



## Welcome to the Summer 2026 roundup newsletter

Hi there philanthropoids,

I hope everyone has had a good break over the summer? (If that applies in your hemisphere, of course; if it doesn't, then I hope you've had a nice winter...?) I had a great family holiday to Portugal and the Azores (where I realised a lifetime ambition of seeing whales! Yay! I also nearly broke my ankle, requiring a trip to the emergency room in Ponta Delgada hospital for an X-ray! Not so yay!) And then we managed to bounce back from the disappointment of having to sell our tickets to Green Man festival (for various reasons I won't go into) and spent a lovely week in the Lake District ticking off some more Wainwright fells.

One thing I realised over the summer is that although combining a 3 day a week job (like the one I do for *Alliance*) with a 2 days a week working on WPM stuff sounds totally fine on paper, the reality is that 3+2 somehow seems to add up to about 8 days work. Hence, if I'm going to keep doing this newsletter and the podcast (which I very much want to do), I definitely need to find an efficient workflow. Luckily I have been helped this time by the fact that there hasn't been an outflowing amount of philanthropy news over the last couple of months, so we might actually be able to get through this summer roundup together in reasonably short order. Fingers crossed, and let's go...

Rhodri

# PHILANTHROPY IN THE NEWS

## RIP Dolly

Following the recent news of the death of country music legend Dolly Parton, it was fascinating to see how many of the obituaries and comment pieces chose to focus not just on her cultural impact, but on [her long personal commitment to philanthropy](#).



For many people who knew Parton only for hits like “Jolene” and “9 to 5”, or for her appearances in movies like *Steel Magnolias*, this seems to have come as a real surprise. For others of us, who were already aware of Parton’s efforts to support early childhood literacy through her Imagination Library, and her support for the development of the Moderna vaccine during the Covid 19 pandemic, it was less of a revelation; although I would still suspect that even many seasoned philanthropy watchers were not aware of [the sheer scale and variety of her giving](#). (I know I wasn’t, and I would definitely self-define as a real nerd about this stuff).

I was reminded of an article that I wrote back in 2020, when Parton’s involvement in funding the Moderna vaccine first came to public



attention, [comparing her philanthropy to that of English footballer Marcus Rashford](#) (who was also in the news a lot at that time because of his support and advocacy for food poverty causes). In that piece (which I re-shared recently on LinkedIn), I mused on what it was about both Parton's and Rashford's approach to philanthropy that meant public reaction to their giving was largely positive (whereas a lot of other philanthropy tends to meet with a more mixed or critical reaction). My suggestion was that it was partly about the way in which they made their money: most people will find it easier to understand how someone got rich being a musician or sports person than they will to understand making billions through algorithmic stock trading or crypto investing, and will probably view the former more favourably. But it is also about authenticity: both Rashford and Parton came from poor backgrounds, and were able to tell compelling personal stories about why that experience had driven and shaped their philanthropy. In Parton's case, as we heard again in many articles and features in the last few weeks, her firm belief in the value of reading and literacy stemmed from her memories of her own father, who was an intelligent man but had never been able to learn to read and thus had his options in life severely limited.

Parton's philanthropy was also notable for being both local and universal in approach. She would often focus at a small-scale level, particularly on places and communities that had been left behind. In some cases these were places that she had a direct link to, [like when she committed \\$1m dollars to help recovery efforts in her native Tennessee following Hurricane Helene in 2024](#). In other cases there was no immediate personal link, but just an affinity for places that were struggling – like when she made [a surprise visit to Rotherham in 2007 for the UK launch of her imagination library](#), or when Parton revealed in 2021 that she had [used the royalties from Whitney Houston's immensely successful cover of her song "I Will Always Love You" to invest in an office block in a historically Black neighbourhood in Nashville](#).

