Street music, technology and the urban soundscape

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Street music, technology and the urban soundscape

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In this article, we will examine the role and place of the street musician, their contribution to the urban soundscape and the ways in which this has been informed and (re)shaped by recent advances in music technology. Despite their global omnipresence, street musicians have seldom been the focus of contemporary scholarly research on music-making and performance. Historically, the street musician has been perceived and depicted as a romantic folk figure, one moving through and working in the urban environment in an ad hoc manner. However, as our research reveals, through the diversification of street music and the steady uptake of new music performance technologies, street musicians are forging different forms of presence in contemporary urban settings, their music becoming an inextricable aspect of the contemporary urban soundscape. Drawing on face-to-face interviews and participant observation work conducted in Brisbane, Australia, during late 2010 and early 2011, we endeavour here to bring street musicians further into the academic dialogues surrounding musicians and performance and in doing so further highlight the centrality of digital music tools within the work of contemporary street music performance.

Introduction: the omnipresent, ‘hidden’ musicians

Street music covers a variety of forms from the marching bands used to mark historical and cultural occasions or political events (McKay 2007) to informal, often ad hoc street performances by small combos or single musicians for shoppers, tourists and other passers-by in return for small contributions of money. The term ‘street music’ is also applied to a variety of genres, including folk, blues, jazz, world, rock, pop – the unifying factor being that these have all been incorporated into the repertoire of street musicians. From unaccompanied voice, to small combos and the classic ‘one-man band’, street music is linked to a broader tradition of street entertainment that goes back many centuries. Although primarily associated with acoustic instruments, recent years have witnessed an increasing prevalence of street musicians utilizing state-of-the-art technology – small but powerful public address systems, digital sound processing effects, samplers and even programmable digital drum machines. The result has been an increasing presence of the street musician in the urban soundscape via the production of a sound that is inherently ‘bigger’, ‘richer’ and more technologically complex than that produced by earlier forms of street music which relied purely upon unamplified acoustic instruments.

Given the amount of research that now focuses on music-making and performance in both contemporary and historical contexts, it is curious that so little attention has been paid to street music. Such an oversight seems particularly significant given the increasing emphasis placed on music in local, urban settings. Even in Finnegan’s (1989) The Hidden Musicians – now considered a classic ethnography of music-making’s impact on local communities and their associated urban spaces – no direct reference to street music is...
made. Yet Finnegan is highly aware of both the depth and diversity of music-making and the complex relationship that exists between the notions of professional and amateur musician as these play out in contemporary musical life. A similarly astute series of observations pertain in the work of Stebbins (1992) whose concept of ‘serious leisure’ accurately befits many aspects of the street music-making world. Increasingly straddling the boundary between amateur and professional practice, the art of the street musician constitutes a rapidly changing field. Spurred on by swift advances in digital technology, new performative conventions are effectively challenging definitions of street music. An equally curious aspect of street music’s absence from academic research and literature rests in the fact that so much attention is now focused on music’s place within and contribution to the urban, cultural economy (see, for example, Brown, Cohen, and O’Connor 2000; Gibson and Connell 2003; Currid 2007). References to the ‘global city’ are increasingly numerous, the latter regarded as translocally linked, cultural-geographic nodes in which creative clusters of artists, including musicians, are considered critical components (Landry 2000; Florida 2002). As this article will illustrate, pivotal moments in the history and development of music as a performing art and cultural form are mirrored in the changing craft of the street musician. Equally, the street musician, both as historical and contemporary figure, has a global omnipresence. Thus, there is a need to acknowledge the ongoing and shifting role of the street musician as an integral aspect of the global, urban soundscape.

We begin this article by discussing the significance of street musicians in a historical and contemporary context. We then go on to consider the changing relationship of street musicians to the urban soundscape and the aforementioned role of technology in this. The article draws on interviews conducted with street musicians in the city of Brisbane, Australia during late 2010 and early 2011.

The historical development of street music

The tradition of street music has a long, and largely undocumented, history. As such, it has been necessary in the course of conducting our research and preparing this article to glean insights regarding the evolution of street music from a variety of text and web-based sources. In medieval times, instruments such as the hurdy-gurdy were commonly used by travelling musicians to provide entertainment at street markets, fairs and other public gatherings (see Wilkins 1999). The one-man band, which also has its roots in the thirteenth century, is perhaps the most popular image of the street musician. Although subject to a variety of applications and interpretations, depending upon the needs of the individual musician, the basic premise of the one-man band concept is to enable a single musician to play a number of instruments simultaneously. During the nineteenth century, the one-man band was a prominent aspect of street life in the developing cities of the industrial age as documented in Mayhew’s (1985) London Labour and the London Poor, a vivid account of the working class urban experience in Britain’s capital during the 1840s and 1850s.

