Introduction - Contemporary Music Ecosystems' Transformations: Live Music, the Gig Economy, and Social Changes

By Paula Guerra and Samuel Lamontagne

File Attachment: Introduction - Contemporary Music Ecosystems' Transformations: Live Music, the Gig Economy, and Social Changes [1]

In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic put a stop to nearly all live cultural activity, Mark Savage painted a devastating portrait of the music industry's state (Savage 2019). In the United States, record sales had dropped by about eighty percent in the 2010s: from four hundred fifty to eighty-nine million. From 2017 to 2018, worldwide record sales percentage plummeted an additional twenty-three percent. At the 2019 Grammy Awards, H.E.R.'s and Cardi B's albums, two of the nominated projects for the "album of the year" category never had a physical release. The situation becomes even clearer when analyzing 2018's top selling records: most of them were film soundtracks. How could the music industry face such challenges? First, we must acknowledge that this is a very recent reality, and that the actors' adaptability cannot keep up with the constant technological progress of music digitization (Guerra 2020) and that, these days, anyone with a computer or smartphone is able to play hundreds of albums and save thousands of songs. We sometimes forget that those processes only started back in 1998 with the invention of the MP3 player. At the time, the MP3 format allowed revolutionary audio compression. The MP3 technology had unintended consequences. Created as a tool to help the music industry, it ended up harming it in the long run. As we know, after the MP3, came the rise of peer-to-peer file sharing softwares like *Napster*, and *KaZaa,* opening the door to free access to music through digital downloading. It also brought the idea – innovative and destructive at the same time – that people didn't have to pay for media cultural consumption. That was true for music, but also for books, newspapers, movies, and so on. As music downloading was ever growing, the music industry's response was to potentially sue each and every individual who illegally downloaded a file by enforcing copyright law, considering copyright infringement as theft (Morris 2015). A famous example of this witch hunt began with the *Metallica v. Napster, Inc.* 2000 court case, in which the legendary heavy metal band – soon joined by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and the rapper Dr. Dre – sued *Napster* for enabling users to share copyrighted music (Moore 2009:197), before going after individual users of the platform (ibid.).

Afterwards, the response was to make listening to music online easier than illegally downloading it, notably through streaming platforms. Current examples include *Spotify*, which allows users to have an unlimited access to a large selection of music for a fixed monthly fee. Because of these transformations, the era of the "traditional" record release, with advertisement and physical sale and distribution, seems long gone. As they saw their profits plummet vertiginously, musicians have been the most affected of all, especially those who weren't top billing acts and celebrities in the industry. One – if not the main – way out of this situation was live music (Guibert and Sagot-Duvauroux 2013). Before the pandemic started, there had never been as many concerts and festivals organized (Bennett et al. 2014; Guerra 2018). And if live music's importance has always been highlighted by musicians and audiences (very few bands choose to follow *The Beatles*' tracks and stop touring), for many artists, touring was the most difficult part of their activity, especially when it came to bands based in peripheral countries like Portugal, which implied spending many hours on the road or having endless layovers in airports. When it comes to indie or less known bands, touring is a problem as well: as Michaela Anne Neller (2021) describes: there are always risks, as profits depend on ticket sales, which always remain uncertain; on the other hand, costs are certain, such as accommodation, gas, food, lodging and more. As such, being the opening act for better-known bands, appears as a safe solution, since it is guaranteed money and, at the same time, a good way for the band to gain wider recognition.

The investment in live music, with music festivals being the most visible face of that effort, should then be understood as a strategy set by the industry and musicians to face ever-dwindling record sales and the low revenue from streaming services. If the COVID-19 pandemic put a stop to everything, the rise of the live music industry in the 2010s went hand in hand with the emergence of a new area of study – live music – which some argue is even richer than what dominated academic discourses until then – recorded music (Cloonan 2011). Numerous authors, from different contexts, have contributed to the development of this theme. They have focused on the implications of the development of the live music sector in the 2010s throughout the various dimensions that make up the "world of music:" transformations introduced at the level of the relationships established between the different actors in the field of music; changes in the construction of musical careers; articulations with cultural

