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# Introduction: Covid Recovery and Early Covid Music Literature

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While commencing the introduction of this special edition in the early months of 2021, the live music industries across the world were just beginning to tentatively emerge from what one commentator described as their "biggest collective threat in living memory"—COVID-19 (Mullova 2020). In England for example, as part of the "post-Covid" recovery process, a government-sanctioned trial event took place in Liverpool's Sefton Park on 2 May 2021, where 5,000 people attended with no masks or social distancing, in what Youngs (2021) described as "the largest number of people to have legally crammed into a small space in the UK since the start of the pandemic". Despite this being an iconic occasion for both artists and audience, the event gave scientists the opportunity to study factors such as the impacts of audience movement and catering and alcohol consumption, with it being compulsory for all attendees to take supervised lateral flow tests. This concert, promoted by Festival Republic, was part of the UK Government's broader "Events Research Programme", which included activities such as the FA Cup final and the World Snooker Championships. This series of events, overseen by an industry-led steering group and taking place between 18 April and 15 May 2021, were used to inform UK Government policy on social distancing, ventilation and test and trace protocols (UK Government 2021).

The event in Liverpool reflected a number of similar activities taking place across Europe, with an indoor 5,000-capacity concert at the Palau Sant Jordi

in Barcelona, taking place a month earlier in April 2021, reporting no sign of “higher levels of infection” (BBC 2021a). As with the concert in Liverpool, all audience members attending the event had to undergo antigen tests, with ventilation measures optimized “to be even better than outside” (APMusicales 2021).<sup>1</sup> As this was an indoor event, all attendees had to wear at least FFP2 quality masks, which were provided upon entry.

Both these events and others, such as those organized by the Welsh Government (2021a) and the “back to live” concert in Biddinghuizen (in the Netherlands) on 20 March (Made for Minds 2021a), followed test concerts organized by the Arena Resilience Alliance at the Rockhal Arena in Luxemburg, which hosted a series of much smaller live activities between 10–14 February 2021. This initiative enforced social distancing and mask wearing, with its objective being to ascertain “what support the live events sector needs from policymakers on both a national and EU level, to enable long-term resilience and future growth” (Love Belfast 2021).

The aforementioned concert in Biddinghuizen, an excellent example of government working with the music industries and the scientific community, was organized by the Fieldlab research team, who were working in association with the Dutch Government to investigate the safest way to increase the capacity of live events of all types, including sports, theatre, concerts and festivals (Made for Minds 2021a).<sup>2</sup> According to their website, as with the test event in Barcelona, the primary purpose of the research was to investigate the behaviours of audience members and associated air quality,<sup>3</sup> with Fieldlab having government permission to upscale to larger audience capacities in order to ascertain if safety measures (such as 1.5 metre social distancing) remained fit for purpose. The research that Fieldlab undertook in the Netherlands has counterparts in other parts of the world, with indicative examples including Portugal (Hyland 2021), Germany (Made for Minds 2021b), Liverpool,<sup>4</sup> and Glasgow, London, Gotheburg, Barcelona and Dublin.<sup>5</sup>

1. This quote was translated from Spanish.

2. See <https://fieldlabevenementen.nl>.

3. Fieldlab categorized events into the following four categories: Type I – Indoor events with a passive [seated] audience; Type II – Indoor events with an active [moving] audience; Type III – Outdoor events with an active audience; Type IV – Outdoor events with a free moving audience (festivals). See <https://fieldlabevenementen.nl/adviesaanvraag-heropening-evenementen-type-i-binnen-passief-met-bijlagen/> (accessed 13 May 2021).

4. Via the Events Research Programme at Liverpool University, who work in partnership with local authorities, public health and the music industries. See University of Liverpool 2021.

5. Via Festspace, a partnership between the cities of Glasgow, London, Gotheburg, Barcelona and Dublin. See <http://festspace.net/about/>.

All these initiatives understand the importance that live music plays in factors such as city tourism, economic development, mental health and social cohesion; however, despite these generic imperatives, it is apparent that countries across the world adopted a variety of approaches regarding the return of live music. For example, when examining the most recent data by Pearle on European live music reopening schedules and comparing it to the earlier “pre-second wave” data I outline in my chapter in this collection,<sup>6</sup> we can see a variety of approaches, with nations such as the Czech Republic, France, Italy and the Netherlands, all of whom opened relatively early in 2020, showing a more cautious approach this time around. As indicated in Table 1 below, as of 14 May 2021, all live music activity was prohibited in nations such as the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, Greece, Austria and the United Kingdom, although the Netherlands and parts of the UK are noted as being on the verge of opening—joining Portugal, Spain, Finland and Hungary, who were already open with restrictions (see Table 1).<sup>7</sup> This is not the place to discuss the reopening strategies of individual countries, but what we need to acknowledge is the role government policy played not only in the protection of its citizens, but also the recovery of live music.

It is also important to point out that countries given the “green light” to open their live music sectors did not necessarily equate to “recovery”. In Wales for example, in May 2021, the Welsh Government permitted indoor and outdoor live performances for the first time since the pandemic began in March 2020. Despite this positive news, as outlined by the BBC (2021b), venues had to adhere to a complex range of restrictions such as social distancing, one-way systems, caps on audience numbers and lack of insurance, which for many venue owners did not make events financially viable. This is a position that in the early months of 2021 was reflected in other parts of the world, with some venues in Portugal, for example, deciding not to open, despite support mechanisms and road maps being implemented by the government.<sup>8</sup> Likewise in Spain, Sparks (2021) reported how many concert venues were “on the verge of closing their doors for good”, issues that are not solely attributed to the

6. <https://www.google.com/maps/d/embed?mid=1Me22qw6S2ErBeHgEkksOHI9d8HoowS9&ll=48.43063474564051%2C6.405438242251202&z=5>.

7. Since writing this introduction many of these countries have begun to open up live music activities, with England for example opening up all of its live music venues on 19 July 2021, despite a significant upsurge in instances of COVID-19. For an updated synopsis of the current state of affairs across Europe, see <https://www.google.com/maps/d/embed?mid=1Me22qw6S2ErBeHgEkksOHI9d8HoowS9&ll=48.43063474564051%2C6.405438242251202&z=5>.