Part of the street musician’s appeal, historically speaking, has been bound up with the image of the street musician as a folk artist – that is to say, an amateur musician whose music is born out of and performed for the urban crowd. From medieval times through to the onset of the industrial revolution during the mid-eighteenth century, such an image was qualified through the personal circumstances of street musicians, many of whom were beggars, paupers and other members of the city’s poorest communities. Significantly, this image and perception of the street musician as a folk artist has continued well into contemporary times, even as the material circumstances of city dwellers have, on the
whole, changed and considerably improved. However, the continuing aura of ‘folk authenticity’ attached to the street musician also emanates to some extent from the increasing commercialization of popular music that took hold in the 1950s, rapidly replacing an emphasis on amateur, live music-making with the purchase of and listening to mechanically reproduced music (Frith 1988). Against the backdrop of this large-scale commodification of music, the street musician has retained an aura of authenticity and earnestness. This, in many cases, is a problematic depiction of the street musician, one that Hirsch is quick to counter in ‘Playing for Change’ as entirely too romantic, often ‘ignoring embedded issues of context, commerce, and contested identity and reception’ (Hirsch 2010, 352; see also Bywater 2007).

Yet this remains a popular depiction of the street musician. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, acoustic music, and particularly the acoustic guitar, became an important symbol of resistance to the increasing commercialization of music and foregrounded the amateur acoustic performer as a symbol of authenticity and accessibility in opposition to the star system of the popular music industry (MacKinnon 1994). The acoustic guitar, then a relative newcomer in the world of folk music, increasingly found its way into the street musician’s assemblage of instruments. Modelling their style on popular folk singer/guitarists such as Woody Guthrie, Pete Seger and Bob Dylan, many street musicians used the acoustic guitar to accompany their voice and augmented this with a harmonica mounted on a frame with a neck-strap. As with the folk scene, the acoustic guitar became a centrepiece of street music, the simplicity of the instrument seamlessly resonating with the established aura of the street musician as a no-frills artist whose craft relied essentially on accessibility and spontaneity.

During the late twentieth century, the repertoire of the street musician and the nature of street music itself became increasingly more eclectic. An ever-broadening range of instruments including string, woodwind, brass and percussion were incorporated into street music performances. Similarly, the repertoire of styles featured in busking performances grew and diversified to include jazz, classical and ensembles, together with elements of what gradually came to be known as ‘world music’ (a category that is still highly problematic and contested; see, for example, Frith 2000). Within this, and absorbing the characteristically pick and mix nature of dance and world music influences, contemporary street musicians have brought a new hybridized sound to the street, combining English and Irish folk traditions with characteristically non-western sounds, for example, from Indigenous Australia and Latin America.

Background to the project

The empirical research for this project took place in Brisbane, the state capital of Queensland, between November 2010 and February 2011. Once labelled a backward and parochial city with little interest in art and culture, the period since the late 1980s has seen Brisbane undergo a series of rapid, wholesale transformations (Birmingham 2002; Stafford 2004; Salt 2005). This also extends to the promotion of arts and culture in the city with dedicated spots such as the South Bank cultural precinct and Fortitude Valley offering a rich variety of arts and cultural attractions (Glover and Cunningham 2003). In the same period, Brisbane has become an increasingly cosmopolitan city, its shops, markets, restaurants and public leisure spaces capturing the full character of the city’s growing multi-cultural and multi-ethnic population. The contemporary Brisbane context of our field research into street music and technology touched on much of the recent history of street music as outlined in the first part of this article. Over a period of three
months, we spoke with 10 street musicians (and observed many others) about the nature of their performance, their experience of performing in public spaces, their views on how their music worked in the context of the urban soundscape and the types of technological innovations they used in relation to this. Taking an ethnographic approach, much of the data collection was conducted on site and, as such, our sample of street musicians reflects a specific period of the city’s street life: from late 2010 to early 2011. Our narrow but deep data set proved revealing: all the musicians interviewed were male and a clear majority of them performed with a guitar, often with a battery-powered amplifier. They played a range of material but tended to perform contemporary popular music or specialize in a particular niche of contemporary practice such as bluegrass slide guitar or country music. In accordance with the university code of ethics governing the project, all the street musicians interviewed were granted anonymity and thus the names referred to herein are aliases. The project was made possible by a small seeding grant made available by the Griffith Centre for Cultural Research.