policies and urban development, particularly through the exploration of the concept of ecologies of live music in urban environments (Baird and Scott 2018; Behr et al. 2016; ibid. 2019; Cohen 2012; ibid. 2013; Frith 2007; Van der Hoeven and Hitters 2019); and the emergence of a new lifestyle, typical of late modernity, a "festival" lifestyle, in which habitués organize their summer holidays according to particular festivals, a lifestyle deeply connected to the festivalization of culture, as grounded in cosmopolitanism in an environment marked by consumptions, appropriations and embodiments of practices (Guerra 2016; Bennett Taylor and Woodward 2014). At the same time, live music has increasingly been on the political agenda, and several cities around the world have been producing reports and strategic studies on this topic. In 2017, the first-ever nationwide live music census was conducted in the UK, allowing for unprecedented levels of detailed, comparable data on the live music cultures from different localities (Webster et al. 2018).

This Special Issue questions the directions this reality will move towards, as well as its impact on musicians, audiences, and the cultural industries. What will happen to musicians, especially those in small bands from peripheral scenes and countries who have to spend hours and days on the road to get from a concert to another (Ballico and Carter 2018; Smith and Thwaites 2018)? What kind of impact will this have on the increasing precariousness of being a career musician, in the blurring between professional and private spheres and how the concept of "choosing poverty" (Threadgold 2018) may or may not explain the situation many musicians experience? The DIY ethos (Guerra and Feixa 2019), at the core of punk culture, is now a key source of influence and inspiration for other music genres, through the creation of alternative networks of production, performance and consumption (Bennett and Guerra 2019a, Bennett and Guerra 2019b). Following this, to what extent can the DIY ethos be used as a vehicle for musicians to adapt to this new reality, whether through the reduction in cost of music production or through the monetization of sociability, notably through the blurring between personal and professional spheres, the investment in social media as a means of forming networks of relationships to perform and tour in different countries? And what nefarious effects can this reality have on the careers of new players whose networks of relationships are not well established (Rogers 2010) and who are part of more alternative and artistic spheres? We know music scenes have always had an over-representation of men, based, above all, in the classic dichotomy between private and public spheres. Secondary and backstage tasks are the purview of women, while the performing and producing, the stage, are monopolized by men. That being the case, to what extent does this emphasis on live music reinforce masculinization processes, or does it, on the contrary, serve as a vehicle to undermine them?

The Special Issue is organized in four thematic sections:

Careers

In a field marked by precariousness and discourses grounded in neo-liberal logics presented as entrepreneurship in which much of the unpaid work, what Maurizio Lazzarato (2021) famously called immaterial labor, or what Ana Alacovska (2021) calls the "wageless life," live music is characterized by multiple strategies of "getting by." In a field, which as we have seen, is at best "not easy," especially for indie musicians who cannot make a living from music without having one or more side jobs to make ends meet, how will it be now, in pandemic and post-pandemic times? As scholars, we must investigate how musicians were affected professionally, and how they applied copping strategies to "get by," or if it was simply not possible, how they had no other choice but to give up (or put on pause) their passion for music and their dreams of being musicians.

In her article "Another Typical Day at the Office: Working Life in the Portuguese Independent Music Scene," Ana Oliveira explores the working life of the multiple actors that make up the current independent music scene in Portugal. Based on seventy-one semi-structured interviews she analyzes which activities they perform and what strategies they mobilize to manage their careers, and, in the process, reveals the centrality of live music and the key role of the actors who play intermediary roles in this sphere – music venues programmers, agents, and promoters.

Georgina Hughes, in her article "Dame Evelyn Glennie: On the Road with Trio HLK," writes about the recent touring collaboration between Dame Evelyn Glennie and the band Trio HLK. The focus of this article is twofold: first, it offers an analysis of the outcome of the collaboration in terms of venue size and social media attention. In this way, it contextualizes how Glennie's prominence may serve to raise interest in Trio HLK. Second, the article offers a reception history of Glennie's live performances with Trio HLK. This perspective aims to examine how her presence has impacted the popularity of Trio HLK, to document how she is given particular attention separately

from the group, and to evaluate the public's response to a classically-trained musician evolving in the domains of improvisation and jazz performance.

