Listen, Watch, Play and Relax: YouTube, Video Games and Library Music in Everyday Life During the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

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Life During the Pandemic

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One of the main impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic was the sudden change of routines and daily life on a global scale. The day-to-day activities that were once spread across several spaces – cars, cities, public transport, offices and other workplaces, schools, restaurants and bars – became, for many, confined to the domestic space, often shared between several people. The transposition of these activities to a domestic context eroded the distinction between places dedicated to leisure, and those dedicated to work and study. This shift also stimulated the creation of new sound and audiovisual content tailored for audiences in quarantine who accessed this content predominantly online. Musicians were also required to adapt, with the majority of their professional activity moving to digital mediums. In this paper, departing from three different online contexts - a video game, a YouTube channel and library music websites - we analyse and discuss some of the ways in which the pandemic motivated the creation and circulation of new digital and sound content, in addition to the impact of this content in day-to-day life during Covid-19.

Introduction

With the spread of Covid-19 and the consequent lockdown measures implemented by numerous countries, it didn't take long for musicians and other professionals in the music industries to express a shared anxiety: what would be the impact of the pandemic on their work? From the new practices they would have to adopt, to the drastic decrease (or complete disappearance) of their income, the possible solutions to the problems and the debate surrounding them have had public visibility when it comes to cancelled

concerts and festivals, delayed album releases, bars and other live music venues that have closed down, and suspended music lessons.

Indeed, the media widely reported the concern felt by musicians whose main income sources derive from performance and the release of music through traditional record labels. An online article in *Rolling Stone* lamented the cancellation of the Coachella festival, of tours by both famous and lesser-known musicians, and the closure of large concert halls, beginning with the alarming statement that: "COVID-19 has totally upended music ... By mid-March, the coronavirus pandemic had effectively put the multibillion-dollar concert industry on indefinite pause and brought cataclysmic knock-on effects into the rest of the music business as well." [1] In this period, Wikipedia was already hosting a page called "Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the music industry," with a listing of the various types of events affected: festivals, conferences, tours, concerts, artistic residences, contests, and award ceremonies.[2]

Some of the media coverage of the impact of Covid-19 on musical activities also touched on certain practices that were not adversely affected by, or that even benefitted from, the pandemic: namely, musical creation at home, using software and samples. The companies that sell these digital music tools were quick to offer discounts to promote their products.[3] This was paired with the testimonials of indie musicians who claimed they had created more music than ever during their confinement, producing entire albums in their home studios to attempt to compensate for the income they had lost with the cancellation of concerts.[4]

However, it is particularly interesting to note not only what these sources mention, but also what they omit. They neglect the impacts on all other musical practices and activities that don't land on the spectrum of record labels and concerts - thus equating 'record labels' with 'music industry' – and, in that sense, revealing a simplistic vision of the 'music industry' as a singular, homogenous entity, rather than a wide variety of industries shaped by different practices, goals and problems, an issue already explored in detail by Keith Negus.[5] The effects of the pandemic were also felt in many other domains of musical creation and reception, whether with clear negative consequences or noteworthy transformations, as composers, performers and audiences adapted to a new reality.

Taking those transformations into account, and focusing on the production and consumption of music through digital mediums, this paper examines two main research questions. Firstly, in what fundamental ways has the Covid-19 pandemic change the

everyday lives of working musicians, and how has it influenced the kinds of music being released (or rebranded) in online platforms, as composers and producers have sought to adapt to new demands caused by lockdown measures and other consequences of the global health crisis? Secondly, how did consumers resort to music as a functional 'tool' to shape their everyday life during the pandemic, and to better cope with the disruption it brought to their day-to-day life?

To approach these questions, we will take a closer look at three different contexts of music production that have been mostly disregarded when discussing the impact of the pandemic on musical activity: YouTube videos, video game music, and library music. In order to explore the adaptations that existing musical material has undergone throughout the pandemic and how it influenced the creation of new content and, in turn, the ways in which this content was used during new daily activities, each section will focus on specific cases from which wider conclusions can be gleaned about the impact of Covid-19 on the production and consumption of music in digital and audiovisual contexts. For this purpose, we will take inspiration from Tia DeNora's insights on music as a functional resource and technology of the self to shape everyday life, modulate mood and regulate routines.[6] The following sections will therefore explore how music has been deliberately harnessed by individuals as a tool for relaxation or as an 'escape' from confinement. In addition, they will also examine how music has come to shape the soundscape of everyday life during the pandemic more indirectly, through its inclusion in audiovisual content that is consumed daily.

"Sleep Music to Boost Immunity"

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the governments of most countries implemented measures of confinement and social distancing. Whole populations were forced to stay at home and restructure their daily and family routines. Remote work became a reality for many people and the domestic space became the stage for activities that were usually carried out outsider of the home, but were now undertaken in a space often shared with relatives or other individuals who were not previously directly included in these activities. The danger of contamination by Covid-19 and the restructuring of domestic and

family life in conjunction with working life led many people to find themselves in states of anxiety that are characteristic of times of crisis.[7]

Through media such as television or digital social networks, citizens have been given various pieces of advice to take care of personal hygiene and socially distance to prevent the spread of Covid-19. These recommendations come from public entities but also from individuals with public reach, such as news anchors, politicians and artists from various areas who have made use of their media exposure to convey messages that appeal to civic duty by repeating phrases such as "wash your hands," "always leave your shoes at the door," or "don't kiss or hug your relatives and friends," or sharing photographs and texts on digital platforms accompanied by hashtags such as #StayHomeStaySafe.[8]

Along with this advice on physical protection for the good of all, other advice directed at protecting mental health also emerged, addressing the stress caused by the imminent danger of contamination and disease, the sudden change of routines and the confinement to domestic space. Articles and messages on a number of platforms have advocated maintaining a routine and working schedule, and taking care of one's personal appearance, even when working at home. This advice has included promoting shared activities that can be done individually or with the family, on one hand to keep an active and busy mind, and on the other hand to overcome the loneliness and boredom caused by social distancing. These recommendations have come from psychologists, doctors and therapists in various fields, but also from so-called 'influencers' who share what they claim to be their individual strategies for managing time and space during quarantine and the pandemic more broadly. Personal trainers and gyms have shared videos of sports classes to be followed at home, many of them to keep the body active, but others, with a more holistic approach often associated with practices such as yoga, have promoted mental health in addition to physical health, through meditation and relaxation strategies.[9]

Along with these meditation and relaxation strategies, various media producers around the world associated with practices such as yoga, have shared playlists to help with relaxation and to cope with life in confinement.[10] In the same spirit, on 18th April 2020, Moby shared a playlist on his Facebook page which, according to him, had the potential to help people sleep, meditate, relax and find calm.[11] This playlist is hosted on Spotify and YouTube and was created by Moby himself, initially for his individual use. The list consists of tracks composed by Moby, drawing on three albums from his career: *Hotel Ambient* (2014), *Long Ambients 1: calm. sleep.* (2016) and *Long Ambients Two* (2019) which, like a large part of his work, sit within the ambient genre. On 15th May

2020, Moby released the 17th album of his career, *all visible objects*. Without calling into question Moby's good intentions in sharing with his followers and fans these playlists dedicated to relaxation, sleep and meditation, and noting that the profits obtained from his work have been used in actions to defend human and animal rights, sharing this playlist can still be considered a marketing strategy for the promotion of the album Moby released soon after. What is interesting in the context of our research is how the musician articulated the characteristics of his music with the new realities of the lockdown period.[12]

Without further study it is not possible to see how exactly the playlists shared by the various people mentioned above, as well as all the other tips on how to overcome confinement, were used, and what effects they had on their users. However, using the *Google Trends* tool it is possible to ascertain what searches have been made by internet users in specific geographical locations or time periods, and how the same search terms increased or decreased over time. This tool can be used for different facets of Google searches (web, images, news, shopping), as well as YouTube searches. It is also possible, in conjunction with all these variants, to insert various search terms and compare their evolution.

For the purposes of this research, this tool was used to perceive how, during the confinement period, worldwide demand on YouTube varied for sound compositions dedicated to sleep, relaxation and meditation, and what other impacts confinement had on searches for these audiovisual works. The search period was defined as the months of February, March and April 2020.[13] We compared the following search terms: "sleeping music," "relaxing music," "meditation music," "sleeping sounds," "relaxing sounds," "meditation sounds," "music for sleeping," "music for relaxation," and "music for meditation." [14] Analysing the way the research for these terms on YouTube evolved in the defined period, it can be seen that the pandemic led to an increase in the appetite for videos using these search terms, with a peak in the middle of April. It is also clear that the search for these terms, like others related to them, had an exponential increase in demand.[15] There is, therefore, a connection between the pandemic and the need for audiovisual stimuli related to relaxation, sleep and meditation, where music and sound are used for self-regulation and self-modulation.[16]

Unrelated to the changes brought about by the pandemic, there are numerous YouTube channels dedicated to the production and sharing of content specifically designed for sleep, relaxation and meditation. These channels have millions of subscribers and their videos thousands of views, such as Relaxing White Noise, Soothing Relaxation and Yellow Brick Cinema - Relaxing Music.[17] Faced with the increase in

demand for these audiovisual products, we sought to inquire if the production and sharing of content on these YouTube channels was influenced by the pandemic. To answer this question, we analyse below the specific case of one of these channels: Yellow Brick Cinema - Relaxing Music. This channel was chosen because it is one of the first and most frequent to appear whenever one searches for the terms mentioned above, it has a high number of subscribers and video views, and it has shared specific content in response to the pandemic, as is explored below. As well as a YouTube channel, Yellow Brick Cinema - Relaxing Music also has a website and an app for mobile devices.

