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# **Amplifying Music: A Gathering of Perspectives on the Resilience of Live Music in Communities During the Early Stages of the COVID-19 Era**

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## **Abstract**

As the novel coronavirus known as COVID-19 spread throughout the United States in March of 2020, the live music industry was shaken by temporary closures of venues, cancellation of festivals, and postponements of tours, among other effects. However long and to what extent the damage to the music industry would be, one thing was certain. At some point there would need to be a return to (a possible “new”) normal. The Amplify Music virtual conference was one of the first gatherings of music industry stakeholders to immediately address issues around the industry’s resilience in this pandemic and what it might look like. Leaders from throughout the world participated in the twenty-five consecutive hour convening. This paper summarizes many of the perspectives, observations, and ideas presented in regard to the future of the United States music industry post-pandemic.

Keywords: coronavirus, COVID-19, Amplify Music, National Independent Venue Association, NIVA, livestreaming, resilience

## **Introduction**

On the afternoon of March 2, 2020, Kate Becker, Creative Economy Strategist for King County, Washington, concluded her presentation at the closing session of a conference presented by the Responsible Hospitality Institute (RHI), an organization focused on nightlife in cities and “helping cities worldwide harness the power of the social economy.”<sup>1</sup> The conference, held in the heart of downtown Seattle and mere blocks away from Ms. Becker’s office, had begun two days earlier on the morning of February 29 when the very first death in the United States from the COVID-19 virus, also known as the coronavirus, had been reported in nearby

Kirkland, Washington, also a part of King County.<sup>2</sup> A local invasion of the virus, which had already reached sixty countries, infecting more than 87,000, and killing nearly 3,000, could possibly devastate the thriving nightlife and live music economy she had, ironically, been showcasing throughout the gathering.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, that possibility became reality. A little more than two weeks later, during a webinar conducted by the Music Policy Forum, Ms. Becker identified her environment as “ground zero” and as a “true humanitarian crisis.”<sup>4</sup> Minutes after concluding the RHI conference she had been given a new role as part of an emergency team: communication regarding all events involving attendance of fifty or more people, which would of course include live music events.<sup>5</sup> In essence, she now added public health to her job description. In the webinar she shared that during her short time in that role, “musicians lost their gig, festivals began to cancel, shows began to cancel, and clubs began closing,” all in that order, as government restrictions were put in place to try to mitigate the spread of the virus.<sup>6</sup>

In that same presentation, Ms. Becker also issued a warning to participants: “I’m sorry to tell you it’s either with you or it’s coming your way.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, many live music events had already been affected at that point. One of them, the 34<sup>th</sup> edition of the Austin, Texas, based South by Southwest music festival, was canceled only seven days after that first United States COVID-19 death.<sup>8</sup> At that point Dr. Mark Escott, Interim Medical Director and Health Authority for Austin Public Health, said there were no confirmed COVID-19 cases in the county, but had called this a “proactive step in preparing this community for this storm.”<sup>9</sup> At that time the U.S. death toll stood at 17, with all but one occurring in Washington state, and 200 confirmed cases throughout the country.<sup>10</sup> One other major domestic music event, the Ultra Music Festival in Miami, had already been canceled—prior to the South by Southwest decision.<sup>11</sup>

This was only the start. Four days later concert promoter Goldenvoice postponed its upcoming Coachella and Stagecoach festivals until October.<sup>12</sup> Tours by superstars Billie Eilish, BTS, Taylor Swift, Elton John, and many others were postponed or remaining dates were canceled.<sup>13</sup> By March 12, the world’s two largest live-event companies, Live Nation and AEG, had suspended all events through the end of the month and created “a global task force to drive strategic support and unified direction ensuring precautionary efforts and ongoing protocol are in the best interest of artists, fans, staff, and the global community.”<sup>14</sup> On March 15, California

governor Gavin Newsom announced the closing of bars, nightclubs, and brewpubs, following several other states' actions.<sup>15</sup> On the other side of the United States the virus was already wreaking havoc when New York City instituted shelter in place orders on March 20, thus further shuttering live music events and venues.<sup>16</sup> By April 1 the virus, which by then had killed more than 43,000 people worldwide, had brought live music in the United States to a virtual halt as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended that all gatherings and events of any kind be canceled or postponed until at least May.<sup>17</sup>

There was of course ever-increasing uncertainty and a steep learning curve for many during the adjustment to life during a public health catastrophe. During the shutdowns, alternate deliveries of live music, other sources of income and revenue, and possible payroll and labor adjustments unfortunately had to be considered. Daily music industry news updates on those and other immediate challenges began to flow regularly, providing information and data as to what various stakeholders needed to know.<sup>18</sup> Among those stakeholders were communities whose creative economies were negatively affected, to varying degrees, by the pandemic and by the resulting actions of their governments, health officials, and citizens. Many leaders within those creative economies, like Ms. Becker, were forced to work within those shifting contexts.

