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## **Introduction**

While undertaking the coursework for a FLAS fellowship at the University of Illinois in 2015 and 2016, I began asking questions about what role the European Union might play in the European popular music industry after being introduced to EU policy areas in a course on European institutions and governance. These questions ultimately formed the basis of my forthcoming doctoral dissertation in ethnomusicology. This paper explores the role that EU-level cultural policy programs play in the overall development of the careers of pop musicians especially in the early stages when perhaps the most assistance is needed. It does so by examining the direct engagement of EU civil servants, parliamentarians, and commissioners with these musicians and other music industry workers through a civil society network known as the European Talent Exchange Program (henceforth, ETEP).

## **The European Talent Exchange Program and the EU’s Popular Music Prizes**

ETEP is a transnational network of European music festivals, industry agents, and artists with aims to circulate musicians throughout the European continent and beyond. Ultimately, the ETEP program seeks to promote the development of a European pop music industry capable of competing with counterparts in the United States and Latin America. ETEP administrators put festival organizers in contact with agents and artists to fund up-and-coming acts in their first international tour following their first international record release. It is subsidized in part by the

European Union via the Creative Europe Programme, an apparatus within the Education, Youth, Sport and Culture directorate general (DG-EYSC) and the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), both of which foster arts programs that have continental European scopes. The subsidies provided by the European Commission cover travel costs between festivals for participating artists, so that income generated from performances can go towards other expenses or serve as more direct profit for the musicians themselves. ETEP has been in partnership with the European Union since 2003, just before the EU's eastern enlargement. By 2019 (the last year of the program before the festival industry was vastly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic), the network had grown to include 122 active festivals in cities and towns throughout Europe and has sponsored over 1500 acts from all over the continent, even from European nations that are not part of the EU. The most well-known festivals in the program are the largest, such as Glastonbury (England), Lollapalooza Berlin (Germany), Sziget (Hungary), Exit (Serbia), Lowlands (Netherlands), Roskilde (Denmark), and Primavera Sound (Spain). ETEP also features many medium-sized festivals (40k-100k attendees) and smaller showcases such as Iceland Airwaves, Tallinn Music Week (Estonia), By:Larm (Norway), MENT Ljubljana (Slovenia), and Taksirat (North Macedonia).

While the EU's engagement with ETEP is primarily supportive, the Commission takes a more direct approach to the industry through its popular music prizes, which are annually given to multiple artists who stand out within the ETEP framework. From its inception in 2004 through 2018, the prize was known as the European Border Breakers Award (EBBA), and was then renamed the Music Moves Europe Talent Award (MMETA) for the 2019 season. Overall the EU has recognized 217 acts from 28 countries, many of whom have gone on to great international success, including Adele, Dua Lipa, Mumford and Sons, Rosalia, Stromae, Swedish

House Mafia, Icona Pop, and many others. This award is easily the most prolific and visible of the EU's cultural prizes, and arguably the most geographically and linguistically diverse as well, given that the award is not limited to artists and acts from EU member states.<sup>1</sup>

## **Literature**

There is significant literature that explains why popular music and festivals are important targets for EU cultural policy programs. The first involves the role of music festivals as sites of placemaking and identity creation, and a recent example comes from Chris Newbold, Christopher Maughan, Jennie Jordan & Franco Bianchini, who list a series of important questions that can be generally applied to analysis of festivals. They say:

Embedded within [the events] are a wide range of potential measures and features that reflect the core aims of each festival. These include the extent to which a festival is: a source of artistic innovation and vitality; transformative (e.g. through educational work); a moment of ambiguity and challenge to the status quo; a source of impacts (which may be cultural, political, social, economic, or environmental); a source of local cohesion, pride, and identity; a mechanism through which to achieve a change in city/national identity and to market a locality; an investment in improving the quality of urban life; a project focused on advancing cultural democracy; a way of mobilizing new audiences and/or new partners and stakeholders; a source of entertainment/delight/social networks; a platform for developing intercultural dialogue and intercultural competence; and for

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<sup>1</sup> Acts are eligible for the award so long as their country of origin contributes to the EU's Creative Europe budget. Thus, some nations external to the EU have artists who have received the award, such as Iceland, Norway, Ukraine, Albania, and Armenia.

achieving change in local and European citizenship/consciousness (Newbold et.al. 2015: xvi-xvii).