It would be possible to dismiss Dolly Parton's philanthropy as slightly old-fashioned: she certainly supported a wide range of causes, and would often give large donations in a fairly reactive way when personal

experience or chance meetings made her aware of an issue. And perhaps ten years ago, when the philanthropy world was still in the throes of an obsession with ‘measurable impact’ and ‘strategic focus’, this would have been the prevailing view. However, in recent years many have expressed a growing concern that in seeking to rebalance giving from ‘heart’ towards ‘head’ we have perhaps gone too far, and that we have lost sight of the vital core of humanity that must be at the heart of philanthropy. In this context, one might argue that Parton’s approach actually epitomises something important about valuing the “heart” aspect of giving; and that this is especially true at a time when a growing number of tech billionaires are using purported concerns about ‘ineffectiveness’ or ‘lack of rigour’ as a basis for trashing the very idea of philanthropy (as we will see in the next news item).

## **Not Giving a Damn: Brian Miller’s anti-charity ideology?**

At the other end of the spectrum from Dolly Parton, Coinbase CEO Brian Armstrong this month submitted a new entry in the increasingly competitive “Which Tech Bro Can Make the Most Performatively Negative Statement About Charity?” contest.



During an appearance on a right wing podcast (which is, let's face it, not a great start to any sentence) Armstrong said:

*"I guess I have sort of a contrarian view where a lot of charities and philanthropies are actually net negative on the world. And they get by ideology...I think a lot of captured. It's actually remarkably hard to find a foundation that has not gotten captured people, by trying to do something good, like criminal justice reform, it turns out they just increased crime. All these unintended consequences happen.... My fear is that it just gets captured by some ideology and I lose control over it... If you look at the Ford Foundation, I think Henry Ford would be turning over in his grave if he knew what they were up to."*

Now, the first thing to say is that anyone self-declaring as a contrarian is a massive red flag to me. If I was chatting to someone in a pub and they said, "I guess I have sort of a contrarian view...", I would immediately excuse myself to go to the bathroom, climb out of the nearest window and go to a different pub - even if that meant leaving my favourite coat behind. I'm also not really sure that Armstrong's claim to be a contrarian holds much water; for one thing, it seems like plenty of his tech bro peers feel exactly the same way about charity, so it sounds more like groupthink than bold iconoclasm. And for another, it is hardly a new line of argument: in fact, Armstrong's claim that "a lot of people, by trying to do something good, like criminal justice reform, it turns out they just increased crime" sounds a lot like the words of the political economist William Stanley Jevons back in 1880, who wrote:

*"Take the case of so-called charity. There are many good-hearted people who think that it is virtuous to give alms to poor people who ask for them, without considering the effect produced upon the people. They see the pleasure of the beggar on getting the alms, but they do not see the after effects, namely, that beggars become more numerous than before. Much of the poverty and crime which now exist have been caused by mistaken charity in past times, which has caused a large part of the population to grow up careless, and improvident, and idle."*

The exact basis for Armstrong's anti-charity position is quite hard to pin down, as even in the single paragraph quote highlighted about, he offers a slightly confusing mishmash of arguments about

ineffectiveness and unintended harms (a la Jevons), but also about his fears of losing control if he created a foundation that was then taken over by “ideologically-driven” foundation professionals. This latter bit is really interesting to me, as in the context of wider discussions about shifting power away from donors it seems pretty retrograde. (Although one could argue that Armstrong is just being honest saying the quiet parts out loud, and that actually plenty of other donors feel the same way about relinquishing power). It is also fascinating to see the history of the Ford family's loss of control over the foundation bearing their name being invoked to back up this argument. I have heard from other people I know who engage with tech donors that they have heard similar concerns about “ideological takeover” at some unspecified point in the future being cited as a barrier to philanthropy, and the Ford Foundation seems to be the go-to example. Which in many ways is an odd choice given Henry Ford's actual views on a lot of things, (e.g. his rampant anti-semitism), as to most people this probably means that the fact that the Ford Foundation's work today doesn't necessarily reflect his exact wishes is a pretty good thing tbh... Also, [as Joel Fleishman has pointed out](#), although the Ford Foundation's split with Henry Ford II in 1976 has been interpreted by many as the paradigmatic case of a wayward foundation going against its founder's wishes, in actual fact Henry Ford's wishes were never specified in any way that was clear enough for this interpretation to make sense. (Unless, of course, you have your own “ideology” that means this is the lesson you want to take...)