With those stakeholders in mind and within weeks of the many cancellations and closures, a unique international virtual conference was organized with the intent of quickly identifying how music in cities, states, and even entire countries would or could be resilient during this public health crisis.<sup>19</sup> Organized rapidly, the free event brought together as many voices as possible from throughout the world to share their experiences, concerns, learnings, and support. The gathering also aimed to connect individuals and networks to support further collaboration and communication beyond the conference itself.<sup>20</sup>

The findings, solutions, ideas, and strategies discussed during the lengthy event were all archived shortly afterward.<sup>21</sup> They now provide a still-frame insight into the perspectives shared at a particular moment during what we now know to be only the early stages of the COVID-19 era. The proceedings of the Amplify Music conference have provided a view into how many communities were addressing the numerous challenges they were experiencing.

The conference sessions addressed music's resilience to COVID-19 through a wide variety of lenses, including mental health, retail, and even music industry education.<sup>22</sup> In this examination of the conference conversations, the focus will be on live music, a segment that would likely involve the most touchpoints in relation to music communities and ecosystems. It is also likely the most affected by society's multiple transformations in the fight to mitigate the coronavirus. Additionally, this analysis involves a sampling of the most applicable sessions, which were a maximum of thirty minutes in length. That was hardly enough time to cover *all* of the related issues, which was not necessarily the intent of the gathering. In many ways the goal was to simply *begin* the dialogue and even create connections to encourage its continuation.<sup>23</sup> Finally, this was a worldwide gathering. Though community leaders from many countries contributed to the conversations, each of them was experiencing a different stage of the pandemic at the time of the conference. The United States in particular was only almost seven weeks past its first COVID-19 casualty. There is thus more of an emphasis on domestic conversations and topics. In this country, how much, or how little, did we really know? What were the major considerations? What were the priorities? Seen through the lens of documented conversations from a particular place and time, a particular convening of stakeholders, did there exist common perspectives on how live music within community ecosystems could be resilient in the COVID-19 era? If so, what were they?

### Amplifying Resilience During the Crisis

By mid-April there was plenty of concern regarding how and when the live music industry would recover from what the World Health Organization had weeks prior declared to be an official pandemic.<sup>24</sup> That concern and the cancellation of South by Southwest prompted the quick creation of the inaugural Amplify Music international around-the-clock virtual conference, which was scheduled for April 23-24, roughly six weeks after the first U.S. COVID-19 casualty.<sup>25</sup> Recognizing the urgency and the need to address recovery in this crisis sooner rather than later, conference organizers included the tagline "Resilience and Community Ecosystems" to highlight its central focus: the recovery of music ecosystems within communities during this crisis.<sup>26</sup> They also developed eleven core themes, including quick actions communities could take and what had been learned thus far,

how resilience might already be present and working in communities, best practices, recovery economics, and what the future may bring.<sup>27</sup>

In order to include other countries beyond the United States, the twenty-five consecutive-hour event would run from 2 p.m. MST on Thursday, April 23 until 3 p.m. MST the following day in order to accommodate speakers from twenty-one countries and twenty-three states in the U.S. The schedule included over one hundred thought leaders, professionals, educators, and other stakeholders for thirty-nine sessions of conversations about the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic to communities, local or national, and their music ecosystems.<sup>28</sup>

