

"Watching the room where the music is happening":
An Examination of Live Streaming in the Vancouver Independent Music Scene
During the Global Pandemic

Nataliya Kiyan

A Thesis

In the Department of Geography, Planning and Environment

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of

Science in Geography, Urban and Environmental Studies

at Concordia University

Montreal, Québec, Canada

December, 2022

© Nataliya Kiyan, 2022

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Nataliya Kiyan

Entitled: “Watching the room where the music is happening”: An Examination of Live Streaming in the Vancouver Independent Music Scene During the Global Pandemic

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Geography, Urban and Environmental Studies

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

_____ Chair
Dr Kevin Gould

_____ Examiner
Dr Will Straw

_____ Examiner
Dr Brian Hracs

_____ Thesis Supervisor(s)
Dr Norma Rantisi

Approved by _____

Dr Damon Matthews, Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Dr Pascale Sicotte, Dean of Arts & Science

Abstract

"Watching the room where the music is happening":
An Examination of Live Streaming in the Vancouver Independent Music Scene
During the Global Pandemic

Nataliya Kiyan

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the city of Vancouver, B.C. has long been home to a thriving independent music scene. However, with the onset of the COVID pandemic, musicians lost their main source of income and means of communication with the audience: live performances. As a consequence, from 2020 to 2022, digital platforms and social media became music venues of the new age, and a primary way for artists to stay connected with listeners and each other. Thus, COVID-19 challenged the relationship between digital and physical spaces and made online mediums the key ‘performance spaces’ for both mainstream and independent artists.

In this Master’s thesis, I examine how live streams became the dominant music venues in 2020 and explore the way these streams remade social and physical connections as well as the relationships between physical and digital spaces within the Vancouver independent music scene during the global pandemic. This study is inductive, qualitative, and exploratory in its orientation, and the main research method is a series of semi-structured interviews with the local independent music scene members who have been especially active on streaming platforms during COVID. The study finds that while live streaming has been a critical medium for performance during the pandemic, musicians view it as a complement rather than a replacement or substitute for in-person performance concerts, owing to the distinct dynamics and aesthetics of the medium. The findings underscore the critical place of concert venues continue to hold for the

Vancouver scene and the need for greater government support for sustaining these physical spaces as well as for leveraging new technologies and virtual spaces.

As there is currently limited literature touching upon the connection between music and COVID-19, this study contributes to understanding what this crisis has meant for the music industry, and how musical artists have been able to adapt during the challenging times. Most significantly, an examination of the current experiences with the ‘digital’ lends insight into possible future development trajectories for the city’s music scene and the kinds of policies that can support Vancouver’s independent music scene.

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	vii
1.0 Introduction.....	1
2.0 Literature Review	4
2.1 <i>What is a Music Scene?</i>	4
2.2 <i>Music in the Placeless World?</i>	8
2.3 <i>Place-Based Music Scenes</i>	11
2.4 <i>Live Streaming and the Digital World</i>	15
2.5 <i>The Displacement of Independent Venues</i>	20
3.0 Methodology	23
3.1 <i>Interviews</i>	24
3.2 <i>Participant Observations</i>	26
3.3 <i>Sources Review</i>	27
4.0 Us Against the City: The Vancouver Music Scene Overview	28
4.1 <i>The Historic Overview</i>	28
4.2 <i>No Fun City Nowadays</i>	33
4.3 <i>Spectacular by Nature...Less by Music</i>	37
4.4 <i>World-Class Entertainment District</i>	39
4.5 <i>East vs West</i>	40
4.6 <i>Support from the City</i>	44
4.7 <i>The (Evolving) Scene in Times of Pandemic</i>	46
5.0 The Immediate Impacts of the Pandemic	47
5.1 <i>Working on Music During the Pandemic</i>	50
6.0 Live Streams	57
6.1 <i>First Live Streams</i>	57
6.2 <i>Advantages</i>	67

6.2.1 <i>Extra Income</i>	67
6.2.2 <i>Learning Live Streaming Skills and Experimenting with Format</i>	68
6.2.3 <i>Venues as Sites of Improvisation</i>	70
6.2.4 <i>Comfort and Spatial Flexibility</i>	73
6.2.5 <i>Outreach & Connection with the Audience</i>	75
6.2.6 <i>The Potential to Strengthen and Expand the Market</i>	77
6.2.7 <i>The Interconnections Between Physical and Virtual</i>	79
6.3 <i>Disadvantages</i>	81
6.3.1 <i>Technical Difficulties</i>	81
6.3.2 <i>Missing Relationships Within the Scene</i>	82
6.3.3 <i>Live Streams as a Band-Aid Solution</i>	83
6.3.4 <i>Live Streams as an (Anti-) Social Experience</i>	85
6.4 <i>Perception of Space During Live Streams “From the Venue”</i>	88
7.0 Support During the Pandemic: The Independent Music Scene Perspective	90
7.1 <i>Artists Supporting Artists Through Virtual Spaces</i>	91
7.2 <i>Supporting Organizations</i>	96
7.3 <i>Governmental Support and Health Restrictions</i>	100
8.0 Conclusion	106
References	111
Extra Materials	128
<i>Appendix 1: Streaming Platforms Used by the Interviewees</i>	128
<i>Appendix 2: Interviewees Table</i>	130
<i>Appendix 3: COVID Restrictions Timeline (In Relation to Music and Art)</i>	132
<i>Appendix 4: Interview Questions</i>	134

List of Figures

Figure 1 – Concert at the Commodore Ballroom.....	30
Figure 2 – The Granville Strip.....	39
Figure 3 – Venues Map	41
Figure 4 – Concert at the Fox Cabaret.....	43
Figure 5 – Vancouver crowd enjoys a concert in the independent pop-up venue right before the pandemic.....	47
Figure 6 – Vancouver-based DJ Evilyn 13 is playing a DJ set during the early days of the pandemic	53
Figure 7 – Dan Mangan and his band play to the empty Denforth Music Hall on March 13 th , 2020	59
Figure 8 – I saved Imperial	62
Figure 9 – Shannon Hemmett of ACTORS photographed through the ladder.....	71
Figure 10 – Empty Seats of the Rickshaw Theatre.....	100
Figure 11 – Live Stream being filmed at the Fox Cabaret.....	103

1.0 Introduction

I started applying for the Master's degree three years ago, in 2019. Back then, I thought of dedicating my thesis to the way the housing crisis and gentrification affect the independent music scene and music venues in the city I call home: Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. This seemed like an obvious choice for the Vancouver resident who was an avid concertgoer and entertainment industry insider such as myself; moreover, I genuinely care about this issue and the problem faced by the local arts scene. However, in March 2020 the world changed forever. Even the flow of my degree has been interrupted and turned inside out: instead of moving across the country and spending a few semesters in Montreal, I ended up completing the entire two-year program remotely, at my desk at home. Needless to say, every life has been altered due to the global health crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the world economy to a grinding halt, and music has become one of the most affected industries. Thousands of working musicians all over the globe were left unemployed; the music venues were one of the first businesses to shut down and – as will be discussed below – in 2022, the last ones to open (for those that were lucky to survive).

As humankind was collectively facing a new mutual enemy, writing about a basically “non-existent” sector of our economy (such as live music) was no longer an option: there were more current and pressing issues to discuss. Moreover, it was hard to predict when live entertainment would be back and what the “new normal” for the music scene was going to look like. This is when I shifted the focus and started exploring the unpredictable, futuristic, and liminal world of live entertainment during the global pandemic.

Even though the health crisis and the lockdown came as a shock, the music world was already technologically advanced and well-equipped enough to quickly translate live performances into a virtual format (Dacks, 2021). Recorded concerts on television and YouTube have been easily accessible for decades, and the screen has been a common medium between artists and audiences for quite some time (Bergman, 2019). However, now there was a new goal behind this medium: to recreate the live experience as much as possible and fill the void created by cancelled concerts.

The pandemic live streams have been modeled after the concert setting, offering viewers the opportunity for a shared, real-time experience and a sense of exclusivity (Ng and Thompson, 2021). Thus, while “physical” concert venues have remained closed, digital platforms have become music venues of the new age and a primary way for artists to interact with their listeners. As many aspects of our lives were digitalized, the pandemic raised an important question: what happens when everything shifts online and the virtual becomes the main performance space?

This thesis project will explore the way technology and digital media platforms have been remaking social connections and physical spaces for independent musicians in the city of Vancouver during the global pandemic. Starting in March 2020 up until this day, I have been observing the evolution of the local scene and the introduction of virtual elements that has occurred due to the unpredictable circumstances of COVID-19. I chose Vancouver as my case study not only because I live in this city and have connections in the local music industry, but also because of the various context-specific local issues that make Terminus City an interesting case study to explore. These issues will be discussed in the Vancouver Music Scene Overview chapter.

This thesis starts with a survey of the literature (Chapter 2). The concept of the music scene is introduced, followed by the discussion on how the scenes have been altered by technology over the course of the twentieth century. I also discuss the role of physical place for the scenes, and how technology has challenged their relationships. The literature review culminates with a discussion of the studies that came out during the global pandemic and addresses the gaps in the literature, and where my thesis could find a fit. Subsequently, this is where I introduce my research question and three sub-questions. My methodology for collecting and analyzing primary research is explained in Chapter 3. It also introduces the main research methods used for this study, talks about the participants and describes their recruitment process. Chapter 4, the Vancouver Music Scene Overview, – a historical account of entertainment in Vancouver, – highlights the disconnect between the City’s officials and the independent music scene and introduces the reader to the current context of the Vancouver music scene.

The main discussion and analysis are based primarily on the semi-structured interviews with members of the local music scene – my primary research method. Chapter 5 is where the immediate impacts of the pandemic on the Vancouver music scene are discussed based on the positives and negatives of live streams highlighted by interviewees and my own observations. The live streaming experience and its spatial and social implications will be discussed in Chapter 6, where the key findings are presented. Chapter 7 discusses whether throughout the pandemic the Vancouver music scene, especially the venues, felt supported by the government, different organizations, and each other. The thesis concludes with final reflections on the findings of the study in Chapter 8 (Conclusion).

2.0 Literature Review

To undertake an examination of how live streams and technological advancement are impacting the independent music scene, an analysis of existing studies pertaining to music scenes and the implication of new technology is required. I will start the literature review by exploring the concept of the “music scene”, its origins, meanings, and current implications, with a brief discussion of how it departs from the concepts of “community” and “subculture”, which are often used interchangeably. I will then talk about the way the music industry has shifted over the course of the twentieth century, from vinyl records to digitalization, and the impacts on music production, distribution, and retail. Next, I will explain how, and why, despite technological advancement scenes have for the most part remained place based. Finally, I will discuss the literature on live streams and music scenes in the context of COVID-19. For this, I will present some academic work that was published during the pandemic, which in its turn will allow me to situate my proposed study and discuss how it will contribute to the literature, as well as introduce the research questions that will guide the study.

2.1 What is a Music Scene?

The term “scene” was originally introduced in journalism, to specifically describe the lifestyle of jazz musicians during the 1940s (Bennett & Peterson, 2004). Since then, it has been adapted to refer to a wide range of cultural phenomena of the western world, such as fashion, music, and other alternative clusters. In this way, the popularization of the notion of “scenes” has helped the members of such clusters find a mutual sense of belonging based on

their taste in music and style and map out their differences from the mainstream culture (Bennett & Peterson, 2004).

Within academic literature, the concept of the scene gained popularity during the late 1980s - early 1990s, as scholars were exploring how to map the sociocultural significance of music in the context of everyday life (Bennett, 2004). The seminal work on the scene is the essay by Will Straw “Systems of articulation, logics of change: Communities and scenes in popular music”, published in *Cultural Studies* in 1991. This work breaks away from the long-lived and well-established preoccupation in academia with the concept of “community”, which presumes a relatively fixed group of people that contributes to a specific music context rooted in a specific geographical area and connected to this area’s heritage and highlights the growing engagement with the notion of regional, national and transnational music spaces prompted by globalization. Since the article was published thirty years ago, it does not yet talk about virtualization and digitalization of music, but already touches upon the increasing internationalization and shifting landscapes of popular culture. Scene, as compared with community, is presented as a more fluid and cosmopolitan, abstract cultural space, where a variety of musical practices coexist in a constant symbiosis and co-influence (Straw, 1991). Apart from “community”, “scene” is also often compared with (and used in the same context as) “subculture”. However, the term subculture has been criticized because it implies the existence of a mainstream culture to which it is opposed. The “scene”, on other hand, exists in society alongside mainstream cultures; it does not necessarily articulate antagonism. Moreover, the members of a subculture are expected to follow certain behavioral patterns and usually have distinct characteristics, while “scenes” can be more liberating and unrestricted. (Gelder & Thornton, 1997, in Bennet and Peterson, 2004). Thus, as a more open concept, “scene” is generally preferred in academic studies.

For Straw, there is a need to examine the ways that specific music practices “work” to create “a sense of community within the conditions of metropolitan music scenes” (Straw, 1991, p. 373). Various agents, such as artists, fans, producers, and support facilities come together to create and enjoy musical experiences and art, which is radically different from the commercial mainstream music industry that is geared to create sellable products and usually consists of a relatively few, key players (Bennett & Peterson, 2004).

Over the last few decades, the term “scene” has been used casually to describe “any loosely organized aggregate of cultural activities” (Casemajor and Straw, 2017, p. 4). Straw (2015) also discusses how the term “scene” has multiple connotations, for example, it can signify collectiveness, place of assembly, workplace, ethical world, etc. (p. 477). The popularity of the term stems in part from its fluidity and adaptability to various contexts and its everyday usage (Straw 2015). The popularity can also be attributed to its fit into the popular “creative city” discourse that came to prominence with the work of Richard Florida (2002), who proposed that cities with vibrant arts scenes and openness to diversity would be more likely to attract high-skilled workers who could drive innovation and economic growth. Thus, over the course of just a couple of decades (from 1991 to 2015), ‘scene’ has become associated with the commodification of art, and studies of various cultural scenes have become more prominent in academia in North America, Latin America, and Europe.

To capture the range of spatial scales that a scene can assume, Bennet & Peterson (2004) define three scene types:

1. Local scene - a scene belonging to a specific geographical location. Shank (1994, in Bennett and Peterson, 2004) shows how such scenes, regardless of the differences in

music genres and visual aesthetics of their members, are brought together and inspired by the specifics and sensibilities of their geographical area. Thus, the contemporary Vancouver music scene is characterized by the city's socio-economic issues, rapid gentrification, the East vs West divide, etc.

2. Translocal scenes used to be more prominent before the rise of the Internet, as virtual scenes share similar traits and have come to replace many of them (see the next paragraph). Translocal scenes are dispersed geographically but share infrastructure and communications with each other. As noted by Bennett and Peterson (2004), translocal scenes are often assembled by the combinations of “the most self-conscious local music scenes” that thrive to come together with either neighbouring or similar scenes (p. 8). They are usually centered around a particular genre of music that is pushed to create connections between different physical locations, interacting with each other by “sharing” artists, fans, and recordings. For example, Kruse (1993) gives an example of the 80's alternative rock as a translocal scene. Another example of a translocal scene, that exists up to this day, is music festivals), where groups of people - both fans and artists - usually drawn from dispersed locations, come together to create their own, uniquely branded scene (Bennett & Peterson, 2004).
3. Virtual scene - scenes created and maintained at a distance, previously through fanzines, currently (increasingly) through the Internet, such as forums in the late 1990s - early 2000s, and social media today (Bennet & Peterson, 2004). The digital era has made the creation of online-based communities, and fan clubs, with participants, highly dispersed geographically, possible and easy.

The three types of scenes defined above speak to the growing significance of technology and the spatial stretching of music connections. The existence of the “virtual” scene as a different category also signifies a change in the need for direct contact, or physical proximity, between an artist and their audiences or among audience members (‘fans’). I am interested to see how virtual performances are impacting the geography and scale of the scene: how (if at all) is the ‘local’ being reconstituted, and what kind of (new) scene emerges in terms of the social and spatial characteristics of a scene. I will also try to either agree or disagree with Rendell (2021) who thinks that local, translocal, and virtual scenes merge during the live stream experience since people from different parts of the world can join these events simultaneously.

In the next section, I will discuss how music has transformed under the influence of technology over the span of the twentieth century.

2.2 Music in the Placeless World?

Jacques Attali (2009) puts music above the material art forms, prescribing it a prophetic role: “Its styles and economic organization are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code. It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible, that will impose itself and regulate the order of things; it is not only the image of things, but the transcending of the everyday, the herald of the future” (p.11). The relation with technology is indicative of this. Ever since the “electrification” of the world at the turn of the twentieth century, music and technological advancement have been changing hand in hand (Frith, 1988; Leyshon, 2001). This includes the distribution, production, and consumption of music, all of which have significantly evolved, and transformed over the last hundred years.

The distribution of music has changed dramatically over the course of the century, starting with vinyl records evolving into the intangible virtual formats of today. The technological advancements in regard to records were most pronounced in the middle of the twentieth century when the music record industry was in its commercial prime (Hracs, 2012).

From the 1950s to the 1970s, multiple record labels were emerging all over North America, gaining power and control over the music industry. The following decades, the 1980s and the 1990s were characterized by further development of bigger labels, as they were taking the smaller independent ones under their wings (Hracs, 2012).

Since the end of the twentieth century, through new technologies such as the Internet, the music industry has been hooked up to what Leyshon (2001) calls “the information super highway”, characterized by the digitalization of music through the creation of compact discs and the MP3 format (p.50). The MP3 format was originally developed in Geneva, Switzerland, by the Motion Pictures Expert Group of the International Organisation for Standardization, or ISO, as a compressed coded standard for moving pictures and audio, initially designed for the interactive television industry (Leyshon, 2001). The development of MP3 has raised concerns within the music industry after the sales of the material carriers of music have significantly dropped. In 1999, the virtual spread of music files was pushed even further by the creation of the first online file-sharing service, Napster, that “came into being, forever altering the architecture of the entertainment industry, technology, and the law” (Allison 2004, 7, quoted in Hracs, 2012). In 2001, Napster had over 60 million users, attracted without any advertising (Leyshon, 2003). Around the same time, high-speed Internet connections became accessible to a wider audience, which only increased the number of music downloads. At the same time, the sales of physical music records (mostly CDs) were declining dramatically (Hracs, 2012). As the major record

companies started understanding the inevitability of these changes, they pushed legal charges against “pirating” of music through Napster and other similar services, as well as started slowly developing the sanctioned distribution of music through online stores (for example, Apple iTunes, that is still the leader within its market) (Hracs, 2012).

With the rise of the Internet and technological advancement, music has become more accessible to people all over the globe, as musicians have developed new ways to momentarily share their art. The way artists make and produce their music has also been eventually transformed by new technologies. Improvement and affordability of personal computers have provided musicians with the opportunity to record and produce their art independently (Leyshon, 2001; Hracs, 2012). Instead of spending money on renting expensive recording studios and equipment, artists now have an easy way to record music at home, as long as they agree to make a one-time investment into the software. This is how, quoting Hracs (2015) “digital technologies transformed the independent model from a viable but niche alternative centred on the punk ethos of DIY, to the dominant organizational form for up-and-coming musicians” (p.466). On top of that, new music genres have emerged that do not require “real” instrumental arrangements (such as various kinds of electronic music). New software, such as Ableton, also allows artists to create any sounds and make music right on their personal laptop. With new digital technologies, musicians can also have more flexibility and creative freedom, without being attached to record labels and producers. This has also been a crucial tool for independent musicians during COVID-19 when they could record their new material without leaving their houses.