Many festival organizers have organically developed expertise in these areas, and thus engage directly with EU civil servants, parliamentarians, and commissioners at industry conferences such as Eurosonic (Groningen, Netherlands), and Reeperbahn (Hamburg, Germany).<sup>2</sup> Many of the discussions at these conferences' panels address the specific concepts identified by Newbold and his colleagues in dialogue with or observation by the EU representatives. Swiss geographer Cecile Sachs Olsen makes a similar case but goes further in the agency of festival organizers and the importance of the sites they inhabit. She says that rather than being seen as places that represent policies, that they “actively engage in the present development of their localities in order to function as **urban laboratories** where new and alternative urban and cultural strategies can be tested and developed.” (Olsen 2015, p.482). This is a key component to much of the programming at industry conferences, as energy technology companies, environmental protection agencies, shipping and transportation, and contractors specializing in temporary construction treat large music festivals as opportunities to try out innovative techniques to see if they are viable to roll over to larger polities, such as cities, regions, or states.

Economists Rafael Boix, José Luis Hervás-Oliver, and Blanca De Miguel-Molina (2015) have shown that at a general level of production the creative industries in Europe seem to inhabit an area that runs from the south of England to eastern Austria, which they refer to as the “Creative Corridor”. Within that strip are clusters including areas such as London, Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Munich, and Vienna; they also refer to Barcelona, Madrid, and

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<sup>2</sup> I conducted fieldwork for the dissertation at these events in 2017, 2018, 2020, and 2021, observing discussions between EU representatives (parliamentarians and civil servants) and various agents from the European music industry.

Stockholm as satellite clusters. If the EU were to focus their funding there, they would in essence be funneling support to what sociologists Cris Shore (2000), Klaus Eder (2005), and others have referred to as the core countries of European integration. This is where the Commission's connection to ETEP becomes critical; by funding festivals rather than major record labels, recording studios, broadcasters, etc. (i.e., those groups found in the "creative corridor"), more of the money becomes available to the newer and the more peripheral states of the EU, and to the external Eastern Neighborhood and EFTA states that contribute to the EU's cultural policy programs.

But most importantly, ETEP funding and popular music engagement shows that EU institutions—in particular the Commission and the Parliament—have somewhat moved away from the original intent of culture policy in the founding treaties, especially the Treaty of Maastricht and the Treaty of Lisbon. Beginning in 2003 and continuing to the present, the European Commission has subsidized ETEP, allowing the platform to financially support the travel costs for sponsored artists to and from ETEP-participating festivals throughout Europe. According to the civil servants of Creative Europe, the EU provides no guidance to ETEP, only financial support, thus keeping its engagement in the supportive-competence spirit of the treaty. However, the European Commission is quite a bit more proactive in its approach to the popular music prizes. The following year (2004) the Commission instituted the European Border Breakers Awards (EBBA), an initiative where the institution has far more autonomy on its actions. This particular awards program, renamed the Music Moves Europe Award (MMEA) in

2019, reflects a general shift in tone and approach from the highest levels of the European Commission leadership, beginning with Romano Prodi in 2000.<sup>3</sup>