## Pandemic Activity Prior to Amplify Music

By the start of Amplify Music on April 23, there had been 42,103 reported deaths from COVID-19 in the United States.<sup>29</sup> 190,000 people had died worldwide.<sup>30</sup> More than 26.5 million Americans had filed unemployment claims.<sup>31</sup> The U.S. House of Representatives had just passed a \$480 billion package to help small businesses and hospitals expand COVID-19 testing.<sup>32</sup> The prior week both the House and the Senate had passed the monumental CARES Act that would put an unprecedented \$2 trillion into the economy.<sup>33</sup> In the United States, New York City was by then the “virus epicenter”.<sup>34</sup> Italy, Spain, France, and the United Kingdom, in that order, had been the most affected European countries.<sup>35</sup> In the Western Pacific Region, Singapore, Japan, the Philippines, and Malaysia were leading in terms of new cases.<sup>36</sup> One day prior to the Amplify conversations President Trump signed a controversial executive order to restrict certain categories of immigrants from entering the United States for sixty days.<sup>37</sup>

## What Is Resilience?

An aim of the very first session of the gathering was, perhaps fittingly, to define resilience. Amy Schwartzman, author of *The Cultural Place-keeping Guide* and a consultant to Performing Arts Readiness and FEMA, among other entities, noted that, “Resilience is the ability to recover from the blows and things that might hit you. So, you need to be grounded. You need to be flexible. You need to have balance. You need to be going both inward and outward.”<sup>38</sup> Mollie Quinlan Hayes, who directs ArtsReady, an organization that helps arts organizations prepare for any type of crisis, emphasized “all hazards planning” in addressing resilience proactively and in the moment.<sup>39</sup> Though the pandemic was a monumental crisis and

we had no idea when it would end, there were “things that could be done to alleviate the fear if we incorporate all hazards planning.”<sup>40</sup>

## Two Early Experiences

Still working incredibly long hours after suddenly being thrust into a public health role for mass gatherings, Kate Becker reported during an early Amplify session that Seattle was figuring out “how to get to a safe place for our community and then how do we get business back up, which is complex.”<sup>41</sup> However, much had been learned thus far, so much so that she and her team had already created a “COVID-19 Handbook”, which they were updating daily on their King County Creative website.<sup>42</sup> Her colleague, Scott Plusquellec, from the Office of Film and Music, said that early in the experience one of the things he and his team did was try to locate resources for shuttered venues.<sup>43</sup> They found that loans and grants were rarely available for businesses that served alcohol, served only people over twenty-one, and had fewer employees, among other issues.<sup>44</sup> But the good news was that music stakeholders and the Seattle Music Commission were joining forces to figure out a structure and to determine how to address their needs.<sup>45</sup> He added that “it brought everyone together in a way that hadn’t happened before.”<sup>46</sup> Ben Van Houten, representing San Francisco, where a case was first reported on March 5 and stay-at-home orders were issued by March 16, suggested that his experience was very similar and “probably tragically similar across the country and across the world.”<sup>47</sup> Everything was now “under the microscope, given how fragile this industry is going to continue to be moving forward...and how critical it is to a recovery.”<sup>48</sup> According to Mr. Van Houten, given the limits that had been put on mass gatherings indefinitely by California’s governor and priorities for shrinking municipal funds, they would be in a “limbo, challenging phase” for a long time.<sup>49</sup>

## Immediate Resources Availability

While Seattle and San Francisco had been facing challenges in seeking funding, in another session Lisa Gedgaudas, Program Administrator of Create Denver in Denver, Colorado, reported that there were by that time 83 COVID-19 deaths locally and 374 deaths statewide.<sup>50</sup> She described the creation of an Arts Through It All campaign, which asked citizens and organizations to contribute to a community support fund and provided ticket buyers of canceled shows the option to donate their refunds to it.<sup>51</sup>

During the previous month, her office created a Denver Artist Assistance Fund, with about \$150,000 to provide to artists experiencing financial challenges.<sup>52</sup> Three hundred applications were received in the first six hours, at which point they had to close it.<sup>53</sup> Her team had also been creating a website that identified not only local funding sources but national funding mechanisms as well.<sup>54</sup>

During the session titled “How Can Local Foundations and Organizations Help?”, Nurit Siegel Smith, Executive Director of the House of Blues Music Forward Foundation mentioned her organization’s Crew Nation initiative.<sup>55</sup> She shared that the program was “a global relief fund that is assisting those working within the music industry who are impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak.”<sup>56</sup> The funding would support the crews and workers who “power live music” and had “fallen through that net” of support.<sup>57</sup>

## The Need for Data

As cities indicated they were seeking financial support, advocacy, and a voice for their music venues and the artists who perform within them, the need for data collection early on in the crisis was a common theme among speakers.<sup>58</sup> This was especially evident during the session in which music community leaders in New Orleans contrasted COVID-19 challenges with their experiences during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, an event that had devastated that city’s economy.<sup>59</sup> Jordan Hirsch, Executive Director of Sweet Home New Orleans, referred to that crisis and how “initially the data we collected was tied to particular resources we were trying to get.”<sup>60</sup> They would say to musicians, “In order to qualify for X program we need to know your pre-Katrina income and post-Katrina income”.<sup>61</sup> They found many other uses for the collected data and this led to more sophisticated reporting which became more and more useful.<sup>62</sup> It even helped them secure significant funding from the Ford Foundation.<sup>63</sup> So, it came as no surprise that the same approach was being applied to the COVID-19 crisis.