As a consequence of the more general technological changes, the network of consumption, represented by music retailers such as record shops, has suffered the most (Leyshon, 2003). Thankfully, up to this day, record stores still exist and survive by the joined

forces of older people who prefer tangible audio formats and younger “hipsters”, who collect records for the sake of “nostalgia”, as an expression of style (Hracs and Jansson, 2017). In a world where record sales are minimal, however, and streaming hardly makes musicians any money, live shows have become the main, authentic way for artists to make a profit, connect with their audiences and promote their art (so-called “gig economy”) (Garland, 2020). While the production and distribution of music have become digitized and intangible, prior to the pandemic, live performances remained the primary way to maintain the direct connection between the artists and the fans. I will further discuss the importance of their proximity in the following section.

2.3 Place-Based Music Scenes

Despite the rise of technology and its consequent effects on key activities of the music industry, music scenes appear to remain mostly place-based. Around the western world, the main record labels, studios, talent, and major venues are still concentrated in a few metropolitan centres. Historically, the main music-related services and infrastructures in North America have been concentrated around Los Angeles, New York and Nashville in the USA, and Toronto and Montreal in Canada. Toronto, Canada’s biggest city, also has the country’s highest number of musicians and music venues (Hracs, 2012). Both Sassen (1991, 2011) and Castells (1996) highlight how there are key “nodal centres” of the economy scattered across the globe. This sectoral concentration is driven “by the benefits of agglomeration which include lower transaction and infrastructure costs, access to pools of skilled workers and specialized services, and the ability to monitor and learn from the competition” (Florida and Jackson, 2010, in Hracs, 2012).

Geography has always been crucial for the cultural economy. Multiple scholars argue that cultural production, or ‘creativity’, is a spatially agglomerated process that relies on the co-location of certain elements of a networked system. Scott (1999) stresses the importance of place in the formation of distinct cultural communities, as well as the infrastructures supporting them. These infrastructures involve listeners and “fans” that are just as important members of the “scene” as the creators.

“No matter what the culture, there is a relationship between the performer and the audience,” notes Schloss (2002). This relationship, he adds, can be characterized by several factors, such as trust, and audience understanding of what the performer is doing. Also, often, the performer is doing something the audience cannot do themselves, which makes people want to invest in the live experience. The audience, in their turn, becomes an inseparable part of a live performance by contributing to the shared experience and, often, determining the outcome of the show (Brand et al., 2012). Audience members at most live performances take on the participant (not observer) role: being physically present at the venue makes them a part of the experience, as crucial as the performer (Bergman, 2019). In her Master’s thesis work, Bergman (2019) compares the relationships between performers and audiences during remote and live performances. Looking at recordings of live performances created before the pandemic context, she discusses that they allow remote performance a vantage point of an observer, rather than a participant (2019). She also notes that observers do not participate in “co-constructing the communicative interaction” that is a live show (Bergman, 2019).

In some cases, the spectators can also become a source of inspiration and creativity for the artists. In jazz, for example, the performance is often improvised and heavily based on “being in the moment”, so the atmosphere, as well as the listeners’ reaction, has a huge impact on the

performers and the way their music develops (Brand et al., 2012). Jazz musicians interviewed by Brand et al. (2012) mention how the public gives them a sense of purpose and duty (to deliver the material) and compare a live concert with going on a journey together. Thus, the connection between performers and their audiences is somewhat sacred and determines the overall live experience. Other studies (Straw, 2015; Cummins-Russell and Rantisi, 2012) have shown the significance of co-location within physical event spaces for forging networks among musicians and between musicians and audiences, foregrounding the importance of face-to-face contact for meaningful exchange, trust-building, and the development of a distinct ‘local scene’.

Hracs et al. (2011) note that by creating vibrant and unique music scenes, “musicians contribute to the social fabric and attractiveness of city-regions” (p. 366). The importance of the geographical locations of the cultural industries is also stressed by Barna (2017), who argues that the music scene has to be “embedded within specific neighborhoods or entire cities <...> [that] act as quality stamps”, and Kruse (2010), who adds that musical identities “were formed, changed, and maintained within localities that were constituted by geographical boundaries, by networks of social relationships, by a sense of local history, and in opposition to other localities” (p. 628). Andrew Leyshon (2001, 2009) has several works exploring the economic geography of music production. He sees the recorded music industry as “an urban phenomenon”, one that is rooted in communities of workers attached to specific places (2009, p. 1313). Leyshon (2001) suggests that the industry is constituted by four networks: creativity, reproduction, distribution, and consumption, which not only represent four links in the value chain of the musical economy but also have their own distinctive geographies. For example, the network of creativity is represented by the record companies, which in turn own manufacturing affiliates, that oversee the reproduction network. The distribution network has originally been represented by retail

outlets or mail order companies that have now for the most part been replaced by Internet services; and finally, the networks of consumption are made up of organizations, and mediums that allow listeners to consume the art, and finally, consumers themselves (Leyshon, 2001, p. 65).

In 2015 only 5% of Canadian musicians were associated with major labels, which makes the other 95% independent artists (Hracs, 2015). By allowing many musicians to get exposure while staying independent, they have greater opportunities to create their own, remote scenes, regardless of their own physical location. In their 2011 study, Hracs et al. show that Toronto, the music capital of Canada, has a closed and highly competitive music community that is not necessarily welcoming to emerging artists. Accordingly, technological advancement has made the Canadian music industry less centralized and allowed other cities such as Halifax, Vancouver, Montreal, and Hamilton to attract and retain musical talent while creating their own unique scenes. In this way, the technology has created a new place-based competition among the scenes and has allowed artists to have more independence in their selection of locations (Hracs et al., 2011). It also means that musicians do not have to be located in the urban core within the centers of musical production (Hracs 2015).

However, despite these freedoms, the digital age has brought its own concerns and difficulties. Among them is the geographical concern, with music being able to “travel” long-distance through the networks of information, and therefore, getting detached from a physical place. Streaming has become the most popular way to consume music (e.g., via Spotify or YouTube), which is making access to music “on-demand” and placeless (Hracs & Jansson, 2017). Kruse (2010) started noticing how the spatial configurations of local music scenes have been changing under the influence of the Internet, particularly with regard to how music is

distributed: “Indie music can now be disseminated online, and people can connect easily across localities, regions, countries, and continents. As Internet options for the discussion and sharing of indie music increase, the local spaces devoted to interaction around music are changing, and sometimes disappearing” (p.625). This has implications for key sites of distribution, such as record stores, that at some point acted as cultural hubs for musicians and music fans, but started inevitably vanishing in the late twentieth century, due to the digitalization of music (Hracs and Jansson, 2017). Hracs (2015) adds that while the Do It Yourself (DIY) aesthetics brought on by technological independence offer some advantages, it can also present challenges for musicians. Not everyone can combine multiple roles and take care of all aspects of their career, including the non-creative ones (e.g., business, publicity, marketing, etc.). And while online marketing has become important, live show performances are an especially important medium for independent artists to connect with fans and must be balanced with online publicity. If originally the DIY movement has been associated with punk sensibilities and treated as a form of resistance to the mainstream culture, it has by now developed into a common practice within the contemporary music scenes, due to growing wage inequalities and uncertainties of being employed in music (Howard et al., 2011). Quader (2021) also adds that the digital world has its own versions of “mainstream” platforms, such as Spotify, and “DIY” platforms with more “independent ethos”, such as Bandcamp and Soundcloud, partially because more proceeds from these platforms’ sales and streams are retained by the artists (p. 8).

2.4 Live Streaming and the Digital World

There have been past studies that looked at live streams, yet during the global pandemic the contact has shifted as streams became widely adopted and musicians have acquired a closer familiarity with them. Before the pandemic, live streamed performances were on the margins of

technological advancements, and would happen rarely, as there was no need for it. COVID-19 has helped live streams to move from their “niche” spot, mostly in the gaming industry, to mainstream culture. As getting together became physically impossible, live streams have created a way for music fans to connect “digitally”. As noted by Hilvert-Bruce et al. (2018), “unlike previous streaming services, such as television and YouTube, live streaming offers real-time human interaction between the streamer and viewers, facilitating their ability to interact with each other” (p. 58). A quick summary and description of the live stream platforms, used by the project’s interviewees, can be found in Appendix 1.

The very first pandemic live streamed concerts were born as an immediate reaction to the cancelled shows in mid-March 2020. Many artists have been preparing and rehearsing for these live concerts for months and did not want to cancel the shows completely. For example, the experience of one of those “trailblazers”, a Pittsburgh-based hardcore punk band Code Orange, was documented by Rendell (2021). On March 15th, 2020, the band moved their album release concert online, to Twitch: a platform previously used mostly for streaming video games (Payne 2018), becoming one of the first musical artists to use it for musical performance (Rendell, 2021). A similar “abrupt” experience of one of the local trailblazers, singer-songwriter Dan Mangan, will be discussed in Chapter 6.

When I started my research back in 2020, only a few academic studies examining the impact of pandemic live streams could be found. As of 2022, two years into COVID-19, the number of works exploring the relationships between music and the global health crisis has grown significantly. In particular, many scholars have contemplated how live streams compare with the authentic experience that is the live concert and studied the behaviours of online viewers. Vandenberg et al. (2020) analyze the variety of rituals available to the audience to

interact during the music live streams, such as messages in the chat box and emojis. They also note how the virtual interactions happening during the observed virtual rave parties are rarely about “sharing the moment”; more often, the participants are reminiscing about the “good old days” and how much they miss the “real” experience (p.7). Rendell (2021) describes how the audience’s use of emojis “mimics” the live concert behavior, as the spectators use clapping, horns, thumbs up, and heart emojis (p. 1103). In their pre-pandemic study (2004) Lee and Peterson label the interactions within the virtual scenes as “flat”, since they usually consist of typed content, which makes it one-sided (p. 187). As seen in Appendix 1, all streaming platforms have a chat option. For the most part, chat is the only way for audiences to communicate with each other and the artist. Zoom and Instagram Live allow video and audio conversations with audiences, however, this option is limited and not always utilized. Moreover, sometimes its usage makes streaming more challenging and chaotic since the artist has to concentrate on multiple things at once. Hence, in the digital realm, audiences usually take on the role of an observer, not a participant (Bergman, 2019). Through a series of experimental live streamed concerts, Onderdijk et al. (2021) explored the connectedness between the audiences and between the audiences and performers, only to find out that the lack of participation was missed by the digital viewers the most. Likewise, in their study involving Korean musicians, Hahm et al. (2022) found that for the artists, the main dissatisfaction with digital performances stems from the lack of connection with their viewers.

During a live performance, both space and time play a crucial role, since this experience is about being “in the moment” with the crowd around you. Unlike sporting events that are often watched on the screen (moreover, some people prefer the latter as they get commentary and replays), concerts are created to make a person a real-time, on-site participant of the show.

During the lockdown, virtual performance has been the only option for artists to perform and for the audience to enjoy semi-live music, however, the time and space relationships of the live events cannot be fully translated into the language of live streams. In other words, live streams' "liveness" is simultaneous, and they are "live" only in terms of time, not space (Vandenberg et al., 2020). Indeed, the main difference from watching a pre-recorded video is that the concert is happening at this exact time, and in some cases, the artist is interacting with the audience digitally, through chat options or on camera during the question-and-answer portion of the show, if the artist decides to recreate the "meet and greet" experience online. The only way for performers to show that the live stream is indeed performed "live" is for them to engage with their audiences through the camera or chat. Yet, because they typically do not see their viewers, this experience might seem alienating and strange. Moreover, the idea of being "live in terms of time" does not apply to all types of live streams. Some of them are in fact pre-recorded and edited, especially live streams filmed in venues that require some editing.

The overall role and significance of the pandemic live streams have been discussed by several scholars. Ng and Thompson (2021) question the usefulness of the live streaming experience for artists. Even though it is crucial for musicians to share their art, stay relevant, and connect with their listeners through any possible means, they suggest that it is unclear how much of that can be achieved through the virtual format. They also argue that live streaming should be considered a separate medium, not a "replacement" of concerts, since it shares more similarities with the recorded and video segments of the music ecosystem, rather than live performance: "It's not really a concert and it's not really a recording, and its in-between status makes it less than either" (Ng and Thompson, 2021, p. 3). Rendell (2021) agrees on the "liminal" role of live streams, calling them "a convergence between live music performance and digital media

broadcast” (p. 1093). Datta (2020) observes that live streams only “emphasize how far from live music-making virtual performances are” (p.1).

The way the pandemic has affected music as a social art form has been discussed by Onderdijk et al. (2021) as they talk about the difficulties of collective music-making during the lockdown when artists were not allowed to play in the same space and had to explore the virtual ways of coming together. The shift away from collective music-making has also altered the relationships young musicians have with their instruments, as well as certain genres of music, for the most part, electronic, that they would typically enjoy in a concert or a club setting (Howard et al., 2021).

Howard et al. (2021) explore both advantages and disadvantages of the pandemic for young, emerging, independent artists. Their study shows that during COVID, young musicians benefit from the increased free time and the opportunity to improve their skills, both in music and business. Lee et al. (2020) discuss the outburst of creativity pushed by the new (online) medium, virtual accessibility of resources, and free time, as they call the pandemic a “cultural catalyst”.

The other important component of this thesis study – the concept of the “independent music scene” and the way the pandemic has affected its geographical implications – has been brought up in a few studies over the past few years. In his work on the independent scene in Central Sydney, Australia, Quader (2021) discusses how online practices created before the pandemic, have been flourishing during the lockdown. They provided independent musicians with the necessary tools to work on their art without leaving their homes. Quader also stresses that online mediums have not replaced traditional infrastructures such as record labels and radio stations, but rather supplemented them and gave musicians temporary outlets during the

lockdown (2021). Gu et al. (2021) look at the vulnerability of China's independent music market, and the hardships caused by the closures of key venues for independent musicians. In China, however, the struggle for venues' survival is linked up with the political context, where the forms of "unsocialist" music that these venues host had a hard time surviving under the current government regime even long before the pandemic. The authors discuss how online concerts "might have captured a new audience for a previously marginal niche", and the ability to create music independently from the comfort of people's homes might have also triggered the renaissance of independent music in China (Gu et al., 2021, p.71). Another work describing the Chinese context comes from Mouillot (2022) who talks about the Hong Kong independent music scene, where the spatial detachment of online streaming has been somewhat beneficial for local acts. It has triggered an outburst of creativity and new ideas for Hong Kong musicians' performing arts, as even before the pandemic, local independent musicians have been struggling through the loss of key venues and cultural domination of mainstream "Cantopop" (short for Cantonese pop) (Mouillot, 2022). However, the implications for 'live shows' is not directly addressed in any of these works.

2.5 The Displacement of Independent Venues

The issue of independent venues' displacement is not limited to China alone; major Western cities, including Vancouver, have been struggling with it over the past few decades, and the pandemic has only worsened the situation. Much like the above-mentioned "Cantopop", mainstream artists, in general, are typically at the forefront of the live music industry, which often leads to a marginalization of alternative culture, including the independent venues that are just not deemed as "important" as the mainstream ones (Toon, 2000). The "gentrification conflict" has been pressing creatives to leave the inner cities and prompting the redevelopment of

their spaces, including music venues, to cater to middle and upper-class residents (Godschalk, 2004; Pickersgill, 2006). Within the new context, the independent alternative spaces are getting replaced by high-profit creative industries, such as craft breweries, high-tech firms, and digital entertainment. (Campbell, 2021, p.11).

The real danger in the loss of alternative spaces is that it could lead to the extinction of existing scenes and make urban centers less attractive for new artists. Scenes are built around physical spaces. If previously it was the style and the looks that defined music scenes and subcultures, Debies-Carl (2014) suggests that nowadays, it is the music venues that are at the core of the music scene identity. These spaces play a crucial role in bringing music to the listeners and bringing artists together with their audiences and with one another.

Green (2018) talks about the hardships of running an alternative venue in a city like Vancouver. The alternative scenes' identities get formed through the relationships between people and places; urban subcultures are inseparable from the spaces where they originate and nourish. They thrive through symbiotic relationships with their environment. Thus, when venues are taken away from people, this inevitably causes a backlash among the members of the scene (Green, 2018). "Music scenes are sites of a reciprocal relationship that exists between physical spaces and the bodies that occupy them" – she proposes (Green, 2018, p.77). The implications that the pandemic has for music venues are therefore a significant facet of the broader analysis of live streams as contemporary 'spaces' of performance. The pandemic context was touched upon by Taylor et al. (2021) who explore the spatiality of live music in the United Kingdom. They state that the "economic viability of live music stems from spatiality" since the music industry is "dependent upon functional live music spaces which meet the needs of the musicians, audiences, and live music professionals whose spatial practice gives them meaning" (p.18). They also

mention how venues in British cities started hosting live streams in order to stay afloat financially, as well as to maintain relationships with the music community and the artists. However, the relationships between the physical and digital spaces in the pandemic world have not been discussed in the academic literature. Also, despite the variety of works coming from all over the world, the Canadian context has not been covered by the literature.

Hence, my study aims to address these gaps by looking at the Vancouver independent music scene during the pandemic and exploring the perspective of both artists and music venues. This study also aims to contribute to such an analysis of the social-spatial features of live streams and the artists' experiences of live streams as key music venues of the pandemic era. Thus, my general research question is: *how have digital live streams transformed the relationships within the Vancouver independent music scene during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

To explore the nature of these relationships, the following three sub-questions have emerged:

- How are live streams remaking the performance spaces as places of both creation and consumption?
- How are live streams shaping social connections within the Vancouver music scene?
- Which policy lessons for supporting musicians are suggested in the Vancouver context?

Since my focus is on the social and physical connections of the Vancouver independent music scene specifically, I will thus bridge the gap between the scene studies and the studies of live streams in the context of the pandemic. I have not yet found a single study combining the lived experiences of both the independent venues and performers during such a transformative

moment, and my paper should pioneer this approach. The thesis will also explore the implications of the live streams for the future socio-spatial organization of the Vancouver scene and the associated policy context.

3.0 Methodology

The study is inductive, qualitative, and exploratory in its orientation. I chose the case study methodology for my research since I am exploring a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context – Vancouver's independent music scene throughout the COVID-19 pandemic – and have no control over the events (Yin, 1981). A case study is a qualitative descriptive approach that is used to look at individuals, a small group of participants, or a group as a whole; it is often used to contribute to the knowledge of a group, community, or organizational phenomenon, and it studies phenomena that are inseparable from their context (Writing CSU, 2021). For example, in my case, I am studying the implications of a particular global event (the pandemic) in the context of a specific urban music scene.

Case study methodology usually answers the questions “how” and “why”. It implies no generalizability, however, data in one case can be used to inform the analysis of another case. Yin (2009) hence calls out the importance of carefully reviewing existing literature in order to find a niche that will allow a case study to contribute to the academic literature.

The case study design employed here relies on three data collection tools. Semi-structured interviews are the primary research method, while observations and reviews of grey literature act as complementary methods.

3.1 Interviews

I used semi-structured qualitative interviews as my primary research method. I chose semi-structured interviews in order to inspire conversations and to encourage participants to describe their worlds in their own terms (Rubin & Rubin, 2001). As a part of this method, I was able to prepare the questions in advance and address a similar set of themes across interviews; however, interviews could be reorganized and adjusted accordingly depending on the flow of each conversation (see the original sets of questions in Appendix 4). All questions were open-ended (Bryman and Teevan, 2005). This method also allowed the conversations to be flexible, spontaneous, and natural and allowed the participants to take control of their narrative.