Street music and the urban soundscape

Sound, in both a regulated and unregulated capacity, has long been associated as a key defining aspect of the city. In his work on medieval carnivals and fairs, Bakhtin (1984) explores how public spaces in early cities across Europe lent themselves to sudden and temporal flashes of unstrained, hedonistic celebration. The carnivalesque nature of such gatherings was permeated by sound – the voices of the crowd, gesticulations of market stall owners, the call of hawkers trying to assemble a public for their various side shows and attractions, and street musicians and other forms of entertainment such as the Punchinello (the buffoon character featured in puppet shows, now more commonly referred to as ‘Punch and Judy’) and travelling theatre groups. As cities developed and, in the wake of the industrial revolution of the mid-eighteenth century, became larger and more anonymous places (Simmel [1903] 2002), the streets and adjacent public spaces were increasingly transformed into sites for sociality. According to Mafessoli (1996), in the current late modern context, it is this quality of public life that most stridently combats the tendencies towards individualism and alienation engendered by the contemporary traits of risk and uncertainty. In this context, argues Mafessoli, it is the public gatherings, in shopping malls, sporting areas and city streets that preserve collective life or communitas.

It is in this context that the role and significance of the street musician, past and present, needs to be understood. The way in which music acts on and influences phenomenological perceptions of space and place is an area that still needs to be mapped comprehensively in music research. An important entrée into this field is seen in the work of Bull (2000, 2007), who considers how users of personal stereo technology construct alternative soundscapes in an attempt to negotiate space and place in contemporary urban contexts. For Bull, however, this kind of music–space relationship is interpreted at a distinctly individual level. The personal stereo user’s creation of a soundscape is, according to Bull, representative of the individual’s desire to subvert the overarching soundscape of the city and replace it with their own aurally constructed phenomenological experience of the cityscape around them. For those listening to street music performance, however, their exposure to the music is different in that it forms part of a shared experience of aural and visual stimuli as these play out in city spaces. At this level, the street musician contributes directly to what Chaney (1993) has referred to as a collective fiction of everyday life. The musician’s performance is, in this sense, part of the everyday narrative
of the urban setting and the collective production of the cultural life that occurs there. Many articulations of this are possible. For example, confronted with a string quartet or hurdy-gurdy player situated in front of a historic building, castle ruin or publicly displayed historical artefact, an audience may be temporarily placed in a reflective mood that draws the music together with their own idealized notions of a represented past. Indeed, street musicians will often purposely place themselves in such performance locations as a means of feeding on such audience associations and providing their performance with a particular atmospheric (and on occasions sonic) quality. As this suggests, street musicians are patently aware of the significance of place as a resource that is as integral as the music they perform in creating both effect and affect in the context of urban soundscapes that are increasingly crowded with noise. Thus, as Chris, one of the Brisbane street musicians who participated in our study explained:

... my favourite spot ... was under the old Wintergarden um, and there was a big overhanging, kind of glass, what would you call it? A roof thing and if you sang up into it it would just reverb right down ... So that was a really good spot acoustically.

A similar observation was offered by Jacob, an ethnic Korean who was based in Brisbane at the time of the interviews and studying at a local university. As the following interview extract illustrates, Jacob’s street performance strategy also hinged to a certain degree on particular uses of urban space to achieve the desired effect in terms of sound:

Interviewer: I notice your spot where you’re playing today it might have a bit of, I don’t know if the sound catches in the room behind where it echoes around?

Jacob: Yeah, yeah, yeah that’s a good point. That’s why um, yeah like initially I choose that place. Because um, yeah it sounds [good] somehow it travels back and it sort of comes out again. So I don’t know, it just makes nicer play.

Like other forms of contemporary street artist, street musicians are also highly sensitive to the ebb and flow of city streets and other public urban spaces and the need to effectively both work in and with the spatio-social dynamics of urban space. Thus, to quote another observation from Chris:

... there’s just spots where it’s easier for people to gather in a group ... that’s the main thing, there’s gotta be enough room so that people can still walk past and other people can stand there and watch so. That’s a pretty important consideration. Also ... the shop owners have a right to move you along if they want so you need to be somewhere that the shop owners don’t mind ... cause some, a lot of them would just say ‘no I don’t want you here’ regardless of how good you might think you are because they don’t like the noise and stuff. Um yeah so, there’s a few consideration, there’s like four or five spots that are really good. It always would depend because there were like three of us like, sometimes you can get away with some spots just solo but um, because there were the three of us, you know, we’re pretty noisy [so] it was kind of limited.