This shift represents a growing trend in cultural policy application at the supranational level, and has been noticed by several scholars (Sassatelli 2009, Hantrais 2007, Littoz-Monnet 2015). Particularly, Kate Mattocks (2017) has argued that the EU has somewhat rejected the subsidiary nature of its supportive competence in the cultural policy area, and that recently “it is the Commission that has been the driver of further cooperation in EU cultural policy coordination, and that while the Council of Ministers acts as a ‘check’ on the Commission’s power, the Commission is able to exert a great deal of influence over the entire process.” Mattocks’s work deals mainly with the day-to-day management of the process within the institutions, and the official dialogues that exist between the Commission and the Council of Ministers within the Open Method of Coordination approach of institutional governance in this policy area. Ultimately, I argue that the Commission’s Creative Europe engagement with the ETEP platform is an excellent case study to show how the EU’s increasingly aggressive approach towards its cultural policy in the twenty-first century is creating a more supranational and less intergovernmental agenda, and that the European Parliament has become extremely relevant under the leadership of the current Culture Committee since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in solidifying new institutional agency in the policy area.

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<sup>3</sup> For more concrete examples of this, see my forthcoming dissertation, where in addition to Prodi I discuss the views of Jose Manuel Barroso, Frans Timmermans, Federica Mogherini, Sabine Verheyen, and Christian Ehler towards cultural policy areas and the overall mission of the EU’s institutions.

## **Culture 2000, The MEDIA Programme and Creative Europe**

Although the Council of Ministers, the Commissioners of the European Commission, and the Culture Committee of the European Parliament all are very active in European-level political discourses involving cultural policy in general, the agents and artists of the European popular music industry most affected by these EU policies **work on a more personal level with the civil servants** employed by specific programs within the European Commission than with high-level politicians. As ETEP and the subsequent EU popular music prizewere launched in 2003 and 2004 respectively, they have received funding from three sequential EU programs that have dealt with cultural industries: the Culture 2000 program (2000-2006); the Culture/MEDIA Programme (2007-2013); and Creative Europe (2014-present). Culture 2000 was the only EU cultural agency of its time, and ran on a six-year budget of €236.4 million (European Commission 2022b), which generally prioritized performing arts, visual arts, literature, heritage, and cultural history. Effectively, the entirety of the EU cultural policy of this period was limited to this amount. The next edition of cultural policy funding was introduced by the Prodi Commission and secured by the Barroso Commission, which increased its budget dramatically and split the program into two different agencies. The Culture Programme dealt mainly with cultural heritage and educational sites and received €400 million in funding—significantly more than what was earmarked for the entire policy area from 2000-2006 (European Commission 2022c). The MEDIA Programme was primarily focused on the audiovisual sector and included outreach to industries involved in broadcasting and film; this was apparently the main target of the EU’s cultural policy, however, as it was granted a budget of €755 million—nearly twice the earmark for cultural heritage (European Commission 2022d). The message was clear—the Commission clearly favored creative industries over the cultural ones. Within this audiovisual grouping the main targets were

television, film, and music—the industries that could deliver the “European agora” that Barroso had lamented the lack thereof in his speech to the Conference for European Cultural Policy in 2006. In total, the Barroso Commission earmarked over €1.1 billion for cultural projects in the 2007-2013 budgetary period.

The MEDIA and Culture Programmes merged in 2014 under the umbrella of Creative Europe, with each becoming “sub-programmes” known as Creative Europe Media and Creative Europe Culture. The outgoing Barroso Commission recommended and secured an even larger budget for the program, €1.46 billion (European Commission 2022a), with two-thirds (€820 million) earmarked for creative industries. The Juncker Commission further increased the budget for cultural programming for the 2021-27 period, raising the total to €1.85 billion (European Commission 2018). The European Parliament’s CULT committee fought increase it yet again to €2.4 billion—a total change of 900 percent since the Culture 2000 program (Directorate General-Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture 2021). Of this new arrangement, €1.41 billion has been earmarked for Media. This upward budgetary trajectory ultimately reflects not only the increasingly strong narrative of the EU in regards to cultural policy, particularly among the Commission, but also the commitment it has to cultural sectors; when these agents at the EU highest level say that culture and creativity are importantly tied to the overall identity of the EU and Europeans, their budget increases seem to suggest that they are quite serious about it, and are willing to spend money on projects that reflect their political and social values.