I have been involved in the British Columbia music scene since 2015, and over the years I have accumulated a broad range of musical connections all over the province. Hence, reaching out to musicians was relatively easy. I started recruiting participants during the late summer-early fall of 2021, after receiving ethics approval for the study. Participants were contacted through social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, and email. At first, I targeted a few musicians who were frequently live streaming throughout the pandemic, some of them I knew personally and some only through social media. I also asked a few well-connected musicians to refer me to frequent live streamers in their circle (“snowball” sampling technique). Besides the musicians, I was also referred to a few “digital venue” hosts who could also provide valuable information for my study. “Digital venues” are platforms that emerged during the pandemic in order to host live streamed shows and keep the artists' community connected. “Digital venues” will be closely discussed in Chapter 7. I also reached out to the operators of

some physical independent venues that I knew were actively hosting live streams in their spaces. They all enthusiastically agreed to participate in the study, since it allowed them to share their struggles with wider audiences. The entire process of recruiting was done online, due to the restrictions on social gatherings.

My participants, therefore, consist of two major categories:

- Independent artists living and working in the Vancouver area. In my study, independent means either unsigned (releasing their music independently) or signed to independent, non-commercial labels. Some of these artists also act as virtual venue hosts.
- Employees of Vancouver independent venues that were hosting many live streams from their empty spaces and were active in this community during the pandemic. Independent venues are small or mid-size venues that do not rely on corporate sponsorship and do everything “in-house”, including booking performances. Concert photographer Kelli Rothwell is included in this category since she was primarily sharing her experience working at venues.

The interview process took place from October 2021 to January 2022. A total of 20 interviews were conducted, however, one participant failed to send the consent form, hence their interview was excluded from the project. The total breakdown of the interview is as follows:

- Musicians (14 participants, 5 females, 9 males). Three of the musicians (2 males, and 1 female) are also virtual venue hosts.
- Physical Venues - owners and employees (7 participants, 2 females, 5 males). One of them (female) is a concert photographer. One male is both a musician and a venue staff.

For a more detailed breakdown of the interviewees, please refer to Appendix 2.

Some of the participants are well-known. For example, The Zolas and Dan Mangan tour North America and Europe, and their songs are played on the radio stations across the country. What makes them independent is that they are signed to independent music labels. The Zolas' and Hotel Mira's label is Vancouver-based Light Organ Records, and Mangan's main collaborator is Toronto-based Arts & Crafts (Arts & Crafts, 2022). The rest of the participants are only known in specific circles and have a limited number of listeners.

The interviews were on average 1 hour in length, with the shortest being around 40 minutes and the longest about 1 hr and 40 minutes. Due to COVID and conflicting schedules, most interviews (11 in total) were conducted over Zoom. Moreover, the majority of the interviewees do not live in the City of Vancouver, so the remote option was the most convenient one. Most interviewees either live in the suburbs or in Greater Vancouver Area, with the exception of two interviewees (Phoenix Lazare and Justin Kelley) who live on Salt Spring Island (British Columbia), and Reid Zakos who lives in Calgary.

Most in-person interviews were conducted at JJ Bean Coffee Rosters at 3010 Main Street, Vancouver, where I rented a small private boardroom for a small fee. One interview was conducted at my place with a participant whom I knew well. The Rickshaw Theatre and the Fox Cabaret interviews were conducted at their respective venues. Most interviews were conducted one on one, with the exception of Darlene Rigo and Noah Kamis of the Fox Cabaret who talked to me together, creating a valuable dialogue where they could bounce ideas off each other.

3.2 Participant Observations

Since in-person events were cancelled in March 2020, I have been regularly attending live streams of local musicians on various social media platforms (such as Instagram Live, Twitch, Zoom, and others), and observing the behaviour of both artists and their audiences. I have also been taking notes on some of their interactions, both verbal and written in the chat. I initially learned about these events through social media announcements.

Once in-person events were back in late 2021, I also observed the pandemic-related sentiments during the first concerts back. At those concerts, I was able to observe the liminal transitional space between digital and physical concerts and think of how the interactions are going to change and evolve.

Observation helps to take the holistic and immersive approach by being a “participant” and engaging in the same relationship with the content as other virtual attendees, in order to understand and get involved in certain cultural practices (Bryman, 2012). In my case, attending both the live streams and the first in-person shows helped me to cross-check the findings of the interviews.

3.3 Sources Review

In addition to interviews and participant observation, I originally planned to review the subject-related grey literature, such as government reports, policies, and working papers, as well as popular media accounts (news, blogs, social media posts, podcasts). In the end, I reviewed mostly media sources that helped me pierce together the tangled timeline of pandemic policies and restrictions starting in March 2020. I have also reviewed policies accessible online, as well as governmental organizational websites. For the Vancouver chapter, multiple books and magazines were reviewed in order to put together the timeline of the city’s entertainment life and

contextualize present dynamics. Alongside the interviews and observation, this review enabled me to acquire a more holistic perspective of the music scene, which I document in the chapters that follow.

4.0 Us Against the City: The Vancouver Music Scene Overview

I will open the main discussion by introducing the geographical case study: the city of Vancouver. Starting with the colonization, and the city's incorporation at the end of the 19th century, I will chronologically go through the history of its entertainment industry, in particular music. I will then describe Vancouver's contemporary independent music scene, using academic papers, media sources, and extracts from personal interviews. Next, I will provide more context by showcasing some challenges faced by Vancouver artists, explain what sets this city apart from other major Canadian centres, and then transition into the discussion of the scene during the pandemic.

4.1 The Historic Overview

“No Fun City” is one of the nicknames of Vancouver, a self-deprecating joke commonly used by city dwellers. Robert Barrington, the production manager of Vancouver independent venue Rickshaw Theatre, explains the phrase by contemplating that “If people are expected to live in a city that's insanely expensive <...>, and not have a nightlife, what's the point of being in Vancouver?” (Personal interview, November 23rd, 2021). Despite the moniker's popularity, not many know where it came from, and finding its origins is surprisingly difficult. Possibly, it was

started by a local firework festival organizer, when in the early 2000s the overly cautious City Hall banned him from using a tobacco company as a sponsor for his event (Time Out, 2006).

The city on the shores of the Pacific Ocean lies on the unceded traditional territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. It was incorporated as recently as 1886 and shaped during the 20th century.

Vancouver's short history has never been particularly "fun", as Terminus City has been familiar with restrictions since its early days. In 1905, for example, the city banned saloons – the early outposts of live entertainment – that were not attached to hotels; local religious groups in power actively stood against the liquor sales in theatres and music halls, advocating for the "amusement carried out with purity" (Chapman, 2020, p. 14). In 1917, a four-year prohibition came to British Columbia that encouraged the establishment of a variety of illegal liquor establishments and underground dealerships. After a few years under the dry law, drinking in Vancouver remained highly regulated: the beer parlours that started opening in 1925 had a "tightly regulated environment devoid of saloon trapping" (Campbell, 2001, p. 11). Vancouver's location – the city is isolated from the rest of the country by the Rocky Mountains – kept it away from the frivolous lifestyles of its eastern counterparts. Around the same time, Montreal, for example, was living the North American version of "la vie Boheme" (Stahl, 2001). The vivid metropolis embraced its role as Canada's "sin city" through the provision of leisure, sex, culture, and art, in striking contrast to Vancouver, where the nocturnal side was kept tame.

When it comes to music, Vancouver has always been "listening" and reacting to the world around it. The expansion of the radio broadcast industry brought sounds from far away to Vancouver households; over the course of the 1920s, the number of licensed radios jumped from

103 to 2100 (Chapman, 2014). At first, Vancouverites favoured the American radio stations from south of the border, yet over time local broadcasts started booming as well (Chapman, 2014).

During the 1920s-1930s, the city's live entertainment history grew as Vancouver became a bustling stopover for traveling vaudeville and burlesque performers. It served as a starting point for tours that would then continue south to the west coast of the United States (Chapman,



Figure 1: Concert at the Commodore Ballroom
Source: N. Kiyon, 2019.

2014). This time period also marked the rise of Granville Street as a destination for live performances and the establishment of the Commodore Ballroom (originally Commodore Cabaret) in 1929 (see Figure 1). Commodore remains one of the most long-standing and legendary

venues in the city, and Granville Street is still Vancouver's primary commercial entertainment district (Chapman, 2014).

Due to its location, distant from other major Canadian cities, Vancouver has always been pushed to harvest its own identity and culture. Vancouver's creative scene has always been more influenced by the laid-back and counter-cultural American West than the major Canadian centres on the other side of the Rockies. This is one of the reasons why, for example, during the late 1960s - early 1970s Vancouver became "the hippie capital of Canada" (Aronsen, 2010, p. 3). The hip neighbourhood of Kitsilano and its West 4th Avenue became the epicentre of the movement within the city. Beyond the issues raised by its American counterpart, within the

Canadian context, the hippie movement focused on some local, close-to-home affairs, such as Indigenous rights, environmentalism, and neighbourhood-based political reform (Aronsen, 2010). The movement also inspired a new local music scene, heavily influenced by Californian psychedelic rock and era-defining bands from the United States. The biggest local bands at the time were Seeds of Time, Papa Bear's Medicine Show, and The Collectors (Aronsen, 2010). The flower children, however, left the streets of Kitsilano in the early 1970s to pave the way for the next major countercultural movement.

In August 1977, the American punk rock band Ramones performed at the Commodore Ballroom for the first time (CBC Radio, 2017). The same year, the local alternative newspaper Georgia Straight released a special issue about punk rock (Fontana, 2011). These events are believed to be the beginning of the punk scene in Vancouver. Over the next decade, the city gave birth to multiple key players of the North American punk rock scene, namely, D.O.A., Young Canadians, and Subhumans. This was the first time, as noted by Kaitlin Fontana, that "any music from Vancouver could really lay claim to ripping into changing a scene from the inside out" (2011, p. x). The isolated dirty port town that Vancouver used to be at the time, indeed had matching energy with the raw and unpolished sound of punk rock. No one knew back then that Vancouver was on the verge of rapid and significant changes.

Just like any world-class event of this caliber, the world fair Expo that happened in 1986, transformed the city by putting "a shiny, progressive face" on it, and Vancouver has never been the same since (Fontana, 2011, p. x). The changes were not welcomed by the local underground heroes, such as D.O.A., who put out their timely 1986 release called "Expo Hurts Everyone" and raised money for the poor evictees who were displaced by the fair's developments. The band members have also refused to be a part of the Expo in any possible way and have never been on

the event grounds (Lawrence, 2016). The local punk scene, however, left its mark on the event in the most radical way.

The Expo hosted a so-called Festival of Independent Recording Artists in hopes to put Vancouver on the map as a hip and exciting city and to showcase the local underground talent to international audiences. On August 4th, 1986, local punk band The Slow for instance was scheduled to play in front of 1500 people in an outdoor venue called Xerox Theatre (Fontana, 2011). While the organizers may have had good intentions, asking punk rockers to perform at a commercial, mainstream event that was, moreover, reshaping the city in a way not welcomed by the marginalized groups would have serious consequences. The Slow knew exactly how to make a statement. Quoting Van Evra (2017), “Once on stage, the band famously tore down large scrims that they were supposed to jump through, threw 2x4s into the audience, lead the crowd in a Sieg Heil salute in protest against the conservative premier Bill Bennett and performed in various states of undress”. To support the protest, several fans from the audience joined the band by climbing on the stage (Fontana, 2011). The shocked organizers pulled the plug mid-song and canceled the other fourteen scheduled performances of the Festival of Independent Recording Artists, without further consideration. The event made history as “the Slow Riot”, and in a way became the first documentation of what would become an ongoing disconnect between the city’s officials (and the huge corporate event organizers) and Vancouver’s underground music scene: “It was the feeling of an authoritative force that could and would giveth and taketh away high-profile shows at the drop of a hat, without mercy or explanation” (Fontana, 2011, p. 5). As a result, the city’s alternative scene went even deeper underground.

During the post-Expo years, another significant music phenomenon, grunge, would explode just south of the border in Seattle. Given the geographical proximity and cultural

significance of this music genre, the grunge movement would gain prominence in Vancouver. Yet this time Vancouver was for the most part enjoying the music explosion of Washington State rather than producing significant acts of its own. Nonetheless, in the shadow of grunge, Vancouver has been able to cultivate its own unique personality (Fontana, 2011).

4.2 No Fun City Nowadays

Today, owing to Vancouver's status as an international metropolis and the multicultural fabric of the city, the local music scene includes artists of different origins and music of many genres. As noted by musician Angie Faith, "we have many cultures of people that live in the <...> Lower Mainland, there's a lot of different kinds of genres of music that are performed live and online" (personal interview, November 5th, 2021).

As the biggest city in the province, Vancouver is also considered the epicentre of the art scene in British Columbia, even though my interviewees perceive the scene to be less vibrant compared to Montreal and Toronto. The West Coast art scene is generally viewed as more vibrant than, for example, that of the prairie provinces. To illustrate, the only interviewee who is from Saskatchewan originally – a Cree hip-hop artist Michelle Lee Runns, known by her stage name MzShellz – shares that "one of the reasons why I came out here, was to focus on the music, because <in> Regina, there's nothing <...>. When I came out here, and I've seen all the diversity of music out here, it is mind-blowing; it's vibrant" (personal interview, November 3rd, 2021).

Nowadays, being an independent artist in the "no fun city" appears to be less fun than ever. The music scene of 21st-century Vancouver faces multiple issues, among the most significant is the difficulty of getting people out to actually "have fun" and to attend live shows.

The two most common reasons for this are the lack of information about the upcoming shows and the cost of living in Vancouver.

Zach Gray, the frontman of the local indie rock band The Zolas, contends that the city's infrastructure lacks connectivity and is not well established; he notes that in Vancouver, "there's so much going on, but it's not integrated. There isn't a central listing of things going on". (Personal interview, December 13th, 2021). To know what is happening in the city, you have to be connected to "the right people", he adds (personal interview, December 13th, 2021).

In his interview, Ian Cromwell, who is not only a musician and a live stream host but also an activist and an advocate for local live music, shares his past conversation with Jared Martin, the new city of Vancouver music officer: "he asked, *"how can we help? But don't ask us to spend money."* And I said, *"Don't worry about it. What I need is for you to network us and to get us in contact with each other"*, and then it just never happened" (personal interview, December 9th, 2021). In the fall of 2022, Ian himself was campaigning to be elected to the City Council in hopes to represent local artists and advocate for their needs.

For Vancouver's independent artists, a core group of fans often ends up being an artist's primary – or only – listeners. Vancouver is constantly ranked as one of the most expensive cities in North America, and it forces many to be extremely selective about the way they spend their money (Shepert, 2022). Moreover, the majority of both producers and consumers of independent music are other independent artists and youth with low disposable income (McCormick, 2017). In their interviews, both Charlie Kerr and Adam Fink agree that it's hard to get people to come out and pay to see a band they've never heard of, even if the ticket is as cheap as \$10 (December 2nd & December 11th, 2021). Zach Gray also notices that people going to concerts are often the

members of the scene, other artists, as well as the friends and family members of the performers. Many of the Vancouver independent bands have a committed circle of supporters, anywhere from a few dozen to a couple of hundreds, who typically follow their art and attend live shows. Adam Fink calls them “your Motley little crew of misfits that have come together to do good “, and highlights that they are “extra supportive” and “extra caring”, because they realize that “Vancouver is small and unaffordable, there's not a commitment to culture”. “That's the Vancouver music scene,” – he adds – “it's us against the city, the expenses, the issues” (personal interview, December 11th, 2021). Even the bands that tour around the world and get played on local radio stations, such as Zach Gray’s The Zolas, have a hard time reaching out to wider audiences outside of this committed circle.

The challenge of widening the audience is exacerbated by current regulations. As noted by McCormick (2017), the City of Vancouver has implemented a set of rules and policies in order “to promote safety and reduce risk” (p.2). Despite the good intentions, these rules have had the effect of limiting both the access and safety of patrons. For example, the Liquor Control and Licensing Act that is used to regulate nightlife in the province of British Columbia results in a limited number of all-ages venues and shows (McCormick, 2017). Zach Gray notes that “in order to make money <on live performance>, you have to basically treat music like a vehicle for liquor sales”, which in its turn makes live music just as strictly regulated as alcohol sales (personal interview, December 13th, 2021).

Indeed, as rightfully noted by local journalist John Kurucz, “A fire hall doubling as an arts space. Gigs in churches or community centres. Rehearsal spaces at libraries. They’re ideas that would seem entirely foreign in places not crushed by an affordability crisis, but just about anything on the table in a city where income inequality is 2.5 times higher than the national

average and housing costs are highest in Canada” (2018). In the face of such challenges, some artists choose to leave and seek more affordable lifestyles elsewhere in the province or the country. And those that stay often operate in the shadows of the city’s planning priorities. Hracs et al. (2011) similarly discuss how the costs of living push independent artists away from the major Canadian cities, such as Toronto, and in our case, Vancouver. Typically underpaid, they often move to smaller and more remote towns or communities. This has been easier given the new technologies that allow independent artists to work remotely and make them relatively spatially mobile. Independent scenes in smaller places are also typically more welcoming, supportive, and less competitive which could be beneficial for musicians, especially at the earlier stages of their careers (Hracs et al., 2011).

Another aspect affected by the city’s unaffordability is the spatial relationships between the artists belonging to the different genres and communities. There has been a common narrative in the media that, due to the prices and lack of venues, the local music scene, regardless of genre, comes together during the hard times, whether it means playing together or supporting each other, or sharing performance spaces and gigs (Lopez, 2010). This narrative has been both confirmed and discredited by two opposing camps of the interviewees, that seem to have different experiences depending on their environment and circles; quoting Angie Faith, “some people would say that the Vancouver music scene is “cliquey”, and others also would say that it’s underpaid, but it really does depend on who you talk to, and what their perspective is” (personal interview, November 5th, 2021). Reid Zakos says that the Vancouver music scene is community-driven and supportive, and Paul Clark calls it a “tight-knit group” with a lot of crossovers, where “people get to work together on different projects” (personal interviews, November 9th, 2021; November 24th, 2021). Justice McLellan agrees, saying that “since there isn't much of the music

industry here, people are following their creativity a lot more uniquely, which brings a lot of different bands together. It becomes less “cliquey” when there are less direct opportunities to make it somewhere. So, it's a pretty open and caring music scene” (personal interview, November 28th, 2021).

In their turn, several interviewees, for example, Megan Emanuel, Noah Kamis, Ian Cromwell, and Zach Gray, think that the scene is rather “fragmented”, and has “pockets of artists” that only work and perform together “and it's quite rare for them to cross over” – although, as Ian adds, this has been changing in recent years (personal interviews, November 22nd 2021, January 6th 2022, December 13th & December 9th, 2021). Zach Gray explains that “the only time you really run into each other as musicians, between scenes, is because we all have to have the same rehearsal spaces, with many small rooms” (personal interview, December 13th, 2021).

4.3 Spectacular by Nature...Less by Music

“A gateway to the outdoors and a wonder all its own” – this is how the city of Vancouver is presented by the destination marketing website for British Columbia, Hello BC (2021). The city was dubbed “spectacular by nature”, after the eponymous book by Bruce Constantineau that came out in 1992. The natural beauty of Vancouver and its charming location by the mountains and the ocean become the main draw for the city that is widely promoted to visitors and locals alike. Vancouver’s city planning strategies also concentrate on a combination of the natural and man-made environments: “the importance of the natural landscape to Vancouver’s identity, livability and indeed creativity has long been recognized in the planning process of the city” (Punter, 2003, p. 241). The neighborhoods are planned according to their geographical

landscapes and views (Ling and Dale, 2010). Thus, in the context of Vancouver, the “outside” is more appreciated than the “inside”: tourist guides, to-do lists, and Internet sources constantly encourage both locals and tourists to go out and engage in a wide range of fun outdoor activities, such as hiking, cycling, kayaking, or skiing. Vancouver is a rare case where the man-made environment is not opposed to nature: here, they come together to create a unique urban experience. Nature, in Vancouver’s case, is not something “out there” - it is a part of the Vancity lifestyle.