As this account reveals, in busy city spaces contemporary street musicians must quickly acquire competence in how to appropriate and manage space effectively. Yet Chris’s comments above also throw into relief another important aspect of the street musician’s relationship to the urban soundscape, that is the inherent quality of the urban soundscape as contested and the consequent need for an ongoing process of negotiation with others who have an interest in managing, not to say policing, the urban soundscape. Again, if the street musician has been an omnipresent aspect of the urban soundscape for many years then, equally, historical evidence of the contestation between street musicians and others with a stake in the urban soundscape is also to be found. A particularly telling example of this is seen in Picker’s work on the soundscapes of the Victorian era. Thus, as Picker (2003) observes, during the mid-1800s influential professional communities in
London, among them ‘artisans, academics, musicians, clergy and doctors’ banded together in ‘[w]hat c[ould] loosely be considered [an] anti-street music movement’ (42). Included in their number was none less than author Charles Dickens, whose acclaimed fiction writing often focused on the plight of the urban poor. As Picker notes, what was at issue here, centrally speaking, was the claim over legitimizing the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable noise; certain powerful groups within London’s professional and intellectual elite were effectively attempting to sanction particular uses of public space and thus bring an element of control over the urban soundscape. Although such examples of collective intervention are now effectively filtered by local government policy, contestation over the parameters of the urban soundscape and what counts as acceptable and unacceptable noise remain and can, as several of our respondents attest, impact to varying degrees on the performative practices of the street musician. Thus, as Chris explains, as a performing street musician with a stake in the production of the everyday soundscape, he must routinely deal with the demands of other stakeholders. The latter, typically those with businesses in the inner-city areas, are granted an element of power by the local authorities to regulate the urban soundscape in order to allow other forms of activity, such as shopping and dining, to occur without the need to tolerate the ‘noise’ produced by street musicians.

In the context of Brisbane, the street musicians we interviewed also referred to other modes of policing that restricted their access to parts of the city. The South Bank Cultural Precinct was considered off-limits by many street musicians due to the fact that it was patrolled by a private security firm who had permission to move on street musicians performing in that space. Similarly, participants often lamented the need to secure a permit in order to perform in the Queen Street Mall, a prime shopping destination in Brisbane. That said, it became evident through talking to different street musicians that over time they had gained a sense of which spaces ‘worked’ for them in terms of the music they performed and also where their music would be deemed acceptable ‘noise’. In many cases, a street musician’s special relationship to a particular space, and the crowd who frequented it, had been developed over a period of time. Thus, as Alex observed:

\[...\] the only place I could possibly draw a crowd is Northey Street organic markets cause I’ve been busking there for a couple of year and I get a lot of, sort of regulars and then the parents bring their kids out in the strollers and stuff and they get ’em to put the money in and all that. So um I don’t necessarily bring out anything special but it might depend on what the crowd’s like. So if it is a bunch of kids I might play some old Rock’n Roll and get ’em dancing or um, but if it’s a bunch of sort of West End types them I’ll do a Pumpkins cover or something like that. Just to keep ’em interested.

In such contexts, where street musicians were working a space and a crowd dynamic in a particular, and positive, way there was a clear sense that they believed that through their music they were allowing the audience to experience the urban soundscape in a different way – through offering them a reprieve from its more routine, and less agreeable, aspects. This is clearly articulated in the following account from David, a street musician originally from France who had been busking in Brisbane for approximately three months at the time of the interview: ‘I think, you know, people are happy to, to listen music in the street [because] it’s like different \[...\] to [what they] have all the time, the noise of the car and stuff and the bus.’

Another variable discussed by street musicians in relation to the their place in the urban soundscape was the weather. Although seldom discussed in accounts of outdoor musical and other forms of arts performance, the weather can play a decisive role, particularly when so much depends on the sound created by the performer. According to
Jacob, the weather on a given day can radically alter the sonic and acoustic properties of
the music he performs, effectively defining the distinction between a good and a bad
performance quite apart from the space utilized, choice of instrument and equipment and
individual musical ability.

Interviewer: When you were walking in the street earlier you told me some interesting things
about the, how the rain affects the sound. Can you just tell me about that again?