8. See <https://covid19estamoson.gov.pt/lockdown-easing-plan-schedule-and-rules/>. The author would like to thank Luiz Alberto Maura for this information.

**Table 1:** A selection of European venue opening policies, dated 14 May 2021

Country	Measure
Czech Republic	Closed. If the situation improves, the Czech Republic will move to Level 4, which potentially allows a 20% capacity for venues, with tested audience and mandatory face masks.
Finland	Gradual reopening from April 2021 to August.
France	Closed. Expected to open on 15 May 2021. Orchestras can give online concerts and some cultural activities allowed in schools.
Germany	Closed. If an incidence rate in the administrative district (Landkreis) is higher than 100 for 7 consecutive days, then live music remains closed. In force until 21 June 2021.
Ireland	Closed.
Italy	Live shows with public presence suspended, although streaming live events and using spaces for filming are a possibility.
Netherlands	Closed. Expected to open on 26 May 2021.
Norway	No data.
Spain	Open under conditions that vary from region to region and city to city. Reduced venue capacity ranges from 30% to 70%.
Portugal	Reopened 19 April 2021.
Greece	Closed. No live audiences allowed although rehearsals and streaming are permitted.
Austria	Closed.
Estonia	No indoor performances permitted, although outdoor activities are, provided the audience does not exceed 150 and no person is at the venue between 21:00 and 6:00.
Georgia	No data.
Hungary	Open under conditions, including seated concerts, music in restaurants. Although performers are not obliged to wear masks, technicians need to if they cannot prove their immunity. Performances must be finished by 11:00 and anyone can attend, providing they have an “immunity certificate”.
Serbia	No data.
United Kingdom	Currently closed, but England and Scotland expected to open from 17 May, with social distancing (1m and 2m respectively).

pandemic, but the long-standing lack of value placed on live music—with the country noted as being one of the worst offenders of illegal downloading. Sparks’s article then proceeds to discuss the impact of government venue “capacity capping”, complex safety regulations and reduced operating hours, resulting in some venues simply not being able to cover their fixed costs, such as rent, utility bills, payroll and insurance. In Germany, the situation in July 2021 was slightly more complex, with venues in Berlin only permitting music activity in outdoor spaces, with the addition of masks when dancing. In other parts of the country however, where incidents of the virus were less pervasive, Federal laws were more relaxed, with the venue “Stereowerk” (old warehouse) in Braunschweig, for example, requiring participants to register alongside proof of a negative COVID-19 test in order to attend.<sup>9</sup> While the majority of live venues based in the northern hemisphere experienced broadly similar issues, those in countries such as New Zealand and Australia offered an interesting perspective for European nations—as they opened their live music industries earlier. In Sydney, Australia for example, Pitcaithly (2020) outlines how a number of venues started to tentatively reopen during July 2020. When asking John Encarnacao, a lecturer based at Western Sydney University about his experiences at this time, he recalled:

I did my first gig back in August [2020]. Everything was 50% capacity with all sorts of protocols. Over the first half of this year [2021], restrictions gradually eased, until in May I did my first show where people were allowed to dance and sing. For many months it was strictly table service, allocated seating and social distancing between tables.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the relatively positive early return of live music, Encarnacao pointed out that when musicians started to return to work, they often had to perform two shows a night to compensate for the 50% capacity cap on venues—often for a single performance fee—practice that was verified as “likely to remain”. Additionally, some performers were noted as having no alternative but to play for a cut of the bar, which depending on the (already limited) crowd capacity, restricted musicians’ salaries. Encarnacao also stated that as time progressed, some venues started to charge entrance fees, which audiences, starved of cultural activity, were prepared to pay for. It remains to be seen if this “recalibration” of the value of live music in Sydney will continue, but if the pandemic does result in audiences around the world not taking grassroots live music for granted, this is one small positive that will come out of it. On the other side of the spectrum, the live music industries in Malaysia were

9. This was accurate as of July 2021. The author would like to thank Dr Stephan Lepa for this information.

10. Encarnacao, in email conversation with the author, 13 July 2021.

still effectively closed towards the end of 2020, aside from some sanctioned busking locations—which included vaccination centres.<sup>11</sup> Likewise in Russia, after a period of the live music industries being open for a year from June 2020, restrictions soon returned.<sup>12</sup> Also in Brazil, which had a particularly hard time dealing with the pandemic, music venues were still understandably closed as of July 2021. Despite this necessity, there were numerous reports of illegal gatherings in areas such as Sao Paulo, with police having to break up a party in what was described as a crammed “windowless” venue (Benassato 2021). This illegal activity even extended to Brazil’s famous carnival, which despite being banned by the government, did not prohibit unmasked crowds across the country celebrating the event, despite the risks to public health (G1 2021).<sup>13</sup> These illegal activities were not only restricted to nations such as Brazil, but also countries such as the UK (McDermott 2020; Stephens and Diver 2020), France (BBC 2021c) and Spain (Franco 2021), amongst many others.<sup>14</sup>

What all these instances indicate is that whether a nation is opening up its music venues with or without restrictions, or indeed continuing to keep them closed, the live music industries across the world are in fact *not* entering what my own chapter in this collection describes as a “post-Covid world”. Instead, the live music industries are entering the uncertainty of learning to live with Covid, where venues and the sub sectors that surround them need to quickly learn how to creatively respond to ongoing government advice, to ensure livelihoods are protected, cultural activity is maintained and the general public are kept safe.

## **Contextual Literature on COVID-19 and the Live Music Industries**

Since the emergence of the pandemic, there has been several research initiatives that have investigated how COVID-19 has impacted the music industries, with live music being a particular focus. This section will outline some of the early academic literature and projects that emerged post-pandemic, focusing on specific themes, such as virtual music making, mental health, thought pieces and early calls for research. For reasons of space, this section does not cover industry-based research, although this is summarized in some nations by reports by the likes of Carr (2020), Strong and Cannizzo (2020),

11. The author would like to thank Malaysian music industry advisor Azmyl Yusof for this information.

12. The author would like to thank Kat Ganskaya for this information.

13. The author would like to thank Marcelo B. Conter for this information.

14. See for example Power (2020) and Anarte (2020).

Planas (2020); Tous Pour La Musique Association (2020) and Donoughue and Shneier (2021).