Thus, the obsession with the extraordinary beauty of the city’s landscapes often overshadows its culture and art scene. “Those who run the city over the decades have done their best to suppress its nocturnal side, monitoring not only the kinds of nightspots its citizens might escape to but also what they did there” - notes Aaron Chapman (2002, p. 7). The creative aspects of Vancouver seem to be pushed back, especially if compared with two other major Canadian cities – Toronto and Montreal, both famous for their elaborate and well-touted music and arts scenes. Both cities casually came up in a few interviews in comparison to Vancouver. Thus, musician Megan Emanuel mentions how “Montreal has a billion venues to play at, whereas in Vancouver, there's like a handful” (personal interview, November 22nd, 2021). Similarly, Montreal is idealized by Noah Kamis from The Fox Cabaret, who adds that “there's a street festival every night in the summer, and there are venues everywhere” (personal interview, January 6th, 2022). Robert Barrington of the Rickshaw Theatre adds that “as far as cultural importance, we're definitely nowhere near the music cities that Montreal and Toronto are” and that “people don't often consider Vancouver to be as music scene oriented as Montreal or Toronto, but we got some great stuff here” (personal interview, November 23rd, 2021). Musician Dan Mangan shares that the Vancouver music scene is “on its own”, “disconnected, and

“isolated” from the rest of Canada, and that when he was first getting into the music industry, there was a lot of pressure to move to Montreal or Toronto in order “to make it” (personal interview, January 20th, 2022).

4.4 World-Class Entertainment District

There is an area in contemporary Vancouver where fun is more or less encouraged. The previously mentioned Granville Street, the historic entertainment area, is situated in the heart of Downtown Vancouver and is home to the city’s top mainstream live music venues, such as the Commodore Ballroom, Orpheum Theatre, Vogue Theatre, and others (see Figure 2). These mid-size venues are owned and operated by bigger entertainment companies such as Live Nation



Figure 2: The Granville Strip.
Source: Vancouver is Awesome, 2014.

(Commodore), Vancouver Civic Theatres (Orpheum), and MRG Group (Vogue), which allows them to stay afloat and remain well-maintained and financially supported through the toughest times (Baluja, 2015). The city’s goal is to

turn Granville into a world-class entertainment district (GED), as it has gradually undergone changes since the mid-2000s. These changes were pushed even further when the 2010 Winter Olympics triggered a rapid gentrification of the city’s core (Patterson, 2018). As an aftermath, in 2018 the City of Vancouver created a series of new bylaws specifically designed for GED: now more venues and liquor establishments on Granville Street could apply for licensed outdoor

patios and have live music until 1 am. These venues would however have to provide patrons with more information by publishing the drink sizes and strengths on their menus (Gill, 2018). The City has also increased the late-night transit options around the area (Green, 2018).

Another permitted “fun” area of Vancouver is the affluent Yaletown neighbourhood. It is situated in the city’s downtown core, east of Granville, and hosts Rogers Arena, the home of the Vancouver Canucks (NHL) and Vancouver Warriors (NLL), as well as BC Place, the home of the Vancouver Whitecaps (MLS) and BC Lions (CFL). Both venues also serve as the primary location for most larger-scale, mainstream concerts by international megastars and major sporting events.

4.5 East vs West

This favouritism also seems to increase the historically existing divide between the western and eastern neighbourhoods of Vancouver. East Vancouver (or simply East Van) has historically been a more affordable, primarily working-class area with a large immigrant population. The West side, which in this context includes Downtown Vancouver, has always been more affluent, upper middle class, and primarily white (Campbell, 2021). Main Street is typically considered the borderline, but it is rather vague. When it comes to the music scene, some “borderline” venues “pick sides” depending on the ownership. For example, two of the venues that will be largely discussed in my thesis, Rickshaw Theatre and Fox Cabaret, are located right on Main but align more with East Vancouver values; thus, East Van is as much a state of mind as a geographic site (see Figure 3).

East Van is home to many alternative, underground and DIY venues that are for the most part privately owned and sometimes volunteer-run. They are also under constant threat of being shut down, as the older, low-income neighborhoods that host them face speculative investment and continuous rent increases (Green, 2018). The loss of alternative venues, which got triggered by redevelopments related to the 2010 Olympics, has pushed a lot of spots underground, literally and figuratively (Mendelson, 2009). Some venues are forced to operate illegally since they cannot afford to run

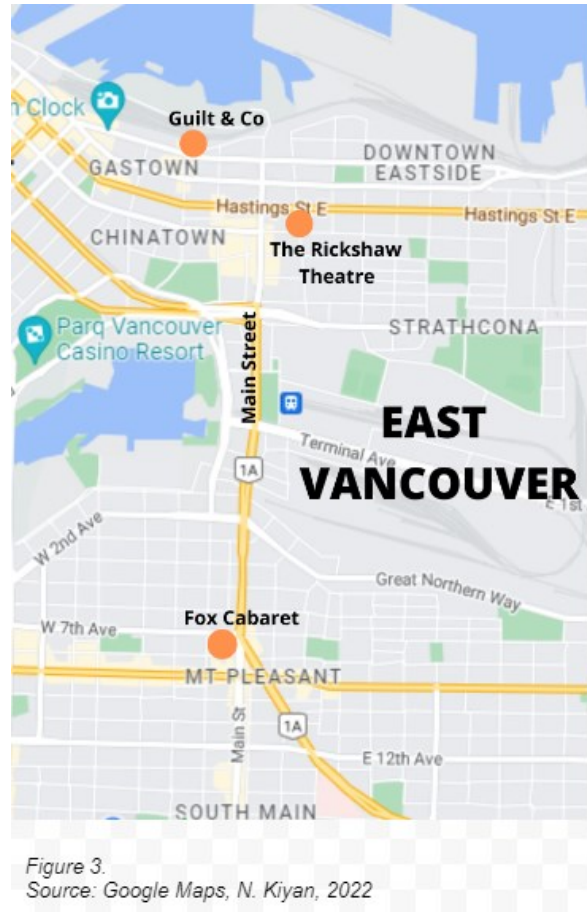


Figure 3.
Source: Google Maps, N. Kiyani, 2022

business on their own terms; they become secret venues open only for the “insiders” and operate with no signage or advertisement (Green, 2018). Most of the interviewees cited gentrification, which is the elephant in the room, as one of the city’s - and the sector’s - major issues. Musician Dwight Abell confirms that the disappearance of smaller and medium-scale venues affects the young bands that are ready to transition “from their garage into the music scene”, as “condos are replacing everything”. He then jokingly adds that “when there's tension, that's when the best art, not just music is made – so maybe we'll have anti-condo music” (personal interview, December 11th, 2021).

Needless to say, frustration with the lack of support from the City of Vancouver is something the local music scene lives with every day. As conveyed in a letter from the local

rock band Hazel Blackburn to the City of Vancouver officials in 2017, after another alternative venue Media Club was turned into a cocktail lounge: “The continued hollowing out of the city and its art community is a shameful, short-sighted strategy which will hurt Vancouver's reputation as a world-class city, degrade civic life and engagement [and] accelerate the flight of the creative class” (quoted in Kurucz, 2017). “All artists start in these small local stages and aren't government-owned, they're privately owned,” laments Darlene Rigo, the director of Vancouver’s Fox Cabaret, “And so if we lose this infrastructure, I think it doesn't bode well for our artists” (quoted in Yoshida-Butryn, 2020).

The Fox Cabaret, alongside the Rickshaw Theatre, and Guilt and Company, are the city’s independent small- and mid-scale venues that are prominent in this paper because they successfully hosted live streams “from the venue” during the pandemic. The empty venues were rented to the artists that would get filmed performing in front of nobody, in order to support both the musicians and the spaces.

Fox Cabaret and the Rickshaw Theatre started hosting live streams in the summer of 2020 and became the most popular live stream stages among local acts. Their popularity among local musicians also stems from both venues being the hubs and having their followers, fans, and culture.

Contemporary alternative scenes are built around people and spaces; taking away these venues means erasing the scene (Greene, 2018). Hence the online presence of both venues during the pandemic was crucial for the city’s artistic infrastructure. Both The Fox and The Rickshaw find their homes around Main Street, and despite being right on the borderline between the East and the West Vancouver, they capture the East Van’s DIY aesthetics and alternative spirit. They

book their roster independently and rely heavily on the income from the live shows and grant funding.

Fox Cabaret is located in the trendy Mount Pleasant area, which has been getting gentrified for years. The director Darlene Rigo shares her concerns about the new Skytrain (local metro) line getting built in the area, which will trigger even more development (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). Originally known as the Fox Cinema, the renovated venue



Figure 4: Concert at the Fox Cabaret.
Source: N. Kiyon, 2019

reopened as a Cabaret in 2013 (Fox Cabaret, 2022). The venue is known for hosting not only live music of all genres, from hip-hop to metal, but also holding popular DJ nights, comedy shows, drag performances, and more. “I find that because there aren't that many places to play, given our size, we get a huge cross-section of performers, which is amazing. And

to me, that reflects a real diversity in the music scene in Vancouver. I think some venues have particular kinds of music that they tend to feature. Whereas for us, it can vastly differ from night to night” – proudly shares Darlene (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). Despite the diversity of its lineup, The Fox has a strong artistic community around it, and its supporters are often artists themselves (see Figure 4).

Down the hill from the Fox, in the heart of the city’s notorious Downtown Eastside, lies another popular independent venue: the Rickshaw Theatre. Much like the Fox, it is a repurposed

movie theatre that started hosting live music in 2009 (Rickshaw Theatre, 2022). The historic stage is home to Vancouver's alternative shows of both touring and local bands, and it is the city's largest non-corporate venue (Robert Barrington, personal interview, November 23rd, 2021). The Rickshaw attracts a more alternative crowd, as the venue is popular amongst punk, metal, goth, and other heavier music fans. This crowd does not seek the glamour and comfort of the commercial venues, they prefer the raw authenticity and the loud sound. The venue's location in the middle of the Downtown Eastside also contributes to the rawness of the scene it attracts. The venue owner Mo Tarmohamed is a tireless activist within the Vancouver music scene, and during the pandemic, he has been loudly advocating for the preservation of local independent venues.

Just a short walk away from the Rickshaw, in the historic Gastown neighborhood, one can find Guilt & Company, commonly referred to as Guilt & Co: a cozy underground bar and music venue that before the pandemic hosted live music on a nightly basis (Gastown.org, 2022). Guilt & Co hosts artists of all genres and the shows are typically booked by the tireless live programming manager Paul Clark, who is also a musician himself. Most Vancouver music initiatives are carried out by individuals: artists, activists, and venue curators, that understand how much it takes to keep the music infrastructure of the "No Fun City" alive.

4.6 Support from the City

On the municipal level, the City of Vancouver attempted to launch a general music strategy that would support the artists dates back to 2016, yet it was indefinitely paused in 2020 due to the pandemic. Quoting Ian Cromwell, "it was probably one of those things where there was an agenda item on some meeting that was like, *"Okay, we're gonna start up the music*

strategy”, and then COVID kind of kick(ed) a lot of stuff off the docket” (personal interview, December 9th, 2021).

The strategy was inspired by two prominent governmental reports – Music Canada’s 2015 report entitled “The Mastering of a Music City” and the 2016 provincial document “BC Music Sector: From Adversity to Opportunity” which outlined recommendations to leverage the music sector as a cultural and economic driver. Also in 2016, the province of British Columbia started a \$15M fund directed at investing in the local music industry. The fund has been titled Amplify BC and was raised to \$22.5M in 2021 (Orton, 2021).

In July 2018, the city council got together to hold a lengthy discussion on the upcoming Strategy (Kurucz, 2018). The meeting brought to light a few “sobering numbers” that, once again, confirmed how uneasy life is for artists in the “No Fun City”. The consultancy firm Nordicity presented findings from a survey of local artists, where 56% of artists cited unaffordable housing as their primary challenge, followed by an inability to get paid by venues or promoters. Another striking number revealed that the average annual income of a musician in Vancouver in 2018 was \$18,000, \$4,600 less than the national average and \$28,000 less than what the average annual income for Vancouverites was in 2017-2018 (Kurucz, 2018). Could the strategy be a redemption?

The document was finally presented in September 2019. Unfortunately, the timing was not right, since half a year later, the music industry came to a grinding halt due to the global pandemic. There have been no updates on the strategy since then, as over the past 3 years the city has been battling with new and seemingly more urgent matters

4.7 The (Evolving) Scene in Times of Pandemic

The way the scene has changed over the course of the pandemic has been discussed in most of the interviews. Participants mention the obvious changes, such as increased financial struggles and loss of physical venues, the lack of performance opportunities for artists, following the inevitable digitalization of musical performance. Ian Cromwell also adds that the fear of social gatherings causes the loss of performance opportunities - especially among immunocompromised people or people with immunocompromised family members (personal interview, December 9th, 2021). Zach Gray expresses his lack of optimism regarding the number of empty spaces and storefronts in the city, as the pandemic has caused multiple independent businesses to either shut down or suffer significant financial losses, with the spaces slated to be redeveloped into condos (personal interview, December 13th, 2021).

Even Dan Mangan, who remained actively involved with the scene as a performer, producer, and advocate throughout the pandemic, has felt like the local music scene has stopped in time. He summed it up in the interview by noting that “it's very hard to feel like you're a part of an evolving thing: it feels like a stagnant version of what was always your prior, it definitely feels like everything's been fossilized in a way. Everyone's just... waiting” (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). The feeling of stagnation was echoed by Dwight Abell who noticed that “a lot of bands were just exhausted and didn't know what to do, and probably put a lot of their creativity on hold” (personal interview, December 11th, 2021).

The next chapter will take a closer look at the impacts of the pandemic on the Vancouver independent music scene, the importance of live streams as a response, and the implications of this response for the socio-spatial organization and future of local music.

5.0 The Immediate Impacts of the Pandemic

We've all been there. We all remember how it went.

2020 started like a regular year, despite the disturbing news about the contagious novel virus that originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan (MacKenzie, 2020). The first two months of 2020 now seem like a party at the end of the world, the final chapter of what we now collectively refer to as “pre-COVID” or “pre-pandemic” times. Much like most of us, the interviewees were making



Figure 5: Vancouver crowd enjoys a concert in the independent pop-up venue right before the pandemic.

Source: N. Kiyari, 2020

plans for 2020 and were full of ambitions and hopes. For example, the Indigenous singer-songwriter Sandy Powlik, who goes by the stage name Lola Parks, was planning to release her second record titled *No Apologies*, and to embark on an extensive

Canadian tour that would have involved playing on the cross-country VIA Rail train (personal interview, October 29th, 2021). Michelle Lee Runns, also known as MzShellz, was making plans to release a new album and to attend a career-defining Indigenous music retreat organized by First Peoples' Cultural Council later that year (personal interview, November 3rd, 2021).

Musician Justice McLellan also was “in a productive business and creative zone”, working on a few musical projects at once (personal interview, November 28th, 2021). Shortly before the shutdown, in early March 2020, Justice and his band, Harlequin Gold, played a show in Seattle,

Washington. Later they found out, that there was a COVID outbreak on the same street, and for McLellan, this experience became the first tap into the familiar anxiety of knowing that the virus was nearby.

On March 11th, 2020, the World Health Organization announced that COVID-19 could be characterized as a pandemic (Crisp, 2021). The reports of cancelled and postponed shows in Vancouver started circulating between March 12th and 13th, when the local news source Georgia Straight announced the temporary closure of the key independent and mainstream venues, such as Vogue Theatre, The Imperial, Commodore Ballroom, The WISE Hall, the Rickshaw, and The Orpheum (Usinger, 2020). Meanwhile, some of the independent venues were on a success spree. February 2020 was a record-breaking month for the Fox Cabaret, with dozens of shows booked for the rest of the year. This is why, according to the director Darlene Rigo, the events of March “hurt so badly”: “we were at the top of our game, and we were finishing paying off our sound system, which we purchased. We were really amped up” (personal interview, January 20th, 2022).

As music tours of both major and smaller scale were put on hold, drummer Adam Fink, for example, had to cancel around 150 shows for the rest of the year, for two of his musical projects ACTORS and Art D’Ecco (personal interview, December 11th, 2021). Charlie Kerr, the frontman of an indie rock band Hotel Mira, was forced to scratch “some of the biggest gigs of our lives” – a US tour that he booked by himself (personal interview, December 2nd, 2021). This is when musicians, many of whom heavily depend on live performance as a main source of income, were left in the dark with no clear directions about the future.

The pandemic has had a devastating effect on all performing arts, which, in turn, has affected performers’ overall well-being and mental health (Ng and Thomson, 2021). As it came

up in the interviews, many of the artists' struggles were related to financial uncertainty, especially because life in Vancouver is far from cheap. Many artists, such as the independent singer-songwriter Angie Faith, used to make their living exclusively from live performances and busking. The pandemic has pushed Angie to apply for financial support from the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) fund, which helped to make some difference, but "not necessarily to the extent of what I would make if I was working", as "50% of my income got wiped", she shares in the personal interview (November 5th, 2021).

Angie adds that at the beginning of the pandemic the media reports were giving her so much anxiety, that sometimes she had to force herself to play music simply to distract herself (personal interview, November 5th, 2021). Pop musician Reid Zakos further adds that "a lot of artists have struggled with depression and anxiety, especially not knowing where income is gonna come from" (personal interview, November 9th, 2011). "A lot of bands haven't given up but were just exhausted and didn't know what to do, and probably put a lot of their creativity on hold" – shares musician Dwight Abell – "I know a lot of creative people that <...> didn't touch a guitar for months <...> or <...> didn't write a song" (personal interview, December 11th, 2021).

Both Reid and Dwight were the interviewees who, partially due to the loss of income, decided to move away from Vancouver. Reid relocated to his hometown of Calgary, Alberta, and continued working with his Vancouver connections from afar. Likewise, for family reasons and pulled by the much lower cost of living, Dwight Abell moved to the suburban city of Maple Ridge, BC, 40 kilometers away from Vancouver, where he is originally from.

Noah Kamis, the Technical Director of the Fox Cabaret - one of the few employees who were able to stay with the venue during the pandemic - summed up the key points about the artists' struggles in his interview:

“I know, there have been a lot of musicians, playing music as that's their form of socializing. And they have, with that being taken away from them, they found a lot of negative mental effects have kind of come of it. I know a lot of musicians who have been struggling with depression and drug abuse, in particular, the past year and a bit just because the feeling of isolation is just that much greater when you're not playing music, and you're not having that kind of routine to look forward to. I know a few bands have broken up because of differing views on topical events. I know some people have been kicked out of bands because they're anti-vaxxers. And, you know, divisions that weren't ever there before, because those conversations were never had, have sprung up, and they've caused more issues” (personal interview, January 6, 2022).

Thus, the pandemic not only challenged the artist’s financial stability but also took away their most prominent way to connect with each other and their community and created previously nonexistent divides over topical issues (such as being pro- or against the COVID vaccine).

5.1 Working on Music During the Pandemic

The pandemic has also created barriers for some artists to release new music. Michelle Lee Runns, for example, was planning to release the MzShellz record in July 2020, and “was planning to have a release party, <with> openers, pack out a club and then <...> tour. <...> If everything worked out, the tour would have happened, everything would have happened, and the album would have been out. But here we are. In 2021. Album is still not out. I don’t even sound like that anymore” (personal interview, November 3rd, 2021). The musician has been postponing the album’s release for so long that she started putting new songs on it and removing the older ones. To date, the record has not yet been released.

Indie rock band The Zolas were caught “in a tricky and lucky spot where our [next] record was completely recorded <before the pandemic> so we were literally sitting on that,

waiting for when the best time was to release it” – shares bassist Dwight Abell (personal interview, December 11th, 2021). The frontman Zach Gray adds that the album was originally scheduled to come out in April 2020. Once the pandemic hit, and the band could no longer get together or tour in support of the record, the release has been postponed. However, “to proclaim that we're alive and we're existing” Zach and co decided to “tease” the release by putting up one pre-recorded song per month, which they successfully did during 2020 (personal interview, December 13th, 2021).

