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Editorial introduction

In late 2020, *Perfect Beat* released a Call for Papers asking for short-form article submissions that clearly documented the state of music research and industry activity in the Asia-Pacific region during the COVID-19 pandemic. 2020 had been a particularly challenging year for the music industries in our region, and also our academic disciplines. We were motivated by the need to reflect on this moment in time and felt *Perfect Beat* to be the ideal platform, given the journal's established history of documenting significant cultural and industry changes. The decision to call for short-form articles—what the journal labels as 'Riffs'—was deliberate. Riffs are unlike standard scholarly articles in terms of word length and even expectations around format and content. Typically, they are commentary pieces that can include interviews with musicians or industry figures, critical reflections of an author's experiences, comparative reviews of musical works, and co- or multi-authored exchanges, and more. The Riff format allows flexibility to express an author's deeply personal or nuanced views in a manner that facilitates scholarly discussions. Our call for Riff articles, in particular, meant that authors were able to concisely capture their immediate thoughts and submit them for publication in a timely manner, rather than writing a long-form academic article during a time when academics were (more than ever) juggling changes to teaching or working from home due to government lockdowns. The call out was enthusiastically received and we received dozens of Riff submissions from musicians, students, scholars and teachers from across the region. They were subjected to *Perfect Beat*'s double-blind peer review process, and due to the quality and number of papers, we felt compelled to publish not one but two Special Issues titled 'COVID-19, Music and the Asia-Pacific'. This issue (Volume 21 Issue 1) contains ten articles that have responded to this theme.

The first half of this Special Issue—five articles in all—addresses the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on various aspects of the music industries, and includes four case studies from Australia, and one from India. These articles consider structural issues with the industry more broadly, as well as provide individual and venue-specific accounts. In both Australia and India, heavy lockdown restrictions had a huge impact on live music, resulting in the rapid cancellations

of tours, music festivals, concerts, and the closure of venues. They all explore how the music industry's pre-existing conditions were exacerbated by the pandemic, producing inequitable outcomes for music industry workers based on systemic and personal circumstances. The perspectives here are mostly captured through interviews and engagement with music industry practitioners; they describe how the impacts of the pandemic, while unprecedented, can be understood as an intensification of existing precarity. The second half of this special issue builds on these initial perspectives about industry. One article, for example, provides a noteworthy perspective from China, where a large music company was forced to adapt to lockdown restrictions. It suggests that new audience consumption methods which were driven by these restrictions may in fact be an ongoing trend. The final four Riffs are written by music teachers/lecturers and students, and capture the much needed viewpoints from the higher education sector in our broad region. These educators acknowledge the significant challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, and they offer practical insights into the ways that restrictions around face-to-face teaching have prompted pedagogical advances in online teaching and learning. They argue that the widespread adoption of digital technologies for the classroom have the potential to increase access to education, leading to positive social outcomes. A counterpoint to this is the reflections of student authors who document struggles and challenges not only with online learning, but also with funding and support.

Our special issue leads with a highly significant, long-form article. It presents insightful, first-person accounts stemming from a major Australian study, commissioned by the Victorian Music Development Office (VMDO) and the Victorian Government's Office for Women, into the experiences of music workers during the lockdowns in the state of Victoria. The article, titled 'Pre-existing conditions: Precarity, creative justice and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Victorian music industries' by Catherine Strong and Fabian Cannizzo, presents data collected via surveys and interviews conducted during the lockdown. Participants expressed a strong desire to rebuild a fairer and more equitable industry in the wake of COVID-19, and viewed the disruptions brought about by the pandemic as an opportunity to demand 'creative justice' in the industry. Similar themes emerge in the next Riff article, which documents the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on small music venues in regional areas of the neighbouring state of South Australia. Here, authors Rosie Roberts and Sam Whiting present the case of the Barn at Wombat Flat: an independent, small live music venue located 120km north-east of the capital city of Adelaide. They, too, report that the existing precarity which is undeniably characteristic of this sector has been intensified through COVID-19 restrictions. Their Riff also documents how venues view disruptions as

an opportunity to address pre-existing problems, specifically in relation to urban-centric policy settings.

Like the previous Riffs, the subsequent article, titled 'I lost a gig *'pero ok lang'*: Filipino migrant musicians in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic', by Carljohnson Anacin shows that pre-existing conditions, due to personal circumstances, as well structural inequalities, played a defining role in musicians' capacity for resilience. Specifically, the Riff argues that the closure of venues and the cancellation of events has only marginally affected Filipino musicians from the cities of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, because most had already been previously excluded from participation in the mainstream Australian music industry. Therefore, instead of focusing on the economic impacts of the lockdown, this Riff accounts for how Filipino musicians' translocal and transnational experiences, cultural capital, and their existing networks in the Philippines and Australia, underpinned their capacity for resilience. Our other Australian case study also provides an account of how COVID-19 impacted artists, this time via an interview with Brisbane-based musician and songwriter Keir Nuttall. This Riff, by Gavin Carfoot, is centred on a discussion of the parody song 'It Was COVID-19' which is based on the melody from the well-known band Redgum's hit song 'I Was Only 19'. While the song's satire and humour are addressed, the Riff provides a confronting account of lost opportunities, tours, and other high-profile professional engagements, all of which have impacted Nuttall's personal life as well as his creativity.