### **Virtual Music Making and Reception**

Haven (2020) provides an interesting early “post-Covid” explanation of the emergence of “the virtual music festival”, a term explicitly used by the Welsh Government (2020) in their guidance on a phased return for the creative industries and noted by Strong and Cannizzo as being preferred (alongside outdoor concerts) to “indoor flat-floor and indoor seated events, due to safety concerns related to the novel coronavirus” (2020: 8). In the article, Haven (2020) notes how musicians around the world used the pandemic to “test out various co-production techniques, increase their digital fan engagement, and host virtual hangouts and dance-parties”, quoting another article by Davies (2020), which discusses how the virtual festival is a “new frontier of the concert-going experience as the promise of virtual reality immersion becomes increasingly accessible” (Haven 2020). Writing at a time when musicians around the world were still figuring out how best to engage with their audiences post-Covid, Haven discusses how these online events were taking place on a number of platforms, with video game platforms such as Minecraft and Fortnite being particularly pervasive. As a result of the potential growth in virtual festivals, Haven mentions the new market position of “Open Pit”,<sup>15</sup> “a volunteer collective of marketing specialists, graphic designers, coders, and producers, [who] are leaders in this new virtual event planning space” (Haven 2020). Open Pit, who worked on the virtual aspects of Coachella and Firefest festivals before the pandemic began, are considered as having a “cheeky, yet critical, engagement with the inflated contemporary music festival market”, organizing “open events that, instead of aiming for wide profit-margins, donate any money made from merchandise or VIP passes to various charities” (ibid.). To quote Haven (2020):

In a COVID music market where virtual reproductions of connection are the only remaining response to live music experiences, Open Pit shifts the exchange value of this affect to present both a critique of and [an] alternative to the profit-based structures and systems of promotions that were integral to the inflated pre-COVID music festival economy. Open Pit’s events, therefore, operationalize dance music’s histories of co-productions of space and sound to reflect and address contemporary global precarities.<sup>16</sup>

15. See <https://openpit.net>.

16. The company are noted as working on two virtual festivals during the early months of the pandemic—Square Garden and #AETH3R, both of which raised funds for the “Feeding America” organization and the National Bail Fund Network.

As with Haven, a project led by the University of Oslo, entitled “Quarantine Concerts” (2021), considers how the pandemic turned the internet into “the new concert hall”, whilst also highlighting how virtual music making has consequent positive and negative social and aesthetic impacts. Based on data from 13 countries across four continents, the research broadly asked the question if and how it is possible for audiences to feel connected to both each other and performing artists in a virtual environment. Resultant data from the project found that although there was a relationship between social connection and live concerts, it differentiates *social cohesion* from what it describes as *Kama Muta*—a feeling of oneness, “of love, belonging, or union—with an individual person, a family, a team, a nation, nature, the cosmos, God, or a kitten” (Kama Muta Lab 2021). So, despite the “traditional” live concert presenting opportunities for more social connection than virtual activities, the feeling of *Kama Muta* is considered as having the potential to be *amplified* in virtual environments. Respondents involved in the research noted how virtual activities (which can be viewed multiple times or experienced live, from both an empty music venue or the artist’s living room) offer significant potentials to audiences who for reasons such as disability, lack of finance, social anxiety or distanced location cannot access a “traditional” live concert. Additionally, despite presenting challenges to artists who are used to getting immediate feedback from an audience in the same space, during an emergency such as a pandemic, virtual concerts are noted as providing a creative outlet which should continue to be explored post-pandemic.<sup>17</sup>

In congruence with the articles by Haven (2020) and the University of Oslo (2021), Rendell (2020) examines a series of case studies on Instagram, Twitch TV and StageIt, noting how internet-based portal shows have increased during the pandemic, offering “real world” alternatives to face-to-face events. Considering portal shows to conflate “traditional venue spatialisation” (2020: 2), Rendell outlines how digital events such as James Alex’s acoustic show on StageIt in May 2020 was a contemporary instance of a “convergence culture”—where old and new media formats interface with each other, forming new relationships and meanings for both artist and audience. Referencing Holt (2010), Rendell rightly points out how over the last two decades, live performance has replaced recording as the primary earner for many musicians, as digital and in particular streaming formats have superseded vinyl, cassette and CDs. However, despite the ontological interest associated with this new pervasive form of spatialization and convergence culture, Rendell describes how virtual environments may lack the authenticity associated with simultaneous time/space/place engagement, with more traditional forms of concert

17. To read an article on the project, see Swarbrick et al. 2021.



engagement regarded as being free from mediation, with the combination of the performer's presence and their musical ability also highlighted. Although not offering audience members opportunities to perform their own identities to the same extent as face-to-face concerts, online performances are regarded as a means of negating issues such as geographical proximity or cost, in addition to offering audiences new intimate ways of engaging parasocially with an artist. Essentially, Rendall's article argues that although virtual concerts may lack the "smell of sweat and drinks that a person may experience at an analog concert", they do open "up a range of performative opportunities for artists and novel engagement for audiences" (2020: 5).

To finish this section on virtual music and environments, a 2021 article by Taylor, Raine and Hamilton provides an interesting additional perspective to the work of Haven (2020), Rendell (2020) and the University of Oslo (2021), by suggesting that the pandemic has caused a "crisis in spatial materiality" (219), resulting in the "need for new representational spaces of music" (ibid.). Describing materiality as a "shorthand for the entanglement of socio-cultural meaning and the 'inescapable situatedness' of human existence within corporeal experience" (222), the authors employ a methodological framework founded on Karen Dale (2005) and in particular Henri Lefebvre (1991), considering the changes to ways in which public spaces can now be occupied—as it is these that are "the roots of the economic challenges facing the UK music industry" (220). Concisely speaking, the article defines "spatial materiality" as a union of social and cultural structures with that of the material world, adopting the position that "social meaning cannot exist outside of [its] influence" (222).<sup>18</sup>

Overall, the article makes an important contribution towards considering how COVID-19 impacted music venues in particular, especially the ways in which promoters and venue owners needed to reconsider how they restructure performance spaces—including virtual ones. Most importantly, the article notes how the pandemic instigated an "existential crisis" in musicians' working practices, as they have attempted to reconsider how to replicate the dynamics of live group performances (which takes place simultaneously, with both musicians and audiences in the same time and space) via an online medium. This existential crisis is discussed in selected essays in this collection, by Flynn and Anderson, Hytönen-Ng, and Lee.