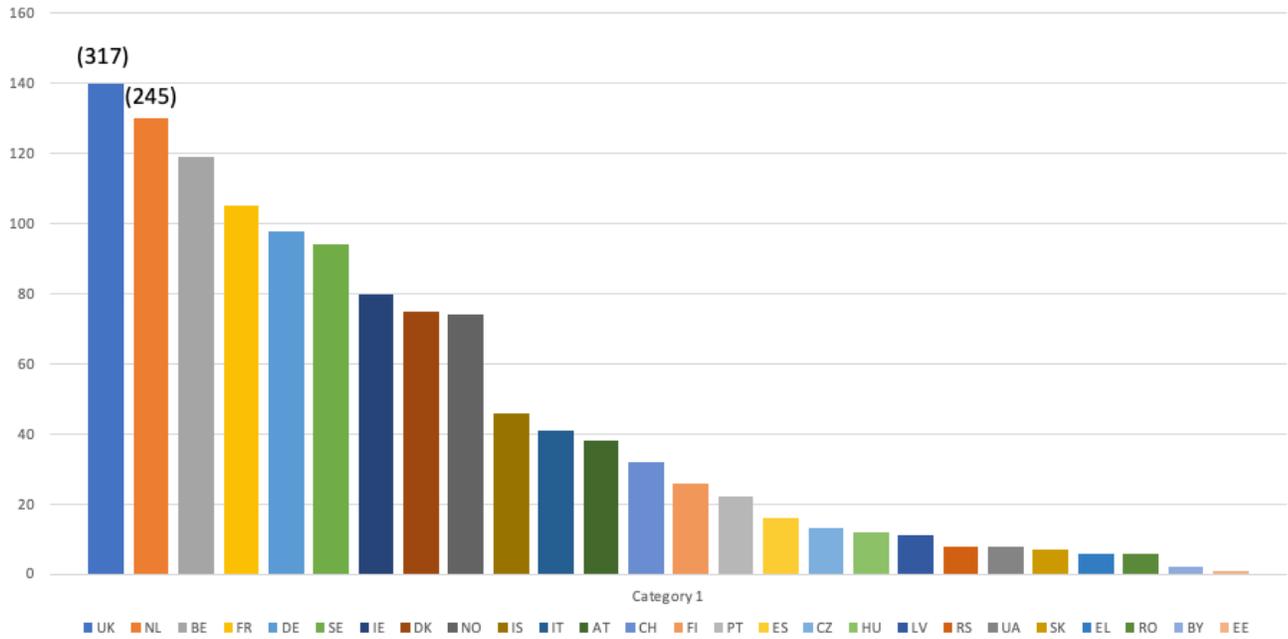
Among the DG-EYSC and the EACEA, there are roughly twenty civil servants performing tasks for the Creative Europe program, directed by two Heads of Unit that oversee the work. Both Heads of Unit are very active with the different industries and regularly attend and present at the industry conferences; several of their unit staff are very involved as well.

Eurosonic, in particular, is an all-hands-on-deck event for the Creative Europe agency; in addition to the awards ceremony for the EBBA (2004-2018) and the MMETA (2019-present) at the festival portion of Eurosonic, Creative Europe also routinely hosts multiple events and presentations at the associated conference. In 2018, for example, Creative Europe ran four sessions, either revolving around the European Border Breakers Award or about promotion of the popular music industry at the EU institutional level. EU agencies have maintained this level of engagement for many years at the conference. As Eurosonic is also the home to the European Talent Exchange Program, it is therefore an important meeting space for strategic dialogue between the ETEP platform and the Creative Europe agency.