Beyond driving private funding and community relations, the importance of data was also discussed during several other parts of the conference as a necessary foundation for developing government policy and funding support. One presenter mentioned that, “Data is the language of policy. The best way to advocate in your community is to get data, because that’s what policymakers want to hear to move the needle.”<sup>64</sup>



That was also the philosophical approach behind I Lost My Gig Australia, an initiative around the live music sector implemented by the Australian Festival Association and the Australian Music Industry Network in the early stages of that country's confrontation with the coronavirus.<sup>65</sup> The organization's website ([ilostmygig.net.au](http://ilostmygig.net.au)) seeks "to bring together the hard data and thousands of stories of live events workers who were suddenly set adrift and to take them to government to press for action."<sup>66</sup>

During a session on working with local governments on a response, Jane Slingo, founder of Global Cities After Dark, shared that after the government announced the cessation of any events involving more than five hundred people, "the speed to getting that [website] live was absolutely crucial."<sup>67</sup> Whenever an artist's performance was canceled, they would enter their data, especially lost wages, at the site.<sup>68</sup> Concert workers also contributed their information.<sup>69</sup> The cumulative data could be tracked day to day for a near-real-time window into what was happening.<sup>70</sup> It "was the catalyst for a sector-wide task force of over fifty organizations with everyone from Spotify to our recording industry association to our performing rights organizations, and on and on" according to Ms. Slingo.<sup>71</sup> From that task force's work a social media campaign was created and it led to a \$650 million funding request to the government.<sup>72</sup> Though it hadn't been approved at the time of the Amplify Conference, Ms. Slingo pointed out that it was nevertheless crucial in making the government realize that the number of workers in the gig economy was much larger than they imagined.<sup>73</sup>

Australia's I Lost My Gig campaign was actually inspired by a program with the same name developed by three individuals in Austin, Texas, and was set up about an hour after South by Southwest was canceled.<sup>74</sup> However, that particular initiative also had a crowdfunding element.<sup>75</sup> A March 15 update on the site stated that the total amount of reported lost income at that point was \$4,285,037.<sup>76</sup> During a session dedicated entirely to data collection, Don Pitts, former head of the City of Austin's Music and Entertainment Division, discussed a national survey his new company, Music Cities Together, had recently begun distributing.<sup>77</sup> He shared that, among other findings, early indications were that the confidence level in obtaining local or federal funding was extremely low.<sup>78</sup> One of his concerns in putting his survey out was a debate that the (Austin) I Lost My Gig initiative might have gone up too early to accurately calculate the losses.<sup>79</sup> Mr. Pitts' team worked for a while on a free survey that cities could

use to gather data.<sup>80</sup> At the moment “six or seven” cities had signed on to utilize that resource.<sup>81</sup>

## New Initiatives

Throughout the many conversations around the resilience of live music there were several other initiatives identified in addition to I Lost My Gig that had already taken root during the early stages of the pandemic. Dayna Frank, owner/CEO of the legendary Minneapolis, Minnesota music venue First Avenue, was only a few weeks into her role as president of the newly formed National Independent Venue Association (NIVA) when she participated in a session on the future of live music venues and events.<sup>82</sup> NIVA was formed soon after the first round of stimulus checks were distributed by the U.S. government, which was an attempt to stimulate the economy ravaged by the pandemic.<sup>83</sup> Ms. Frank described the organization at the time of the conference as “a collection of now almost eleven hundred independent venues and promoters across all fifty states that have joined forces to fight for meaningful federal legislation to protect the future of the independent (live) music economy.”<sup>84</sup>