Jacob: Alright ... say like it’s ... if you sing in the shower booth you can hear it better
because of the two reasons. First that’s [a] confined area, so it makes [an] echo. The second,
the vapours within the shower booth ... make the sound a bit more dense, so it sort of makes
it really long and warm sound. Then outside, if you sing it outdoor with the rain you get that
same sort of vapours, same sort of damp but it’s not [a] confined area so your sound is too
much blocked. It’s sort of ... degraded because of the heavy air and um yeah it just make[s]
the sound not clear enough. But um, on sunny days my sound can just travel like straight if you
get, ah yeah, if you got a right amp it just makes a boom. Great sound.

Street music and technology

As Jacob’s references to amplification in the above interview extract suggest, technology
is becoming increasingly important to the way that street musicians position themselves in
the context of the urban soundscape. Despite the continuing, widespread belief in acoustic
music as being in some way more ‘authentic’ than music produced on electric instruments
(and increasingly non-conventional instruments such as turntables and computers), in
recent decades both the performance and consumption of acoustic music has undoubtedly
benefited hugely from technological enhancement. Indeed, Narváez (2001) illustrates how
the use by acoustic folk and blues guitarists of electronic pick-ups and discrete
amplification systems to increase the volume of their performances has gone largely
unnoticed by audiences who still consider the music they hear to be acoustically generated
(see also MacKinnon 1994). From the point of view of musicians themselves, the use of
such technology is essential to raising the level of their instruments’ sound above that of
the audience and other background noise encountered in pubs, clubs and similar venues.

A similar rationale has informed the street musician’s experimentation with
amplification as the technology has become more readily available for this to be
incorporated into street performance. Indeed, even before small, portable battery-powered
amplifiers were available, it was not uncommon to see street musicians using customized
amplifiers powered by car batteries, or illegally drawing off high-street electrical mains
supplies. One important innovation in this respect was the introduction of amplifiers
designed specifically to deal with the range of frequencies produced by acoustic
instruments. Many of the leading producers of amplifiers for electric guitars, notably
Marshall, Roland and Fender, have made successful inroads into the acoustic amplification
market. Amplification tailored especially for other popular acoustic stringed instruments,
notably mandolin and bouzouki, as well as dual units that amplify both instruments and a
vocal microphone have also been introduced into the market and have been very popular
with street musicians. The most obvious advantage of these ‘acoustic’ amplifiers is the
enhanced quality of sound they offer the musician. Whereas it was previously possible to
use electric guitar amplifiers for acoustic performance, their more restricted sound
frequency meant that much of the inherent sound quality of acoustic instruments was lost
in the amplification process. A further, and related, drawback was the problem of
feedback, a howling noise created when sound reaches a sufficient volume to create a loop
between an instrument or microphone and an amplification system. Newer amplifiers have
overcome much of this and the increased levels of volume they afford have allowed street
musicians to create a greater presence in busy urban street settings, cutting through the noise of motor vehicles, the sound bleed-over from retail stores and other aspects of the urban soundscape.

Cutting through the ambient sound and surface noise of the street was seen to be an essential part of performing street music on particular sites in Brisbane. While the licensed buskers working the popular Queen Street Mall are restricted to acoustic performance, those working outside the mall require amplification to perform. As one respondent made clear, on these sites technology is taken up primarily as a competitive strategy:

Martin: Yeah *The Beach House* (a nearby restaurant) from Wednesdays through till Sunday, I think they have acoustic covers musicians playing and by about seven o’clock or something you start competing with them. But generally you’re competing with traffic noise so that’s why you have to use an amplifier. If somebody was here with an acoustic guitar they probably wouldn’t make a lot of money because they can’t be heard.

Thus access to the street’s audience becomes a question of battery life in addition to finding a site well trafficked by pedestrians. Most respondents who used amplification performed until their amplifier’s batteries failed, ensuring that while it allowed access to an audience, it also limited the amount of time in which they could perform.