Although it is not that difficult to poke holes in Armstrong's arguments, this doesn't change the fact that he clearly believes what he is saying about charity. And, more worryingly, an increasing number of other wealthy figures in the tech world seem to agree with him. (Perhaps because of the obvious appeal of a argument which tells you that the ‘rational’ or ‘effective’ thing to do is not to give your money away, but to keep it for yourself). So it is crucial that we continue to challenge these anti-charity narratives, in order that they don't take hold more widely.

## **New reports on Asian philanthropy**



This was a good month for anyone who is fascinated (as I am) by the ongoing rise and rise of Asian philanthropy, with reporting from a number of major conferences in the region as well as the publication of a couple of big reports which seek to boost the evidence base on Asian giving.



The Commission on Asian Philanthropy, which was formed in 2024 and includes representative from many of the region's biggest funders, [put out an interim report](#) (ahead of its final findings in 2027). This

highlighted many interesting research findings, as well as offering a number of recommendations about what needs to be done to strengthen philanthropic ecosystems across Asia. The report estimates that domestic giving in the countries it covers will total more than \$1 trillion over the coming decade, and could be a major force in helping to propel the region forward. It also emphasises the fact that “in Asia, philanthropy is not perceived to be a separate sector operating independently of the state, market, and community engines” – in particular, a lot is made of the close relationship between philanthropy and state in many Asian countries (which is something I have heard from other sources too). Interestingly, the report is also clear that whilst giving at the top end by very wealthy individuals is important, it is at the everyday giving level that the majority of future philanthropic income across Asia will be found – with implications for the choice of policies that are adopted to try to bolster cultures of philanthropy in the region.

[There was also a report this month from the philanthropy consultancy Bridgespan, looking at family philanthropy in Asia.](#) This highlighted something else that I have often thought distinctive about Asian philanthropy (and which others have echoed to me): that the lines between individual (or family) and corporate philanthropy are much more blurred than they tend to be in Europe or the US – in part because there is still a much stronger culture of owner-entrepreneurship, and a long history of diversified companies with wide-ranging interests (and thus it seems natural to incorporate philanthropy as just one more element in that portfolio).

The remarkable recent growth in Asian philanthropy seems set to continue as well: in a speech to a conference hosted by the Hong Kong Jockey Club, [Hong Kong's Chief Secretary for Administration Eric Chan Kwok-ki made clear Hong Kong's ambitions of becoming a new global centre of philanthropy,](#) as well as a hub for the region.

**Hostile Environment: Populist and far right attacks on UK civil society**

Attacks on charities by populists and the far right are sadly a well-established reality in many places around the world. The UK has not been immune to these by any means, but until now we might have felt that we had escaped the worst of what our civil society colleagues in other parts of the world have had to face. Unfortunately, however, there are signs that we might not be able to feel that way for much longer.



Back in June, a mysterious new think tank calling itself “Cambridge Circus” published a report (its one and only report to date) calling into question the legitimacy of charity campaigning. [As I explained in an article for Alliance digging into this report and its implications](#), this is not a new line of argument by any means – but the fact that it is being brought back to the fore by an organisation that is clearly well-resourced; which has a degree of sophistication that marks it out from many previous efforts to push similar narratives; and which is by all accounts closely linked to the Reform party makes it worth paying attention to.

Then this week there was a far more visceral reminder of the threats posed to civil society, as a group of far right anti-immigration protesters ramped up their criticism of the RNLI (the charity which operates Britain’s coastguard and rescue services) – [going so far as to dox individual volunteers by posting photos of them on X](#) (the social



media platform that is now largely a hate-fuelled bin fire presided over by the rictus grin of Elon Musk), and labelling them “traitors”. I can’t decide whether this is a disgraceful new low, or merely a depressing inevitability given the way things were going, but it is absolutely reprehensible either way.

Many charities are, I fear, going to have to navigate similar challenges in the near future. For some this will pose difficult choices about how to balance the safety of staff and volunteers against the need to deliver on their charitable mission, which may result in the people and communities they serve not getting the full support they need. So, what can we do to avoid this? Well, for one thing, politicians could help by being firmer in their condemnation of attacks on civil society – making it clear that vital humanitarian work should not be politicised, and that in any case campaigning and advocacy by charities on issues related to their missions is entirely legitimate. The rest of us in the wider public can also show our support by continuing to donate to charities that are victims of hate campaigns. This won’t necessarily solve the problem, but it might help to build a sense of solidarity and send a message that the vast majority of us reject the hate-filled and divisive narratives that populists and the far right are trying to sell us.

