

## **Independent Singer/Songwriter**

The role of being an independent singer/songwriter is passionate and fulfilling but also has many hardships. The profession is affected by numerous factors, which will be explored throughout this essay. Without having control or support of a record label, this leaves many responsibilities down to artists that go beyond just creating music. This essay will explore the duties, responsibilities and skills needed, alongside considering opportunities and challenges that one would face, such as handling difficult financial and legal situations, and how to deal with them.

## **Qualifications, Experience, Skills and Qualities**

To be a successful musician, there are no mandatory qualifications. (**AGCAS, 2022**), says that experience and overall musicianship are paramount in the development of one's career. Most musicians start learning their instrument from an early age and some take music theory exams and instrument graded exams. For example, Trinity Rock and Pop, which are exams offered by (**Trinity College London, n.d.**), for musicians who play various types of instruments. These exams are not compulsory, but they can give musicians a greater understanding of their instrument and allow them to focus on the technical aspects. To help me gain experience, I play many small-scale gigs to allow me to get more confident showcasing my music in preparation for bigger shows and have taken guitar exams to strengthen my skillset.

A singer-songwriter who prioritised gaining experience over qualifications is Ed Sheeran. In an interview with Sheeran's parents, his father (John Sheeran) shared the fact that Ed received all Fs from his music college (ACM) that he attended for 3 weeks before being asked to support Just Jack on his 2009 tour. The experience he gained from being on tour was more beneficial to his career than achieving the best grade (**SkyNews, 2019**). He wrote in his book 'A Visual Journey' that when he moved to London, he emailed every promoter he could find, in an attempt to find work. He said he attempted to do three shows a night, so he could eat. (**Sheeran, 2014**). As heard in the interview (**OfficialJonathanRoss, 2014**),

Sheeran talks about how people assume that artists are 'born with talent'. He plays an audio recording from when he was young. It was clear that he has made remarkable improvements. In the recording, he had a lack of vocal control. However, after years of practice, Sheeran has great control over his voice, due to learning all about how to use it.

Ed Sheeran is a great example to show that even established artists must work hard and prioritise their experience to be successful. Ed Sheeran also shows many valuable personal qualities, such as dedication and passion, which makes him more employable and a joy to work with. It is extremely important to be an overall nice person, so people want to hire you, and you will often be recommended if people enjoyed their time working with you.

## **Duties and Responsibilities**

### **Admin Duties**

The duties of this profession can be unpredictable. **(Ike, 2016)** Says that these duties include research, emails, organising writing sessions, and managing social media. To take advantage of opportunities, it is important to do research to find new venues to play at and look for bigger artists that you could support on tours or in venues you like. It is also important to actively contact venues, so they see that you are interested which makes you seem motivated and eager. Social media plays a significant role in this too. This is because your social media should express your artist identity and could be the first impression that you give a promotor, venue, or new listeners. **(SoundTechnology, n.d)** explains that it is vital that you present your image well. For example, colour schemes, show dates, and always thinking about creating unique and engaging content that keeps people intrigued.

### **Creative Duties**

In addition to the online side to the profession, a day's work for a singer/songwriter also includes many writing sessions alongside getting in the studio, or home recording. As an

independent artist, many singer songwriters record their own demos at home using interfaces such as a Scarlett 2i2, which is a simple to use, portable interface. As explained by **(Writes, 2018)** many artists chose to record from home. I also tend to make lots of demos of initial ideas with my home recording equipment, to decrease the pressure of time, and high studio rates of a professional space.

### **Financial and Legal Issues**

There are many financial and legal issues that impact this profession including copyright, contracts, royalties, licensing, and unfair pay. It is vital that singer/songwriters learn about copyright so that they understand how to correctly handle situations that involve copyright. This could be signing contracts with record labels or splitting royalties with other writers, so that royalties are shared out fairly between collaborators. The **(Musicians Union, 2023)**, advises that writers all sign and date an agreement that sets out the name of the song, contributors, their shares of the song and what the share involves. This makes sure that everyone involved in the agreement is aware of the percentage of the song they are entitled to, and what royalties they will receive. If this is not done professionally, songwriters may be unfairly paid or lose control of their work. Therefore, it is essential to understand how contracts operate and what exactly it is that you are agreeing to.

An example drawn from **(Bonner et al, 2024)** that highlights the importance of understanding contracts is the conflict between Taylor Swift and Scooter Braun. In 2018 Swift left Big Machine Records after recording six albums. Around six months later, the record label was bought by Scooter Braun's company, including the master rights to Swift's albums. Swift wanted to buy back the rights to her master's but was told that she could only regain back her master's gradually, in turn for her writing new albums. Swift did not accept this deal and kept fighting to buy back her work. According to **(Callahan, 2025)**, in 2025 she finally bought back her master's. If Swift had been more educated on the importance of music contracts, she may have avoided this legal battle with Big Machine Records and Braun. **(Michael, 2025) Also** talked about this and said that legal Issues can have a huge

impact on the profession, however a musician familiarising themselves with contracts and copyrighting will give them more security and control in similar situations.