Cities

The attention paid to the connections between live music and urban planning has grown in the last decade, both in academia and the policy sphere. Amongst local governments and policy makers, the economic impact assessments of live music seem to have contributed to a wider recognition of the merits of this cultural form. But in general, the perspectives on live music are often grounded in economic considerations and in the effects on city branding and the creative city. This diverts attention from social and cultural benefits of live music by too often leaving out of the analysis, discourses about cultural participation, education, diversity or citizenship (Lamontagne 2020). More research is needed on its social and cultural benefits aiming for a holistic vision of live music ecologies (Van der Hoeven and Hitters 2019).

In his article entitled "Grand Paris and Electronic Dance Music: Nightlife Policies, Neoliberal Urban Planning, and the Gentrification of the Banlieues," Samuel Lamontagne studies the 2010s electronic dance music boom in Paris. At that time, a set of public and private institutional actors agreed on the implementation of nightlife policies. Following the principles of the creative city, these have facilitated the development of festive activity particularly as deployed in the Parisian *banlieues*. However, this boom has not avoided forms of instrumentalization of culture, sometimes closely accompanying the urban policies that prepare the Grand Paris planning project.

Paula Guerra, with "If Live Ain't Enough for Them: Live Music and an Unexpected Scene in the Last Decade," describes the crucial role played by live concerts, as well as the impact of physical venues, in the emergence, dynamics, and consolidation of the Portuguese punk scene, from its beginnings to the present day. Based on a qualitative and quantitative methodology in a pioneering Portuguese study, this article aims to systematically collect, map, identify, and categorize all live punk music events registered on the internet between 2010 and 2015. The author's main goal is to understand whether live punk music still sees itself as a vital part of keeping this scene alive, as was the case during its genesis in the late 1970s.

Platforms

Understanding the concert as an ecology, we can perceive the profound changes it is experiencing, notably because of the introduction of different technical devices. In this sense, forms of work organization and professional skills both have changed. Consequently, there are new business forms and new distribution formats, such as live broadcasts. It is therefore important to reflect on the transformations linked in to the digitization of work tools, thus taking into account the history of the evolution of musical professions and technical devices, but also their impact on daily work in this area.

In his article entitled "The Values of Live Music Videos on YouTube: A Montreal Case," Michael Spanu discusses how live music is crucial in understanding Montreal's distinctive cultural identity, and how its nightlife musical activity produces specific knowledge and behavior. As the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Montreal music scenes has been severe, the primary response came in the form of the rise of virtual concerts. However, as Spanu shows, these shows mainly benefited top mainstream artists and resulted in economic and social losses for brick-and-mortar concerts. The author aims to assess the values of live music on digital platforms through the particular case of live music videos shot in Montreal and broadcast on YouTube.

Loïc Riom, in his article "(Un)Playing Music at Sofar Sounds: Some Element of an Ethno(methodo)musicology of Live Performances," asks a seemingly simple question: How do you play music live? Answering this question implied trying to sketch out a methodology for the study of musical performances. Drawing on the principles of ethnomethodology, the author attempts to make an ethno(methodo)musicological description of a concert of a young Parisian rapper at Sofar Sounds. Building on this approach, he characterizes the ways musicians (un)play their music at Sofar Sounds and how they adapt to this particular setting.

Gérôme Guibert, in "Live Performance and Filmed Concerts: Remarks on Music Production and Livestreaming before, during and after the Public Health Crisis," discusses the fact that when economic models for the concert

broadcasting on digital platforms were still not fully developed, COVID-related measures restricting individual movement radically sped up demand for livestreaming in 2020. Drawing on notions of "immersiveness," this article explains why intermediary stakeholders, especially technical service providers, seem to be best placed to take advantage of the convergence between the economic production of concerts and their filming, rather than promoters or audio-visual producers.