## **Guess who’s back...?**

Regular readers will know that I have long been slightly obsessed with Effective Altruism. I find a lot to admire in certain aspects of the EA approach, but I also find other aspects deeply problematic (as I explained in depth in a WPM article back in 2022 asking “[why am I not an Effective Altruist?](#)”) I also covered the downfall of crypto-fraudster Sam Bankman-Fried, and its impact on the EA movement (of which SBF had been a major supporter), in great detail in this newsletter. So I was fascinated to read [a piece in the FT over the summer declaring that: EA is back, baby!](#) Or whatever the FT version of that sentiment is. (NB: [if you can’t get through the FT paywall, there is also a free to read article in Gizmodo which summarizes most of it](#)).

## Effective altruism has rebounded since the FTX scandal

Yearly new pledges with Giving What We Can to donate 10% of income to 'effective charities'



The piece is basically a riff on [Nan Ransohoff's "3<sup>rd</sup> wave of US philanthropy" idea](#), which is very modish right now: i.e. that the massive fortunes about to be made in the AI industry by people who work at places like OpenAI and Anthropic will result in a massive uptick in the resources available for philanthropy. The FT article explores Nansohoff's suggestion that the majority of this money will find its way to EA-aligned causes, rather than more traditional nonprofits, and highlights the fact that EA donations (as measured by yearly new pledges through the EA platform Giving What We Can) have rebounded strongly after a fairly precipitous drop in the immediate aftermath of the FTX scandal.

In addition to the supply-side driver of massive wealth creation within AI, I suspect there is also an A-linked demand-side factor that might help to explain some of this, since EA has become heavily identified with the idea of AI-safety. So if you are concerned about the risks of super-intelligent AI breakout (as many in the tech industry seem to be, although for some reason that hasn't yet stopped them rushing to develop new AI tools...), then EA provides an obvious ready-made framework for your philanthropy if you decide to start giving. How



much new AI wealth makes it into more 'traditional' EA causes that are concerned with poverty alleviation and healthcare, rather than technologically-centred 'X risks' remains to be seen. (If you want more on this, there was also [an interesting interview in Semafor](#) [with Alexander Berger from Coefficient Giving \(nee OpenPhilanthropy\), giving his thoughts on "Silicon Valley's \\$40 billion Philanthropy Boom"](#)).

---

## WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

This is the section where I provide a bit of an update on what WPM has been up to over the last month or so.

### Philanthropisms Podcast

As usual, I put the podcast on hold over the summer to give myself a bit of a break so there weren't any new episodes for most of July and August. It is back up and running now though, and the first episode of the new season (if we're calling it that?) featured a great conversation with Michael Jarvis from the Trust, Accountability and Inclusion Collaborative, about what the post-USAID landscape for global philanthropy might look like.

We've also got loads of other interesting guests lined up already for the autumn, so stay tuned!



### Artist name

Michael Jarvis: Global philanthropy in a post-USAID world



Listen to the episode

**Alliance article on right wing populism**

As I already mentioned briefly above, I wrote [an article for \*Alliance\* this month](#) (with my other hat on) looking at what the recent report from the mysterious 'Cambridge Circus' think tank criticising charity campaigning can tell us about the challenges that the rise of right wing populism is likely to pose for UK charity and civil society in coming years.

[Read the article](#)

### **WPM/Maecenata Institute online event**

On the subject of right wing attacks on civil society, at the end of October WPM (i.e., me) is teaming up with the Maecenata Institute (the German civil society think tank) to host an online event on the issue of delegitimizing civil society. The idea will be to bring together a range of experts from around the world, who can offer perspectives on how this trend is playing out in their countries and regions, so that we can explore similarities and differences, and what we might be able to do collectively to challenge anti-civil society narratives.

Full details TBC but it is looking like it will take place on **Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> October at 1200 UK time (1300 CET)**, so mark your calendars if this sounds of interest.

