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Disrupting More than the Music: Reciprocal Care Relations in Community Music-Making during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The years 2020-2022 have been “dangerous times,” bringing new meaning to Bruce Cockburn’s (1984) folk rock ballad about the shift from being dazzled by life’s beauty to waiting for the sky to fall. Crises like the COVID-19 pandemic impact music communities on multiple levels. Drawing from care ethics (Noddings, 2010, 2012), this study explores the experiences of 12 Canadian community music leaders attempting to maintain the “community” in their groups during a time of disruption (Evison, forthcoming). Findings reveal that when leaders’ empathy, compassion, and love towards members cannot be enacted or reciprocated because of crisis, care can be offered and received through alternative routes involving technology and need-based approaches. These alternative ways of music-making can be fraught with unforeseen challenges, highlighting the importance of support systems to enable reciprocal care relations. Consequently, community educators can continue supporting their members’ music-making, thus sustaining community music’s vital social and musical benefits.

Keywords: care relations, community music, choirs, crisis leadership, technology, disruption

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