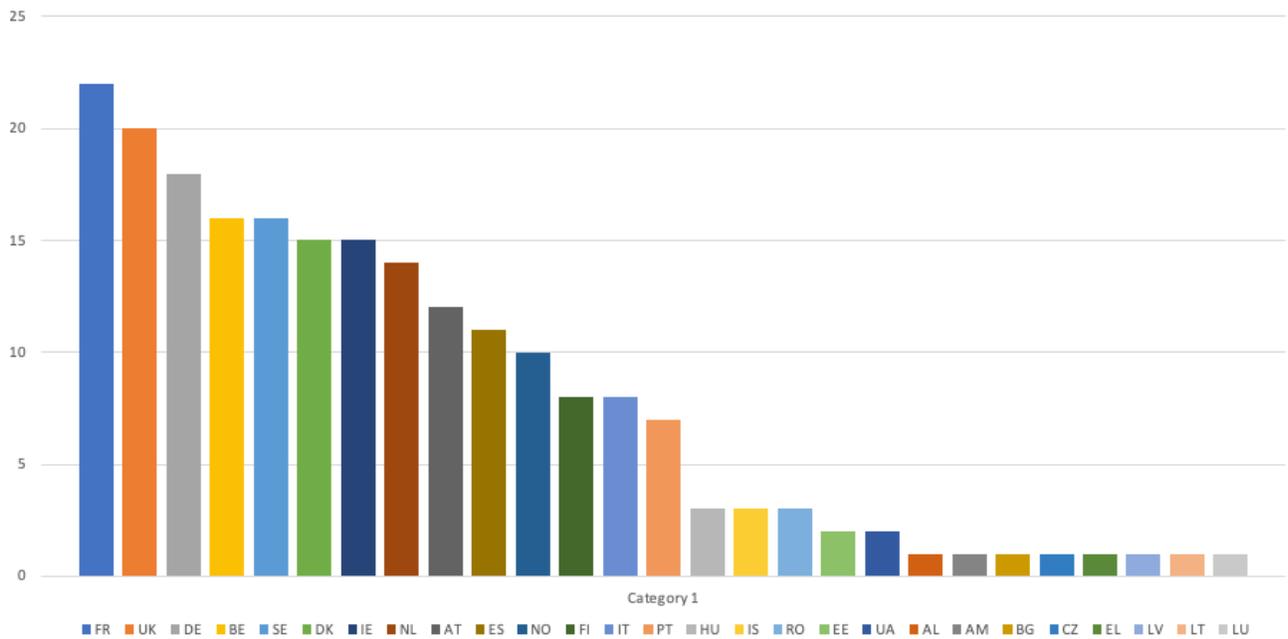
### **EU Prizes for Popular Music: EBBA and MMETA**

As previously stated, the EU has paralleled their support of the ETEP network by instituting a Popular Music Prize, which was initially known as the European Border Breakers Award (henceforth, EBBA), and since 2019 as the Music Moves Europe Talent Award (henceforth, MMETA). This is an annual prize given out to ten (plus or minus, depending on the year) acts on their first international tour. The prize was instituted after the first full year of ETEP, in 2004, and reflects the overall trajectory of the ETEP program, just on a much smaller scale. For example, over 1500 artists have taken part in ETEP, and just under 200 acts have won an EBBA or MMETA award. What is most interesting, though, is just how parallel the two programs are. **Figure 1** shows the number of ETEP acts from each participating nation; and **Figure 2** shows the number of pop music prize winners by nation. As you can see, the trajectories of each chart are very similar. In addition, 13 of the 15 highest participating nations within the ETEP framework are also among the 15 highest awarded nations. This suggests that

**Figure 1: ETEP Participating Acts by Country**



**Figure 2: EU Pop Music Prizewinning Acts by Country**



even though the Commission and Parliament are taking more active and driving cultural policy roles in recent years, they are doing so by following the lead of the industries they are working to support.