According to Zach, it’s not just the pandemic that made The Zolas postpone the album release:” There was a lot going on that year, there was the pandemic, and there was also so much social unrest, and so much forward progress in social justice movements, that I really wasn't in the mood to release anything that wasn't really meaningful to me at that moment” (personal interview, December 13th, 2021). The social justice movements referenced by Zach Gray were primarily a reference to Black Lives Matter and the activism that followed the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. The band’s fourth full-length album *Come Back to Life* ended up being released in July 2021 – a year and a half after its recording.

Not everyone who had their music recorded before the pandemic, however, felt like holding on to it for so long. For example, Ian Cromwell felt like “there's never going to be a right time – so I might as well pick the wrong time” (personal interview, December 9th, 2021). Ian has been working on his EP *Unmade* for a few years and ended up releasing it in April 2020. He took advantage of live streaming by putting up a collaborative release party, where he not only played the new songs but also talked about his music and invited the collaborators and audience to speak and join the stream (personal interview, December 9th, 2021). Likewise, Reid Zakos decided to stick to his original plan and released his album *Legends and Myths* in April 2020, explaining

that “it's a weird time, but people don't have much to do, so people are still listening to the music, people are still streaming. So, it's something I can do in the meantime: to at least build my brand. aesthetic” (personal interview, November 9th, 2020). The musician was happy with the outcome: “The response was pretty good. I got a significant amount of streams and people were still sharing my music and <...> engaging with my content. And even if I can't tour it, I know that that opportunity will come eventually” (personal interview, November 9th, 2020). Interestingly enough, Sim et al. (2020) found that during the pandemic people were streaming less music via audio formats, possibly because of the decreased commuting times. Instead, the visual forms of streaming, such as live streaming and video gaming have accelerated (Forbes, 2020).

Sandy Powlik believes that “there's always good that comes out of things” and adds that the pandemic “gave us more time to think, there was no rush” with her album *No Apologies*, which was delayed by a few months, but still came out in July 2020. The singer's only regret was that she could not tour and play it across the country (personal interview, October 29th, 2021). Singer-songwriter Phoenix Lazare, whose record *Gold* came out in July 2021, shares: “I never assumed that I would be in a place where I would be releasing my debut full-length album during COVID. I didn't even have an album release show actually, we just hosted a house concert. But I had a lot of people online that were really supportive of it, and circulated it, so that was really helpful” (personal interview, October 20th, 2021).

Music is “a compound of social interaction among people, built upon social and environmental foundations” (Terasawa et al., 2021, p. 1). During the first few weeks of the spring lockdown, it helped many to feel less isolated and became one of the ways for people to cope with grief and fear. The videos of people in Italy singing on the balconies have gone viral online, and the international evening cheer to the health workers became a new, loud way for

people to come together daily, not only to celebrate the front-line employees but also to feel connected and united (Rumball, 2020; Fink et al., 2021). Performers around the world started playing music for their neighbours on their balconies, including the Vancouver DJ Neky the Kid (full name Neky Mahmood), who held his recurring DJ sets after the 7 PM cheer: “One evening I

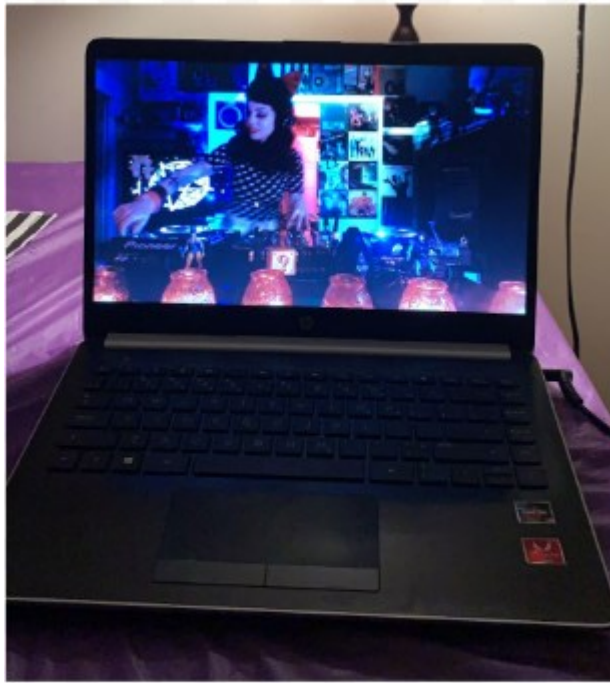


Figure 6: Vancouver-based DJ Evilyn 13 is playing a DJ set during the early days of the pandemic
Source: N. Kiyani, 2020.

just decided to set up and show appreciation. I wasn't sure how the neighbourhood would respond, but I felt like music has the ability to unite us all, so I just went for it” – he told Daily Hive (McLean, 2020). The forward-thinking Mahmood also included the virtual element by streaming his set on Instagram Live. Performing on the balcony was not something the DJ has ever considered doing before the pandemic, despite having the tools and technology available. The pandemic has pushed Mahmood and many other musicians to

think outside the box, to become more independent with their art, and provided artists with more free time to actualize themselves and to follow their ambition. “There’s a lot of people that have taken the time to learn other instruments or study <their instruments> even further” – notes Paul Clark of Guilt & Co (personal interview, November 24th, 2021). In the literature, this was discussed by Howard et al., whose interviewees, young musicians from several countries, have reported an increase in productivity and the opportunity to get better not only in writing music but also in producing it (2021).

Dwight Abell, originally known as a bassist of The Zolas, is one of the artists who was able to find his own voice through the pandemic. After moving to Maple Ridge during the lockdown, Dwight had more space to work on his music from home, and the newfound free time has allowed the musician, who has been writing songs since he was 13, to finally concentrate on his solo project “dwi”. “Okay, there's lots of things I can't do. So, let's focus on the things I *can* do.” – he shares his thought process – “I can't tour, I can't play shows for a while there. I couldn't even hang out with the band members <of the Zolas>” (personal interview, December 11th, 2021).

Dwight's solo project started with the release of a pandemic-themed tune “Summer's Shut Down” in July 2020. Thanks to the musician's industry connections, he got signed to the local independent label Light Organ Records, that works with The Zolas, and was able to release his debut album *Mild Fantasy Violence* in October 2021. Due to the realities of the pandemic, the record creation “was a very inward personal thing that I did mostly by myself or with another person” (personal interview, December 11th, 2021). Hracs (2012) has discussed new technology had changed independent music scenes by allowing them to move some aspects of music production, distribution, and promotion online to personal devices such as laptops and smartphones.

The new creative ideas, however, did not stop at music, and it is no wonder that Lee et al. (2020) even labeled coronavirus “a cultural catalyst” (2020, p.1). The pandemic suddenly required artists to become professional multitaskers. “You have to be able to sing good. But then you also have to know graphic design, maybe a bit of coding, if you're smart; you have to be able to edit video. You have to know how to live stream, to edit another thing. Honestly, being a musician today is more like being an IT guy than it is being an artist. There's more that's

involved” – shares Zach Gray (personal interview, December 13th, 2021). The feeling of isolation and the desire to connect has also pushed artistic people to start new creative projects. In order to maintain the sense of community within the local arts scene, Justice McLellan started his own podcast where he interviewed the scene members. The podcast, originally titled Department of Justice, later renamed into J Pod, captures the pandemic times from April 2020 until September 2021. “I think it will oddly document some of the feelings of the pandemic, which I hadn't really thought about before” – shares Justice – “But it's something that a couple of friends have brought up to me: *“This is cool that you did this at this time because it's like a snapshot into the Vancouver music scene at a time, but also during a pandemic”* (personal interview, November 28th, 2021). In 2021, once the restrictions were eased off and people were allowed to hang out with their “bubbles”, Justice has also found time to finally record the debut album with his band Blue J:

“You know, the podcast, the album, this was the first time in my life where I had time to just focus on some creative work. For me, during this pandemic, I feel like I had the chance to do some stuff, which makes me emotional because it's just the spectrum of how this has affected so many people and how it's given me some opportunities to do some creative stuff, to take some time for myself” (personal interview, November 28th, 2021).

Both Sandy Powlik and Michelle Lee Runns share how COVID, and isolation made them learn about grants and grant writing. At first, Runns got help from the Afro-Indigenous entertainment group Rudegang Records, but then she really pushed herself to practice and to learn more about grants, which is a crucial skill for independent artists, especially during the global health crisis (personal interview, November 3rd, 2021). Powlik, in her turn, got inspired to do peer assessments for her fellow musicians and to be a juror on grants and award panels. Even though it was online, it was a great opportunity to meet other artists and members of the music community (personal interview, October 29th, 2021). Similarly, the participants of Quader's study

(2021) - independent musicians in Australia - list the variety of skills they were able to pick up during the lockdown, such as “enhancing their home studio skills, social media marketing, and branding skills, online content creation skills, as well as seeking different kinds of opportunities like session-playing and collaborating on songs via online networks” (p.13). The multitasking nature of independent music, rooted in DIY aesthetics has been discussed by Hracs as early as 2012 and 2015, yet COVID has pushed this independence and the artists’ autonomy to the next level. In the isolating world of the pandemic, it became a necessity. Hracs, however, notes that it is a double-sided coin, since multitasking can be difficult for many, and not all musicians are inherently good at other aspects of the music business (2015). This is especially true in relation to the non-creative (technical, business, and managerial) tasks that not all musicians might be willing to take on. However, these interviewees were collectively excited to learn new skills, partially because they understood the temporality of the situation and wanted to take advantage of their newfound free time in isolation. Additionally, the resources available online and the opportunities to connect with your colleagues remotely have only made the process easier.

“Not only did artists need to be talented and good songwriters and good performers, but now they had to be specialists in cameras and audio gear and the Internet. So, there was like this whole new skill set going around” – explains Dan Mangan in his interview (January 20th, 2022). In his turn, Mangan, one of the most influential independent musicians in Vancouver, has mastered the multi-talented skill by building his own online community during the hardest times. He was also one of the first Vancouver artists to release a live streamed show for public enjoyment - a theme to which we turn in the next section.

6.0 Live Streams

As we transition into the discussion of live streams, it is important to remember that live streaming itself was not “invented” during or for the pandemic. The tool gained popularity within the gaming community back in 2011 and was underutilized by musical artists (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018). For example, the only interviewee who frequently live streamed prior to the pandemic is Charlie Kerr, who found that the Instagram Live performances were a “fun way to scratch the performing edge”, but it was not a goal in itself (personal interview, December 2nd, 2021).

After the loss of live performance in March 2020, moving online was a logical response for musical communities around the world. As was noted by the CTV news article back in April 2020, “Live music and entertainment in B.C. is going virtual” (Stewart, 2020). At that time, live streams became the only possible way for artists to perform. As Reid Zakos noted, “It was really good to at least have some kind of opportunity to perform live or to promote songs” (personal interview, November 9th, 2021).

The next section will look at how the shift online was experienced by both musicians and venues.

6.1 First Live Streams

The first pandemic live streamed concerts were born as an immediate reaction to the canceled shows in mid-March 2020, as some artists, such as Dan Mangan, were caught off guard by the newly implemented restrictions. In March 2020, Mangan was supposed to kick off the tour dedicated to the 10th anniversary of his acclaimed record *Nice, Nice, Very Nice* by playing

two shows at Toronto's Danforth Music Hall. The first show on March 12th went on as planned, and "It was just glorious, it felt like the last night on Earth, I'll never forget the feeling that night" - shares Dan in the personal interview (January 20th, 2022). The pandemic restrictions in Ontario were instituted the next morning, putting the second show, as well as the rest of the tour, on indefinite hold: these concerts ended up being postponed several times.

Yet instead of calling it a day and immediately heading home to the West Coast, Dan's drummer Don Kerr suggested the following: *'We should still play. Let's just get some cameras in here. <...> Everything's already set up. Let's just do **a show for nobody**, that'd be fun.'* And so, we did that" - adds Mangan (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). The concert was filmed, labeled by two hashtags: #Quarantunes and #ShowToNobody, and put up on YouTube a few days later; it still can be streamed for free on Dan's YouTube channel. For Mangan and his band, this was "an unknowing first tiptoe into online shows" (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). The first pandemic live streams, such as Dan's, were abrupt and unplanned and were born out of artists getting "caught off guard" by the sudden lockdown restrictions and needing to adapt to the new medium immediately. A similar case study is discussed by Rendell (2021), who talks about the American hardcore punk band Code Orange, which was forced to change the format of their album release concert and move it online last minute. In the sense of time, those shows were not exactly "live", as they were pre-recorded a few days back; they were considered "live" because audiences all across the world could watch the premiere and simultaneously react.



Figure 7: Dan Mangan and his band play to an empty Danforth Music Hall on March 13, 2020. (Source: Henry Beckwith in CTV News)

As Mangan shared with CTV News, over 1,000 people were online as the stream premiered, watching and actively participating in a live chat on YouTube (Kotyk, 2020). What immediately struck Dan is how technology fostered a connection with his listeners during the premiere of the *Show to Nobody*: “I remember being on the live chat, as it was premiering on Monday, and everyone was chatting and asking questions, and I was giving background info on stuff. <...> This felt more connected than maybe I anticipated. And at the end of the 30-minute airing, <...> I felt this rush as if I was getting off stage, it felt eerily really familiar” (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). In the moment of collective shock brought on by the sudden beginning of the pandemic, Dan’s audience from around the world was brought together by the digital performance, and they collectively discussed in the chat how much they needed this experience (Kotyk, 2020).

The “abrupt” live streams, however, could only happen once, and only during the short liminal time period between the old “normal life” and the very first days of the lingering lockdown – a lockdown that ended up lasting almost two years in British Columbia. As was well put by Ian Cromwell when reflecting on the process of putting up the first live streams,

“The metaphor that I use was learning to drive the car while we were building it, while we were going down the highway. We were going at top speed. We didn't really know what we were doing. And we didn't know how any of this stuff worked. I was learning to use OBS <*Open Broadcaster Software - free live streaming software*>, while we were live streaming. I was building scenes, while also trying to interview someone. It was just wild mayhem. <...> The whole thing was just a mess. It was an absolute catastrophe. But we were on a holy mission, we were convinced that we needed to step up”
(personal interview, December 9th, 2021).

The first live streams mostly happened during the spring of 2020 and became a challenging but very different experience for the interviewees. Justin Kelley (HOWND) went live to celebrate the release of his EP on March 20th, 2020, and his experience was far from perfect: “It felt so different, it was pretty frustrating” (personal interview, October 26th, 2021). Over time, Justin started enjoying the streaming experience more, as he learned new skills and started using various audio and visual effects during his live broadcasts on Twitch (personal interview, October 26th, 2021).

Justin’s partner Phoenix Lazare had quite the opposite experience doing her first live stream on April 26th, 2020. “That was still when everyone was pretty much staying home and not doing anything” – she shares – “and so a lot of people were excited. And I had a lot of friends and family, and friends of friends, and strangers, and whatnot” (personal interview, October 20th, 2021). Phoenix performed the concert on Zoom, and so she could see her audience on camera; she shares how excited she was to have people from around the world joining the

stream. Similarly, Angie Faith shares her positive reaction to her first stream: “Wow, I really love this just as much as I love playing live shows!” For the first few months of the pandemic”, Angie says, “I didn't leave my apartment, I live streamed every day. I even created The Morning Show with Angie Faith, which was funded by Creative BC. And I went live as much as I could at 11:11 <am> every day” (personal interview, November 5th, 2021). A similar commitment was shown by Dan Mangan. The positive outcome of the Show to Nobody in Toronto, his original virtual “experiment”, inspired him to continue live streaming throughout the pandemic, as he became one of the most digitally savvy local artists: “This is way more special than I ever thought it would be. And so, I eventually continued to do those maybe every week, for a while” – he shares (personal interview, January 20th, 2022).

As the artists were able to temporarily turn their homes and backyards into “venues” for streaming, it became crucial for the actual physical performance spaces not only to stay relevant but also to make ends meet while staying closed. Some venues across the country, such as The Starlite Room in Edmonton, had joined the live streaming trend early into the pandemic and started regularly hosting virtual performances for local bands (Faulder, 2022). They would rent their empty spaces to the musicians and have only camera, sound, and light technicians working on-site, making sure they followed the social distancing guidelines. The same was done by Vancouver’s Orpheum Theatre, which hosted the Vancouver Symphonic Orchestra on March 15th, 2020. The orchestra’s performance in the empty theatre was streamed to 16 000 viewers all over the world (Thibault, 2020). These types of performances would either be streamed in real-time or pre-recorded, edited and placed online a few days later. This format also created a unique perspective of the real venues: in a way, it has turned the physical venues into digital spaces

through the live stream platform. Over time, those shows became carefully planned and promoted (Faulder, 2022).



Figure 8: I Saved Imperial
Source: Instagram

Most of the Vancouver venues, however, were rather quiet during the first months of the lockdown. Quoting Noah Kamis of the Fox Cabaret, “In March 2020, everyone was just so caught off guard, and no one knew what to do; the logistics of figuring out <the live streams from venues> took a while to put together” (personal interview, January 20th, 2021). Yet adapting to the culture of streaming was especially important for Vancouver, where venues had a lesser chance of surviving. “Even prior to the pandemic, the live music scene here was at risk because of the extreme development the city has seen.” – explains

Darlene Rigo of the Fox Cabaret – “The condos that have taken over so many spaces, and even if we survive the pandemic, that will still be an issue” (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). “It’s such a tough city for music, to begin with, and the pandemic has made all those problems that much worse.” – adds Noah Kamis – “Vancouver has lost so many venues, I don’t think people really understand the problem that venues have in the city until you actually look at the past 10 years, how many venues have shut down versus how many opened up” (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). Hence, most venues stayed fully closed through March and April

2020, while tirelessly applying for grants, trying to make money by selling merchandise (e.g., t-shirts and sweaters) and accepting donations online. Another independent venue, Imperial Theatre, started selling gift certificates for certain amounts that could be used for future shows after the pandemic (see Figure 8) (Imperial Theatre Instagram, 2020)

Once the pandemic hit, the Fox Cabaret had to postpone and reschedule a variety of events that had been booked for almost every night of the year. In order to survive, The Fox started applying for rent relief and grants, launched online silent auctions, merchandise sales, and giveaways, and applied for grants that allowed them to host live streams and upgrade the live streaming equipment (Darlene Rigo and Noah Kamis, personal interview, January 20th, 2022). The Cabaret's main goal for hosting live streams was to provide work opportunities for tech staff and musicians and also to remind people that "performing is still a thing, to keep that live energy around" (Noah Kamis, personal interview, January 20th, 2022). However, the financial difficulties experienced by both the artists and the venues had made live streaming more costly for both parties: "before <the pandemic> we tried to be as accessible as possible, and our costs weren't as high, so it just made the venue way more accessible to local acts. Whereas now, it's like the costs have gone up for everyone" – shares Darlene Rigo (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). The real concern for the Fox was that if the venue would shut down permanently, this would shake up the city's musical ecosystem. Venues of all sizes are important, but the mid-sized venues have a specific role in accommodating the artist's transition between playing at bars to selling out larger venues: "For the smaller local bands, and for the smaller touring bands, we're really important. And if we go, then there's really nowhere for people to play" – contemplates Noah Kamis (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). Mo Tarmohamed of The Rickshaw painted a similar, anxious picture in his interview with CTV: "We're just integral in

the development of artists, which I think the Canadian government realizes is an important thing, but they don't realize...if we go, the house of cards just falls apart” (Yoshida-Butryn, 2020). In his interview, Robert Barrington adds that “there's a role that civic theatres play in Canadian culture, there's a role that the arenas and the amphitheatres play, but it's venues like ours are bringing in touring bands, putting Canadian bands on the bill with touring bands. It really is a big cultural asset (personal interview, November 23rd, 2021).