When scanning social media, it is apparent that musicians such as Edinburgh-based Malcolm MacFarlane used the closure of live venues as an opportunity to record "virtual performances", which give the illusion of

18. In the case of music, these material structures can range from musical instruments, to PA systems, to the devices we use to listen to music.

“liveness”, but which are in fact multitracked recordings.<sup>19</sup> Comparable practices were adopted by a number of other musicians, in an attempt to “remain creative” and keep their profile active.<sup>20</sup> In a similar way to the emergence of multitracked recording in popular music history, these performances are very much positioned to give the illusion of a group of musicians performing simultaneously, although their various visual backdrops make it overtly apparent that the performances are not taking place in the same space. These recordings very much resonate with Virgil Moorefield’s perception of the ontological space between what he describes as “the illusion of reality (this sounds like it was played by real people in a ‘real’ setting) and the reality of illusion (this doesn’t exist in the real world; we’re making our own universe)” (2005: 74).

Likewise, New York-based Mike Moreno used the early months of 2021 to compensate for the cessation in live music revenues, by establishing a series of socially distanced duo concerts from his living room. Over the course of around five months (up until May 2021), Moreno streamed these concerts live to his social media followers, encouraging viewers to contribute via PayPal, with the money used not only to pay the musicians, but also to invest in high quality equipment so the music could be broadcast and experienced in high-definition stereo.<sup>21</sup> Although such performances are not the same as experiencing music in the same physical space as the musicians, they have inadvertently assisted artists such as Moreno to reach a wider audience and monetize online practices in a way that was not prevalent prior to the emergence of the pandemic. In congruence with the findings of the University of Oslo (2021), it could be argued that concerts such as these have also ironically facilitated a new type of intimacy (aka *Kama Muta*) which you don’t get when experiencing music in the “neutral territory” of a concert venue, as audiences get an insight into the actual habitat of musicians, in addition to having the opportunity to ask direct questions via “chat” functions of social media. In doing so, these performances could be argued as being a “remediated” version of a live performance, resonating with Bolter and Grusin’s dual notions of “hypermediacy” and “immediacy” (2000), where live audiences are experiencing cultures’ seemingly opposing imperatives of wanting more realistic experiences via increasingly sophisticated media, which subtly disguises itself. Just as pre-Covid news channels such as CNN consist of a multitude of hypermedia screens with accompanying text, graphics and social

19. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1J3bXJb-nY>.

20. See, for example, Welsh-based ensemble Freshly Cut Grass, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKRiko3cs5k>.

21. See <https://www.youtube.com/c/morenovids/videos>.

media feeds, so the performances of MacFarlane and Moreno attempted to give their fans an allusion of a live music concert, via technological methods that were not pervasive pre-pandemic. What we don't get in performances such as these, however, is the setting of an iconic music venue, where audiences and musicians alike simultaneously experience being part of a "sound world" of performing in iconic venues that are engrained with their associated traditions.<sup>22</sup>

As these examples indicate, many venue owners and in particular musicians have had to upskill in order to engage with these new forms of musical materiality and it seems apparent that if they continue post-pandemic, the practices have the potential to change the economic, social and cultural landscape of live music, as musicians pursue more direct routes to market. Inevitably, as Taylor, Raine and Hamilton (2021) outline, many of these innovations are being more broadly adopted by "younger musicians", which has the potential to forge a "generation gap", as some (mainly older musicians) are simply not versed with social media or live streaming technologies. It is also important to point out that these practices have potentially negative impacts on audiences, as they effectively exclude those who may not have access to high-speed internet communications, thus highlighting the importance of governments ensuring their populations are not experiencing "digital poverty". As indicated in a blog post by Cambridge University posted during the pandemic, "the public health crisis currently gripping the UK stands to make the impacts of digital exclusion worse for the millions of people affected, and the poorest will be hit the hardest" (Holmes and Burgess 2020).

### **City Sounds and Mental Health**

In terms of early scholarship on more general "music making", the Institute of Empirical Aesthetics (positioned in Frankfurt and Aarhus Universities) developed the "Musicovid" project near the start of the pandemic.<sup>23</sup> With an aim of facilitating knowledge sharing, grant funding and interdisciplinary research opportunities, the research grouping, who had their first

22. Some venues such as Ronnie Scott's in London and Smalls in New York facilitated musicians to broadcast live performances to online audiences. See, for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yzwllrCsXc>. Also, for an example of a recent (premiered 28 July 2021) "virtual opera" written in response to the pandemic, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Av0nOz6GPe4>.

23. Described as a global and interdisciplinary network of researchers and musicians focused on facilitating and supporting worldwide research on the role of music during the pandemic. See <https://www.aesthetics.mpg.de/forschung/abteilung-musik/musicovid-an-international-research-network.html>.

collaborative gathering on 19 May 2020, engaged with subject areas such as “quarantine concerts”, music and mental health (including music therapy), streaming concerts, the impacts of COVID-19 on creativity and city sound mapping. Although dealing with the impact of COVID-19 on the music industries was included in this early work, the network’s principal aim was still to consider its effect on society’s capacity to cope both individually and collectively, in terms of “anxiety, boredom, loneliness, stress, and uncertainty about the future”, by investigating, documenting and understanding the “multitude of ways in which music is used, experienced and discussed” (Musicovid 2021). Most importantly, although understanding these factors presently is obviously deemed important, the network also aims to provide the necessary foundations for future societies, should a similar situation arise.