### **Alliance 30th Anniversary event**

As I write this, I am currently on the early train down to London (0620 – yuck) to take part in an all-day event to mark *Alliance* magazine's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. I'm going to be compering the day and also doing part of the keynote, which should be good – although I obviously don't know how it's going to go at this point, so I will have to finish writing this later!

UPDATE: It was great. Really interesting stuff on the stage, and lots of connecting and reconnecting off it. If you were there, thanks for coming!



This is not a flattering photo. But it is probably fairly accurate.

### **Trip to Sao Paulo**

I am also preparing for a trip to Sao Paulo next week. The main reason I'm going is to take part in the launch of a new organization – Instituto Benerra -aimed at trying to build the culture of philanthropy in Brazil, but I'm also taking the opportunity to meet lots of people. It should be really interesting, so I will report back in due course!

---

## **OTHER GOOD STUFF**

This is the bit where I share other philanthropy-related things I have come across that might not quite count as news but are definitely worth checking out.

## **Nepal harnesses technology to enable flood relief donations:**

Following the horrifying recent scenes of devastation in Nepal, as a melting glacier caused catastrophic flooding, there has inevitably been an outpouring of donations from across the world. Many of these have gone to international NGOs (as they usually do) but an intriguing article in the *Economic Times* highlighted the fact that [thanks to the Nepalese government's adoption of digital payment technology it has been able to direct a large volume of donations directly to its own Prime Minister's Disaster Fund](#). Unlike in previous disasters, when potential donors would have to go to a physical bank in Nepal to make a donation, they can now do it electronically by scanning a QR code. This obviously makes it far easier for people in Nepal to donate, but it also means that people are able to donate easily from much further afield because anyone with a dollar-denominated credit card is able to send money to the fund, so its fundraising power is vastly increased. As a result the fund has so far been able to raise nearly \$80 million (USD).





[Read the article](#)

**Canva Founder's Philanthropy:**

There was an interesting profile over the summer from *Inc.com* of the [philanthropy of Canva founder Melanie Perkins](#). As the profile explains, Perkins chose to start her philanthropic journey not with a clear idea of what she wanted to focus on, but with a question to others: what did they think she should be doing? I suspect that people will have a different reaction to this depending on how they view the role of donors. For some, it may seem at best like a lack of clarity or direction on Perkins's part, or at worst like an abdication of responsibility. But for others it may come across as a laudable example of humility and willingness to learn, of a kind that many other doings would do well to replicate. What do you reckon?



[Read the article](#)

### **Philanthropists love AI. Philanthropists hate AI: =**

[A piece in the FT recently highlighted the different ways in which philanthropists and funders are approaching AI](#). The article highlights examples of funders focussing on both near-term and long-term threats from AI, as well as others who are funding projects designed to harness the technology for good. There wasn't anything massively new in all of this, but it was interesting to see it in the pages of the FT, and thus getting out to a wider audience.



[Read the report](#)

## **Why philanthropy may not be the fix everyone wants it to be:**

There was a really [interesting interview in \*Pioneers Post\* recently with Priscilla Boiardi from the OECD](#), exploring some of the findings from the most recent edition of their annual “[Philanthropy for Private Development](#)” report. Boiardi is clear that philanthropy is not going to be able to fill the holes left by the destruction of USAID and the reduction of other aid commitments, but also argues that philanthropy might be doing much more than we think already. She highlights the fact that the OECD’s own estimate of \$68bn in philanthropic donations going to development between 2020 and 2023 is almost certainly well below the actual figure, because there are many holes in the available data. (It doesn’t capture, for instance, Indonesia, the Middle East or Thailand).

There’s lots of other stuff in there about trends in global philanthropy and the challenges of gathering data on giving, so if you fancy getting in the weeds on those then I definitely recommend having a read of this one.



[Read the article](#)

## Weird Ferrari-lanthropy?:

One of the weirder stories I came across over the summer was about [an eccentric billionaire optometrist from Florida called Dr Herbert Wertheim](#) (no, really) who claims that his recent purchase of a Ferrari Luce (the famed car maker's first fully electric vehicle) at a charity auction was an act of philanthropy. The car has an estimated worth of \$1.1. million, but Wertheim has paid \$40 million for his – which will go to the Ferrari Foundation to fund education programs. He also suggested that he would lend the car to nonprofits for them to use in future fundraising efforts.