After considering the pandemic's impact in Australia, we move north to the Asian continent and turn to the context of live music in India. In this Riff, author Pradip Sarkar looks at the impact that COVID-related restrictions have had on small-scale musicians and DJs. Informed by his online ethnographic research into four DJs based in the cities of Mumbai, Kolkata, Bhopal, and New Delhi, the Riff documents and evaluates these musicians' efforts to engage with their audiences via social media platforms, principally Instagram and Facebook Live. Prior to the pandemic, these artists had developed a strong presence on these platforms, primarily for the purpose of promoting live shows. However, due to lockdown restrictions, digital avenues became the only forum through which these artists could connect with audiences, and so their strategies for engagement shifted. The Riff provides online case studies into how the affordances and limitations of social media platforms were navigated at a critical juncture, and how new approaches to DJ livestreaming was developed in the face of growing audience fatigue.

Staying in Asia, our next Riff provides a welcome point of view as to how large music organizations responded to COVID-19 in China: the first country to experience lockdown restrictions. This Riff, by Weida Wang, evaluates how China's largest online music platform, which is owned by entertainment company Tencent

Music Entertainment Group (TME), mobilized and developed its services in order to sustain its business activities in the absence of festivals and live performances. This was achieved principally through a livestreaming concert service titled TME Live, which was launched during lockdown, and served to facilitate interactive and immersive virtual concerts with a high-production value. The Riff also considers the ongoing value and significance of the platform after lockdowns eased, suggesting that the pandemic has resulted in a shift in consumption patterns in China, whereby audiences appear to continue to respond positively to both virtual and real-life experiences.

Music academics have needed to adjust teaching and learning techniques to suit the needs of our students and our institutions during the pandemic. The next two Riffs encapsulate just some of these changing methods, and are written from the perspectives of music educators who discuss how the pandemic has impacted the tertiary classroom environment. For example, in the article 'Riffing on course redesign: Leveraging pedagogy for teaching music online', Benjamin Phipps, who is an ethnomusicologist and teacher working as an educational developer in Australia, documents the challenges presented by remote learning and online technologies by reflecting on his own use through the pandemic. Phipps argues that the temporary cessation of face-to-face learning forced educators to embrace new technologies and approaches to content delivery. It also presented an opportunity to create better social outcomes for students in the long-term through increased access to learning environments for all students regardless of socio-economic backgrounds. Pedagogy during COVID-19 is also a primary concern for a team of researchers and educators at the University of the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, Australia. Their co-authored Riff traces the evolution of their project-based learning models during a time of restricted online-learning environments. Briony Luttrell, Hannah Banks, Andy Ward and Lachlan Goold discuss a collaboration between Theatre and Music students at their university to create a live radio production of *Sunday Morning at the Centre of the World* by Louis de Bernières. The authors propose that project-based learning models were ideally-suited to restricted and unpredictable environments, because these models encouraged teamwork and active learning, while providing scenarios that mirrored existing industry practices. While these models were mostly delivered online, the lifting of restrictions in Queensland during the second half of 2020 meant that students were eventually able to perform the radio project in person rather than online, which was greatly welcomed. This case study provides an example of how learning programmes can transition between the virtual and tangible, equipping students with agility and rapid problem-solving skills.

The final two Riffs in our Special Issue offer a counter perspective to the Riffs authored by educators; these address the pandemic's impact on teaching and

learning from the perspectives of students. The first of these is by Alice Rose, a postgraduate candidate studying at Oxford University. She describes how the pre-COVID support networks provided for ethnographic fieldwork in ethnomusicology left her without access to basic information and institutional support usually available to student researchers. The student documents her experiences in Osaka, Japan, where she was undertaking fieldwork when the pandemic began. It progresses to describe Rose's struggles when returning from fieldwork and how she had to advocate for funding extensions, repay research grants, and apply for insurance to reimburse the unforeseen costs imposed by the restrictions on travel. The Riff positions these overwhelming obstacles as an intensification of neoliberal conditions in academia that have resulted in an unresolved tension between economic efficiency and ethical practice. The final Riff about music education discusses the ways in which the pandemic has affected those who study music with private practitioners as opposed to large academic institutions. This article shares author Sarah Renata Strothers' experiences as a student in the United States who is learning the shakuhachi (Japanese end-blown bamboo flute) from a sole teacher. The Riff reflects on how existing pedagogical models, which were centred around spaces where social and pedagogical relationships cultivate (namely, the physical and virtual), evolved through the pandemic.

The diverse perspectives showcased in this issue no doubt reflect the impact of COVID-19 on the music industries and on the education sectors during 2020. Conditions during this pandemic are constantly in flux, and these articles serve to capture our experiences before, once again, we adapt to new circumstances. We look forward to sharing further Riffs from *Perfect Beat* authors in our second special issue, also titled 'COVID-19, Music and the Asia-Pacific', which expands on some of the above themes, as well as providing a range of new perspectives from across our region.