During a separate session, Dani Grant, owner and general manager of the Mishawaka Amphitheatre in Fort Collins, Colorado, shared that she and several others had very recently created a task force with a goal of helping independent venues to work with their local governments to identify how they can be the best “public health assistant” to their governments when they reopen.<sup>85</sup> Using the moniker Reopen Every Venue Safely (REVS), the task force’s goals would also include allowing a venue to have whatever identity it wants without feeling “watched.”<sup>86</sup> But they would also be seeking funding from government to “have the right-skilled people at the venues to do those types of things.”<sup>87</sup> She added that “my bouncers don’t want to become public health officials and I don’t want them to, either.”<sup>88</sup>

Along with new initiatives borne from the crisis, new means of educating and communicating to music stakeholders were established, especially since so many were having to stay home. Three weeks after the first death from COVID-19 in the United States, the Music Policy Forum began presenting an ongoing series of free Friday webinars dedicated to various music related topics.<sup>89</sup> It was one of many music-related entities that began offering free webinars prior to the Amplify Music conference.<sup>90</sup>

## Considering the Future of Live Music

When would music venues be reopening? That was perhaps the most burning question on everyone's mind during the Amplify Music conference—as well as on the minds of people throughout the music industry. Notwithstanding a cure or vaccine for COVID-19, reopening venues would likely be *the* best first step toward a solution for most of the challenges music communities were facing. During a session that considered the road ahead for live music, the unfortunate short answer was, “I don't know.”<sup>91</sup> Dayna Frank responded that it would simply be up to the local doctors and governments.<sup>92</sup> Eric Gilbert, Director and co-founder of the Treefort Music Fest in Boise, Idaho, referred to guidance in his state that suggested venues and events might be able to reopen as early as the end of June, though possibly with limited capacities.<sup>93</sup> But, he added, “because a lot of these events are booked well into the future, trying to understand that moving target is pretty challenging.”<sup>94</sup> For context, as of mid-April, many major music festivals and tours weren't yet canceled, and some had scheduled postponements. Chicago's Lollapalooza festival, originally scheduled for early August, would not be canceled until June 9.<sup>95</sup> At the time of Mr. Gilbert's comments, Milwaukee, Wisconsin's Summerfest, “The World's Largest Music Festival,” was still on the schedule for September.<sup>96</sup>

The horrible timing of the pandemic, in relation to most concert venue's timelines, had exacerbated the situation, especially for outdoor venues. Chris Zacher, executive director of one of the many Levitt Pavilion amphitheaters in the U.S., expounded on that conundrum by mentioning that, “All of our revenue is generated between May and September of each year, and we have to generate enough revenue to get from September to May the following year.”<sup>97</sup> Potential sponsorships, planning, etc., with so many uncertainties could put venues like his in “preservation mode.”<sup>98</sup> Ms. Frank referred to articles she'd been reading which opined that, due to the shutdowns, local independent venues like hers and Mr. Zacher's would be losing significant market share in the near term to the more cash-heavy major live music companies like AEG and Live Nation.<sup>99</sup> However, Mr. Zacher offered that “the investment in those organizations is going to go down when there's no activity, which might provide a bump for all of us independents”.<sup>100</sup>

There was at least one unanimous sentiment during this and other sessions. The concept of opening at half-capacity or less would be a challenge not only due to the economics, but to the “vibe” of the event as well.

According to Ms. Frank, “It kind of sucks the energy out of the room” for the attendees and the performer[s], comparing it to drastically poor-selling shows.<sup>101</sup> Mr. Zacher added, “The safest thing to do is to wait until it’s safe enough to do full shows. But how many of us are going to be able to survive through that is really the question that nobody can answer right now.”<sup>102</sup> The X factor for local venues appears to be the funding. Mr. Zacher underscored this when he said, “If we’re successful in procuring funding from city, state, and federal authorities, we’re going to have a much better chance.”<sup>103</sup> Another shared prospect within Amplify Music discussions was the distinct possibility that—given this was a health crisis rendering large gatherings as dangerous—music venues had been among the first to close and they could be the last to reopen, a fear that NIVA highlighted in its messages to policymakers.<sup>104</sup>

There were also other unknowns in regard to the immediate or long-term future of live music that were discussed during the sessions. For example, assuming that when venues are reopened it will likely be within the context of a recovering economy, will average ticket prices need to decrease? Given all of the quarantining and staying at home during the pandemic, to what extent will consumers be reluctant to leave their homes for any reason, much less a concert? Conversely, when concert venues reopen, how much pent up demand will exist among consumers who might be aching to return to enjoying live music in person?