COVID-19

As mentioned above, with the emergence of the first file sharing softwares, and the first streaming platforms, the music world underwent a huge change: musicians' incomes suffered a significant drop (except for the big stars, who still have contracts worth millions with these platforms) and they had to rely more and more on live performance and touring. It is not surprising that in recent decades we have seen an exponential growth of festivals all over the world. As Fabian Holt shows in his foreword, with COVID-19, all this has been called into question. In many ways, the pandemic precipitated the move of live concerts online? This disruptive innovation in the music world led artists to respond to consumer demand for greater participation and engagement with livestreams on YouTube and other social media platforms (Vandenberg, Berghman, and Schaap 2021). However, not all bands have the financial means, nor the technical skills, to make this transition satisfactorily. This socially distant paradigm (Frenneaux and Bennett 2021) raises numerous sociological questions that deserve to be properly analyzed, which the two articles of this section set to do.

Paul G. Barretta, Terrance Tompkins, and Jeff Apruzzsese, in their article "Impact and Hope for the Live Music Industry," examine the shifting ecologies of the live music industry, the reorganization of live music intermediaries and the future of live music and performances. Drawing on perspectives from both producers and consumers, the authors argue that livestreaming has emerged as a newly established component of the concert industry which will have long-lasting implications on the live music experience.

Lucas Wink, with "In the Virtual Field: Musical Performance and the New Dynamics of Bombos in Times of Covid-19," focuses on Bombos, a Portuguese musical ecosystem that annually mobilizes hundreds of individuals around live and collective musical practices with percussion and other instruments throughout Portugal. This article addresses the pandemic's impact on the dynamics of preparation and performance of Bombos. Operating from a logic that reflects a do it yourself ethos, musicians resorted to virtual modalities and digital tools not part of their usual modes of playing. The author, through an ethnography of virtual practices, aimed to elucidate how these individuals undertook actions to overcome the infeasibility of performing face to face.

As we conclude this introduction, we want to take time to reflect on some of the shortcomings of this Special Issue. Although it sheds light on multiple crucial aspects of live music, and makes an important contribution to the advancement of the field of live music studies, we have to confess the lack of attention given to the economic dynamics and organization around live music (Guerra et al. 2021; Howard et al. 2021). While recognizing this shortcoming, we want to offer some reflections on these aspects of live music. As a way to encourage future research and studies on live music, we identify three potential perspectives we believe to be particularly interesting and fruitful:

1. From amateurs to professionals of music

Since a large proportion of concert organizers work on a voluntary basis, the question of professionalization is a central one in the live music business. A reflection is needed on the forms of learning specific to concert professions and their transformations brought about by the gradual implementation of training programs; the forms of engagement of these volunteers; the impact of these employment patterns on the functioning of the concert organization and production structures, the boundaries between volunteers and professionals in terms of practical knowledge and working conditions.

2. Organization of the live music business

In his seminal analysis, Howard Becker (1982), underlined the need for the concerted work of a vast group of individuals for the art worlds to take place. We can easily take the axioms of this seminal analysis and apply them to the case of music and live music. In addition to musicians we should think about the "support personnel" whose work is essential, but who are often forgotten or undervalued in the studies focusing on this subject. Little is known about the different occupations (technicians, bookers, programmers) and organizations (festivals, ticket retailers, public funders) required to produce concerts, but also to market live music, and to exploit it in other formats. How do musicians and non-musicians collaborate to make, play or promote music? What is the role of intermediaries, such as agents, managers, promoters, journalists, etc.?

3. Working in the gig economy

In recent times the term gig economy has been used to describe, in a generalized way, new patterns of employment, based on the fragmentation of work, self-employment, short-term contracts and intermittency, high levels of precariousness and workforce exploitation, situations that go beyond the world of music and apply to the most diverse sectors of activity. But specifically as far as the live music business is concerned, it is important to reflect on: the employment practices and working conditions within the sector; musicians and other professionals' working lives and practices; new forms of live music market and new actors in action; responses and resistance to gig-work; forms of organization of live music workers in defense of their rights and in the fight for better working conditions.

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