The Yellow Brick Cinema channel has been on YouTube since January 2013 and has 4.27 million subscribers. Its description states it is a channel dedicated to music for relaxation and improved sleep. The channel is led by a woman named Margie but, as she states herself, the music is by (almost always anonymous) composers, who are, according to Margie, experts in the field.[18] This process of composition and content sharing is very similar to the practices of musical composition and circulation that are characteristic of library music.[19] Besides original compositions, preexisting classical music by canonical composers such as Beethoven and Mozart is used. These musical pieces are integrated into videos with the same purposes of relaxation and wellbeing. The use of classical music for relaxation is not exclusive to this channel, nor to YouTube, being a common practice, for instance, on radio stations such as the British station *Classic FM*, as discussed by Jarman Freya.[20]

Within the context of music created and used to relax, sleep and meditate, but in smartphone and tablet apps rather than YouTube, Anahid Kassabian defines a set of categories for audiovisual compositions.[21] From her analysis of apps, the author finds several patterns in the products used and divides the sound content into four categories: "sounds," "music," "voice," and "binaural beats." These four categories are also identifiable in videos hosted on YouTube and on several channels with the same purpose. In the case of Yellow Brick Cinema, however, in terms of the sound content of compositions identified as original, there are only videos that fall into the categories of "music" or "binaural beats."

Regarding the category "music," Kassabian maintains that it includes content based on the principles of the composition of Muzak from the 1930s to the 1980s, associated with an idea of "beautiful music" — tracks without percussion, without voice and with simple harmonies.[22] The category "binaural beats" covers works that have a conjugation of frequencies. In Yellow Brick Cinema, the tracks have the "binaural beats" auditory effect, but also have the formal organisation and timbre characteristics that place them in

the category of music as defined by Kassabian. Thus, for this channel, we consider that in terms of sound content there are two types of videos: those that use classical music and those that use original music. The original music tracks use sounds produced by a synthesiser, which often imitates string instruments (namely harp), flutes or tuned metal bars, with simple melodies, without a strong beat or the use of percussion. There is also a prevalence of piano, especially in videos that use classical music.

In terms of format, three types can be identified on this channel. The first is *video* — a video where there is an articulation of sound and image. The videos are pre-made and then shared on the channel. There is also a prevalence of long duration tracks which use sounds.[23]
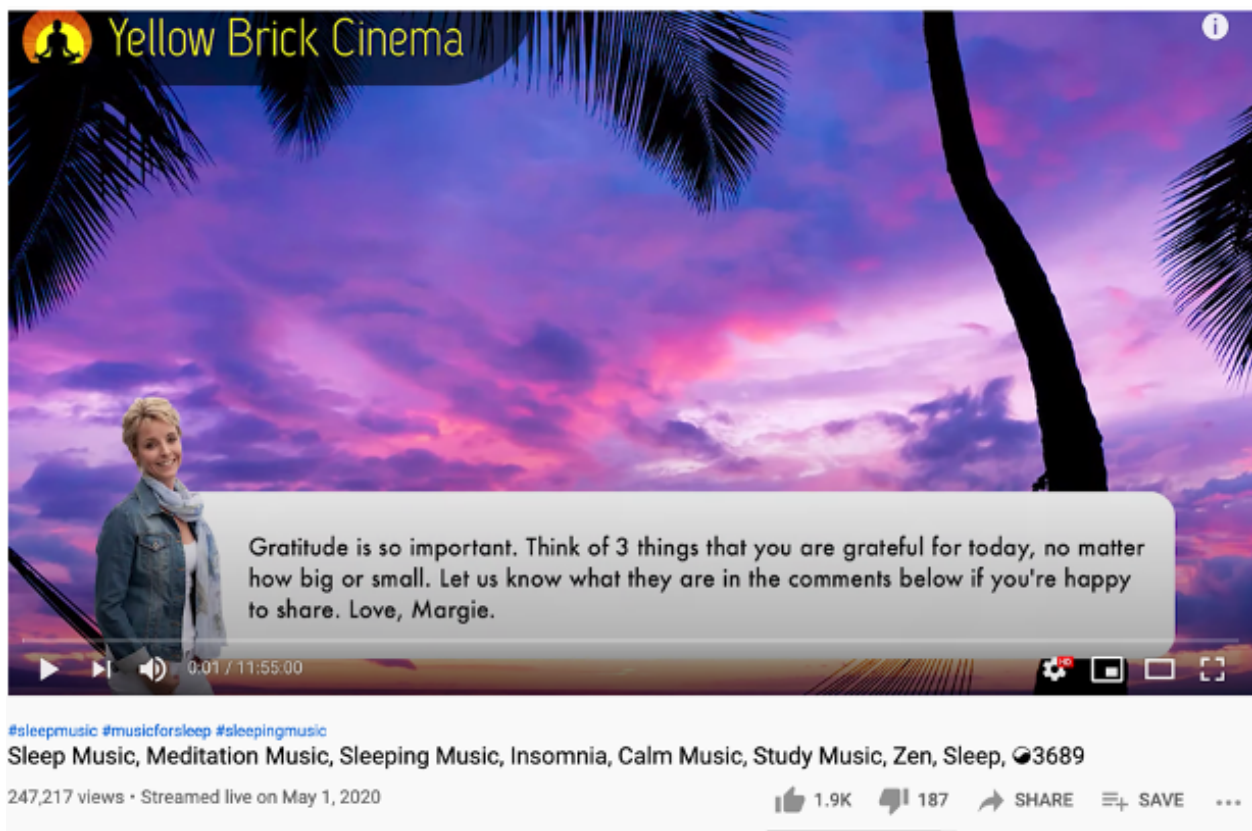

Figure 1. Screenshot from Yellow Brick Cinema – Relaxing Music, "Sleep Music, Meditation Music, Sleeping Music, Insomnia, Calm Music, Study Music, Zen, Sleep, ☯3689," streamed live on May 2, 2020, accessed September 29, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSW8eXr5NWQ.

The second is *live*, which also articulate sound and image but are transmitted live. The user can only hear and see what is being transmitted at that moment or what was

previously transmitted. Most are uninterrupted transmissions. Some specific moments of
these live broadcasts are then transformed into videos, as mentioned before.

Figure 2. Still of a live stream from Yellow Brick Cinema, Youtube channel,
https://www.youtube.com/user/yellowbrickcinema/videos.

The third is *Playlist* — a set of videos almost always with a common purpose, to fall
asleep, concentrate, or relax, for example. The videos that the channel has previously
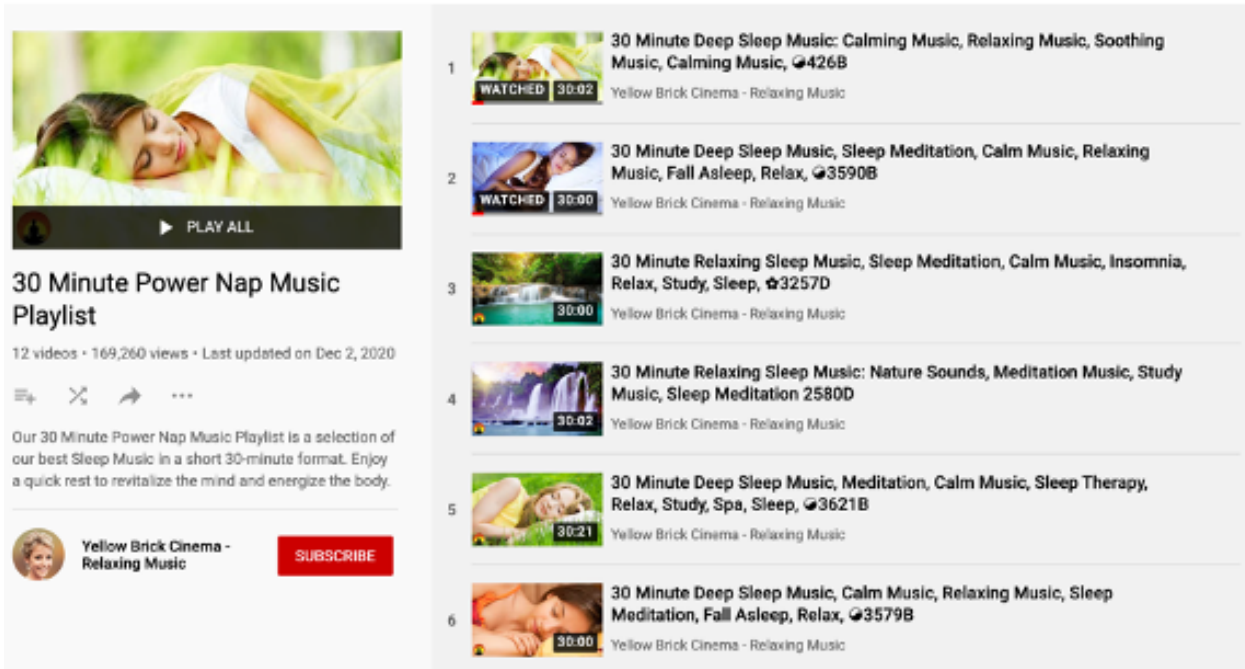shared are used for this purpose.