A separate session centered more on the potential consumer experience with live music gatherings in the context of a “new normal” environment likely ahead.<sup>105</sup> For example, in a world more fearful of viruses, will it be mandatory for everyone’s activities and movements to be tracked via their phones in order to support contact tracing and/or to know where or when crowds have gathered? UCLA professor Gigi Johnson put forth that potentiality as well as the question of liability for venues who admit someone who is infected and spreads a virus to others.<sup>106</sup> Entertainment attorney Dave Ratner pointed out that contact tracing as a practice may have privacy issues to resolve.<sup>107</sup> Add to all of this the fact that permitting for venues is already expensive. Professor Johnson pointed out that if the costs to add many precautionary measures are significant, it could lead to an increase in pop-up/underground shows, thus affecting competition for the conforming venues.<sup>108</sup>

## Livestreaming in the COVID-19 Era...and Beyond?

In early March, at the beginning of the pandemic and the subsequent closing of music venues, the obvious challenge for musicians who lost gigs was how to replace that lost income. Perhaps because it was the most likely go-to, especially considering stay-at-home orders and quarantines, online virtual performances and livestreaming vastly increased in prominence. Viewership in the Music and Performance Arts category on Twitch rose by 524%—from an average of 92,000 viewers to 574,000 viewers—during that month.<sup>109</sup> There was a reported 70% increase in Instagram video streaming from mid-to-late March in the U.S.<sup>110</sup> By the beginning of April, *Billboard* was reporting on companies like StageIt, Side Door, and Looped that were enabling artists to transition from free performances to hard ticketed livestreamed concerts in an attempt to replace lost touring income.<sup>111</sup>

Given this trend and the opportunity it presented for artists, it was certainly appropriate to include a panel discussion on livestreaming within the Amplify conference. During the session, Maestro CEO Ari Evans explained that four years earlier his company had approached artists about livestreaming and been met with a “what is livestreaming?” type of response.<sup>112</sup> But after the collapse of the live music industry due to the COVID-19 shutdowns, artists were not only suddenly flocking to livestreaming but also seeking out new monetization mechanisms within it.<sup>113</sup> Mr. Evans pointed out that the Maestro platform provides that opportunity, supporting the ability to add options like virtual gifts, paywalls, and integrated merchandising to the experience.<sup>114</sup> He considered livestreaming to be the “quintessential communication format of today’s age” because it provides the opportunity to provide deeper relationships between the audience and the artist, among other things.<sup>115</sup>

U.K. artist Emma McGann joined the conversation as an artist who had for the past six years already taken full advantage of livestreaming and made it her full-time approach to performing after starting off on a platform called YouNow.<sup>116</sup> She admitted that, “In the very early beginning it was very unusual to get used to” after she had grown accustomed to performing in person.<sup>117</sup> But it was now “second nature” to her.<sup>118</sup> To her the “why’s” for livestreaming included community building, the interaction with fans, and the lifting of barriers versus the traditional live show.<sup>119</sup> Ironically, she was starting her first in-person trek of the U.S. when the pandemic began and the tour had to be canceled.<sup>120</sup>

When asked what tips she would offer to artists looking into livestreaming, she responded that the first question she's usually asked is, "How do you monetize this straightaway?"<sup>121</sup> Her response has been, "Really you shouldn't be worrying about monetization at this time if this is going to be a long-term thing. First, focus on community building."<sup>122</sup>

While the discussion mostly centered on a strong outlook and a world of possibilities for livestreaming, there were still some potential obstacles to consider. For example, the complexity of licensing issues can be daunting and it is still a "wild west" environment, especially among the various lesser-known platforms.<sup>123</sup> In fact, in an article published the day before the Amplify conference, attorney Eleanor Lackman was quoted in regard to livestreaming that, "There's probably a lot of infringement going on. We've had this flood of use with the stay-at-home orders, and there has to be a lot out there that isn't licensed."<sup>124</sup>

In regard to livestreaming, perhaps the biggest "what if?" mentioned during several other Amplify sessions involved consumer preferences once in-person venues reopened. One panelist insisted that, "While these live experiences online are really great, I don't think they're a replacement for the experience you get at a live show—that energy that people share within the venue. People feed off that, and it's really hard to do when you're looking at a computer screen."<sup>125</sup>

## The Vulnerabilities Had Been Exposed

During a session early in the conference, Seattle's Scott Plusquellec recalled the mood during that weekend at the late-February Responsible Hospitality Institute event, when "it was a conference that was all about the strengths of the (nightlife) industry and about the strides that we had made, where cities were paying more attention to nightlife and their music industries. What were the next magnificent things that will involve this industry?" But, he added, "In some ways this [pandemic] has ripped the whole blindfold off. Maybe we haven't gotten to where we thought we were."

