - Barber, S (2019) 'Song Stories: Podcasting as Narrative Building for Creative Workers', *Popular Music and Narrativity*, Institute of Musical Research, University of London, June 7, 2019.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words).

Barber engages with the people and processes integral to Western popular songwriting. By contextualising and sharing his findings, his work has generated new knowledge that has changed practice for a global audience of songwriters and music fans. The beneficial outcomes of these interventions are evident for three groups in particular:

- Professional songwriters — including guests — have gained new perspectives on their practice.
- Aspiring songwriters have been provided with the tools and inspiration to enhance their techniques and to nurture their careers.
- Music audiences have been given access to new ways of understanding their favourite artists.

Professional songwriters: reflection on songwriting practice

Professional songwriters interviewed by Barber report experiencing the benefit of having the opportunity for self-reflection provided by the podcast. Ivor Novello and Brit Award-winning

songwriter, KT Tunstall said, *“The interview took me back to earlier parts of my career and provided a way of considering how I’d developed my approach. When listening to the podcast, I’ve learned a lot from hearing how other writers go about their work. The opportunity to put exciting new techniques into practice in my work is inspiring and encouraging”* (S04). In response to a survey designed to explore in detail the motivations of podcast listeners — developed in accordance with host institution research ethics guidelines — 70% of professional songwriters agreed that the podcast had significantly changed how they approached their work (S03). For respondents identifying as female professional songwriters, the podcast positively informed their professional development. 75% indicated that the podcast had significantly changed their approach to songwriting. As one female professional songwriter explained, *“Listening to Sodajerker shifts me out of creative ruts and inspires me”* (S03). This is particularly impactful given that female songwriters and producers are often absent from discourses around songwriting, and chronically under-represented in industry statistics. 83% of survey respondents identifying as female professional songwriters agreed that listening to the podcast had made them more aware of the business of popular music as it related to songwriting (S03).

Aspiring songwriters: inspiration, encouragement and new techniques

95% of listener survey respondents who identified as aspiring songwriters indicated they gained an enhanced knowledge of songwriting processes as a result of the podcast (S03). 92% also agreed that they better understood the business of popular music as it related to songwriting (S03). As the founder and CEO of Song Academy — a leading UK organisation engaging young people in songwriting — stated, *“Sodajerker is leading the conversation on the craft of songwriting...Our international community of young songwriters find the podcasts inspirational and informative...Our students tell us they like listening because Sodajerker’s guests are afforded a chance to talk about their music in a way that doesn’t happen in other media venues. This opportunity to access in-depth dialogue about the creative process and to use that knowledge in their own work has helped to transform how our young people approach the songwriting process”* (S05). Evidence of the podcast encouraging songwriters to try new techniques in the development of their own work was evident also for the 25.5% of survey respondents who identified as aspiring songwriters over the age of 50. One respondent said, *“I appreciate the kinds of questions asked of the songwriters...the kinds of things that a songwriter would want to know”* (S03). This sentiment was also expressed by aspiring female songwriters responding to the survey, with 100% agreeing that *Sodajerker* had significantly improved their understanding of the songwriting process (S03). This was also evident amongst female attendees of the Songwriting Studies Research Network events, with a female songwriter stating the events provided a space to, *“think about exactly what you’re doing and how you’re doing it and what your thoughts are, and that’s really important to keep moving and evolving”* (S06).

Music audiences: enhanced knowledge and new perspectives

The podcast intimately connects the listener to the songwriter and 97% of survey respondents identifying as non-musical fans stated that they often recommended the podcast to friends and other music fans (S03). Through their engagement with the podcast, listeners describe arriving at a greater understanding of the songwriter’s creative practice, and new perspectives on their favourite artists. A respondent identifying as a 26-30 year-old female music fan said, *“it’s something different from the same 10 questions every artist is asked on every other podcast, interview, and media appearance. I always learn something new about the artist being interviewed and the songwriting process/industry”* (S03). This was echoed by one of the 226 listeners who reviewed the podcast on the Apple store: *“you leave each podcast wanting to go back to your record collection and listen again to the songs you’ve just heard discussed”* (S02). The Head of BBC Radio Current Affairs, who commissioned the 2016 *Sodajerker* BBC World Service radio documentary, *The Secrets of Songwriting*, said, *“What makes Sodajerker special is a) the team’s incredible depth of research into, and understanding of, music: and b) their single-minded focus on how songwriters create original music”* (S07). In reaching a global audience of music fans, *Sodajerker* has been described by *The New Statesman* as *“particularly good at developing a good rapport with their guests...interviewees refer to exactly how a song is*

written...It's such an obvious-seeming inquiry, yet it never fails to elicit a fascinating response" (S09), and by music journalist and former *Esquire*, *Q* and *The Word* editor, Andrew Harrison, as, "The Frost/Nixon of tunesmithery" (S08). Harrison said, "these masterclasses in the art of writing music are so fascinating that even the tone-deaf and unmusical will love them. As a non-musician myself, I can attest to the impact that these conversations have had on my understanding of the creative process" (S08). The podcast has been freely available on demand to a worldwide audience since 2011, leading to 3,254,361 downloads (S01), 226 4/5-star reviews from listeners in 6 countries (S02), and placings in the music podcast charts in 74 countries (S01).

Dr Barber's work has — and continues to have — a beneficial impact on the understanding of songwriting for a variety of stakeholders. Following his appearance as a guest on the podcast and a subsequent live-on-stage interview with *Sodajerker* at the 2019 Meltdown Festival — which he curated at The Southbank Centre — Chairman of the Songwriters' Hall of Fame, Nile Rodgers, said: "These are difficult times for songwriters, and to have a resource like the *Sodajerker* podcast, where knowledge is shared by world-leading professionals and given freely to people around the world, is extremely valuable for the creative development of songwriters. For this reason, we cherish working with *Sodajerker*. Many organisations have a duty and responsibility to advocate for songwriters, but they are among the very few who actually do that" (S010).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- S01** – Sodajerker on Songwriting Podcast download statistics. **[Named Corroborator 1]**
- S02** – Sodajerker on Songwriting Podcast Listener reviews.
Global reviews from Apple download store. **[Named Corroborator 1]**
- S03** – The *Sodajerker on Songwriting* Listener Survey Report.
- S04** – Testimonial letter from KT Tunstall, professional songwriter.
- S05** – Testimonial letter from the founder and CEO of Song Academy. **[Named Corroborator 2]**
- S06** – Video evidence and testimonials from Songwriting Studies Network events.
Screenshots and links to video evidence, including timestamps for testimonials. **[Named Corroborator 3]**
- S07** – Testimonial letter from the Head of BBC Radio Current Affairs. **[Named Corroborator 4]**
- S08** – Testimonial letter from Andrew Harrison, music journalist. **[Named Corroborator 5]**
- S09** – Press reviews of the *Sodajerker on Songwriting* podcast.
Selection of press reviews, including links, dates, publications and screenshots. **[Named Corroborator 1]**
- S10** – Testimonial letter from Nile Rodgers, professional songwriter and Chairman of Songwriters' Hall of Fame.