A financial issue for independent singer/songwriters is getting underpaid or being paid in 'exposure'. This puts a huge financial strain on independent artists. The 'World First Live Music Census' that is talked about by **(Romer, 2018)** showed that over half of musicians worked unpaid or for 'exposure' over the past 12 months and felt that the 'exposure' they were promised by venues did not benefit their career. It is also stated that 68% of musicians found low pay from venues was making it difficult for them to have a stable income. This is especially important when musicians also said that almost half of their annual income comes from performing live, and only 3% from recording.

The online report published by **(Musicians' Union, 2012, p.14)** states that these financial issues can have huge impacts on the profession. However, taking on side-jobs that will be more financially beneficial such as part time teaching, means that a musician can have a more stable and reliable career. **(Small, 2018)** writes that this doesn't mean that a singer/songwriter should disregard any jobs that aren't financially appealing, however, it is important to analyse the situation and decide if the job is right for them, because unfortunately, exposure is the most abused selling point used by lots of venue owners and promoters to get you to work for a low rate.

### **Marketing and Promoting**

As an independent Singer/Songwriter it is extremely important to market and promote yourself. This is, so you are continually engaging with your followers and giving them new things to be excited about. This includes posting about your upcoming gigs with direct links to buy tickets or posting short clips of songs. According to **(Byrne, 2025)**, a good way to communicate with your fan base that also creates a sense of personality and intimacy is having Q&A sessions. This can be as simple as poll questions on your Instagram story. It is a great way to make your followers feel involved in the 'behind the scenes' of your life and

music-making. These small measures allow your followers to be curious and interact with your content. Another way to spark engagement is to make interesting content that is expressive, unique, distinctive or even comedic. The most effective way to do this, is to post content that is specific to your artist identity. This could include using certain colours that you feel portrays you best as an artist, fonts that fit well with your style, and images that capture your artistic intentions. I make sure to keep my social media platforms active to keep my followers engaged, which also attracts new followers too.

### **Intellectual and Personal Challenges**

Sometimes, this competitive industry can be mentally challenging. It is important as an independent artist to learn how to deal with challenges. One of the most brutal challenges a musician may face is imposter syndrome. Defined by *(Musicians' Union 2021)*, it is the persistent inability to believe one's success is deserved and has been achieved as a result of one's efforts and skills. The source stated that 87% of people in the creative industries experience it. It can be triggered by a range of different things from going through a writer's block to performing a bad set at a show. According to *(Vandergast, 2023)*, there isn't a simple answer to overcoming imposter syndrome, but it instead depends on how it has a bearing on your career. Once you learn the root of the cause, it will become easier to manage. It is completely natural to feel anxious and nervous at times, but this shouldn't be down to your negative opinions of your own talent or skill but rather because you want to have a good performance. It is important to learn to adapt your relationship with failure to succeed because "without failure there is no room to grow" *(Vandergast, 2023)*. Many established artists also suffer with Imposter syndrome.

One of the artists that has been the most open about his experience is Lewis Capaldi. As reported by *(Chamberlain, 2023)*, he spoke about imposter syndrome and said he doesn't understand why people go to see him. He talks about this in his Documentary *(Lewis Capaldi: How I'm Feeling Now, 2023)*, saying he's not confident in his abilities as a songwriter, and it gets worse the more successful he is. We hear him speak about Elton John

sending him a heartfelt email trying to reassure him of his talents, but his imposter syndrome is so strong that no matter what people say, he still feels like an imposter.

### **Career Progression/Development**

Career development for an independent artist can include numerous things. From developing a fan base, signing a contract with a record label, supporting big artists, or selling out headline shows. Every artist has different goals, and every achievement, whether big or small, should still be celebrated and valued. An artist that has recently made huge career progression is Olivia Dean. In 2021, she was named breakthrough artist of the year and 2 years later released her first studio album *Messy* (Dean, 2023). She had some recognition and had already performed at multiple popular music festivals such as ACL and Coachella (Brulloths, 2025). However, her most recent album, 'The Art of Loving', (Dean, 2025), touring, and collaborating with Sam Fender on the song 'Rein me in', (Fender and Dean, 2025) is what helped her gain the most traction. She said in an interview with Capital that it was her biggest show ever, and the feeling of performing to that many people seemed almost surreal. (CapitalFMOfficial, 2025) Alongside this, her album 'The Art of Loving' (Dean, 2025) becoming a hit in the US and making it to number one in the billboard charts in the UK was a huge success within her career.

In conclusion, being an independent singer/songwriter includes both challenges and successes. Through writing this essay, it has helped me to understand how I can make personal progression in my own career. It is vital that I stay motivated and passionate, to succeed. The biggest challenges I may face will be the biggest lessons that I will learn, and without failure there is no growth. Therefore, it is important that I continually practice and dedicate myself to the profession. That could be improving my skills, gaining experience and staying busy with admin and creative duties. Also, educating myself on legal and financial issues to ensure I am in complete control of my work, crafting new creative marketing ideas, and most importantly planning the next steps of my career to track my progress.