Figure 3. Screenshot of a playlist from Yellow Brick Cinema – Relaxing Music, "30 Minute Power Nap Music Playlist," December 2, 2020, accessed September 29, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQkQfzsIUwRbwThq097kokkK6tCaSPUxa.

Regardless of the format, the background images refer to an ideal of nature, almost untouched by humans, and there are many associations with water. Sometimes images of people relaxing or meditating are also used. The titles of the compositions almost always identify their purpose, even if there is more than one intended use—the same video can be intended to help one sleep deeply or to read a book, for example. The words used in the video descriptions promise that these musical tracks will have an immediate effect.

The comments left by users in response to these videos are mostly "thank you" messages to the channel owner, Margie, for solving the problems they had with sleep and relaxation. They describe the way they use the videos in their home, thus attesting to their effectiveness. The "community" section of the channel is also noteworthy, where Margie shares written and photographic records of moments in her daily life and also presents polls to her subscribers in order to understand what kind of content they want to experience/consume, giving users the power to decide. User comments in this section of the channel contribute to the feedback culture characteristic of YouTube.[24]

During the period defined above - 1st February to 30th April 2020 - it can be ascertained through the online tool *SocialBlade* that both the number of subscribers to the channel and the number of video views increased. Also during this period, Margie launched a series of questionnaires for her followers about their confinement due to the Covid-19 pandemic, to attempt to determine what kind of content they would like to have at their disposal to alleviate the situation. As a consequence, a series of specific audiovisual content was produced and shared for the lockdown period. With the same theme, four live transmissions were active and there were three playlists arranged with the same purpose.[25]

Figure 4. Still of a video from Yellow Brick Cinema - Relaxing Music created for life during the pandemic. Yellow Brick Cinema – Relaxing Music, "Relaxing Music for Quarantine, Healing Music, Meditation Music, Sleep Music, Zen, Study Music, ☯ 3699," streamed live on May 21, 2020, accessed September 29, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKt4KljFnqY.
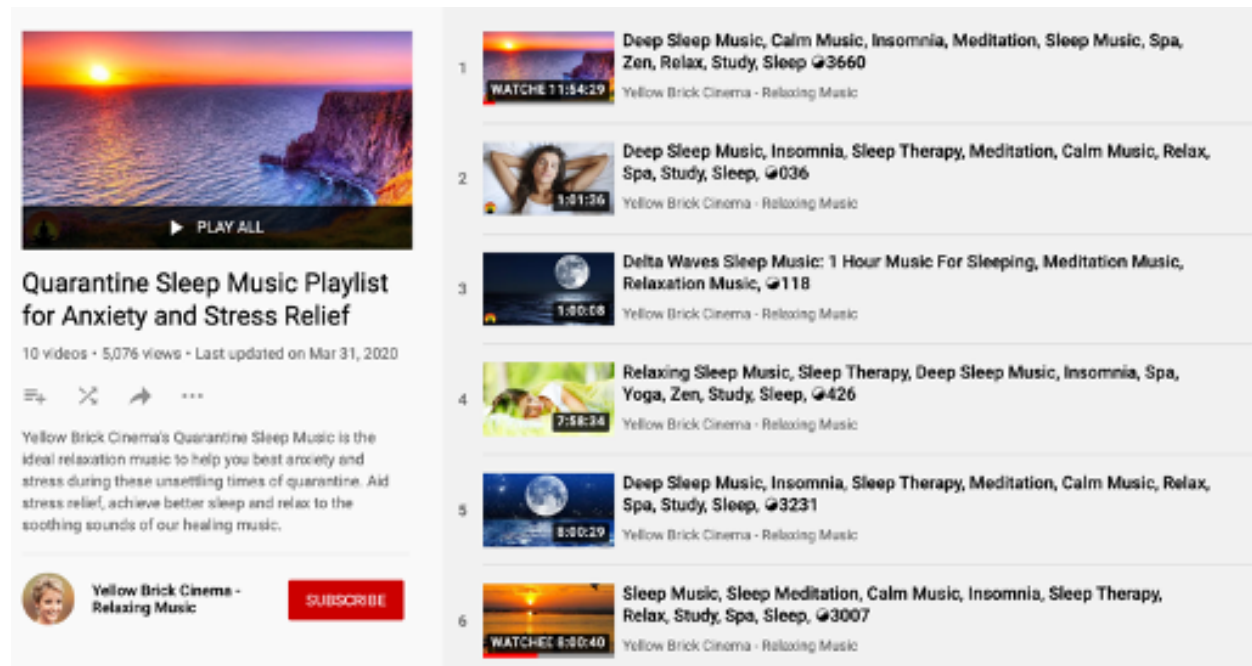
Figure 5. Still of a playlist from Yellow Brick Cinema - Relaxing Music created in response to the pandemic. Yellow Brick Cinema – Relaxing Music, "Quarantine Sleep Music Playlist for Anxiety and Stress Relief," March 31, 2020, accessed September 29, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQkQfzsIUwRbwThq097kokkK6tCaSPUxa.

Despite the intense production and sharing of content by the channel during the lockdown, the videos and live broadcasts are no different from the content previously made available on this channel, prior to the quarantine period. The playlists created in this context use some videos that were created and shared during the pandemic, but also use videos that had already been shared in previous months and years that are not directly related to this public health crisis. Previous videos have been recycled with the only addition being the titles of the videos, live broadcasts and playlists of terms such as "quarantine," "healing," "boost your immune system," and "lockdown."

Therefore, what the playlists by people with media exposure (or musicians such as Moby) and the videos, live broadcasts and playlists created and shared by Yellow Brick Cinema have in common is the fact that they reorganise and transform pre-existing material (or new material with very similar characteristics) with the new purpose of helping individuals deal with the pandemic. Although conceived for this specific situation, this sound and audiovisual content has not been modified; however, the terms added and title changes claim that this material is effective in coping with the reality of living through a pandemic. This perceived effectiveness is enhanced by being shared by

individuals and channels considered authorities in the management of welfare and relaxation in particular, and lifestyle in general. In this relationship between users and videos, there is a continuous influence in which the titles influence users and the users' comments attest to the content effectiveness for others, thereby triggering the production of more content with the same audiovisual characteristics, titles, hashtags, and keywords. In this particular case, digital influencers, Moby, and Margie from Yellow Brick Cinema, influenced consumers' choices regarding what music to listen to in this context. However, they were also influenced by others who led them to select and consider these compositions for this specific moment. These figures, through this audiovisual content and its articulation through the social isolation brought by the pandemic, have therefore come to contribute to the construction, reconstruction and propagation of stereotypes and distribution of subjectivities, which will go beyond this specific period of confinement to the domestic space.[26]

The textual and paratextual elements of this audiovisual content has an undeniable role in its circulation, by assigning it the function of helping people deal with the pandemic, quarantine, and lockdown, and as such presenting it as a tool to enable self-regulation or self-care: changing mood and energy levels, affecting the body and generating emotional states, thus becoming a device for social ordering.[27]

"Every Day Now Looks Like The Weekend": Video Games (Musical) Responses and Reactions to Covid-19

Another area of audiovisual culture affected by the pandemic has been video games. In the first quarter of 2020, a report published by the music streaming platform Spotify on the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for quarantine and confinement presented the idea that "every day now looks like the weekend."[28] As millions of listeners began to adapt their routines and reconfigure their labour and leisure in their homes, musical consumption habits have also been affected and have shifted to these new realities.[29] By relocating listening from commutes and other 'on-the-move' settings to more intimate, domestic and motionless spaces, the phenomenon of *mobile listening* has perhaps been replaced by *immobile listening*.

In addition to an increase in the number of subscribers and listeners - Spotify has more than 286 million globally active users - playlists and other listening suggestions titled "chill," "lounge," "relax," "weekend," "at home," and other terms in the

scope of relaxation and days off became non-exclusive and proliferated on mobile phones, computers and other listening devices, including consoles and gaming platforms.[30] Gaming has seen as a growth of over 50% since April 2020, leading to a greater connection between video game music and everyday life at home.[31] This interconnection has been further reinforced by the pandemic: the search for narratives and participatory experiences between users and virtual games contributes not only to leisure but also to maintaining well-being and mental health, with the result that new titles have been produced to appeal to a more heterogeneous and diverse population.[32]

Beginning with a brief case study, this section goes on to explore the contribution of the interactive audiovisual format of games to the relationship between a participatory narrative, its soundtrack, and the interaction established between the player and their virtual universe, fostered and strengthened by domestic isolation as opposed to the growing online socialisation and sharing of experiences during this period.