Wertheim claimed that he had done things this way in part because it is “hard to give away billions of dollars”. But I really can't see that it is hard enough to make this the best way of going about things!



Image credit: [Banhada](#), [CC BY 4.0](#)

[Read the article](#)

## **Nathan Straus's pragmatic philanthropy:**

As a confirmed history of philanthropy nerd, I am always delighted to find out about a donor from the past that I knew nothing about. So, I was really interested to read [a review by Leslie Lenkowsky over the summer of a new book by Andrew Fisher detailing the life and humanitarian deeds of Nathan Straus](#). Straus was one of the early owners of the famous Macy's department store, and used the fortune he amassed to pursue a range of philanthropic projects – most notably pushing for the pasteurisation of milk after he lost one of his own children to what he believed to be a milk-borne disease.

Like his peer and friend Julius Rosenwald, Straus left less of a mark on the historical record than some of his contemporaries, because his philanthropy was less formal and he chose not to set up a foundation. (Rosenwald, of course, did – but it was purposely limited-life). Because of that - and because his philanthropy was relatively narrow and unglamorous – he tends not to be talked about much today, but it is certainly interesting to find out more about his story and to add him to the list of notable early C20th donor.



ANDREW FISHER

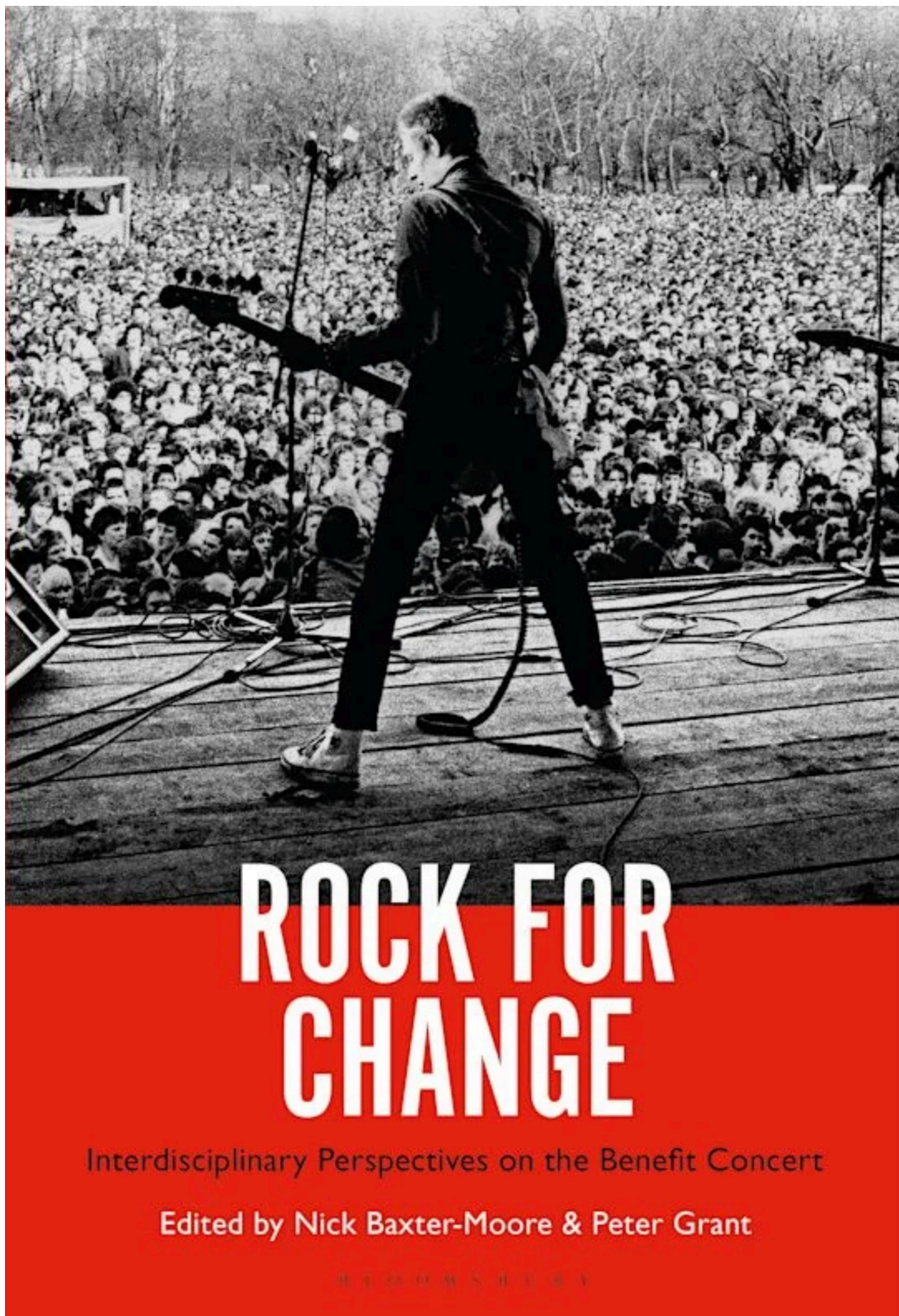
# NATHAN STRAUS

From Macy's Magnate to  
International Humanitarian

[Read the book review](#)

**Rock for Change:**

While we are on the subject of new books, I was alerted (thanks to an invite to an online launch event) to the forthcoming publication of what looks like a really interesting new edited volume titled [\*Rock for Change: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Benefit Concert\*](#). Personally I am particularly interested to read the chapters on “the ethos of punk benefit concerts” and the one on Live Aid, but there are lots of things in here that look worth checking out.



[Buy the book](#)