The first live stream at the Rickshaw Theatre was aired on June 26th, 2020, and featured performances of two local bands, Wrecked Beach and Oswald (Robert Barrington, personal interview, November 23rd, 2021). The online show was free to watch, but the audience was encouraged to donate money to support the venue and the bands. By the time of the interview in November 2021, Rickshaw has hosted over 20 live streams. “None of them were big money makers” – explains the venue’s production manager Robert Barrington – “we did them more so to maintain some semblance of activity, and to get bands performing. To make sure that we remained in people's minds, remind people about what a music venue is, and what concerts are so that when all this is over, we don't see people who have become comfortable being couch potatoes, and just sitting in front of their computers: people who are willing to brace what life was before all this stuff, and, and head back out and be reckless and courageous and have fun” (personal interview, November 23rd, 2021).

Guilt & Co’s Paul Clark shares that he had to cancel about 120 shows in March 2020 and remembers how many people thought that the lockdown will be a matter of a few weeks, so there was a lot of uncertainty about how many shows should be pushed and postponed, and what comes next (personal interview, November 24th, 2021). In spring 2020, while the venue was closed, the staff took time to work on some renovations (personal interview, November 24th,

2021). During the brief reopening in the summer of 2020, Guilt & Co adopted a hybrid model and hosted live shows that were also live streamed online by donation. However, the government-proposed capacity of 50 people, seated at tables at all times, did not go as planned: “We rarely had 50 people in there because if all you got were groups of two, you can't sit them together. So, most of the time, there were only 25 to 30 people in the room, because each table even if it was a six-top only had two or four at it” – explains Clark (personal interview, November 24th, 2021). Hence, Clark and his crew put a lot of effort into making their streams enjoyable to their audiences on the other side of the screen. “Our goal was to release as many as we could and make sure that they weren't just cell phone footage with bad audio, they were multi-cam edited, high quality, something that someone could actually get some enjoyment out of watching at home” - shares Paul (personal interview, November 24th, 2021). He also adds that he wanted to offer live music to those who did not feel comfortable coming to the venue during the pandemic (personal interview, November 24th, 2021). Guilt & Co stopped streaming after the second lockdown in the fall of 2020.

Digital concerts quickly became an important way for artists to stay visible and connected. “Through the pandemic, we were all just sort of trying to continue to stay relevant” – shares Phoenix Lazare – “and that was one of the ways that I was able to connect to my audience in a way that was more meaningful than just posting on Instagram and be like, “*How's everybody doing?*” (personal interview, October 20th, 2021). Zach Gray also notes that he live streamed in order to “proclaim that we're alive and we're existing” (personal interview, December 13th, 2021). This corroborates the findings of Howard et al.’s study, where several interviewees

mentioned how live streams have helped them maintain their artistic presence throughout the pandemic (2021).

In May 2020, the Government of British Columbia provided a glimmer of hope for both artists and venues, allowing gatherings of 50 people maximum with active COVID safety protocols in place (see Appendix 3) (CBC News, 2020; CTV News, 2021). This is when the Fox Cabaret temporarily reopened for 50 people seated, and Guilt & Company started hosting their hybrid streams “from the venue”. 50 people capacity may not be profitable, but it is better than being closed with no income revenue; hence, several independent stages, including The Fox Cabaret and Guilt & Company, reopened in summer, as soon as they felt safe. Unfortunately, the reopening of the province did not go according to plan: the COVID cases started increasing in July. A few months later, the venues were shut down again as BC was hit by the second wave of the pandemic. During the brief reopening period, both venues and artists were able to experiment with formats (Hudson, 2020). Angie Faith felt like she became a seasonal entertainer because during the warm month she could play outside, which she did during the summer of 2020. These performances interestingly challenged the space and turned a street into a temporary music venue. The most memorable summer experience for Angie was playing on the streets of the historic neighbourhood of Gastown: “Around one hundred people were there, all socially distanced, spread out. It was the first time I played to a large crowd in a year, and it reminded me just how much people value and appreciate music and live music. All I would hear from people is *“Oh, my God, it's so good to have live music again!”*, a lot of recognition. A lot of people crying, a lot of people taking a moment with their partners just like to hold each other while I sing to them” (personal interview, November 5th, 2021). Hence, the brief period when people

could enjoy a rare performance again was special and meaningful for the artist and the audience alike; it brought back the feeling of unity and as if everything was “back to normal”.

As the performers and the venues were adapting to the new pandemic reality, they were also experiencing both the positive and negative impacts of live streaming. In the following section, we discuss the advantages and disadvantages of digital performances that came up in the interviews.

6.2 Advantages

6.2.1 Extra Income

As was previously mentioned, financial insecurity became one of the main sources of anxiety for independent musicians during the pandemic. In the absence of live performances, digital streams became a way for artists to *make money*, even if it was significantly less than if they were playing live. Angie Faith and Sandy Powlik both mention running a virtual “tip jar” at their non-ticketed online shows and being able to make a little money this way. Phoenix Lazare talks about how her family members from around the country would buy the virtual tickets even if they could not attend the show, just for her to get paid. Even Dan Mangan’s Show to Nobody, which was not intended as a paid stream, had people donating money that was distributed between the crew members (Kotyk, 2020).

Yet since many of the listeners – much like the artists – have lost their source of income, it was not always the option. As mentioned by Reid Zakos, “It’s hard in a pandemic, when < a lot of people are> unemployed, so it’s hard to pay for tickets, and it’s hard to tip people. But it’s nice that there was still a way to have a sense of entertainment and joy, even in a very dark and uncertain time” (personal interview, November 9th, 2011). In her interview, Angie Faith also

brings up the “scarcity conversation” that came up during COVID: “People would lower the value of themselves, they would charge less, even though they're worth a lot, just so they could perform” (personal interview, November 5th, 2021). Howard et al. (2021) raise a similar concern about a possible devaluation and a contestation of the cost of live music concerts after the pandemic (p. 10). Nonetheless, most still saw paid live streams as a new valuable source of monetary support.

6.2.2 Learning Live Streaming Skills and Experimenting with the Format

The benefits of free time and opportunities to learn new skills were already discussed above. Live streaming in itself became a new skill, as the musicians had to figure out how to navigate the digital world and at times gained the opportunity to experiment with the format.

Justin Kelley (HOWND) shares how he taught himself to get accustomed to the platform Twitch and learned its ‘ins and outs’: “It was always something that I casually was looking at and messing with but took it a bit more seriously <during the pandemic>” – he says (personal interview, October 26th, 2021). Lola Parks and Michelle Lee Runns have both spent time learning the ways to host high-quality live streams from their homes, and have over time added extra equipment, such as the light ring, the smoke machine, and extra devices to add different angles to the performance (personal interview, October 29th, and November 3rd, 2021).

The casual nature of most live streams has allowed performers to experiment with the formats in a way they would not have been able to if they performed in-person. Thus, Sandy Powlik was doing shorter curated themed streams, where she would select songs according to a certain theme (e.g., covers of songs by female songwriters), which you cannot really do with live shows. “It just really allowed us to think differently and approach things differently” – she

adds (personal interview, October 29th, 2021). In her turn, Phoenix Lazare once decided to write a song while being live on Instagram; this not only provided entertainment and a unique deep dive into the song writing process for the listeners, but also gave the artist “a motivation <...> to finish a task or to just share a different part of myself or share what I'm doing with my audience” (personal interview, October 20th, 2021). Similarly, Angie Faith once requested that her fans send ideas for a new song in the chat, and she started improvising live using the words she received: “That's another skill that wasn't fully highlighted for me until this moment: I made up a full song!” – adds the musician in her interview (November 5th, 2021). Onderdijk et al. (2021) have discussed how different ways of connecting with a performer improves the virtual concert experience for the audiences and they conclude that promoting “audience members’ feelings of presence” should be the aim of virtual concert organizers and performers (p. 22).

Digital reality has also allowed artists to unlock new promotional ideas for their projects. Given just a few hours' notice, Zach Gray once went live from the beach by his house. He did not perform, but rather played the recordings of his new songs from his computer, occasionally pausing them to explain the meaning behind each line and each song: “It was pretty low quality, it was coming from a Bluetooth speaker and then back into my phone. So, it wouldn't have been that great if you didn't already know the song, but that was really fun” – he shared in the interview (December 13th, 2021). This was a unique and intimate way for Zach to share his artistry with The Zolas’ fans, and to have a direct dialogue with them. This is not something the artists were necessarily considering before the pandemic, as the need to connect in isolation has unlocked new ways to reach out to the audiences and each other and to disseminate their art. Indeed, this represents a new format that can be labeled as “*casual live streams*”. Not only musicians, but also various artists, makers, thinkers, and business owners started using the

“quick access” platforms, such as Instagram Live and TikTok, to go live abruptly and casually, in order to communicate their ideas, promote their services, or engage in an activity with their audience.

6.2.3 Venues as Sites of Improvisation

Live streaming has provided multiple learning opportunities for musicians streaming from home. Playing at a venue, however, usually frees the artists from worrying about the technical side of their performances, such as sound, lighting, and cameras. Hence, in their turn, the live streams recorded in physical venues gave their staff an opportunity to learn new things and to experiment.

At Guilt & Co, for instance, Paul Clark was learning the craftsmanship of a videographer: “<For> the first <live stream>, we just had one camera, and the audio stream. And then we added a couple more cameras, so it got pretty cool, once we could play around in different cameras and different angles” – shares Clark (personal interview, November 24th, 2021). “We've learned something at every live stream, on the technical side of things. It's gonna continue to be something that, if there's a need for it, we'll continue to try and do better and better” – happily adds Robert Barrington of the Rickshaw. Barrington further adds: “It looks like a real concert when you're here. We have a full lighting system, and digital consoles, and can offer multitrack recording. We can put out a high-end visual product that feels more like three a real concert experience” (personal interview, November 23rd, 2021). The purchase of this equipment was possible thanks to the grants that the Rickshaw received during the pandemic. Interestingly enough, it was not only videography but also photography, that the empty venue gave freedom to improvise with.



Figure 9: Shannon Hemmett of ACTORS photographed through the ladder.
Source: K. Rothwell, 2020

The concert photographer Kelli Rothwell became a rare spectator of live music during the pandemic, as she took shots of multiple live streamed shows at the Rickshaw. One evening when she was photographing a local post-punk band ACTORS, “there was a ladder slipping out that <was used> to get different camera angles <for the stream>. And I was like: “*you know what, this is a fun prop. It’s in my way, but I’m going to use it*” (personal interview, October 30th, 2021).

Kelli used her creative eye to take a few unique shots through the ladder, which is something that would not

happen during an actual live concert, where the photographers don’t have “props” to play around with and sometimes can only photograph a few songs out of the set. Surprisingly, Kelli’s ladder shots worked well with the mysterious and gloomy music of ACTORS (see Figure 9).

Meanwhile, Fox Cabaret got creative with the format of their streams. In the fall of 2020, Fox hosted an event that its staff credited as the most memorable live streamed experience:

“We came up with the idea of having an online fundraiser, which turned into <...> a little documentary. We had 16 artists come down over a couple of days and pre-record a set of two or three songs. And then had all of the staff film intros to these bands from home on the phones that we cut into the between the process. It was going to be a pretty simple cut-and-dry idea. <But we went from> “you can buy t-shirts online, you can watch these live streams”, to basically producing a movie with a post-production schedule and everything. And that was so much fun, and so awesome to do. And it was the first-time lot of the artists played in like a year. <...> It was so nice to be there over the two days that we filmed everything and talk to people and just see how happy they were to be able to perform again. And how

lovely everyone was about wanting to support the club and making sure that that space still existed”
(Adam Fink, personal interview, December 11th, 2021).

For the staff and the performers, the fundraiser became a highlight of the pandemic. It did not make Fox much money (the stream was free and the audience was suggested to donate \$9.99), but rather became a community-driven passion project. The documentary was not streamed in real-time, but pre-recorded in October 2020, put together over a few months, and put up online right before Christmas the same year. Noah Kamis agrees with Adam’s excited feedback: “Putting this together has been such a dream for us. We really are so lucky to have such talented, amazing artists in our community!” (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). Darlene Rigo adds that the project got the staff working and artists playing again (Darlene Rigo, personal interview, January 20th, 2022).

Hosting the non-attended live streams at The Fox and The Rickshaw became a unique, private experience for both the musicians and the venue staff. The venue staff members were simply excited to hear live music again, especially since they missed this essential part of their lives during the days of isolation. Both Darlene and Noah of The Fox share the excitement they felt while listening to live music and interacting with band members during the filming of the fundraiser (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). Kelli Rothwell shared that her photographing sessions at The Rickshaw felt very exclusive because it was essentially a “private show” for her as a concert photographer. She also adds that it was “pretty remarkable to be able to be in those spaces, when nobody else was” (personal interview, October 30th, 2021).

6.2.4 Comfort and Spatial Flexibility

The theme of both spatial and content-related flexibility with regards to viewers watching streams from home and artists performing from their houses came up in most interviews. Kelli Rothwell talked about how much she enjoys the “quick, easy access points for Instagram Live”, and says that she would not want to lose it after the pandemic ends (personal interview, October 30th, 2021). What Kelli talks about is the simplicity of the platform, where you get notified every time someone you follow goes “live”, and you can momentarily join the stream from anywhere. She shares her excitement that this experience can happen “anywhere at any time. You don't even really need to schedule it or if you don't want to, just like doing it impromptu” (personal interview, October 30th, 2021).

In a way, the pandemic has enhanced the idea of the “placeless world” and has shown how, thanks to the Internet, artists, and scenes do not have to be associated with a specific geographical location (Leyshon, 2001). Phoenix Lazare, who spent the pandemic successfully releasing music and performing from the remote Salt Spring Island, BC, has experienced firsthand that “you don't necessarily have to be anywhere specific, or in the middle of a bustling city to write, record, release and play music” (personal interview, October 20th, 2021). Megan Emanuel adds that “the pandemic has made people feel a little bit more autonomous, in terms of what they're able to achieve. There is less of a reliance on venues, people have realized that they can do live streams and that they will be well attended, they realize that they can create online content” (personal interview, October 22nd, 2021). Certain studies (Hracs, 2012, 2015) have shown the importance of online technologies for supporting non-local forms of collaborative creation and virtual performances; however, the pandemic shifted this relatively marginal activity of live streaming onto centre stage as a key cultural dissemination medium. Hence, all

the musicians interviewed shifted to live streams as the main performance 'venue' after the onset of the pandemic, which pushed artists to realize and explore the possibilities associated with the digital world.

The convenience of streaming “from home” gave both artists and audiences a sense of comfort. Many interviewees have appreciated the simplicity of streaming from home: “You don't need to tour anywhere, you don't need to load in a venue, you don't need to pay a merch person. <.> You literally just do it from home, and you can collect an income from regions that you normally wouldn't play at” – says Dwight Abell, and then adds: “After you're done with the show, you're like, “*Okay, I'll just go to my kitchen and eat dinner*” (personal interview, December 11th, 2021).

Phoenix Lazare also enjoys the placelessness of the virtual performance: “You can be wherever you want in your house, or wherever you're doing a live stream from. A lot of people that maybe have performance anxiety or social anxiety can definitely benefit from just being in their own space” (October 20th, 2021). Her partner HOWND, whom she has streamed with on a few occasions, also adds that he appreciated “how comfortable this could be, or how cool this could be, because I'm in the living room just hanging out, and I'm also able to have a concert” (personal interview, October 26th, 2021). Sandy Powlik shares that the comfort element has also contributed to the positive experience of her listeners: “People are a little more at ease because you're in the comfort of your own home. You have the space or surroundings that you are comfortable in” (personal interview, October 29th, 2021).

6.2.5 Outreach & Connection with the audiences

The opportunity to use live streams as a way to communicate with fans has been around before the pandemic, yet the artists had not previously taken full advantage of it. After all, it was not necessary since this could be done in person during the live performance. The isolating time of the pandemic has reminded people how important it is to experience a sense of community, even if it is just virtually. Angie Faith shares that live streaming has provided her with peace of mind and gave her an opportunity to do what she loves most – performing – despite the lockdown: “Live streaming has provided me with <...> the ability to share myself, express myself and be heard, and not just sit in my apartment and play guitar on my own, which is therapeutic, but it's so much more when you actually have an audience” (personal interview, November 5th, 2021). Michelle Lee Runns adds that it has also allowed her to create a more personal connection with her listeners: “You can ask me questions and I can answer you, it's just like engagement. It's almost like building a little community of your fans” (personal interview, November 3rd, 2021). Similarly, Sandy Powlik shares that she “made an effort to engage, and to connect, and to tell stories and talk about either myself or the song, which I didn't always do with live shows” (Personal interview, October 29th, 2021). This difference can partially be explained by the fact that during the live performance, artists face time limits set by the venue. On the contrary, when they are performing from their homes, they can play and insert as many “blurbs” between the songs as possible. Charlie Kerr also adds that the live streaming has allowed him to create a virtual fan community of people who are united by the love of his band's music yet come from different places and would not have met otherwise (personal interview, December 2nd, 2021). Lee et al. (2021) discuss the benefit of live streams for geographically dispersed audiences, “giving cultural diversity a whole new level of expression” (p. 3). This has also

allowed fans from the same cities to find each other and to connect, transcending non-local as well as local geographic constraints.

Some interviewees were also looking for creative ways to interact with their fans at a distance. During his weekly live streams on Zoom, Dan Mangan decided to replicate the famous sporting event feature “Kiss Cam”, in which someone scans the audience with a camera and selects people to show on the jumbotron: “I’m playing a song, my moderator Mark would start spotlighting different people and bringing them up. And they’d always have a moment of like: “*Oh, there’s me!*” And then they kind of laugh and smile, and they’d wave, and then they’d do someone else” (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). Likewise, during one of The Zolas live streams, Dwight Abell enjoyed being able to “scroll through all the faces and see everyone singing the words,” as “people chose to go to a concert but they’re in their environment” (personal interview, December 11th, 2021). For most platforms, live chat was the only way to interact during the performance (see Appendix 1).

However, there were some benefits to the traditional live chat, as well. As noted by Dwight Abell, the chat has allowed audiences to talk about the performance and share their thoughts with the rest of the observers, which is not something that would be possible during the live performance (personal interview, December 11th, 2021). Paul Clark has also added how the chat comments on the sound quality, such as “I can’t hear the singer” has really helped him navigate through the streaming process, yet in his case, it worked because he was hosting the stream - not performing (personal interview, November 24th, 2021).

The above mentioned creative video interactions, however, would not work on every platform, because Zoom has a unique feature to allow the audience to (voluntarily) be on camera (see Appendix 1). In this sense, it is the most “social” live stream platform, since, on top of the

live chat, it allows the audience to turn on the camera and makes the experience a little less alienating. Yet since Zoom live streams can only be accessed with a link, they have to be carefully planned, and cannot be abrupt. Also, only the more established artists with dispersed audiences and more distinct fan bases, such as Dan Mangan or The Zolas, could justify doing frequent Zoom streams.