On 23th April 2020, rapper Travis Scott toured the virtual space of the online video game battle-royale *Fortnite* by hosting a musical event called "Astronomical" (taken from his album *Astroworld*) which featured 12.3 million players, a number never reached before in this context.[33] [34]There were more than 27 million participants over three days for multiple instances of the concert, which premiered the song "THE SCOTTS," making this example particularly relevant to discussion of the creation of creative network spaces closely dependent on the direct participation of players and their relationship with the musical dimensions of gaming worlds. Unlike the first virtual concert at *Fortnite*, hosted by DJ Marshmello in 2017 and limited to a stage with the technical apparatus usually associated with live performances, Travis Scott's performance was in an extensive area of the game map.[35] In this event, his giant virtual character interacted with elements from space, the ocean, gardens and dwellings that make up the game's universe and in which the players interact, explore and seek to achieve various objectives. Travis Scott's stage was the entire virtual realm of *Fortnite*, leading us to ask what other platforms have been particularly relevant to the musical dimension of players' daily lives in the period marked by Covid-19.

Several articles point to a significant increase in the number of people playing video games since March 2020 and a consequent response from the industry by creating more content and models to meet this demand.[36] In addition to the online-only video games that have gained more members, such as *Call of Duty: Warzone* or *World of Warcraft*, other phenomena can be seen to reflect the impact of the pandemic on the domestic context. *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, exclusive to Nintendo Switch, was the best-

selling title in March 2020 (and Nintendo Switch was the best-selling console in this period).[37] While many players have been confined to their homes, *Animal Crossing* is a social simulation game, allowing players the ability to create and decorate their own virtual home, perform everyday activities, and make contact with others in similar situations. This thereby blurs the boundaries between video games and social networks, creating virtual contexts based on contact between human beings and the sharing of activities directly linked to 'real' everyday life.

In the current growing process of society's *videoludification*, combined with the digital and networked culture that dominates and transforms the different modes of interaction within various social spheres, the heterogeneity of the population commonly referred to as "gamers" is further accentuated not only as a reflection of this diversity of genres of video games but also due to the Covid-19 pandemic.[38] As Edouard Nattée explains: "Video game sales were driven by new consumers, especially women … Women, people 40 years old and over, and, more broadly, casual gamers – all the unusual suspects that video game makers usually struggle to lure flocked to play during lockdown." [39]

Therefore, the plurality of audiences attracted to video games, what they represent and how games are integrated into their daily lives is also demonstrated in the increased demand for titles with terms associated with relaxation, including "chill" and "fighting stress." In particular, tags such as *walking simulator, narrative-based games, interactive stories*, and others, are some of the main terms associated with the ideal of 'calm,' often highlighted in lists of suggestions and articles in different online platforms.[40] Among hits such as *Journey*, *ABZÛ*, *Firewatch*, *The Talos Principle* or *Flower*, we will now focus on the RPG (role-playing game) *Stardew Valley*, which simulates the practice of farming, whose musical and sound dimensions play a central role in the idea not only of relaxation but also of engagement with the world and the creation of empathy with the character controlled by the player.

Stardew Valley is a video game that combines RPG elements with farming and relationship simulation, whose narrative is based on a familiar and simple premise; in the final moments of his life, a grandfather indicates that he has left a plot of land to the character that the player creates and controls.[41] The land is in the idyllic Stardew Valley, far from the city and the stressful, noisy and artificial world that the protagonist inhabited in her office while working for a company called Joja Corporation until she decides to move.

Figure 6. Four stills of the opening sequence of *Stardew Valley* that provides the player an introductory contextualisation of there character's background until reaching her farm left by her grandfather, "there will come a day when you're feeling crushed by the burden of modern life" is illustrated by Joja's Corporation workplace to the point when the player's avatar decides to open his letter and leaves Stardew Valley. Screenshots taken by the author on her personal PC copy of the game.

Through a simple set of mechanics – walk, point and click – the player is introduced to the various components that comprise life on the farm: from planting seeds and watering crops, to building structures and clearing the land. This virtual daily life starts at six in the morning and is managed completely in accordance with the objectives of the participant in this game, which was acclaimed by several critics as one of the best RPGs released in the 2010s, winning two awards in its launch year: The Breakthrough Award from The Golden Joystick and Outstanding Simulation Game from NAVGTR.[42] The player quickly understands that there is much more to explore in *Stardew Valley* beyond planting and selling vegetables. Among the five activities or skills available - farming, mining, foraging, fishing and combat - she can diversify and play each game day with these actions, being able to explore magical mysteries and memories or rebuild her farm in Pelican Town, which is surrounded by other areas that can (and should) be prospected for various purposes. The game has more than thirty other characters, related to each

other with their own routines and experiences, which the player can get to know, and with whom they can interact, perform tasks and establish personal relationships.

The intrinsic connection to nature and the environment, while simultaneously highlighting a major critique of capitalism and exploitation by large companies, underlines one of the core moral objectives of the video game and comprises central components in its design and consequent audiovisual dimension. For instance, the capitalist threat in *Stardew Valley* is represented by the revelation that the company for which the protagonist had been working, Joja Corporation, jeopardises the local market owned by the character of Pierre through cheaper prices and an extended business schedule. The player can choose from two options: collecting resources produced by her farm through world exploration and quest completion in order to rebuild the community centre and unite the inhabitants of the village in one collective space, or pay a large sum of money for Joja's CEO to become a partner and fulfil many other game goals significantly faster. In addition to the narrative clearly disfavoring the latter option and creating a moral conflict for the player, the audio dimension of this aspect is also emphasised. As the avatar approaches Joja supermarket, the non-diegetic music fades out until, within the space, only electronic machine noises and certain sounds associated with reading the price of products are heard, consolidating the coldness of this space and its detachment from the idea of nature and comforting environments. The player develops both her character and farm throughout the four seasons of the year, each one with twenty-eight days in the virtual internal chronology. This chronology reconfigures the appearance of the town and all the places that constitute this universe, as well as the sound environments and the music that accompanies daily life.

From spring to winter, each month is associated with a set of songs circumscribed by the respective season and which are heard across the game world.[43] Unlike the current compositional paradigm for mainstream video games, where the narrative setting and universe of each title is illustrated stylistically at a musical level through a set of codes and stereotypes in a Hollywood-esque tradition, the *Stardew Valley* soundtrack seeks to represent the diversity of spaces and the transition between seasons and their transformations. From flutes to banjos, sitars to synthesisers, the musical diversity reflects the large amount of possibilities offered to the player in this universe and in the narrative that she is building and living in:

> The seasons change and cycle through the year, but the seasons do not return in direct repetition: something is always different. This is why the sheer number of sounds heard in *Stardew Valley* is of ludic and narrative significance, but the seasons

> do not return in direct repetition: something is always different. This is why the sheer number of sounds heard in throunst the shoreline, to the cycling hum of the refrigeration system in Joja Mart. The variety of sounds and music creates the possibility for an always-the-same-yet-always-different soundscape. Each sound or track of music, by itself or in combination, communicates to the player something new about *Stardew Valley* and its in-game ecology.[44]

The dynamic aspect of this video game's significance functions, in its essence, by introducing a certain track corresponding to a season at the beginning of each day and accompanying the player's actions.[45]After finishing this track, which lasts an average of two minutes, another track may not start until the end of the day. In other words, musical accompaniment is not predominant throughout the gameplay and it primarily establishes a new day or the entrance to a different place, thus giving primacy to the environments and sound effects of the whole universe and the interactions of the game.[46] Different ambient sounds and musical accompaniments interconnect and build sonic landscapes adapted to each season that define specific characteristics, such as atmospheric conditions. It is possible to listen to the different sounds of animals and objects in spring or autumn, as well as to hear different sonic backgrounds on the same day in the morning and evening and in different places. Through the combination of sounds resulting from the player's direct action (such as taking steps in different terrains, using tools and performing tasks) and the general interaction with elements of the world, both diegetic and non-diegetic components merge during gameplay, building the aural dimension of the relationship established between the player, their character and the narrative, and can thus be defined as *transdiegetic* sounds:[47]

> By positioning the player outside the game world but with direct access to act within the game world, computer games may utilize extradiegetic sound to give the player information relevant for the choice of actions internal to the diegesis. Since extradiegetic music in films is not part of the fictional world and is not heard by the fictional characters, it is therefore valuable only to the audience … These sounds are central for the comprehension of the positioning of sound in computer game spaces, and work as a bridge between the game world and the player's world. In this respect, these sounds become part of the interface, and enable the interface to become more transparent.[48]

Transdiegesis thus becomes an integral part of the player's everyday sonic landscape, in

which both realities and their limits merge through the reactive sound response to the user's actions and their proactive effect in the physical environment they embody. In the context of the interactive relationship between the player and the virtual narrative, the auditory dimension greatly enhances the creation of empathy and the production of meaning through a relaxing experience.