A similar assumption regarding the live music industry may also have been debunked by the arrival of COVID-19. During one of the discussions, Michael Bracy, President of the Music Policy Forum, made the point that, "Music workers, both performers and crew, and everybody who works in the chain, have been extraordinarily vulnerable forever."<sup>126</sup> He later added, in reference to the role of Music Cities organizations, "We

knew that the existing structures did not meet the needs of the challenges of the music community.”<sup>127</sup> Moreover, he concluded, “There’s a fundamental disconnect between the power and importance of music and how it is reflected in economic structures in this country and globally.”<sup>128</sup>

During a session specifically focused on what the crisis has taught us about the current music industry, Karen Reece, President of the Urban Community Arts Network and a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, pointed out an already-existing disparity that was only being magnified by the pandemic.<sup>129</sup> Her work centers on providing equal opportunities for hip-hop artists and people of color in festivals and on stages.<sup>130</sup> She stated that, “With COVID-19, it’s emerging that there are some similar inequities happening within all of the livestreaming that’s coming out.”<sup>131</sup> Within much of the increased livestreaming content being made available “we’re just not seeing that hip-hop representation.”<sup>132</sup>

## Conclusion

Several common themes emerged during the Amplify Music 2020 virtual conference. There clearly existed a much-shared need for external monetary support. It was agreed that the collection of data and development of managed communication were necessary to achieve that support. Moreover, mechanisms to educate, build consensus, and to advocate needed to be activated if they weren’t already. Additionally, there was a recognition of the reality that the live music ecosystem was in itself inherently already vulnerable and would likely have to transform—the extent to which it was still too early to determine given what was known then. These seemed to be among the major perspectives in determining how resilient live music within communities could be during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As of this writing, there is of course an advantage in that at least two months have passed since these dialogues happened. We certainly know more now than we did then, for better or for worse. Either way, live music has made progress in some respects, and in others it has not. For example, some credit for the writing of the RESTART Act, a bipartisan U.S. Senate bill that would support business most affected by shutdowns, has been attributed to NIVA.<sup>133</sup> In the meantime, though, many music venues have not survived the crisis and have closed permanently.<sup>134</sup> What *is* clear at this moment is that the effects of COVID-19 are still by far the most prominent challenges for the live music economy in many cities.<sup>135</sup>

An analysis of just one collection of conversations to form a general observation may have its drawbacks. Not every country in the world, nor every state in the United States, was represented at the Amplify Music conference. That would of course be nearly impossible for any such event. Given how quickly it was organized, scheduling conflicts, and other factors, there were certainly key stakeholders and voices who were not at the table. That fact was acknowledged in the very first Amplify session.<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, this was a sample, similar in nature to any other experimental dataset. It also represented a distinct and relatively uniform point in time, where no contributor had one hundred percent certainty of what would happen the next month, week, or even day in terms of the spread or mitigation of COVID-19. Perhaps with each moment that passes the Amplify Music conversations are less and less relevant. On the other hand, the conference itself may have been helpful in “moving the needle” more quickly toward recovery. Time will surely tell. Many months or years from now there might be much to learn from the initial actions and reactions communicated during the convening, especially if there is another pandemic. The history of the live music industry during the COVID-19 era, in general and within communities, will of course eventually be written. The Amplify Music conversations could prove to be useful artifacts for that work.

The documentation of the latest version of the playbook for the resilience of music in communities began that day back in early March of 2020 as Kate Becker added a public health element to her creative economy role. One particular Amplify Music speaker referred to her as “our Paul Revere” in that she immediately elevated a call to action in other cities while she was addressing the emergency in her own.<sup>137</sup> The Amplify Music 2020 conference, given its timing and approach, was in essence a gathering of many “Paul Reveres”. Their messages, at that time, were absolutely helpful to the battle ahead and will remain relevant until communities can defeat the effects of COVID-19 on their music economies.



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