6.2.6 The Potential to Strengthen and Expand the Market

Besides creating stronger bonds with existing audiences, artists were also able to reach new markets and find new listeners outside of their typical geographic conglomerates. The live streaming experience has allowed them to do the following:

- a) Perform for multiple markets at the same time. Both Phoenix Lazare and Sandy Powlik share how virtual streams are a great way to connect with your audiences located around the world (personal interviews, October 20th, 2021; October 29th, 2021). Sandy Powlik adds that “people tuned in <to her live streams> from Indonesia, from various places in the United States, from various places in Canada at the same time, so that was pretty incredible” (personal interview, October 29th, 2021). Meanwhile Dan Mangan, quickly started noticing that his weekly streams have been attended by the same core group of people. Since his streams were done through Zoom, he could see their faces and unmute them, which eventually created a conversation between Dan and listeners all over the globe – something that would have not been possible outside of the digital realm (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). As noted by Rendell, live streams “evoke translocal scene discourse as audiences from different parts of the world come together to watch the show <...> thus conflating the local, translocal and virtual” scenes (2021, p. 1103).

b) Perform for fans located in remote areas that are usually not covered by the tour.

Phoenix Lazare shares how happy she was to see her friends and family from around the world attend her streams, including “people that have never seen me play live because they just haven't been physically in that place where <they would be> able to attend, which was really beautiful” (personal interview, October 20th, 2021). The joy of being able to finally perform for people from around the world at the same time has been echoed by multiple interviewees, including Angie Faith, Zach Gray, and Charlie Kerr. In her interview, Kelli Rothwell brings up the idea of “digital citizenship”. While this concept existed prior to the pandemic, the pandemic has “pulled music into that fold of what it means to live in that space. “I think it was really important to feel like you're connected with other people” – she adds (personal interview, October 30th, 2021).

c) Make musical performances more available to the various groups of people who might have issues accessing a live show (such as people with disabilities, parents of young children, etc.). This was brought up by both Charlie Kerr and Ian Cromwell during the interviews (December 2nd and 9th, 2021). In academic literature, increased accessibility was mentioned by Crisp (2021) as one of the benefits of live streams for community musicians (p. 131). He, however, mentions that this might limit the involvement of the older audience members who might struggle with technology or people in remote communities who do not always not have access to the high-speed Internet (Crisp, 2021, p. 132).

Online concerts have also made it easier for artists to grow their followers and digital audiences. As Megan Emanuel explains, it's hard to ask people to follow your Instagram when you are on stage because at that moment people might not want to be on their phones and can forget about it later. But when you are streaming from the Instagram Live platform, it is easy to make people follow your content, click links and explore the digital content you have displayed

online (personal interview, November 22nd, 2021). Angie Faith adds that playing online – even when she was playing cover songs – has allowed her to promote the original music that she has available on streaming services, such as Spotify (personal interview, November 5th, 2021).

6.2.7 The Interconnections Between Physical and Virtual

Live streams can build not only a digital audience but also opportunities for live performances in the future. Angie Faith shares how some of her online listeners reached out to her to book her for in-person events after the pandemic (personal interview, November 5th, 2021). Through the live streams, Michelle Lee Runns was able to land her first headlining show in Vegas, where she went during the brief ease of restrictions in 2021: “The guy tuned into a live stream that I was doing, and then he was like: *“Oh, this is cool.”* So, he messaged me. And he invited me out to Vegas to headline their show” (personal interview, November 3rd, 2021).

Since the streams could be viewed anywhere in the world, this has also become a way for physical venues to promote and showcase their stage outside of Vancouver, for example, for the touring acts who may want to play there in the future (Darlene Rigo, personal interview, January 20th, 2022). In his interview, Adam Fink agrees that “It's nice to showcase that <the Fox is a beautiful venue>. I think it's nice for people to be able to see it. Say, you're an artist touring, and you're looking for places to play. And you see The Fox pop up, you see a <live streamed> show there, how good it looks and how nice it sounds” (personal interview, December 11th, 2021).

Aligning with Green (2018), who states that alternative scenes are built around alternative venues, Robert Barrington notes how the Rickshaw Theatre “curates a sort of scene” in itself, with its distinct group of loyal fans and followers who know and support the theatre. “We are known as a metal room to some, and a punk room to others. <...> As a venue,

we do have quite a bit of outreach to people in this community” (personal interview, November 23rd, 2021). Barrington thinks that seeing a band performing a live stream from a venue, instead of a living room, holds “some benefit of that familiarity” (personal interview, November 23rd, 2021).

Darlene Rigo shares how during the shooting of the Fox fundraiser, many performers confessed their love for the venue and its importance to them and the city: “To me, that was really moving, I was in tears a number of times, it was very powerful (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). “It was nice to see people in Vancouver who were genuinely the fans of the room and wanted to make sure that the room was still around and existed” – adds Adam Fink, talking about the same event (personal interview, December 11th, 2021). Noah Kamis suggests that the same applies for the viewers: “there were a lot of people that were watching that just because they wanted to support the Fox (personal interview, January 20th, 2022).

Before the pandemic, Guilt & Co had both fans of the venue and artists coming to enjoy the music. Similarly, Paul Clark has noticed that some people were joining their streams to enjoy the specific acts, while some wanted to support the venue. He shared his hope that people who joined from outside of Vancouver would be attracted to the venue’s character and would want to either perform there or visit it when they come to the city (personal interview, November 24th, 2021).

6.3 Disadvantages

As noted above, there were numerous benefits cited in relation to the shift to digital streams. Yet undeniably, there were also several negatives that came out of being isolated and playing the concerts online. These range from the technical to the social and are elaborated below.

6.3.1 Technical Difficulties

For many interviewees, multiple challenges emerged while learning to operate new devices and discovering ways to perform online. Sandy Powlik shares the struggle of live stream multitasking, as she was attempting to properly position the camera while trying to perform, interact with the audience and read the live chat at the same time: “I had it <the camera> facing me, but then you look opposite handed <...>. But you can see the comments and maybe talk with them. So, I eventually switched it, so it was facing away. In which case, I didn't get to know what is coming up. I think you need another device: you need two devices so that you can have it facing away, so then it looks correct” (personal interview, October 29th, 2021). A similar issue was voiced by Michelle Lee Runns, who mentioned that “it was a really hard one on the technical side because I didn't realize that you need four different devices, one for the music, one for the stream, one for your song” (personal interview, November 3rd, 2021). Angie Faith has also mentioned the unpredictability of Wi-Fi quality when streaming from home (personal interview, November 5th, 2021).

The Zolas were reflecting on the live stream that they held on Zoom in May 2020. At that time, the three piece band was unable to get together due to restrictions, so they came up with a different way of hosting the virtual show. Zach Gray, as a lead singer and guitarist. was the only

person performing songs by playing the acoustic guitar in his kitchen. Meanwhile, bassist Dwight and drummer Cody were “moderating” the meeting, chatting in between songs, as well as overseeing the Questions and Answers period with fans after the performance. The live stream, however, started chaotically, because the original Zoom settings had only allowed a limited number of viewers. Hence, the first 100 fans were able to connect, while hundreds more were stuck in the “waiting room” until the issue was resolved. “When things go wrong in a public thing, that’s usually my favorite part of the event. It’s with just a little bit of human connection and a little bit of charisma, you can turn that into the most memorable and the most fun and lasting thing that happened.” – shared Zach in his interview, – “But when it happens online, when it happens on Zoom, most of the time, you can’t do that. The thing that’s broken is your ability to communicate with people” (December 13th, 2021). Despite the overall success of the stream, and the large community of fans The Zolas were able to bring together virtually, Zach was anxious about the possibility of technical malfunctions: “There’s a bunch of technical stuff behind the scenes that you have to sort out and know how to troubleshoot. You can learn some things, and learn how to use it, and think you’re fine. I was comfortable with all the stuff I needed to do. But if something went wrong, I didn’t fully know how to fix that” (personal interview, December 13th, 2021).

6.3.2 Missing Relationships Within the Scene

Despite the simplicity of connecting with people through your phone - when your contact list is just one tap away - the relationships between the artists are much more complex. They often are based on sharing performances and physical spaces, playing together and collaborating. This can not be fully replicated by live streams or virtual platforms. “I lost touch with a lot of

people, especially if we were <previously> doing with a lot of open mics and shows together”, shares Angie Faith (personal interview, November 5th, 2021). Megan Emanuel also talks about the challenge of collaborating, especially during the lockdowns and early into the pandemic, when everything had to be done remotely, and artists could not get together to record or rehearse (personal interview, November 22nd, 2021). Since music is frequently a social art form, not all kinds of music or activities related to music could be done at the distance. Zach Gray adds that “COVID” probably killed a lot of collaborative forms of music, like bands, and groups and whoever. I bet you, that a lot of solo musicians were born during this pandemic” (personal interview, December 13th, 2021).

6.3.3 Live Streams as a Band-Aid Solution

Some interviewees, such as Justin Kelley and Reid Zakos, contemplated that since live streams required less commitment and engagement from the audiences than the live shows, many listeners were treating them as radio or background music, especially on the platforms that did not have an option for the audience to be on camera. This was convenient for the listeners, because they could, for example, mute the songs or artists they did not want to hear, even though it was not very respectful toward the performers. As stated by Paul Clark, this makes people “more aloof with music”, because they can log out after a couple of songs, which is not usually the etiquette during a live performance (personal interview, November 24th, 2021). Paul also expressed his concern that this might result in audiences being less engaged with the magic of live performance, being more distant, and having a mindset of “logging out” after a song or two, even during the in-person shows (personal interview, November 24th, 2021). Noah Kamis equates live streams to “the fast food of the COVID era”, giving the metaphor the following

explanation: “They technically are serving food, and they are popular for a reason. But they're never going to replace a proper restaurant, where you can actually have a fully crafted meal that's curated and everything like that. They're simple and easy for consumers, but you don't get the same quality of the product” (personal interview, January 6th, 2021). This speaks to the innate qualities of a physical location and how they form part of the creative process. While this interconnection between a setting’s social and aesthetic dimensions and performance has been highlighted in other studies (e.g., Taylor et al., 2021; Green, 2018), the loss of these dimensions during the pandemic underscored the significance of these elements in creating a dynamic and stimulating performance.

Ng and Thompson (2021) called live streams “less than” either a concert or a video recording. Dan Mangan agrees that live streaming will never be the same as the live show. However, he suggests the need for a different perspective, thinking that this negative outlook only diminishes the streaming experience:

“People who treated online shows like a bumner version of a real thing <...>, placed a ceiling on what the experience was. <...> And I think that we really succeeded with our online shows because I never looked at it like “this is good enough for now”. I was treating it like, here's this exciting new medium that allows me to connect with 1,000 people at once from all over the world. And so, I treated it not as a lesser version of a show, but as a totally different thing. Shows are shows. These are like virtual hangouts with me and a bunch of other people who like my songs” (personal interview, January 20th, 2022).

As the interviews took place a year and a half after the onset of the pandemic when some of the restrictions were previously temporarily lifted – giving everyone a taste of “how it used to be” – a lot of the excitement and enthusiasm about live streams had already started to fade. Many were itching to go back to the actual live performance, and the idea of “live stream fatigue” was brought up in many interviews. As Phoenix Lazare summed up in her interview: “It’s great to try

a new thing and support artists during a rough time. And then, after a while, it's just like, another thing that you're watching on your laptop. <...> I think people are just really eager to get back to attending live shows” (October 20th, 2021). Kelli Rothwell agrees; being an avid concert photographer, she shares how during the first few weeks of the pandemic she was trying to take pictures of her laptop with live streams on it, to capture the authentic pandemic experience, yet it quickly “got old” (personal interview, October 30th, 2021). Undeniably, the fact that at some point literally everything – work, services, social life, entertainment – was accessed through the screen of a laptop or a phone, has only sped up the “technology burnout”. The original excitement about seeing your favourite bands play digitally has been eventually replaced with impatience and a desire to get back to “normal”. As Ian Cromwell contends, “People are weary, and burnt out, and not interested <in watching live streams>. Because people were hoping that they would recapture what they had in a live room. And that's just not possible in a virtual room” (personal interview, December 9th).

This leads us to the next, and arguably most important, disadvantage.

6.3.4 Live Streams as an (Anti-) Social Experience

Being in close proximity to other people is one of the things that immediately sets the real concert apart from watching a live stream at home. Many interviewees conveyed that such a connection was taken for granted. There was little awareness of how much the social aspect of a live show would be missed once taken away. And, despite all the advantages outlined above with regards to new ways of connecting with fans, it became increasingly obvious that the live stream could never fully replace the actual in-person interaction. As noted by Bergeman (2019), “different communication platforms allow varying degrees of social presence” (p.4). Out of the

platforms accessible to interviewees, only Zoom has the option to see your audience (at times to even let them speak) (see Appendix 1). Especially early into the pandemic, the chat rooms available to the audience on any streaming platform were filled with “nostalgic” messaging reminiscing the good old pre-pandemic times, rather than enjoying the “now” (Vandenberg et al., 2020). For the majority of streaming platforms, chat is the most common way to connect, which makes the interactions faceless, one-sided, and flat (Lee and Peterson, 2004). After all, words and emojis can not replace the actual emotional exchange happening in the actual venues; the exchange that is often non-verbal.

Phoenix Lazare, who was interviewed a few weeks after her first post-pandemic live show at Guilt & Co, shares that “it just felt so good, being in a room with other people” (personal interview, October 20th, 2021). Kelli Rothwell adds that live streams do not capture “the same magic and experience of being at a live show with other people” (personal interview, October 30th, 2021). Many interviewees commented on the lack of familiar concert energy and the emotional exchange between the artist and their audience found in live settings. As stated by Michelle Lee Runns:

“It's not the same because when you're at a live show, the audience feeds your soul. As an artist, it fed my soul, having the crowd hyped up. There's hype, there's a rush that you get when you're on stage and people are loving it. I tried to get the “hopeness” out of it. But I'm at home, so trying to grab that hype and put it on camera was kind of challenging”
(personal interview, November 3rd, 2021).

Similarly, the energy of the live experience was praised by Justice McLellan:

“Where if you're in a room, and there's energy going around the crowd, and this is symbiotic energy between the band and the crowd, you begin to have more space for taking chances. And then there's more, there's a conversation going on, between you, your band, and your audience. And it's an energy that can really start to form some kind of organism within a room. And that is a wonderful, transcendent experience if you tap into that. And if you all get there, if the

crowds in that space, if you're in that space, obviously a lot of things have to line up to make that happen. But when that does happen, it's beautiful. It's like there's something very organic and universal about that (personal interview, November 28th, 2021).

Similarly, Bergeman (2019) notes that “remote” audiences are observers, rather than participants. Her research was done before the pandemic, and she studied the perception of pre-recorded shows. During the pandemic, Hahm et al. (2022) confirmed through their study on Korean performers that the lack of “physical proximity between performers and the audience in the same place”, which “creates a shared experience”, is considered “the most critical factor for performance quality” (p.7). Hence, the lack of connection and proximity between the performer and their audiences is crucial when it comes to the quality and satisfaction of digital performances.

Green (2018) posits that the identities of alternative scenes get formed through the relationships between people and places; urban subcultures are inseparable from the spaces where they originate and nourish. “Shows are a *place* where it's a community centre, essentially. <...> A show is where you're going to see your friends who are in the music community, your friends whom you maybe met because we were also fans of the same artist” - agrees Megan Emanuel in her interview (November 22nd, 2021). Taylor et al. (2018) add that “the live music industry is inherently spatial in nature” since live music is typically produced and consumed in physical spaces (p. 8). Musicians thrive through symbiotic relationships with their environment, and when venues are taken away from them, this inevitably causes a backlash among the members of the scene (Green, 2018). Thus, while the pandemic has created a redefined version of the scene, where both the spaces and the audiences have moved online, these extended socio-spatial relations come at some cost.

Live streams were certainly valuable mediums for performance when there was no opportunity to perform live. They, however, cannot replace the “real thing”. To describe live streams, interviewees used such terms as “a band-aid” (Noah Kamis), “a fine alternative when you don't have live music” (Dwight Abell), and “a placeholder” (Kelli Rothwell) (personal interviews: January 6th, 2022; December 11th, 2021; October 30th, 2021). According to the interviewees, it was good while it lasted, it filled the gap, but it will never replace the real thing. Watching live streams is not the same as being at the venue, quoting Ian Cromwell, it’s more like, “watching the room where the music is happening” (personal interview, December 9th, 2021). This reality brings to light the significance of spatial struggles within a local scene. While Green’s (2018) reference above was in relation to heavier alternative music, such as metal and punk - the next section will bring to light the significance of such struggles for the Vancouver independent music scene.

6.4 Perception of Space During Live Streams “From the Venue”

When talking about the live streams “from the venue”, many interviewees emphasized the lack of energy coming from the crowd. The audience at a regular concert is “on the same page”: “even though you don't know anyone else's name in the room, everyone's experiencing the same thing collectively together. And you just get this energy, this vibe about it” (Noah Kamis, personal interview, January 20th, 2022). Kelli Rothwell complains that, as a concert photographer, she enjoys capturing the energy of a crowded energetic room, while capturing a performance in an empty venue simply would not produce the same quality photographs (personal interview, October 30th, 2021). Rothwell has been attending concerts all her life, as a

fan and a photographer, so she knows well how it feels to be a part of a vibrant crowd. In her interview, she summarized the alienating feeling of being present in an empty venue during the live stream recording:

“It felt a little bit cold at times, not having the bodies packed in there: literally cold and also a little bit figuratively. If you've gone to a concert, you understand the concept of energy, and a crowd focused on one thing for an extended period of time and being able to engage. It's not like being in a theatre, where you're sitting and watching; you're *participating*, you're living in the moment with all these other people and with the musicians that are on stage. It's a thing: concerts are very collaborative between musicians and the crowd. So having that removed, I think made it a little bit more difficult. For the artists on stage, you're just not knowing if you're doing something right, because your audience is on the other side of the screen. How do you know if a song is resonating?”
(Personal interview, October 30th, 2021).

Adam Fink, who played live streams in both The Fox and The Rickshaw, confirms Kelli's thought that this emptiness is, indeed, challenging for the artists: “Being on stage, without having any response is really difficult. It's hard to gauge how it's going, having no gauge of anything. It's almost like being in a rehearsal space” (personal interview, December 11th, 2021). Similarly, Justice McLellan compares playing on stage for streams with having a sound check before a regular show: “You show up, you set up, and you just play some music into a *reverberated* space” – shares the musician. “It's a space architecturally built for people”, – he continues, – “and when you're in a space that is made for people and there are no people there, it naturally feels strange” (personal interview, November 28th, 2021).

As a venue operator, Robert Barrington has observed many artists on the Rickshaw's stage, prior to and during the pandemic. He shares that many bands have remarked how odd it was to perform to the empty room, and how uncomfortable he felt, asking them to be performative on camera (personal interview, November 23rd, 2021).

The emotional exchange between the artist and the audience was not there for the live streams to capture. And while the physical venue was there, it was not easily “translatable” into the virtual format. Paul Clark shares his thoughts on how the camera cannot capture the space the way it is but only in a mediated form: “because it's a *camera in the venue*. You'll never get the same feeling as if you're sitting in there” (Personal interview, November 24th, 2021). Adam Fink notes that the physical and the digital spaces are not “mutually exclusive”. They do not compete, but they are two different experiences and are not comparable. Dwight Abell also shares that it is the physical elements of a venue – its sensory features – that are missed and cannot be replaced: “The thing that I didn't realize I missed about live music is the smell of a live show, the smell of the lights, the smell of the fog machine. The environment, you can't synthetically remake that, it'll never be the same” (personal interview, December 11th, 2021). Hence, it’s not just the music, people, and space – it is the intangible and aesthetic qualities that make the concert experience special and impossible to recreate digitally.