Another form of technological advancement of importance to street musicians is the continued development of digital sound effects (also referred to as signal processors or stomp boxes). Such devices have been a part of the electric guitarist’s recording and live performance repertoire since the 1960s when artists such as Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton first used analogue devices such as the wah wah pedal, phase shifter, fuzz box and univibe to dramatic effect. However, apart from specific artists, such as Scottish-born singer-songwriter and guitarist John Martyn, for many years such technology featured very little in the work of acoustic musicians, largely because of the problems associated with amplifying acoustic instruments. The introduction of digital effects (and concomitant improvements in amplification systems) has altered this situation significantly. Less noisy than earlier analogue effects units, digital effects are also much more reliable and user friendly. This is particularly the case with delay and reverb units – both of which have a cleaner, more predictable sound quality compared to the original tape-echo and spring-reverb devices of the 1960s and 1970s. Such units can be creatively used by musicians to add depth and presence to their performance. This can be particularly effective in the case of solo performers where a new richness can be added to their music. An equally useful accessory in this respect is the ‘loop’ pedal. A relatively recent innovation, the loop pedal replicates the tape loop effect much favoured during the 1970s and 1980s by artists such as Mike Oldfield, who used this technique extensively on his debut album *Tubular Bells* (Virgin, 1973). In the digital era, sampling has removed the need for the accurate cutting and splicing of analogue tape into physical loops and has led to an increasing use of ‘looping’ in a live context especially among solo musicians. The loop pedal became the logical accessory for the gigging solo musician, allowing them to build up complex arrangements using only their instrument and voice.

As with the advancement in personal amplification, the buskers of Brisbane have embraced many of these other technologies. Dual vocal/guitar amplifiers that featured digital reverb processors were sought-after and valued items, as were a range of other professional equipment such as D.I. (direct input) boxes for vocal microphones and the aforementioned looping and delay stomp-box pedals. All battery powered in nature, these items have found a place within the soundscape of Brisbane’s inner city. The uptake of these technologies was significant in the work of one respondent (Sam) in particular. Sam performed in a much sought after site in the city: a busy passageway leading into...
Brisbane’s Central railway station. The site provides pedestrian traffic along the sidewalk but its key advantage is the proximity offered to both a busy intersection (with attendant delays) and the diagonal foot traffic that comes across the street and flows past and around the site as pedestrians enter the arcade behind it. Loud, congested and exposed, this was a pitch that could only be accessed via an amplifier and it was here that Sam plied a very different type of busking. In essence, Sam improvised with an electric guitar and effects pedals, often creating loops as backing material. He was neither an adept guitar player nor an experienced street musician. He did not play popular or recognizable songs or sing, yet he was able to earn ‘forty bucks, fifty bucks a day,’ by merit of location and an ability to introduce melodic sound into the street environment. Technology played a vital part here. Without it, Sam would not have been able to perform audibly or compositionally. Tellingly, towards the end of our interview he became distracted by another busker, a friend, using his equipment loudly in the distance. He became noticeably concerned, too much volume brings trouble, and as soon as we finished our interview, he walked over and turned the amplifier down.

**Conclusion**

This article has focused on the practice of street music and its place in the contemporary urban soundscape and the role of technology within this. During a performance, buskers are fixed in place while the city moves around them. They are never fixed for long but it is here that they experience the least liminal aspect of their work. They leverage their income by remaining momentarily still and audible in light of the constant churn of change around them. While this environment is ever fluid, there are necessary aspects of their labour that aim to resist change. To be a street musician is to remain still and perform and as such it is this tension that they exploit to earn a small living. Similarly, this is the very same desire for momentary stasis in performance that is served by the technology they take up. The sound of a performance can be pushed into a specific place and held there with an amplifier. The natural reverb provided by an overhanging building can be replaced with an effect pedal. Loops and drum machines and samplers can provide recurring rhythms and accompaniment to a musician performing in what, when analysed carefully, is a vulnerable state, embedded as they are in the almost invisible routines of everyday life in the city.

**Notes**

1. A popular descriptor for this is ‘busking’, a term still commonly applied to street music – and other forms of street art – denoting the art of performing in the street and other public places for small sums of money donated by the passers-by.
2. An exception here is Gibson and Connell’s (2003) work on music and the cultural economy of Byron Bay in NSW, Australia. However, this focuses on a distinct aspect of street music linked to backpacking culture and youth music scenes and festivals.
3. The hurdy-gurdy was traditionally used by beggars. It is a stringed instrument played by turning a handle that rotates a wheel on the strings to produce a drone. With the other hand, the player manipulates a series of keys in order to produce a melody on the top string of the instrument.
4. There were few women busking in Brisbane during data collection and the few approached declined to be interviewed by our male researcher. Future studies made specifically about busking women, conducted in a setting rich with appropriate respondents, could prove a valuable contribution to this field.
5. A license from the Brisbane City Council is required to busk in busy and central areas such as the Queen St Mall, Brisbane Square, King George Square and The Fortitude Valley Mall. While free to obtain, the license dictates modes of performance (no amplification, inoffensive), duration (no
more than two hours) and professional demeanour. It also requires a completed application form and a formal audition and, as such, significantly diminishes the ad hoc or impromptu nature of busking work in these areas.

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