The use of *Stardew Valley* as a relaxation experience, especially in the pandemic period, is confirmed by feedback from players on its soundtrack, discussed on Reddit and especially on YouTube. In particular, videos such as "Relaxing Stardew Valley Music," which features a selection of tracks considered relaxing from the entire musical repertoire of the game, or videos from each season's sonic environment, such as "Stardew Valley - Autumn Forest Ambiance (birds, leaves, white noise)," are accessed for use in different domestic settings.[49] It is interesting to point out that even though the former video mentioned here was published in 2017, recent comments from several users between March and July 2020 (therefore during the pandemic), remark on the use of this video game and its music to combat isolation and loneliness, for example:

> 42:55 This was the first song in a game that ever got me to look up the soundtrack of a game. It's such an insanely good song. Stardew Valley helps me deal with Corona Quarantine with my friends in West Germany. It keeps me from feeling lonely in this situation.[50]

Additionally, there are other videos related to the creation of environments but with the term *ASMR* in their description, thus appealing to players who use this phenomenon in their processes of relaxation, rest and even sleep by using the sonic elements of the game for this digital practice.[51]

In this sense, and considering the multiple aspects raised above, *Stardew Valley* stands out among the various possibilities for encountering a virtual and interactive experience during the time of confinement by adapting to anyone interested in playing, whether they are new players motivated by the confinement or experienced users. This universe allows all players to decide how to structure their virtual routine, accomplish tasks and objectives they have set for themselves, and explore everyday life at their own pace.[52] The feeling of satisfaction obtained from the fulfilment of the game's virtual tasks and its narrative, underlined by the non-diegetic music and the associated sonic landscapes, is one of the key factors in the success of *Stardew Valley.*

In the participatory culture that defines the current paradigm of society and its networked dimension, players find new forms of sociability through video games and the

sharing of experiences arising from interaction.[53] *Stardew Valley* and the de-prioritisation of violence and severe threats to the player are thus part of a range of other titles which:[54]

> … are more than escapist entertainment, though; they're helping to reshape how we connect in a future where social distancing might become the norm. Video games are letting people chat, connect, and meet new people … While the pandemic and ensuing lockdown have dramatically changed the way we live our lives, video games offer a way for us to safely indulge in our basic human need to connect … Many of these "comforting" games are classified as "life simulators," Kowert says. The activities they involve allow players to feel a sense of normalcy. They aren't grounded in fantasy; rather, they run on a frontier-like narrative of building the land and connecting with neighbors to create community, fostering an environment where players feel they don't compete but work together.[55]

The global uncertainty of the near future impels the necessity to perform a number of adaptations and changes to daily lives to which the cultural industries, to borrow the language of Theodor Adorno, also respond in the constant circulation of content and capital.[56] With the rapid dynamisation of digital music experiences from different musical genres and distinct forms of artistic production, new virtual spaces are being created in an attempt to connect producers, promoting debates about creativity and creation in times of crisis and the respective feedback from audiences.[57]Although it is not yet possible to determine how this matter will (continue to) be transformed, the convergence between the dimensions of online music production and consumption and video games is undeniable; their music, soundscapes and *transdiegetic* relationships go beyond their origin in the virtual universe and become integrated into the daily lives of users, whether working, studying or relaxing, so consolidating empathic relationships during gameplay and enabling both virtual and non-virtual contact with other people.

"Medical Tension," "In It Together," and Other Preparations of the Library Music Industry For Covid-19

Another area of audiovisual culture which has contributed to and supported the transformation of daily life during the pandemic is library music. The impact of the pandemic on library music and its composers went unnoticed by the general public, as so

frequently happens with any discussion of this specific branch of the music industry. However, library music was affected too, revealing, in the transformations brought about by the pandemic – and in what remained unchanged – the peculiarities of this type of musical production. Library music, also known as production or stock music, consists of music tracks that are nowadays catalogued in online platforms according to different categories, including genre, mood/emotion, and instrumentation, with the purpose of one day being used in all kinds of media. Even though library music is not limited to audiovisual and multimedia content, it is mainly in those contexts that it ends up being used, and we can thus find it in everything from television programmes, advertisements and online videos to video games and apps.[58] Considering it is the main source of music for television news and documentaries, the demand for specific sonorities and styles tends to evolve in tandem with current events that generate media coverage, ranging from presidential elections to Christmas holidays. It is therefore unsurprising that the pandemic transformed not only certain production practices of library music, but also the type of music that is produced.

On 26th May 2020, a virtual panel organised by the Production Music Association (PMA) sought to discuss the effects of the pandemic on library music and predict some of the changes it would bring into the future.[59] The industry professionals who took part in the panel, from founders of library music catalogues to music supervisors who oversee the use of music in their productions, agreed that, in general, they did not notice their work slow down during the pandemic. In fact, in certain cases, they claimed to notice an increase in the demand for library music, with audiovisual productions where the budget had been cut, due to restrictions caused by the pandemic, were seeking to save on music costs by switching to library music instead of the more expensive option of specifically commissioned music. In addition, various institutions and organisations transferred their activities online, with video or live broadcasts, and sought library music to accompany their audiovisual content.[60]

Nevertheless, a specific aspect of the production of library music was inevitably affected, namely the recording of tracks with performers instead of using digital samples. One of the aspects that is highly valued in library music, and which contributes heavily to the reputation of a catalogue, is the recording of music with performers, or, at least, the use of samples that sound 'real' and cannot easily be identified as samples. The use of recorded instruments instead of resorting exclusively to digital samples is an important point of distinction between 'high-end' library music companies, which have prestigious clients, and companies with more affordable catalogues; the former, therefore, had a harder time adapting to the restrictions brought about by the pandemic

than the latter, whose composers could simply go on producing music without leaving their homes or studios.[61]

These companies also underwent other adaptations. In respect of the musical styles and sonorities that they sought to include or highlight in their catalogues, we can identify two main trends. The first is not surprising to those who are familiar with the habits and strategies of library music. Foreseeing a greater number of videos and other audiovisual content which would, in a more or less factual way, portray the evolution and impact of Covid-19, library music composers received briefs for 'sombre' music to be included in playlists that were thematically linked to the pandemic. Some companies, even though they might not have commissioned any new music, quickly built-up those playlists with tracks that already existed in their catalogues. In March, the French company Cézanne displayed on its homepage the playlists "Sciences" and "Crisis & Consequences," with tracks taken from albums such as *In The Lab*.[62] Other examples could be found on the website MegaTrax, which offered playlists like "Medical Research" and "Public Service Announcement," and on the website VideoHelper, where a specific page presented prospective clients with five playlists with the theme "Global Health Crisis," "To assist you during your coverage of the current COVID-19 crisis": "Medical Tension," "Sombre News," "Hard News," "In It Together," and "Neutral To Positive." [63]

The variety of scenarios contemplated by playlists such as these – from sombre news to a more positive outlook – is symptomatic of one of the main goals of library music: to attempt to predict every possible facet and outcome of a specific event, in order to ensure that a catalogue will offer every kind of music needed by its clients. This explains the speed with which this industry reacted, since it must keep up with the frenetic rhythm of audiovisual productions such as television programs and online videos. Alessandro Mastroiani, one among many composers who release vlogs on YouTube about their work in library music, published a video on 13th March 2020 where he claims that, a few days earlier, he had received commissions from several companies for music to be used in "documentaries, tv news and other television programs about the coronavirus." [64] The composer then goes on to say:

> My very first reaction was "wow, we really are in the show business, and it does not stop, even when there is a pandemic and the situation is very serious." Then I thought about it and I said well, after all that is a part of our job as composers. We are storytellers, and our main role is to help filmmakers and producers to tell a story.

> And our music is influenced by the everyday events anyway, so it was important for me to try and do it.[65]

The track the composer later presents in his video is entirely electronic. In fact, much of the library music explicitly associated with Covid-19, through its titles, descriptions and keywords, is electronic. This also relates to the tendency in library music and other music created for audiovisual content to associate electronic timbres with concepts such as "science" and "medicine." We find a clear example of this phenomenon on the website Audio Jungle, which has an abundance of tracks tagged with keywords that in themselves seem to form a kind of lexicon of the pandemic, such as "contact tracing" or "lockdown." Tracks with titles like "Coronavirus Global Health," "Covid Mitigation," and "Pandemic Virus" (described as "a dramatic and disturbing composition perfect for medical subject") are predominantly characterised by minor keys and the use of synthesisers and other electronic timbres, such as electric guitars with distortion.[66] However, not all the tracks linked to the pandemic share this overall sound; others are slower and less rhythmic, with a combination of piano and electronic effects, especially reverb. We find this in the tracks "The Pandemic," and "Chillout Ambient Piano," which are described as "melancholic" and "reflective," and explicitly destined for "coronavirus related documentary film," and "aerial urban lockdown videos." [67]

Audio Jungle also provides us with another interesting example of a practice that is widespread in library music: the use of keywords and other textual elements to associate music tracks with the most noteworthy events of a certain period in time, thus improving their chances of being found and used by video editors and other clients. In early May 2020, an arrangement of an excerpt of Mozart's *Requiem* was uploaded to the website. Most of its keywords were variations on the concepts of "religious" and "funereal," but others included "apocalypse," "corona," and "virus." [68]