Early on in the pandemic, the network showcased a number of projects that were taking place around the world, one of which was a project conducted by the University of Aberdeen, that “aim[ed] to capture sonic environments which have changed as a result of governments’ actions [...] to curb the spread of the virus” (Stollery 2021). Containing high-quality “pre and post lockdown sounds”, the project, which was implemented on Google Maps, included examples such as the “Belper Moo” (named after a town in Derbyshire whose residents “moo” every evening out of their home windows to relieve boredom),<sup>24</sup> to numerous examples of the general public across the UK clapping frontline NHS workers, to Zoom-based church services, to sounds of “quiet towns and cities” that were historically very noisy, such as 30th Street Station in Philadelphia (formerly the eleventh busiest station in the US) and Barcelona Airport (which was near silent). Although Aberdeen University doesn’t document what they intend to do with these sounds, the archive displays the unique way that COVID-19 impacted the soundscapes of the world—a useful resource for future generations to understand how the local connects with the global, in addition to what government policy can effectively “sound” like.<sup>25</sup>

A final example of a project showcased within the “Musicovid” network was a series of podcasts produced by the Kennedy Center on “music and the mind in times of COVID-19”, focusing on subject matters such as “music, loneliness and isolation”<sup>26</sup> and “using music for health and well-being during

24. See BBC 2020d.

25. Taking place on 16 December 2020, an online conference was also organized on a similar subject by Università degli Studi di Firenze (in Italy). See <https://soundofthepandemic.wordpress.com>.

26. See [https://youtu.be/FND\\_IQTjGQM](https://youtu.be/FND_IQTjGQM) (accessed 17 June 2021).

covid”.<sup>27</sup> All of the podcasts featured vocalist Renee Fleming in discussion with “scientists and practitioners working at the intersection of music, neuroscience, and healthcare”, aiming to examine the need of societies to create, experience and benefit from the arts.<sup>28</sup> Amongst other things, these podcasts remind us how loneliness was exacerbated during the early stages of the pandemic, highlighting its negative consequences on health.

On the subject of the impact of the pandemic on public health and well-being, a number of articles were published in 2021 in the open access journal *Frontiers*, investigating areas ranging from the benefits of virtual connectivity, music as a coping mechanism and the differing impacts of music on men and women. For example, research by MacDonald et al. (2021) focuses on how virtual environments can be used as a means of connecting musicians during the pandemic, verifying that it is possible for multiple musicians (70 plus) to make collaborative music synchronously over Zoom,<sup>29</sup> working with its inherent latency creatively. The “free form” improvisational nature of the music, which relied less on traditional notions of harmony, melody and rhythm, was noted as giving participants a form of therapy to counteract feelings of isolation during the pandemic, as they were given a “free rein” both musically and visually, in an environment which was described as the “Zoomosphere”, in which the “virtual and the real are locked together” (ibid.). Results from the project highlighted both the negative impacts associated with the isolation of lockdown, but also the positive impacts that music making such as this can have on health, mood and identity.

In terms of the impacts of music listening on mental health, after conducting a survey of 412 Australian undergraduate students, Vidas et al. (2021) considered music to be one of the most effective ways of helping young people deal with stress, being as impactful as “exercise, sleep or changing location” (ibid.). The authors, who build upon similar work by the likes of Mas-Herrero

27. See [https://youtu.be/zQ\\_Dc6FgGSw](https://youtu.be/zQ_Dc6FgGSw) (accessed 17 June 2021). For an account of how the pandemic impacted the sounds of Alfama, a district of Lisbon, see Sánchez-Fuarros and Lacerda’s chapter in this collection.

28. The Kennedy Center, “Music and the Mind Live with Renee Fleming”, <https://www.kennedy-center.org/whats-on/festivals-series/sound-health/music-and-the-mind/> (accessed 17 June 2021).

29. In a project primarily conducted in Belgium and the Netherlands, Onderdijk et al. (2021) reported a 264% increase in online joint music making of various types, including asynchronous and synchronous. The authors also reported how this increase in participation was also reflected in an upsurge in Google searches asking for information about joint music-making software, with Zoom, Skype, Messenger, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts, WhatsApp, Jitsi, Facetime, Facebook Live, Instagram Live, JackTrip, JamKazam, JamTaba, Jamulus, Ninjam, SoundJack, Starleaf, and Whereby, all being employed to a greater or lesser extent—despite latency issues.

et al. (2020), Fink et al. (2021), and Granot et al. (2021), note how music can be used to regulate emotions, often by what they describe as “mood congruent music”, that is, listening to sad music when they are sad, happy music when they are happy, and so on (Vidas et al. 2021). Although their sample size is relatively small, Vidas et al.’s work shows that active music listening can be a meaningful way of managing stress during a crisis such as a pandemic, in addition to being positively associated with life satisfaction—helping listeners “stay virtually connected” during social isolation.

Similarly to Vidas et al., Martínez-Casticalla et al. (2021) outline the negative impacts the pandemic has had on wellbeing, before discussing how listening to or performing music, under certain conditions, can positively impact feelings of isolation and despondency.<sup>30</sup> The authors report how factors such as gender, age, location and personality traits all impact the ways in which we use music and the impacts it has on us, with women for example being noted as “more likely than men to listen to music for enjoyment, consolation, releasing negative emotions or reducing loneliness”. Young people meanwhile (under 30) are regarded as having a greater tendency to use music as a social connection tool (ibid.). Interestingly, the findings of Martínez-Casticalla et al. indicate that music had a particular impact on those who were “emotionally vulnerable” during lockdown, be that through the impact of Covid on their daily lives or because they had a predisposition of coping less well in stressful situations.

As a final example of the 2021 *Frontiers* special edition, Gibbs and Egermann (2021) also consider the impacts of music on wellbeing during the pandemic, but this time via listening to music that evokes feelings of nostalgia on its recipients. Overall, the research suggested that listening to nostalgic music during the pandemic had the potential to have a positive impact on wellbeing, although this depended on the psychological predisposition of the listener. Gibbs and Egermann’s work highlights how feelings of nostalgia have the potential to buffer perceptions such as “usefulness”, “ability to relax”, “boredom” and “closeness to others”, showing how nostalgia (and therefore nostalgic music) can increase feelings of social connectiveness, optimism, “sense of purpose and meaningfulness of life”. As a testament to the mental health crisis the pandemic has propagated in the music industries, in addition to the important role music playing and listening has in assisting recovery, see the chapters in this collection by Carr, Hytönen-Ng, Kuchar et al., and Lee.