25101168  
SHR4C007R~001

## Bibliography

AGCAS. (2022) *Job Profile Musician* Available Online: <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/musician> [Accessed 10/11/25]

Bonner, M. Garcia, G. Olson, S. (2024) *Taylor Swift and Scooter Braun's drama, explained* Available Online: <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/uk/entertainment/a62500630/taylor-swift-scooter-braun-scott-borchetta-tyrannical-control-amas-netflix-doc/> [Accessed 16/12/25]

Brulloths, E. (2025) *How Olivia Dean Became 2025's Fastest Growing Jazz-Pop Star* Available Online: <https://mhstrailblazer.com/lifeandarts/2025/12/03/how-olivia-dean-became-2025s-fastest-growing-jazz-pop-star/> [Accessed 13/11/25]

Byrne, L. (2025) *The Importance of Social Media for Artists, Musicians, and Creatives* Available Online: <https://lindacooganb.medium.com/the-importance-of-social-media-for-artists-musicians-and-creatives-a360ad91c45e> [Accessed 12/11/25]

Callahan, C. (2022) *Taylor Swift Now Owns Her Music After the Scooter Braun Saga. See a Timeline of What Happened* Available Online: <https://www.today.com/popculture/music/scooter-braun-taylor-swift-feud-rcna50205> [Accessed 16/12/25]

CapitalFMOfficial. (n.d.) *Olivia Dean performing with Sam Fender was such a power move* [Video] Available Online: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Gfmmia9BQ-s> [Accessed 13/11/25]

Chamberlain, L. (2023) *Lewis Capaldi explains how success and 'imposter syndrome' have affected his mental health* Available Online: <https://uk.style.yahoo.com/lewis-capaldi-explains-success-imposter-130400436.html> [Accessed: 12/11/25]

25101168  
SHR4C007R~001

Dean, O. (2023) *Messy*. EMI Records

Fender, S. and Dean, O. (2025) *Rein Me In*. Polydor

Ike, J. (2016) *A Day in the life of a full-time musician* Available Online:

<https://bandzoogle.com/blog/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-full-time-musician> [Accessed 11/11/25]

*Lewis Capaldi: How I'm Feeling Now*. (2023) *Netflix Documentary*. Directed by Joe Pearlman. Netflix. [Accessed 12/11/25]

Michael. (2025) *Recognising Your Rights in Music Contracts: Ownership and Control of Copyright* Available Online: <https://www.lawditmusic.co.uk/recognising-your-rights-in-music-contracts-ownership-and-control-of-copyright/> [Accessed 16/12/25]

Musicians' Union. (2023) *Copyright for Songwriters and Composers* Available Online:

<https://musiciansunion.org.uk/working-performing/composing-and-songwriting/copyright-for-songwriters-and-composers> [Accessed 12/12/25]

Musicians' Union. (2012) *The Working Musician* Available Online:

<https://musiciansunion.org.uk/MusiciansUnion/media/resource/Guides%20and%20reports/Education/The-Working-Musician-report.pdf?ext=.pdf>. [Accessed 07/01/2026]

Musicians' Union. (2021) *What is Imposter Syndrome and What Can You do About It?*

Available Online: <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/career-development/career-guides/musicians-wellbeing-guidance-pack/what-is-imposter-syndrome-and-what-can-you-do-about-it> [Accessed: 12/11/25]

OfficialJonathanRoss. (2014) Ed Sheeran Singing Badly | The Jonathan Ross Show [Video]

Available Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flkjMuaKYQU> [Accessed 12/11/25]

25101168  
SHR4C007R~001

Romer, C. (2018) *Unpaid 'exposure' does not benefit musicians' careers* Available at:  
<https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/unpaid-exposure-does-not-benefit-musicians-careers> [Accessed 11/11/25]

Sheeran, E. (2014) *A Visual Journey*. London: Octopus Publishing Group

SkyNews. (2019) Ed Sheeran failed music college before catapulting to global stardom  
Available Online: <https://news.sky.com/story/ed-sheeran-failed-music-college-before-catapulting-to-global-stardom-11789709>[Accessed 11/11/25]

Small, A. (2018) *Saying "No" Will Help Your Music Career. No Seriously!* Available Online:  
<https://www.mymusicmasterclass.com/saying-no-will-help-your-music-career-no-seriously/>  
[Accessed 11/11/25]

Sound Technology. (n.d.) *Finding success as an Independent Artist* Available Online:  
<https://www.soundtech.co.uk/news/finding-success-as-an-independent-artist> [Accessed 12/11/25]

Trinity College London. (n.d.) *Rock and Pop* Available Online: <https://www.trinityrock.com/>  
[Accessed 07/01/26]

Vandergast, A. (2023) *How Musicians can crawl Out of The Imposter Syndrome Spiral*  
Available Online: <https://www.anrfactory.com/how-musicians-can-crawl-out-of-the-imposter-syndrome-spiral/> [Accessed 12/11/25]

Writes, S. (2018) *Home Recording VS Studio Recording* Available Online:  
<https://www.wired4music.co.uk/2018/02/home-recording-vs-studio-recording/> [Accessed 15/11/25]