The second tendency that can be identified in library music during the pandemic seems, at first glance, opposed to the first. If this industry was quick to supply music for every possible calamity, it certainly did not neglect audiovisual content that, on the contrary, bears an underlying message of optimism and 'togetherness' in adversity. Returning briefly to the PMA panel mentioned earlier, when the CEOs of library music companies were asked about any changes in the musical styles that were most sought after by clients, and if they were asked for music that had adapted to the mood and tone of this time, their answers pointed to two main trends. They claimed that, on one hand,

they had quickly received requests for "sombre music," given the numerous videos documenting the pandemic that were soon produced. However, they pointed out that they also noticed an increase in demand for music that was "positive" and with a "hopeful ending," which they attributed to their clients not wanting "music that made them feel even worse than they already did." [69]

The majority of this "positive" music is meant for advertisements, but it is also widely used in online videos and apps about cooking and exercise. The domestic pastimes which many pursued during confinement also influenced the course of library music, which offered tracks to accompany all kinds of content tied to those activities. For instance, the website PremiumBeat presented a playlist entitled "All In This Together," with tracks like "Working Together," "At Home," and "Interconnected," all in major keys and with a predominance of piano and guitar.[70] Other websites, like Epidemic Sound, were quick to put together playlists such as "Online Education," "Workout From Home" and "Create Content At Home" : the first is targeted at teachers looking for music to make their online classes "more appealing" ; the second at personal trainers who now broadcast their workout sessions; and the third at travel vloggers who, unable to create their usual content, are trying their hand at covering more domestic themes.[71] Library music companies thus adapted their offer of music by taking into account not only the videos that focused on the negative impacts of the pandemic, but also all types of content that emerged with, or were altered by, lockdown measures and the changes they brought.

These examples reveal how library music too, along with music in YouTube videos and video games, played a part in the transformation of everyday life during the pandemic, through its use in audiovisual content created during or about the global health crisis, particularly videos and apps that address the adaptation of daily life to socially distanced times, from online teaching to working out from home. The fact that library music is from its very inception conceived as essentially functional music gives particular relevance to approaches that view it as a "technology" or resource that is harnessed to shape an individual's mood and state of mind during daily activities.[72] Of course, as with the YouTube videos and video games previously discussed, library music functions as a 'tool' to regulate mood and routines, not as isolated sound but in conjunction with images and text when included in audiovisual productions. In that sense, it has always played a part in shaping the everyday; the wide range of transformations to daily life ushered in by the pandemic inevitably also affected the timbres and genres that library music catalogues invested in the most, and that were eventually heard in videos and other content.

In addition to influencing what kind of library music was created (or rebranded) to accompany audiovisual productions, the pandemic also changed the everyday life of many working musicians, by disrupting their main professional opportunities and income streams. Therefore, it is worth taking a brief look at the ways in which this crisis emphasised the specificities of library music as a full-time or part-time job that provides a large number of musicians with an income. Certain online forums where composers converge, particularly private groups on the social network Facebook, were suddenly filled with discussions on the possible impact of the pandemic on their work.[73] Several of them pointed out that they would only feel the consequences of the decrease in certain audiovisual productions in one or two years, which is the usual delay between the use of a library music track in a production and the payment of royalties to its composer. Some believed that the cancellation of large events, such as sporting events – which would, in ordinary times, have generated a substantial amount of media coverage – had diminished the opportunities of their music being used and, consequently, of future payments. Others had a more positive outlook, claiming that, with a considerable amount of the population at home during confinement periods, there would possibly be an increase in the audience numbers of television programs and streaming, which could translate into an increase in royalties.

An advantage of their usual activity was also highlighted: they could continue to work from home, in their studios, without being forced to slow down their music production. However, this point generated no small amount of anxiety due to what some saw as an inevitable increase in competition: with the cancellation of concerts and public performances, some composers were fearful that the affected musicians would turn to library music to find some financial security during uncertain times. That fear seemed to be confirmed with the influx of new members to these groups asking for advice for beginner composers of library music, and showing particular interest in the 'buy-out' models of licensing music, which pay an upfront fee to composers, but no subsequent royalties, thereby depriving them of a very significant portion of their income. These new members explained that, with the interruption of the concerts and instrument lessons that supported them financially, they were looking for ways of earning money quickly in order to, among other things, pay their rent.

The pandemic thus highlighted the very peculiar nature of library music in comparison to other music industries. On one hand, the day-to-day life of a large number of composers, already used to working from their home studios using samples, did not undergo any particular changes or adaptations. These musicians did, however, monitor with concern the cancellation of events and audiovisual productions, from the Super Bowl

to cinema trailers, which would have used their music and been an important source of revenue. On the other hand, by taking part in a music industry that is inextricably tied to the demands of audiovisual industries, they have worked through the pandemic by carrying on with the task that falls to library music composers; to create music that will be used in the media coverage of unfolding events, music that, in the meantime, is included in playlists that both reflect and predict all kinds of consequences and outcomes of the pandemic, from "medical tension" and "sombre news" to "online education" and "home workouts."

Concluding Remarks

In this paper we have examined three case studies related to the use of music in everyday life during the pandemic and the lockdown measures it brought for many across the world. In the first section, we discussed how in a domestic context changed by the pandemic, online articles and other media encouraged different practices of relaxation for the maintenance of well-being. Among other strategies, in various media platforms, we find pieces of advice instructing people to use music and sound in order to (re)configure their daily life and achieve a relaxed state of mind. We thus witnessed an increase in the demand for this specific sound content and a consequent growth in its production. The analysis of a specific YouTube channel, whose main activity is to produce videos with sound and music to help people relax, sleep and meditate, was particularly illustrative of the increase in the production of this content during the first period of lockdown. The most curious aspect of these 'new' videos is that there are no audio or visual differences compared to the previous material produced by the channel, other than the addition, to their titles and descriptions, of words and hashtags like "lockdown," "quarantine," "healing," and "boost your immune system." These new words transformed pre-existing material into content that directly targeted people seeking music and videos to aid their relaxation efforts during lockdown.

We then explored how, in the interactive format of video games, the relationship between a participatory narrative, its soundtrack, and the interaction established between the player and their virtual universe was fostered and strengthened by domestic isolation. The use of video games as a tool for relaxation during lockdown was explored with the specific case of *Stardew Valley* and an examination of its players' comments

and feedback on YouTube and Reddit. The relaxation experience afforded by the game is especially evidenced by its soundtrack, which was included in YouTube videos created for the purposes of relaxation, ambient soundscapes or ASMR and meant to be used in domestic spaces, in or out of the game.

Finally, in the third section of the article, focusing on the library music industry, we analysed yet another context of musical production which witnessed an increase in the creation of content specifically designed to meet new demands caused by the pandemic and lockdown measures. In addition to illustrating how not all music industries were negatively affected by the global health crisis (with library music composers who, already used to working from their home studios, saw no significant changes in their daily workflow), the case of library music also reveals how new music was created (or granted new titles and keywords) in order to be used in audiovisual coverage of the pandemic, or in apps and other content directly related to lockdown measures.

Although the three different contexts of music production and reception explored in this research might at first seem rather disparate, except for the broad connection of all, in some way, to audiovisual and digital mediums, upon more detailed inspection they share some commonality in their adaptations to the pandemic. The global health crisis created a need for new types of content, either targeted at the general population, including YouTube videos and video games, or at the audiovisual industry, library music. As YouTube witnessed a rise in searches for music deemed to be "relaxing" and to help with a general sense of wellbeing, certain video games, along with their music, were assigned a new role during lockdown, that of providing a calm and stress-free experience for their players. Video game players thus sought to escape their confinement at home by interacting with the ever-evolving music, soundscapes and mechanics of a virtual universe. Alongside such efforts by the consumers of this content to shape their domestic space and routine through music, library tracks supplied the sound to countless videos and apps targeted at people seeking new hobbies during their period of isolation.

The growing need for music related to relaxation and wellbeing meant that, in addition to the creation of new content, pre-existing music was rebranded to tap into that growing demand. This repackaging applies both to certain YouTube videos and channels and to library music catalogues that quickly included old tracks in new pandemic-themed playlists, and even, albeit in a more indirect fashion, to the new ways in which players came to view and discuss games like *Stardew Valley* and their music. Indeed, in the three cases that we have analysed, music and sound in general are used to configure everyday life. In a context of isolation and reconfiguration of daily life, there was an

identifiable surge in the production of musical and audiovisual contents adapted to the transformations brought to domestic spaces, routines and daily activities. This music was included in various online platforms, playlists and audiovisual formats, such as news, cooking tutorials, AMSR videos and interactive video games. Although presented as novelties, some of these musical creations were often reused, with the addition of new paratexts in order to increase their semiotic power and better adapt them to the configuration of the everyday life during the pandemic.[74]

There will no doubt be an abundance of future research on the development of new music and musical formats adapted to the constraints imposed by the pandemic, but these specific cases from YouTube, video games and library music demonstrate that there is also a significant phenomenon taking place with the reframing and rebranding of pre-existing content in order to better adapt it to the new demands and practices that have emerged. Lastly, these cases demonstrate that even musical activities that carried on online were affected by the pandemic; they too underwent changes because of it, although such changes are of a different nature to the more widely discussed concert cancellations and unemployment among musicians. In the case of library music, the production of tracks with samples instead of recorded instruments inevitably became more prevalent, and as musicians increasingly turned to this corner of the music industry as a temporary financial solution, composers gauged that influx of competition with increasing concern. Of course, the specific cases that were examined in this article are far from having stabilised, and will benefit from more research in the future; the activities of YouTube channels, the interaction of players with video game music, the production of library music tracks, and many other areas of musical creation and reception in digital mediums will continue to undergo transformations as the pandemic brings about a 'new normal' for musicians and their audiences.

