Born to be Alive: Live music as a crucial dimension of 21st century popular music

Savage (2019) paints a devastating portrait of the music industry's current state. In the United States, record sales have dropped about 80% in the last decade: from 450 to 89 million, and its plight continues. From 2017 to 2018, worldwide record sales percentage plummeted an additional 23%. At the latest Grammy Awards, two of the nominees for best album never had a physical release. The situation becomes more acute when analyzing 2018's top selling records: the vast majority relates to film soundtracks. How can the music industry react? We must first consider that this is a very recent reality and that the actors' adaptability cannot keep up with the constant technological progress in music digitalization and that, these days, anyone with a computer or smartphone is able to download hundreds of albums and stockpile thousands of songs. We sometimes forget that those processes only started back in 1998 with the evolution of the MP3 player. At the time, the MP3 format allowed a revolutionary audio compression. It was a clear example of an action's non-intended consequences: a tool which was supposed to help the music industry ended up harming it in the long run. As we know, after MP3 came sharing websites like *Napster*, *KaZaa* with peer-to-peer downloads of free music. If, on the one hand, the number of downloads was ever-growing, the music industry's reaction was to potentially sue any and all people who illegally downloaded a file (Morris, 2015). The most recent example of this phenomenon in everyone's mind may be *Metallica*'s quixotic struggle.

Afterwards, the reaction was to make buying music easier than illegally downloading it. Current examples include *Spotify*, where, for a fixed monthly fee, users have an unlimited access to a large selection of music. However, it is impossible to return to how things were, to the era of the "traditional" model of record release, advertisement and sale. Musicians were the most affected of all, for they saw their profits plummet vertiginously, especially those who cannot be considered big stars in the industry. One – if not the main – way out of this situation was live music (Guibert & Sagot-Duvauroux, 2013). If we pay close attention, there have never been as many concerts and festivals as there are today (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 in *The Beatles*' tracks and stop touring), the truth is that, for many artists, touring is the most difficult part of the entire process, especially when it comes to bands based in peripheral countries like Portugal or Australia, which imply many hours on the road or endless air travel. 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.

In this sense, we have witnessed in the last decade the consolidation 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). Several authors, from different contexts, have contributed to the development of this theme, focusing on the implications of the increase in the importance of live music in 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 & Scott, 2018; Behr et al. 2016, 2019; Cohen, 2012, 2013; Frith, 2007; Hoeven & Hitters, 2019). At the same time, live music is increasingly 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).

The objective of this Special Issue is to question 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 hours on the road to get from concert to concert (Ballico & Carter, 2018; Smith & 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, which had been at the core of punk, 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 & Guerra, 2019a, 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, meaning, through the blurring between personal and professional spheres, the investment in social media as a means of forming contact networks to perform and tour in different countries? And what nefarious effects can this reality have for new players whose contact networks are not well established (Rogers, 2010) and who are in the more alternative aesthetic 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?

We therefore invite you to submit articles that address the following questions:

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, Becker (1982), underlined the need for the concerted work of a vast group of people for the art worlds to happen. 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.

4. A shifting concert sustainable ecology.

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

5. The live music ecologies during and post-COVID-19.

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. Among 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 analysis in the field over live music is 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 & Hitters, 2019).

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Submission Guidelines

Ethnomusicology Review is now accepting submissions for this Special Issue, scheduled for publication in Fall 2021. Started as *Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology (PRE)* in 1984, *Ethnomusicology Review* is an annual peer-reviewed journal managed by UCLA graduate students and a faculty advisory board. Our online format allows authors to rethink how they use media to present their argument and data, moving beyond the constraints of print journals. We encourage submissions that make use of video, audio, color photographs, and interactive media.

Articles are original essays of no more than 8000 words, and will be evaluated by the editors of this Special Issue. They are expected to extend current theoretical and/or methodological approaches to the study of music, broadly conceived, and may be written from a variety of disciplinary perspectives including ethnomusicology, musicology, anthropology, sociology and cultural studies. Articles explicitly engaging with contemporary ethnomusicological scholarship are particularly encouraged.

The submission deadline is **October 20, 2020**.

What to Submit

Articles

- Not more than 8000 words

- A brief (one paragraph) abstract, must be in English. For non-native English speakers, articles must be reviewed by at least 2 native-speakers before being submitted.

- Optional: a brief (one paragraph) biographical sketch

- An Author Agreement Form – available for download at the following link:

https://ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/2011-11-03_author_agreement.pdf

Requirements

- Email submissions to both paula.kismif@gmail.com, and slamonta@ucla.edu.

- Send text electronically as Word (.doc) documents.

- Format submissions in compliance with previous issues of *Ethnomusicology Review.*

- Bibliographies should use the Author-Date style used by this journal and the journal *Ethnomusicology* by the Society for Ethnomusicology. See past volumes for guidance.

- Send digital images in JPG, TIFF, PNG or other widely compatible formats.

- Send musical examples in MP3 format.

Authors must include any instructions pertaining to:

- Placement of images and audio examples, and their captions

- Special characters or fonts required

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