**Olivia Rodrigo's Daisy Chain festival:**

There was [a great example of the intersection of music and philanthropy this summer in the form of Olivia Rodrigo's "Daisy Chain" festival](#). This was a new all-female music festival that Rodrigo put together by leaning on her contacts, which saw people like Chappell Roan, Stevie Nicks, Doechii, Garbage, The Breeders, and Rodrigo herself all perform.

In part the purpose of the festival was to celebrate the work of female artists, and to model a different, less competitive approach to putting together a festival (all the acts were, for instance, listed in exactly the same font size to emphasise their equal billing). And by all accounts it was great. (I certainly had to put some effort into making sure my daughter didn't hear about it, for fear that I would come under intense pressure to find a way of flying out to California....) But it also had a more direct philanthropic purpose, with 100% of the proceeds from the festival being distributed among nonprofits working on issues of women's health and women's rights. These philanthropic aims then got a further boost with the [news that Melinda French Gates is matching the \\$10 million raised by the festival](#), taking the overall sum going to charity up to \$20 million. Good stuff all round.





[Read the article](#)

### **AND FINALLY: Howzaaaaaaat!**

I decided to go with a good old-fashioned funny fundraising story for this edition's "And Finally" section. So please enjoy the tale of [Sam](#)



[Bodoano from Worpelsden, in Surrey \(UK\), who is hoping to become the Guinness World Record holder for the longest cricket bowling run-up after running 62 miles \(100km\) from Lords cricket ground to Valley End cricket club in Woking](#), where he bowled the opening ball of the game to his own dad. Bodoano ran through the night to complete his delivery, and in doing so raised nearly £6000 for the Ruth Strauss Foundation.

As far as I know he didn't bowl a no-ball, but that would obviously have been absolutely hilarious.

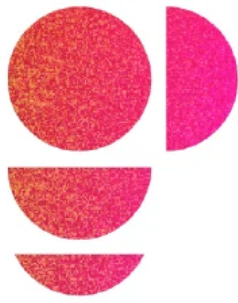


[Read the article](#)

---

Well, there we are then. That's it for another month. Some how I will find the time to do another one of these for the end of September (I hope), so see you all then.

Rhodri



# Why Philanthropy Matters

Why Philanthropy Matters Haskell  
House 152 West End Lane, London  
United Kingdom



You received this email because you  
signed up on our website or made a  
purchase from us.

[Unsubscribe](#)