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Biographies

Joana Freitas

Joana Freitas is a PhD student in Musicology at the NOVA FCSH with a FCT PhD Scholarship (SFRH/BD/139120/2018) and she completed her master's degree with a dissertation titled «*The music is the only thing you don't have to mod': the musical composition in modification files for video games*." At CESEM she's a coordinator of the Research Cluster in Music and Cyberculture (CysMus) and member of the Research Clusters of Gender and Music (NEGEM) and Sociology of Music (SociMus). Her main areas of interest are video game music, film music, audiovisual media, interactivity, digital culture and cybercommunities, gender and sexuality.

João Francisco Porfírio

João Francisco Porfírio is currently a PhD student in Musicology at NOVA FCSH and FCT PhD Grant holder (SFRH/BD/136264/2018). He completed his master's degree in Musical Arts at the same institution with the dissertation '*Sounds Like Home*' – *the domestic soundscapes in the construction of daily life and as object of composition*. At CESEM he's a member of the Critical Theory and Communication Group, of SociMus (Group of Advanced Studies in Sociology of Music) and CysMus (Research Cluster in Music and Cyberculture), where he develops research on subjects related to ambient music and soundscapes of domestic everyday life.

Júlia Durand

Júlia Durand is currently enrolled in a PhD in Musicology at FCSH – Nova University of Lisbon, where she completed her M.A. in Historical Musicology. She is a member of the Research Cluster in Gender and Music (NEGEM), the Group for Studies in Sociology of Music (SociMus), and the Research Cluster in Music and Cyberculture (CysMus), all sections of the Center of Sociology and Musical Aesthetics (CESEM). Her PhD research focuses on the production and use of library music. Since 2015, she has also written scripts for musical theatre and electronic music.

Footnotes

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6.
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14.

Google Trends only allows to compare five terms at the same time. That is why three separate analyses were made: one analysis compares "sleeping music," "relaxing music," and "meditation music" (analysis one); another analysis compares "sleeping sounds," "relaxing sounds," "meditation sounds" (analysis two); and finally an analysis that compares "music for sleeping," "music for relaxation" and "music for meditation" (analysis three).

The three analyses can be consulted directly in Google Trends, see:

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"Music for sleeping; music for relaxing; music for meditation," Google Trends, accessed September 29, 2021, https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2020-02-01%202020-04-30&gprop=youtube&q=sleeping%20sounds,relaxing%20sounds,meditation%20sounds.↩

15. For example, "relaxing piano music": +450%; "relaxing music sleep": +900%; "relaxing water sounds for sleeping": +500%; "relaxation music": +1450%. ↩

16. DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life,* 45-63. ↩

17.
Relaxing White Noise, YouTube channel, https://www.youtube.com/user/relaxingwhitenoise;

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Yellow Brick Cinema – Relaxing Music, YouTube channel, https://www.youtube.com/c/YellowBrickCinema. ↩

18. "About," Yellow Brick Cinema – Relaxing Music, accessed October 7, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/c/YellowBrickCinema/about. ↩

19. Júlia Durand, "O elefante na sala de pós-produção: a utilização de library music em criações audiovisuais" (Masters Thesis, Lisbon, NOVA FCSH, 2017). ↵

20. Freya Jarman, "Relax, Feel Good, Chill out: The Affective Distribution of Classical Music," in *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*, ed. Marie Thompson and Ian D. Biddle (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 183–204. ↵

21. Anahid Kassabian, "Music for Sleeping," in *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*, ed. Marie Thompson and Ian D. Biddle (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 165–81. ↵

22. *Ibid.*, 171. ↵

23. For an example of one of these videos, see Yellow Brick Cinema – Relaxing Music, "Sleep Music, Meditations Music, Sleeping Music, Insomnia, Calm Music, Study Music, Zen, Sleep, 3689," streamed live May 2, 2020, accessed May 28, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSW8eXr5NWQ. ↵

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Yellow Brick Cinema - Relaxing Music, "Deep Sleep Music for Quarantine, Insomnia, Meditation, Sleep Music, relax, Spa, Calm Music ☯3681," streamed live on April 21, 2020, accessed September 29, 2021,https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_yV9dnp_yQ;

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Yellow Brick Cinema – Relaxing Music, "Quarantine Sleep Music Playlist for Anxiety and Stress Relief," playlist, March 31, 2020, accessed September 29, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQkQfzsIUwRZydlp0Nl5jwcerO9v4aEH5;

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26. "Distributed subjectivity is, then, a nonindividual subjectivity, a field, but a field over which power is distributed unevenly and unpredictably, over which differences are not only possible but required, and across which information flows, leading to affective responses. The channels of distribution are held open by ubiquitous musics. Humans, institutions, machines, and molecules are all nodes in the network, nodes of different densities." Anahid Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), xxv. ↩

27. DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 55-58; 103-108; 111-121. ↩

28. Spotify, "Spotify Technology S.A. Announces Financial results for First Quarter 2020," *Newsroom Spotify,* April 29, 2020, https://investors.spotify.com/financials/press-release-details/2020/Spotify-Technology-SA-Announces-Financial-Results-for-First-Quarter-2020/default.aspx. ↩

29. The implementation of this measure at transnational level was reflected, ironically, in the sudden increase in streams of the song "Don't Stand So Close To Me" by The Police, reflecting the need for physical distancing both in and out of everyone's home. Spotify, "How Social Distancing Has Shifted Spotify Streaming," *Newsroom Spotify*, March 30, 2020, https://newsroom.spotify.com/2020-03-30/how-social-distancing-has-shifted-spotify-streaming/. ↩

30. Spotify, "Spotify Reports First Quarter 2020 Earnings," *Newsroom Spotify*, April 29, 2020, https://newsroom.spotify.com/2020-04-29/spotify-reports-first-quarter-2020-earnings/. ↩

31. As Hubert Davis states, "listening to music at home has become far more common and the device of choice seems to be video game consoles. Both the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One offer the option to run the Spotify app in the background while playing games even for people who don't have a Spotify subscription. The company reported a 50% increase in listeners on these devices, saying they've ranked in the top 2 or 3 platforms over the last month." Hubert Davis, "How COVID-19 Has Changed Music Streaming Habits, According to Spotify," *ScreenRant*, May 2, 2020, https://screenrant.com/spotify-2020-coronavirus-streaming-habits/. ↩

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 Todd Spangler, "Travis Scott Destroys 'Fortnite' All-Time Record With 12.3 Million Live Viewers," *Variety*, April 24, 2020, https://variety.com/2020/digital/news/travis-scott-fortnite-record-viewers-live-1234589033/.↩

34. ↩

35. The "stage" is described as such: "Really, the entire Fortnite island was the stage. During the opening song a giant Scott stomped around the island, while players could run across the water to catch a glimpse. As the tracks changed, so did the visuals. At one point everything was fiery and Scott turned into a cyborg; later it looked like everyone had been transported to Tron. When "Highest in the Room" came on, the crowd was submerged underwater, along with a giant spaceman. There were rollercoasters and psychedelic effects and at the end players were literally flying around the planet." Andrew Webster, "Travis Scott's First Fortnite Concert Was Surreal and Spectacular," *The Verge,* April 23, 2020, https://www.theverge.com/2020/4/23/21233637/travis-scott-fortnite-concert-astronomical-live-report. ↩

36.
Broughton, "The Video Games Industry on Coronavirus";

 Gregory, "Don't Feel Bad If Your Kids Are Gaming More Than Ever." ↩

37. As stated by ROsie Knight following an analysis published by Super Data, the game has sold more than 5 million copies since its launch in March 2020. Rosie Knight, "ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW HORIZONS Smashes Digital Sales Records," *Nerdist*, April 29, 2020, https://nerdist.com/article/animal-crossing-new-horizons-breaks-sales-records/. ↩

38.

As some authors have been discussing in the last decade, video games can be understood nowadays as a growing and consolidating culture, where several aspects of today's society, from practices to experiences and meanings, are reflected and shaped by video games. As Daniel Muriel and Garry Crawford put it: "Social reality is turned into a (video) game, and, in doing so, video game culture significantly affects society as a whole. Therefore, though there might be social actors that ignore video games as culture, the culture of video games is affecting them. It is affecting all of us, regardless." Daniel Muriel and Garry Crawford, *Video Games as Culture: Considering the Role and Importance of Video Games in Contemporary Society* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 5.