### **EU Popular Music Prizewinning Artists**

By following the lead of the industry, these programs have produced some spectacular results. Not only have the programs supported and recognized an enormous amount of up-and-coming acts, several ETEP alumni and EBBA/MMEA winners and nominees have gone on to very successful careers following their time in the program or their reception of an award. Adele, winner of fifteen Grammy Awards (including two each for Album, Record, and Song of the Year), kicked off her European career in ETEP, playing at both Rock Werchter (BE) and Eurosonic (NL), and began 2009 with an EBBA award for her debut release, *19*. Two months later she received a Grammy award for Best New Artist. Mumford and Sons performed at five ETEP festivals in 2010—Montreux Jazz (CH), Way Out West (SE), Benicassim (ES), Lowlands (NL), Pukkelpop (BE)—and won an EBBA award in January 2011. Stromae, a Belgian rapper who performs in French, used ETEP to sponsor performances at three festivals in French-speaking areas: Les Eurockéennes de Belfort (FR), Vieilles Carrues (FR), and Paléo Festival (CH); following his time with ETEP and his EBBA award in 2011, he began headlining European festivals and toured the United States with Janelle Monae as his *opening* act, including a sold-out show at Madison Square Garden in New York City—the first time a Francophone performer had headlined that particular arena (Ali 2015). Sam Smith, an ETEP alum performing at four festivals—Bråvalla (SE), Haldern Pop (DE), Lowlands (NL), and Rock Werchter (BE)—won four Grammy awards in 2015 for the same release he toured in support of through ETEP in

2014. Stormzy, a London-based grime performer who played six festivals as an ETEP sponsored artist in 2016—Dour (BE), Exit (RS), Le Printemps du Bourges (FR), Øyafestivalen (NO), Roskilde (DK), and Way Out West (SE)—headlined Glastonbury, arguably the largest festival in Europe, less than three years later in May 2019.

*Dua Lipa (United Kingdom/Kosovo)*

Perhaps the most recognizable ETEP alumnus of the past several years, however, is Dua Lipa. In 2016, Dua Lipa participated in the program, performing at four ETEP festivals and winning an EBBA award at Eurosonic in 2017. Dua Lipa used ETEP to kick off not only her European career, but also her performance career in general. She had been signed to the Warner Brothers record label a few months prior, and had released two singles before the Eurosonic festival, but her performance at Vera, a small club venue at the festival in Groningen, was the first official performance that she had with a band. During the subsequent 2016 ETEP season, Dua Lipa played four ETEP-sponsored shows: Frequency (AT), Lowlands (NL), Pukkelpop (BE), and Way Out West (SE), and also two other ETEP festivals in England—Glastonbury and Secret Garden Party—that were ineligible for sponsorship because they are were in her home country; she also played two other festivals that were not part of the ETEP network—Zurich Openair (CH)<sup>4</sup> and Flow (FI). She used these festivals to build a larger European tour that took her to venues in Germany, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria, and then continued the festival circuit for the next two years, playing Longitude (IR), Benicassím (ES), Rock Werchter (BE), Montreux Jazz (CH), Open'er (PL), and Glastonbury (UK) in 2017, and Lollapalooza Berlin (DE), Electric Picnic (IR), Leeds Festival (UK), Reading Festival (UK),

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<sup>4</sup> Zurich Openair has since joined ETEP, in 2017.

Lowlands (NL), Pukkelpop (BE), Sziget (HU), Lollapalooza Paris (FR), Tomorrowland (BE), Mad Cool (ES), and Ruisrock (FI) in 2018. In 2019, she focused mainly on recording *Future Nostalgia* and only played a handful of theater shows in both Europe and the United States. The album was nominated for Song, Record, and Album of the Year. Dua Lipa's upward trajectory has been dramatic, and significantly fueled by performances at festivals within the ETEP network.