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30. The power of music on wellbeing was reflected in a 2021 Arts Council of Wales call, with three of the nine successful proposals being music based. See <https://arts.wales/news-jobs-opportunities/arts-council-wales-awards-ps300000-9-projects-new-arts-and-health-fund>.

## Early Journal Calls, Symposia and Thought Pieces

At the emergence of the pandemic, it was apparent that a number of journals released a “call for papers” on the impact of Covid, with one such example being the *Journal of Health and Well-Being*, who put a call out for a series of articles under the collective heading of “The Role of Music During COVID-19: Short-Term Challenges through Technology, Wellbeing, Industry and Education”.<sup>31</sup> Although the collection was not published when writing this introduction, a series of short abstracts indicated the themes to be covered—ranging from considering the health and wellbeing of musicians and students; music as a mood regulator; sustaining inter-cultural musical exchanges; music education in isolation; how the brass band world has adapted and the impacts of lockdown on amateur music groups.<sup>32</sup>

As outlined above, another journal which responded rapidly to the emergence of COVID-19 was the open access platform *Frontiers*, whose call was entitled “Social Convergence in Times of Spatial Distancing: The Role of Music During the COVID-19 Pandemic”. The original call of the journal outlined how the initial response of both professional and amateur musicians, “bore witness to an underlying conviction about music’s ability to create and maintain social bonds”, in addition to assisting people “escape from anxiety, boredom, loneliness, stress, and uncertainty about the future” (*Frontiers* 2021). However, although many of the responses of communities across the world displayed commonalities, music was seen to be “conceptualized and practiced very differently across cultures” (*ibid.*), and it is this psychological-cultural relationship the journal was intending to engage with. Although the project is still ongoing, a number of interesting articles have emerged since the original 2020 call, some of which I summarized earlier.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to academic journals, there were also a small number of symposia instigated in the wake of the pandemic, such as the event organized by Royal Holloway and Goldsmiths, in conjunction with the Institute of Musical Research. Entitled “Orchestrating Isolation: Musical Interventions and Inequality in the COVID-19 Fallout”, the event asked a series of important questions such as how COVID-19 has changed musical practices for performers and industry, including digital equalities, cultural differences for audiences,

31. See <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/alc-grad-school/2020/06/24/the-role-of-music-during-covid-19-short-term-challenges-through-technology-wellbeing-industry-education/> (accessed 4 July 2021).

32. The special edition was eventually published in the autumn of 2021, under a slightly different title, “Musicking through COVID-19: Challenges, Adaptations, and New Practices” (2021). The special edition currently contains 53 articles and is accepting others on an ongoing basis. See <https://www.musichealthandwellbeing.co.uk/musickingthroughcovid19>.

33. As of 28 October 2021, 44 articles had been published.

industry hierarchies and touring networks.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, a 2020 “call for papers” for an event organized by the University of Lincoln in conjunction with the British Forum of Ethnomusicology (entitled “Ethnomusicology and Music Enterprise in Catastrophic Times”) noted how similar infrastructural shifts within the music industries have in fact occurred before—in the Great Depression for example, where “radio broadcasting became ubiquitous and changed the public’s listening habits, promoting new recording techniques that consolidated the popularity of specific genres such as ‘crooning’” (British Forum of Ethnomusicology 2020). In more recent times, the British Forum of Ethnomusicology website noted how the austerity measures resulting from the 2008 financial crisis led to many musicians losing income streams “as culture was drastically cut from government budgets and both individuals and large companies were forced to rethink their economic models” (ibid.). “What ensued was a surge of inventiveness to keep music going despite dire circumstances” (ibid.). The conference’s call for papers proceeded to discuss how the pandemic “has highlighted on a global level the fragility of social and economic systems based solely on services without any state-organized safety nets for the performing arts industries such as those found in France and Belgium” (ibid.). The pandemic is also noted as offering an opportunity for the music industries to “reassess their position in the world” via movements such as Black Lives Matter.

In the academic world, it is not uncommon for the turnaround of peer-reviewed publications to take more than a year from start to finish. However, due to the need for a more rapid response as government legislation progressed and the reality of the virus became starker, there were some examples in the academic community of what can be called “thought pieces”, which are generally shorter and more informal in nature. The research group “Working in Music” is one such example of a network that produced a series of pieces on subjects such as women in music during COVID-19 (Karmy 2020; Nikoghosyan 2020); private sector support networks in Chile in the midst of lack of government support (Karmy and Urueta 2020); impacts of the pandemic on music research, and funding support for UK musicians (Chatora 2020).

Regarding the latter, Gable (2020) outlines how we require a more comprehensive understanding of both the unique challenges faced by musicians and workers in the music industries, in addition to more clarity on how we can address those challenges in both the short and long term. Gable draws

34. The Institute of Musical Research, “Orchestrating Isolation: Musical Interventions and Inequality in the COVID-19 Fallout”, 22 June 2020, <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/research-and-teaching/departments-and-schools/music/events/orchestrating-isolation-musical-interventions-and-inequality-in-the-covid-19-fallout/> (accessed 4 July 2021).



on her PhD research to verify the freelance nature of the music industries, with many musicians undertaking portfolio careers and often working jobs outside of their profession in order to make a living. Drawing on evidence from a Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport committee meeting on 9 June 2020, Gable outlines the financial struggles that many musicians were already facing pre-Covid, with numerous respondents to a Musicians' Union Survey stating they doubted "they would be able to stay" in the industry following the crisis (Gable 2020). Gable's essay then proceeds to confirm some of the pervasive issues reported in the UK, such as many musicians and workers in the music industry falling through the gaps of the two main UK support schemes—the Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme (CJRS) for employees and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS). Amongst the "workers", Gable specifically mentions the small labels and management companies who "may or may not qualify for the SEISS due to their business structures", verifying that they "could be forgiven for shying away from the loans offered to small businesses in England" (ibid.). While noting that the arts councils of all four home nations in the UK had set up emergency funding, they were seen to be lacking when compared to Germany's 156 billion Euro fund for example, "with concerns that the UK funding available to freelancers and creative businesses isn't flexible enough to work for all variations of business structures" (ibid.).