See also Frans Mäyrä, *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture* (London: SAGE, 2008);

 Frans Mäyrä, "Pokémon GO: Entering the Ludic Society," *Mobile Media & Communication* 5, no. 1 (2017): 47-50.↩
39.
Marie Mawad, "Video Games Want Players to Stay beyond Covid," *Sifted*, May 20, 2020, https://sifted.eu/articles/video-games-coronavirus/;

 Although it may be a parallel phenomenon noted by companies during this pandemic, it is possible to affirm that in the last decade women gamers are notn't "unusual" – in fact, quite the opposite – regarding global gamer demographics. According to the 2019 Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry from the Entertainment Software Association, in a survey of the USA, 46% of gamers identify as female with an average age of 34. Regarding women's representation in the media and the games industry itself, it's another matter that is gaining visibility in academia and other spheres. Entertainment Software Association, "2019 Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry from the Entertainment Software Association," accessed September 29, 2021, https://www.theesa.com/resource/essential-facts-about-the-computer-and-video-game-industry-2019/. ↩
40. These labels, which designate genres of video games that can now be considered successful and increasingly in demand, were initially used as a pejorative term (mainly walking simulators) in order to devalue certain titles that were removed distant/divergent from common elements and/or mechanics that defined the commercial and mainstream titles of the industry. The main focus of walking simulators is the exploration of the virtual universe and its observation, interaction

with its audiovisual dimensions, with a key role attributed to the narrative and the development of history, which also applies to the consequent terms of narrative-based and interactive stories. Muriel and Crawford, *Video Games as Culture*, 39-40. ↵

41. RPG, meaning role-playing game, is a video game genre in which the player takes on the role of a character in a fictional scenario, performing actions throughout a narrative with consequences not only on her character but also on the progress of the story. This genre isn't exclusive to digital settings, as it is possible to be played in person with the participative collaboration of several players in a group or in several other virtual media, and in fact this is the origin of the term. For further information, consult Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron, ed., *The Video Game Theory Reader* (New York; London: Routledge, 2003) ↵

42.

Connor Sheridan, "Overwatch Scoops Five Awards, Firewatch Wins Best Indie Game: Here Are All the Golden Joystick 2016 Winners," *GamesRadar+*, November 18, 2016, https://www.gamesradar.com/overwatch-scoops-5-awards-firewatch-wins-best-indie-game-here-are-all-the-golden-joystick-2016-winners/;

 NAVGTR, "2016 Awards | NAVGTR," *National Academy of Video Game Trade Reviewers*, 2016. https://navgtr.org/2016-awards/. ↵

43. The caves, the sacred forest and the library/museum, for example, have their own musical accompaniment. The beach, on the other hand, presents no non-diegetic music other than in special events, namely the Dance of the Moonlight Jellies and the Luau Festival Each season has specific days with in-game festivals, such as the *Spirit's Eve* (the game's version of Halloween) during autumn or the *Festival of Ice* during winter. Each event introduces a track that can only be listened to during those moments that allude to the general atmosphere and purpose of the date. ↵

44. Kate Galloway, "Soundwalking and the Aurality of *Stardew Valley*: An Ethnography of Listening to and Interacting with Environmental Game Audio," in *Music in the Role-Playing Game: Heroes & Harmonies*, ed. William Gibbons and Steven Reale (London: Routledge, 2019), 153. ↵

45. Karen Collins, *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2008). ↵

46. It is important to note that there are specific tracks for certain characters that are only heard at a certain stage of the relationship that the player establishes with them,

be it friendship or romance. There are also specific tracks for annual events (such as Christmas, Halloween, or the *Flower Dance* of early spring) that seek to establish the musical language most appropriate to the thematic character of these moments of the year. The player might not participate in these moments and therefore not encounter these songs during her gameplay. ↵

47.

Kristine Jørgensen, "On Transdiegetic Sounds in Computer Games," *Northern Lights: Film and Media Studies Yearbook* 5, no. 1 (7 September 2007): 105–17;

 Kristine Jørgensen, "Time for New Terminology? Diegetic and Non-Diegetic Sounds in Computer Games Revisited," in *Game Sound Technology and Player Interaction: Concepts and Development*, ed. Mark Grimshaw (Hershey PA: Information Science Reference, 2011), 78–97. ↵

48. Jørgensen, "On Transdiegetic Sounds in Computer Games," 106-107. ↵

49.

Lou Says, "Relaxing Stardew Valley Music," July 11, 2017, accessed October 7, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJCFQtTPq_8;

Ambiance Magic, "Stardew Valley - Autumn Forest Ambiance (birds, leaves, white noise)," November 11, 2017, accessed October 7, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w52K6F5IhLk.

 ↵

50. NXTLVL 665, comment on Lou Says, "Relaxing Stardew Valley Music," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJCFQtTPq_8. Here, the user is referring to the track "The Wind can be Still" that is played during the winter season. ↵

51. ASMR, standing for Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response, is, according to Emma L. Barratt and Nick J. Davis, "a sensory phenomenon, in which individuals experience a tingling, static-like sensation across the scalp, back of the neck and at times further areas in response to specific triggering audio and visual stimuli." Emma L. Barratt and Nick J. Davis, Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR): a flow-like mental state," *Peer J* 3 (March 2015): e845. ↵

52. *Stardew Valley* also offers the possibility to play in multiplayer mode. For example, plays can be on a community farm with friends in order to share tasks, build and collect resources, thus being able to form relationships not only with the virtual characters of

Pelican Town but also with people who are already a part of the players' daily lives and identities. ↩

53.

For more on participatory culture, see Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006);

Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

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54.

One of the game's mechanics of time management is the limitation of the player's activity schedule and its consequences that can be considered a *threat*. If the character isn't resting/going to sleep until 2AM, she will faint and wake up the next day either at her farm or at the clinic and getting charged 1000 gold for this expense. If the player is being attacked by monsters in the caves and loses all her health, the same will happen and even some random items in her inventory may disappear.

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55. Tanya Basu, "Why Games like Animal Crossing Are the New Social Media of the Coronavirus Era," *MIT Technology Review*, April 16, 2020, https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/04/16/999944/coronavirus-animal-crossing-video-games-social-media ↩

56. Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 2001). ↩

57. Axel Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008). ↩

58. Júlia Durand, "Minimal Produtivo: A categoria 'empresarial' nos sites de library music," in *Log in, Live on: música e cibercultura na era da internet das coisas*, ed. Paula Gomes Ribeiro, Joana Freitas, Júlia Durand and André Malhado (Vila Nova de Famalicão: Edições Húmus / CESEM - Centro de Estudos de Sociologia e Estética Musical, 2018), 243. ↩

59. Production Music Association, "The pandemic and production music: what will be the impact?" PMA Academy Webinar, May 26, 2020. No hyperlinks were made available to watch the panel after it was broadcast live. ↩

60. This applies, for instance, to church services and religious ceremonies. ↩

61. In fact, the PMA organised another panel with information on the best practices of long-distance recording, acknowledging that many library music clients do not approve of tracks "that sound 'synthy'." PMA, email to author, May 5, 2020. ↩

62.

 "Playlist: Sciences," Cézanne Music Agency, accessed September 29, 2021, https://en.cezame-fle.com/sciences-playlist-130313.html;

 "Playlist: Crisis & Consequences," Cézanne Music Agency, accessed September 29, 2021, https://en.cezame-fle.com/crisis-&-consequences-playlist-138898.html. ↩

63. By the time this article was published, these playlists were no longer accessible online. ↩

64. Alessandro Mastroianni, "COVID-19, Library Music and How to Write Music for Documentaries (PART 1)," March 13, 2020, accessed October 7, 2021, https://youtu.be/qXPSyDzfe5U ↩

65. *Ibid.* ↩

66.

 "Coronavirus Global Health Crisis," Audio Jungle, accessed September 29, 2021, https://audiojungle.net/item/coronavirus-global-health-crisis/26573587;

 "Covid Mitigation," Audio Jungle, accessed September 29, 2021, https://audiojungle.net/item/mitigation/26570311;

 "Pandemic Virus," Audio Jungle, accessed September 29, 2021, https://audiojungle.net/item/pandemic-virus/26437343. ↩

67.

 "The Pandemic," Audio Jungle, accessed September 29, 2021, https://audiojungle.net/item/the-pandemic/26444395;

 "Chillout Ambient Piano," Audio Jungle, accessed September 29, 2021, https://audiojungle.net/item/lockdown-ambient-piano/2638580. ↩

68. "Mozart Requiem," Audio Jungle, accessed September 29, 2021, https://audiojungle.net/item/mozart-requiem/26435531. ↩

69. Production Music Association, "The pandemic and production music: what will be the impact?" PMA Academy Webinar, May 26, 2020. ↵

70. "Playlist: All in This Together," PremiumBeat, accessed September 29, 2021, https://www.premiumbeat.com/playlists/2q0ysh1k7uotfh9. ↵

71.
 "Playlist: Online Education," Epidemic Sound, accessed September 29, 2021, https://www.epidemicsound.com/albums/album/1772/;

 "Workout from Home," Epidemic Sound, accessed September 29, 2021, https://www.epidemicsound.com/albums/album/1770/;

 "Create Content At Home," Epidemic Sound, accessed September 29, 2021, https://www.epidemicsound.com/albums/album/1746/. ↵

72. eNora, "Music as a Technology of the Self." ↵

73. The administrators of these groups authorised the use of their observations for the purpose of this research on the condition they remained anonymous. ↵

74. DeNora, "Music in Everyday Life," 45. ↵