### *Aurora Aksnes (Norway)*

The overall ETEP effect is perhaps best illustrated through the experience of Aurora Aksnes, a popular artist from Norway who performs under the mononym Aurora. If an artist strategically plans their ETEP year, they can spend 16 months on the roster, or effectively two summertime festival seasons. Aurora was an ETEP-sponsored artist from spring 2015 through fall 2016, and visited 25 total festivals—more than any other single act in the history of the European Talent Exchange Program.<sup>5</sup> This festival tour also totaled 14 countries from all parts of the European continent—Western, Eastern and Central Europe, Scandinavia, the Baltics, the Balkans, and Iceland. In an interview with Gideon Gottfried from the trade publication *Pollstar* about the impact of the European Talent Exchange Program on her early career, she stated:

For me, nothing is more important than spreading my music through live performances...

I think what ETEP does is brilliant! Helping artists get booked at festivals all around

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<sup>5</sup> In 2015, Aurora performed at Europavox (FR), Exit (RS), Galapagai (LT), Iceland Airwaves (IS), Les Nuits Botanique (BE), Live Music Festival (PO), Melt! (DE), Pinkpop (NL), Provinssi (FI), Reeperbahn (DE), Ruisrock (FI), The Great Escape (UK), and Vieilles Charrues (FR). In 2016, she performed at Colours of Ostrava (CZ), Festival Number 6 (UK), Glastonbury (UK), Krakow Live (PL), Lollapalooza Berlin (DE), Lowlands (NL), Montreux Jazz Festival (CH), Provinssi (FI), Rock en Seine (FR), Rock Werchter (BE), Roskilde (DK), and Way Out West (SE).

Europe, and also on radio and media [sic]. Especially in the start-up-phase when artists need it most. Considering that I have performed at quite a lot of festivals with an ETEP program this year I definitely think I have benefitted from it. I've been able to visit so many different countries, and actually have people coming to see us in every single one. I am very grateful (Gottfried 2016).

ETEP assumes that the festival performances of these tours are essential for those who have successful career launches on the European scene. If the artists were playing at smaller venues, depending on word of mouth or promotion from their agents alone, audiences would be much smaller and exposure much less. As Chris Anderton notes, festivals are particularly important sites of branding for all musicking actors involved (Anderton 2019);<sup>6</sup> Aurora was able to leverage her experience and exposure on the ETEP platform to significant success. In January 2016, halfway through her ETEP tenure, she was awarded a European Border Breakers Award (EBBA)<sup>7</sup> and a public choice EBBA for outstanding achievement with her debut album and tour. Since 2016 she has released three albums, toured extensively, and been contracted to perform significant parts on the soundtracks of several films, including the animated features *Frozen II* (2019) and *Wolfwalkers* (2020).

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<sup>6</sup> After introducing more audience-driven social narratives of music festivals through the scholarship of others, Anderton adds to festival literature by specifically drawing attention to the professional side of musicking, showing how festivalization benefits musicians, agents, music industry workers, sponsors, vendors, and the festivals themselves.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter Four for more discussion about the EU's popular music prizes, EBBA and MMEA.

## **Conclusion**

In review, this paper argues that the European Union institutional engagement with the European popular music industry, particularly in the area of festival performance, is an excellent encapsulation of the EU's general approach to cultural policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, echoing Kate Mattocks's observation that the Commission in particular is taking a much more driving role in the area. I have also posited that this has had visible and notable effect on the careers of many participants in the music industry, particularly the young emergent performers. In addition to discussing Dua Lipa and Adele, my forthcoming dissertation explores the ETEP and EU pop music prize experiences of several other artists from around the European continent. I also discuss fieldwork conducted at several festivals across the Nordic region to see how the cultural policies are enacted on the ground at events that reach millions of Europeans every year. Ultimately, I argue in my dissertation that not only are these civil society and EU programs important to the careers of the musicians themselves, but that the acts, artists, and industry workers involved are also important to the identity of the European Union and that an extremely important feedback loop of policy, funding, innovation, performance, and then new policy emerges in the process of this engagement.

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