Other early thought pieces included considerations of the ways in which both musicians and the general public turn to music in times of crisis, with a piece published by the World Economic Forum asserting that music making was a way of gaining control in a world where autonomy was greatly restricted. Examples of this phenomenon included the residents in Italy and Wuhan "singing across balconies" near the start of the crisis and the pervasiveness of "YouTube Choirs". The article outlines how music has the capacity to "create a sense of community and belonging", acting as "an antidote to the growing sense of alienation and isolation in society in general" (World Economic Forum 2020). Most importantly, it verifies how the COVID-19 pandemic was not the first time these practices have occurred, citing the hymns Parisians sang when the cathedral at Notre Dame burnt down in 2019.

I would like to finish this brief excursion into the early literature related to music and Covid, by discussing a research project by Ioannis Tsioulakis and Ali FitzGibbon (2020). Their work, which focuses mainly on Northern Ireland and Greece, makes the important point, like Gable (2020) above, of highlighting how the performing arts sector (theatre and music) was already experiencing difficulties prior to the pandemic, due to prolonged austerity. They refer to how the pandemic has highlighted "not only the fragility of the lives and livelihoods of these occupations but also the failure of governments and

public agencies to understand the nature of this work or the gaps in existing support systems” (ibid.). Their essay then proceeds to reference some of the long-standing research that considers the issues associated with the “freelance” nature of the creative industries: relatively low income (when compared to their non-creative counterparts in the same industries), poor pension plans and lack of protection by employment regulations, all of which made these workers more susceptible during a pandemic. For example, musicians in both Greece and the UK not only had work cancelled during the pandemic but were seen to have “poor contracts”—resulting in no “contingency mechanisms for compensation” (ibid.). Additionally, the portfolio careers of those in the performing arts sector are regarded as “disappearing”, with one Greek respondent typifying the problem: “I make a living through three activities: gigging in commercial venues, private tuition, and busking. Now I can’t do any of it!” (ibid.). Also, as indicated earlier, many of the respondents in Tsioulakis and FitzGibbon’s research outline how financial models in the performing arts often leave them ineligible for government finance schemes. Although much of their research resonates strongly with what has already been documented in this introduction, they do highlight a particular issue that has not been mentioned—what they describe as an “oversupply” of cultural work. As I have already alluded to, freely available music on the internet is a welcome gesture in a time of crisis, but, as Tsioulakis and FitzGibbon point out, we need to be aware that it also somewhat condones an expectation that is pervasive when audiences engage with both social media and in grassroot music fraternities—the expectation that music is available for free. Tsioulakis and FitzGibbon’s article concludes with a series of recommendations, one of which is the importance of all citizens having access to universal basic income (UBI), with Spain being noted as the first country to roll this out. According to the authors, “UBI is a better solution than bureaucratically complex compensation schemes with gaps that freelance performing artists fall through” (ibid.).

## Conclusion

The impetus behind this special edition came about off the back of an International Association for the Study of Popular Music symposium that took place on 17 March 2021, very close to the first anniversary of the first lockdown in the UK. Entitled “The Impacts of COVID-19 on the European Music Industries: A Sample of Academic Projects Taking Place Across Europe”, the symposium, chaired and organized by myself, featured six speakers from Wales, England, Germany, Norway and the Netherlands, all of whom presented on various research projects, ranging from reflections on government

reports, the impacts of COVID-19 on local music makers, to methodologies for the sustainability of live music, to impacts on specific sub sectors.<sup>35</sup>

When reflecting on the symposium, I think the one standout factor was how much all of the nations had in common. Despite experiencing different regulations regarding the opening of our respective venues, we all shared common concerns surrounding factors such as how best to support our live music industries post-Covid; how to identify gaps in our live music ecologies due to stakeholders leaving the profession; how to train those who wish to enter the profession; and how to work with governments to ensure the necessary research takes place.

This collection is essentially an extension of this symposium, focusing primarily on Europe, but also including articles from Australia and New Zealand. It is recognized that all articles are centred in the global north, with many nations not included. The reasons for this are complex and there is no question the collection would have been improved by including essays from Africa, Latin America and Asia, for example. However, despite this shortfall, it is hoped that the collection provides an historical snapshot into the disruptions of cultural production that were experienced in various parts of the world.

Featuring articles from academics based in New Zealand, Australia, Finland, the UK, Germany and Spain, the collection opens with an article by Adam Behr, Craig Hamilton and Patrycja Rozbicka, who investigate their involvement in a recent project examining the live music sector in Birmingham, UK, exploring the broader live music ecology of the city and the impacts of the pandemic on its subsectors. Overall, the article asks an important question pertinent to all nations around the world—how can local, national and international live music industries sustain their music ecologies and economies during a pandemic? This is an overarching question all the articles in the double edition are grappling with to a greater or lesser extent.

The second article, by Mathew Flynn and Richard Anderson, considers the devastating impact that 18 months without full-capacity live events have had on the financial, musical and social wellbeing of the Liverpool City Region's (LCR) music sector. Their analysis shows how uncertainties concerning a return to normal operations, access to funding support, working within socially distanced limitations and dealing with changing regulations have underlined the live music workers' experience of the pandemic as well as how a sense of uncertainty persists despite a return to full-capacity events in July 2021. While their research shows how digital alternatives partially helped

35. For a recording of the symposium, see <https://paulcarr.org/2021/03/18/the-impacts-of-covid-19-on-the-live-music-industries-a-sample-of-academic-projects-taking-place-across-europe/> (accessed 4 June 2021).

alleviate lockdown's detrimental effects, live streaming was still considered a "stop gap" by the LCR music sector. In conclusion they observe the "return to normal" also heralds a return to pre-pandemic music industry economics, which, somewhat paradoxically, often function to the detriment of the musicians on whom the regional live sector's operational and financial recovery depend.

The third article, by Iñigo Sánchez-Fuarros and Maria Teresa Lacerda, examines the changing atmosphere of Lisbon's Fado live music scene, focusing in particular on the effects of lockdown measures and other public health restrictions on the *casas de fado*, a distinctive type of local institution where music, tourism and the quest for experiences of authenticity intersect. Drawing on interviews with venue owners, local association representatives, musicians and local media sources, the article argues how the pandemic has revealed the fragility of a local music ecosystem, which is overly dependent on foreign tourism and institutional support for its survival.

The fourth article, by Fabian Cannizzo and Catherine Strong, initially outlines how, despite Australia's low per capita cases of COVID-19 in the early stages of the pandemic, its dependence on international travel did result in a number of infections in early 2020, prompting federal and state governments to impose travel restrictions, social distancing orders, and some state-wide lockdowns. Cannizzo and Strong's article proceeds to examine music workers' expectations for their future, and the future of the music industries post-"hibernation". Through surveying and interviewing workers and business owners from across the music industries in Victoria during a period of lockdown, it explores how workers position themselves in relation to the idea that the sector could return to "normal" post-Covid working practices and economies, showing how some workers are orienting themselves to a future where the sector re-opens mostly unchanged, while others believe that the industry will be fundamentally different post-pandemic. The article considers how workers' activities during lockdown were shaped by these beliefs, with many exiting or preparing for an exit from music work, with those who anticipate staying undertaking extensive labour to ensure the viability of their careers.

In a similar manner to Cannizzo and Strong, the fifth article, by Johannes Krause, Jan Üblacker, Katharina Huseljić and Niklas Blömeke, outlines how the pandemic and its associated venue closures have confronted operators in Germany with fundamental uncertainties about the prospects of their venues, with both public and political debates revolving around the question of whether operators may have to close or remain open during the crisis. Using data from the German live music survey and linear regression modelling, the article analyses the factors influencing the expected duration until insolvency for venues, showing how the continuous financial support

provided by the state extended the expected time to insolvency, as does the number of actors and initiatives using the venue on a regular basis. On the other hand, operators with market venues, venues for lease and venues in big cities are seen to have more pessimistic expectations. The article demonstrates how both the safeguarding function of state support and diverse live music networks in times of crisis bear important implications for the promotion of resilient live music ecologies.

My own article in this collection reflects upon an extensive report I documented for the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee (CWLCC), a body which recommends policy to the Welsh Government and holds it to account. After initially providing a brief historical account of the ways in which the UK and more specifically the Welsh Government responded to the pandemic in terms of generic and targeted support, in addition to how private sector bodies “filled the gaps”, the article discusses how the report’s recommendations resonated with both the CWLCC *Turn up the Volume* (2020) report and the official Welsh Government (2021b) response, providing an account of how three distinct narratives (the reports from myself, the CWLCC, and Welsh Government) have been able to improve the prospects of live music stakeholders in Wales.

The seventh article, by Robin Kuchar, Maxine Frey, Julia Gooß and Tim Mertens, like Krause et al., focuses on the German live music sector. The authors note how during the initial phase of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, music venues and clubs were the first to close—and often the last to re-open. Based on knowledge about music venues and club culture from the pre-COVID-19 era and data collected from club owners, clubbers, venue associations and cultural policy in Germany, this article encompasses a variety of perspectives regarding the situation that live music venues and clubs found themselves in during the pandemic. Firstly, it analyses, from a German perspective, the club-related developments of the COVID-19 crisis from the first lockdown in March 2020 to the spring of 2021. Secondly, it considers the effect of “loss” among audiences and, thirdly, the discourse surrounding cultural policy and emergency funds for music clubs and live music culture in Germany.

The eighth article, by Elina Hytönen-Ng, initially outlines how jazz as a genre relies on live performance and how the economic downturn brought about by the pandemic only highlighted this fact. Via a series of interviews with London-based jazz musicians, Hytönen-Ng proceeds to reflect on how the pandemic financially and emotionally impacted them, using the idea of “liminal state”, as conceptualized by Arnold van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1982). The article also reflects on the support that jazz musicians received during the pandemic, in addition to outlining the new skills learned.

The penultimate article in the collection, by Jelena Gligorijević, outlines her field research in the city of St. Gallen (in north-eastern Switzerland) where the authorities are noted as opting for a “liberal” handling of the pandemic. As a result, the city’s live music venue “Palace”, where she was conducting her fieldwork, remained open to the public as late as mid-December 2020, a policy that allowed Gligorijević to implement fieldwork which focused on the pandemic’s significant constraints on social behaviour. Her article addresses the ethical dilemmas encountered when operating in this “grey zone” of field research, while also documenting the challenges and adjustments that the Palace venue had to undertake. Amongst other things, the article specifically focuses on analysing changes in the experience of the Palace’s sociality and spatiality under social distancing rules, providing an alternative angle on the existing body of music-cultural research, which has a tendency to focus on factors such as government policy and cancellations and transformations of music events into virtual gatherings.

The collection concludes with an article by Daniel A. Lee, who focuses on the phenomenon of virtual guitar communities. Lee initially notes how the music industry was already experiencing uncertainty as musicians experimented with new modes of dissemination and monetization following developments in telecommunications prior to the pandemic. He outlines how guitar players have traditionally formed local networks and communities in geo-located domains—a phenomenon that has expanded in the twenty-first century to include virtual spaces. Lee proceeds to investigate these online guitar communities from the perspective of UNESCO’s *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, with data being analysed using Inductive Thematic Analysis. Although Lee accepts the serious negative effects the pandemic has had on individual musicians and live venues, he outlines how it has also acted as a catalyst for fresh vigour within online communities, who are seeking new ways to connect. Whilst artists sharing and interacting are noted as potentially providing a richer environment in the future, bringing to light cultural expressions previously suppressed, Lee’s article expresses an important point—that without a strong recognition of cultural responsibility, this richness may result in a homogenous melting pot.

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