7.0 Support During the Pandemic: The Independent Music Scene Perspective

The pre-pandemic struggles of being an independent artist or managing an independent venue in the ‘No Fun City’ have been discussed earlier in the thesis. The pandemic has significantly worsened the situation, as Darlene Rigo put it in her interview with CTV news: "It's looking dire not just for us <The Fox Cabaret> but for all of these venues across the country, and I don't see how most of them can survive without government funding” (Yoshida-Butryn, 2020). Countless initiatives to save the scene were coming from within the artists' community, with like-minded individuals having each other’s backs. Similarly, referring to the independent music

scene in Britain, Garland (2020) mentions that most support for the independent music industry has “come from within the industry itself” (p.1). To a lesser extent, most community members felt supported by higher levels, such as provincial and municipal governments. In this section, I will talk about those initiatives. I will first introduce artist-initiated support in the form of virtual performance spaces that were created by three interviewees: Dan Mangan (SideDoor), Megan Emanuel (Park Sound), and Ian Cromwell (Locals Lounge). I will then discuss the non-profit organizations that worked to keep the local scene afloat, and how they supported the interviewees. Finally, I will talk about the governmental support and lack thereof, as well as how the health restrictions were at times damaging, rather than helpful, for the local venues.

7.1 Artists Supporting Artists Through Virtual Spaces

Due to the inability to come together during the first months of COVID, some local artists decided to create innovative third spaces: virtual “venues” for performance and community gatherings. These “spaces” had their website domains set up for information, and used one of the popular platforms, typically Zoom or Instagram Live, for the streaming portion. They became an important safety net for musicians during the pandemic, especially during the early stages of COVID, and were praised by many interviewees. Below is the story behind three of these platforms launched by local artists.

SideDoor

SideDoor was launched by Dan Mangan and Laura Simpson, his musical colleague from Nova Scotia, back in 2019 (SideDoor, 2022). Labeled as “the world’s marketplace for artists, hosts, and audiences”, the platform “removed time and space”, due to its self-serve nature (SideDoor, 2022; Dan Mangan, personal interview, January 5th, 2022). The artists would

independently create a profile, add financial information, book a show, and sell tickets, which eliminated the in-between parties such as agents and promoters, as well as a strict dependency on venues and their availability (Dan Mangan, personal interview, January 5th, 2022). The goal of the platform was to offer more options for alternative performance spaces, not limited to just the music venues. Hence, prior to the pandemic, SideDoor successfully booked over 300 shows in odd spaces such as bookstores, backyards, living rooms, parks, and basements (Dan Mangan, personal interview, January 5th, 2022).

After the events of March 2020 and Dan Mangan's successful and communal first live stream experiences, the artist decided to temporarily turn SideDoor into a secure platform for booking live streams. The goal, more than anything, was to safely and digitally bring people together, and the main focus was on "hanging out and making it feel like a visceral spontaneous experience that comes and goes, not an on-demand piece of content" (Dan Mangan, personal interview, January 5th, 2022). Artists would go through the self-serve SideDoor portal and book their online show themselves. The ticket purchasers would consequently receive a Zoom link to this show, which would go active at show time. Due to the offerings on Zoom, the experience was quite interactive, since the audience's microphones could be unmuted and they could speak to the artists, as well as be seen on camera. Out of the interviewees, SideDoor was used by The Zolas, Phoenix Lazare, and Dan himself. Lazare praises the platform, noting that "they did very well at transitioning their business model to accommodate online concerts and benefit artists through that, which was such a great thing at the time, because we were all like, "What are we going to do?" (personal interview, October 20th, 2021). Sandy Powlik, however, shares that the platform benefits established artists more than emerging artists because people are not always willing to pay to watch someone they don't know (personal interview, October 19th, 2021).

Locals Lounge

Another community project that was pushed to go online is Locals Lounge.

Locals Lounge started in 2016, as an interview and performance series hosted by Ian Cromwell (Chernoff, 2022). “It was a once-a-month opportunity for me to sit down in a room with an artist and an audience, and just talk to them, and hear a bit about their lives, and their relationship with the city and the community, as just to provide some human context to the live performance, which is something that is a big part of what people really love about local music” – shares Ian (personal interview, December 9th, 2021). Following the pandemic, the series has adapted to the virtual format, as Cromwell hosted close to 40 events during the first three months of COVID. Ian shares that the project “got a lot of great feedback from friends who tuned in, and people who said that it was great to feel community” (personal interview, December 9th, 2021). However, the translation of the actual “space” into the virtual experience was not as successful as its in-person predecessor. Ian was trying to build a digital community of people, a “core group” who would be attending every show, but instead, he ended up with “the same number of people in every performance and it wasn't the same people every time” (Ian Cromwell, personal interview, December 9th, 2021). Hence, instead of a dedicated audience that came to support Ian and his project, most attendees would join one time only to support each individual performer. The project permanently moved back offline to Guilt & Co as soon as the provincial restrictions were lifted, and smaller live shows could resume (personal interview, December 9th, 2021).

Park Sound

Megan Emanuel shares how the first months of the pandemic found her in a privileged position, as she was receiving a steady income through her day job, unrelated to music (personal interview, November 22nd, 2021). Watching her artistic peers lose their jobs, altruistic Megan first decided to pay for their meals (personal interview, November 22nd, 2021). She then got together with her colleague, sound engineer and musician Andy Shichter, who runs the recording studio Park Sound in North Vancouver. The artists came up with an idea to support the musical community by running a series of paid live streams. “<Recording> studios, especially in a smaller city like Vancouver, become a hub for community activity” – explains Megan (personal interview, November 22nd, 2021). With this digital project, Megan and Andy tried to close the gap created by the pandemic-related temporary closure of the business. The online series was named Park Sound, after the studio, as the artists were trying to digitally recreate the connections and the community spirit between the scene members. Park Sound hosted streams throughout the lockdown, from April to September 2020, charging audience a \$10 cover fee that would go to the performers. Despite the bad sound quality on Instagram Live, the audience was simply happy to get together and enjoy music, as some comments read “Oh my God, I’m crying” and “Oh my God, I needed this whole couple of weeks, as the pandemic started” (Megan Emanuel, personal interview, November 22nd, 2021). Megan and Andy did not make any money off the project, since their main goal was to give back to the community. However, they have increased the actual recording studio’s visibility as the number of their Instagram followers doubled from 600 to 1200: “The Park Sound community got a lot bigger, in a very organic and community-oriented way, which was really cool” – shares Emanuel (personal interview, November 22nd, 2021). In September 2020, Megan adds, “We were like, *“Okay, I don't think we're needed anymore. People are very much empowered to do this, they're making their own money”*, this is how their

digital project, with its mission being accomplished, came to its end (personal interview, November 22nd, 2021).

As of fall 2022, there has no longer been a need for the virtual live stream spaces, and both SideDoor and Locals Lounge are successfully operating in their original, offline formats. The Park Sound Studio successfully survived the pandemic and operates up to this day. Due to the live stream fatigue and the excitement of the lifted restrictions, the demand for the digital format of those spaces has ceased, but it worked for the time being and has allowed the original (non-digital) projects of Mangan, Cromwell, and Emanuel to stay afloat and increase visibility during the dark times of the pandemic. Based on the interviews and media articles, there were several benefits attained by the digital live stream hubs mentioned above:

- Musicians have the infrastructure to perform during the pandemic.
- Musicians have the means to make extra income through performance.
- The hosts get exposure and acquire new connections and followers.
- Artists and audiences have the means to come together as a community to satisfy their social needs.

Based on the interviews with three hosts, the main purpose behind such digital spaces was to create or maintain a sense of community and unity, rather than just to offer artists a space to perform. But unlike real spaces, digital platforms lack the sense of place and are mostly utilized based on the desire to get together and the emotional connection to the artist or the host (for example, Dan Mangan and Ian Cromwell are both known and respected within the community). This also speaks to why the digital incarnations of the platforms did not last after

the restrictions were lifted: the opportunity of interacting with the hosts in person is not easily replicated by the virtual experience.

7.2 Supporting Organizations

Besides being supported by fellow artists and their creative endeavours, the interviewees also praised a few non-profit organizations at the provincial and federal levels that advocated for the local music scene and supported artists and venues in the face of the pandemic challenges. These include Creative B.C., Music B.C., FACTOR, and federal groups via the advocacy of Rickshaw Theatre owner, Mo Tarmohamed. Each is reviewed briefly in turn below.

Creative BC

Creative BC is a non-profit society that collaborates with “provincial ministries and initiatives, municipal resources and relevant industry associations and committees” in order to grow the creative industry in general (Creative BC Official Website, 2022). It supports the music, film, sound recording, digital media, and publishing industries of British Columbia. In support of the local music scene, Creative BC has introduced popular funding streams, namely Amplify BC and Vancouver Music Fund, that have helped many interviewees during the pandemic.

In April 2020, Creative BC partnered with the provincial government to create a platform called Showcase BC (Therrien, 2020). The platform’s website was calling everyone to “stay home, stay connected, and #ShowcaseBC through great entertainment from our local creators” (Showcase BC, 2022). The hub contained a variety of recorded live entertainment

content in order for British Columbians to “stay connected while staying home” (Therrien, 2020). To help musicians take part in these streams, Creative BC also launched the Showcase BC funding stream, offering “\$500 to emerging artists and \$2,000 to established artists for live streaming, song writing, and professional development” (Therrien, 2020). On April 16th, 2020, the platform hosted its “signature” free event called Showcase BC LIVE! hosted by the province’s Premier John Horgan. The hour-long concert was streamed on Zoom and featured the performances of four local musicians, Dan Mangan being one of them, playing songs from their homes (Showcase BC, 2022).

During the pandemic, Creative BC also restructured its Amplify BC funding, by allocating the \$2.2 million budget to provide operational funding for venues (Collins, 2020). Unfortunately, this was not nearly enough to save the venues, considering that in BC, the live music sector constitutes about \$700 million in revenue, and \$150 million of it is in Vancouver alone (Collins, 2020). Mo Tarmohamed notes that the Amplify BC funding would only take Rickshaw through three months of the pandemic (Collins, 2020). Creative BC has also helped Phoenix Lazare, Justice McLellan, and Angie Faith with financing their pandemic projects.

Music BC

Music BC is a non-profit organization that primarily does advocacy work to support the provincial music sector. They describe themselves as “the voice of the BC Music industry locally, domestically and internationally, through active advocacy for funding, policy, red tape reduction, tax credits, and creator’s rights” (Music BC, 2022). Music BC works closely with Creative BC and the provincial government, creating the financial streams accessible to musicians of all genres and backgrounds. Ian Cromwell praises that “They serve the interests of

the recorded music” and “do live performance encouragement, as well” (personal interview, December 9th, 2021).

Many interviewees brought up the support offered by Music BC in their interviews. Megan Emanuel notes that out of all organizations, she felt most supported by them (personal interview, November 22nd, 2021). Noah Kamis adds that, unlike the provincial government, Music BC sees The Fox Cabaret, and independent venues in general, as places to share and enjoy art, not to party and get drunk (personal interview, January 20th, 2022). Other interviewees that were supported by them include the Rickshaw Theatre, Locals Lounge, Guilt & Co, and MzShellz.

FACTOR

Another non-profit organization that provided grants and financial relief to the local music industry members during the pandemic is the Foundation to Assist Canadian Talent on Records (FACTOR). FACTOR is a federal body, hence its scope is not limited to one territory or province, and they support anglophone acts all around the country. Michelle Lee Runns received an Indigenous Hip Hop grant from FACTOR (personal interview, November 3rd, 2021). Angie Faith compliments FACTOR on their generosity with feedback and recommendations on her grant applications (November 5th, 2021). Megan Emanuel, Robert Barrington and Paul Clark agree that FACTOR did a great job allocating grant money to streaming instead of touring, and all received some funding through this initiative (personal interviews, November 22nd, November 23rd, November 24th, 2021).

Other Federal-Level Organizations

There were two other federal organizations through which Rickshaw theatre's owner and operator Mo Tarmohamed was active and advocated for music venues around the country.

- Canadian Independent Venue Coalition.

The organization was formed to lobby various levels of government for support (Yoshida-Butryn, 2020). As Tarmohamed explained to Daily Hive, “\$400-million was put aside to support the arts and culture through the Heritage Fund, but independently owned live music venues have never been able to access any of that funding. Those funds only get allocated to non-profit organizations. Independently owned venues across Canada have fallen through the cracks. No one is paying attention to us” (Collins, 2020). Hence, the creation of the Canadian Independent Venue Coalition was an important step in order to lobby the government to provide alternative spaces with more financial help.

- Canadian Live Music Association (CLMA).

CLMA was formed in 2014 in response to a national need for a united representation of the independent music venue sector (Canadian Live Music Association, 2022). Robert Barrington explains that, unlike independent venues, civic theatres and playhouses typically get financial support from the government (personal interview, November 23rd, 2021). The initial goal of CLMA was to make sure the independent venues are also represented and could request similar types of financial support: “We had a concise message to send to the government regarding funding and the need to support places like this and the role we play, not only in supporting musicians but in supporting Canadian culture as a whole” - shares Robert (personal interview, November 23rd, 2021). Darlene Rigo also praises the work done by the CLMA during the pandemic, calling them

incredible advocates for the music community: “They started the campaign and asked for people to write letters. And they got 20,000 letters, which got Dr. Bonnie Henry <British Columbia’s Provincial Health Officer> to sit down with some of the stakeholders and discuss her reasoning. And it didn't change <anything> , but at least they got that far” (personal interview, January 20th, 2022).

7.3 Governmental Support and Health Restrictions

It was on March 16th, 2020, that all social gatherings in the province of British Columbia were officially banned (CTV News, 2021). During the pandemic, there were no specific laws and legislations planned for live music venues, despite it being one of the hardest hit sectors (Noah Kamis, personal interview, January 20th, 2022). Quoting Taylor et al. (2021), governmental policies have “dominated” most commercial spaces during the pandemic, by enforcing closure and other mandates (p.14).

Mo Tarmohamed of the Rickshaw Theatre and Darlene Rigo of the Fox Cabaret were vocal about their concerns about their venues’ survival and have been often featured in media

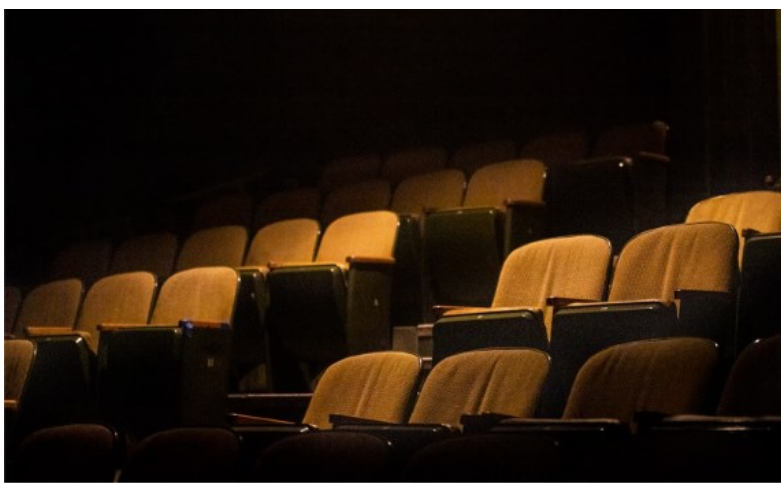


Figure 10: Empty Seats of the Rickshaw Theatre
Source: K. Rothwell, 2020

sources as major advocates for the future of independent venues. "Costs just pile up, and that's not going to go away, and we have zero revenue. We're selling merch and stuff like that but that's a pittance compared to

what we would be earning right now” - Tarmohamed shared with CTV news back in June 2020 (Yoshida-Butryn, 2020). He continues: “For us right now, it's just finding ways to access any government funding so that we're ready when the time comes when things get back to normal” (Yoshida-Butryn, 2020). For her part, Darlene Rego shares how Fox’s landlord refused to give the venue a rent reduction during the lockdown. The theatre has also experienced an insurance crisis that hit multiple venues across the country, when insurance brokers refused to insure venues (Darlene Rigo, personal interview, January 20th, 2022). Adam Fink explains in his interview that The Fox is an independent small business that does not have any financial backing besides the support of the community, the music scene, and patrons: “A venue is not just a place for people to get drunk and blow off steam, it's an integral part of the community, just like any other sort of business. <...> And I feel like the way that the government has been, is they don't think about those kinds of things” – he complains (personal interview, December 11th, 2021). Since the majority of independent venues’ money comes from liquor sales, they operate under a liquor primary license. This, in turn, creates a certain image of the venues for the government, as shared by Noah Kamis: “The BC Government thinks that we are a place for people to get drunk” (personal interview, January 20th, 2022).

The interviews for this project took place between October 2021 and January 2022 – right after the live events in British Columbia province were slowly starting to resume (See Appendix 3). On October 24, 2021, the provincial government decided to lift the capacity restrictions on venues of *all sizes*, as long as each patron has an assigned seat. The restrictions conveniently aligned with the opening of the 2021-2022 Hockey Season at Rogers Arena, and the first home game of the Vancouver Canucks on October 26th, 2021, which was not a coincidence (Carrigg, 2021; Zussman, 2021). At that point, Canucks were the last team in the National Hockey League

to have their home arena capacity restrictions lifted (Recksiedler & Nassar, 2021). Vaccine passports and mask mandates were still active at the hockey games, yet the arena was finally allowed to host up to 18,870 fans under one roof (Williams, 2022). From October 24th, people were also allowed to mingle in restaurants and at smaller events too. However, everyone had to have an assigned seat, and most importantly, *dancing* – one of the main activities that draw people to live events – was still banned (Carrigg, 2021). This disconnect between what is allowed in big commercial venues, and what is not allowed in smaller independent rooms, has caused a lot of confusion and dissatisfaction within the independent scene. Robert Barrington explains that it is “because the arenas and the sports teams have a bigger lobbying power with the politicians, and admittedly, they're big revenue generators”, and adds that “people are standing and shouting at hockey games. It seems odd that people are not allowed to stand to watch a band” (personal interview, November 23rd, 2021). Paul Clark agrees, noting that “I love movies and sports, but music and the arts have been very unfairly treated in terms of regulations. Money talks and there's more money in movies and sports than there is in music” (personal interview, November 24th, 2021). Moreover, British Columbia was the last province to adjust the capacity regulations and lift COVID restrictions for the music venues, and Adam Fink, Robert Barrington, and Noah Kamis all complained about this decision in their interviews (November 23rd, 2021, December 11th, 2021, January 20th, 2022).

Adam Fink, who is equally involved in the local music scene as a drummer, DJ, and staff member at the Fox Cabaret, shares that during the pandemic he felt supported by the community and organizations like Music BC, but not by the government:

“It's really hard to reconcile certain things that are happening, especially right now <...> Because when you're telling me that we can't have 300 people in a club dancing and having fun and seeing videos of 20,000 people screaming and yelling and dancing <at a

hockey game> literally doesn't make sense. I feel like the provincial government has been terrible in regard to helping venues as small businesses. They have been more punitive than they have been helpful. We were the first industry to close down, we are still not open <completely>”
(personal interview, December 11th, 2021).

Robert Barrington rightfully complains that the restrictions “don't affect the big rooms, they just really take a toll on nightclubs and then venues like ours <The Rickshaw Theatre>, who need to be able to have open standing room in order to facilitate the sort of audiences, that the touring artists are coming to play for” (personal interview, November 23rd, 2021). In a similar fashion, Taylor et al. (2021) note that the governmental approaches to the pandemic in the UK have unveiled a similar hierarchy of live music venues, with some getting “favoured” by the funds and policies over others (p.15). Hence, these issues and favouritism is not specific to Vancouver and Canadian context.

Before COVID, Fox Cabaret was hosting popular late DJ dance parties that would start right after their concerts, and they were the venue’s main revenue generator. The Fox tried hosting them again in October 2021, yet without dancing and mingling, it felt more like a pub



Figure 11: Live Stream being filmed at the Fox Cabaret.
Source: D. Rigo, 2020.

than a music venue with people sitting at tables, getting drinks, and listening to music (Adam Fink, Personal interview, December 11th, 2021).

Hence, even though the smaller venues were finally re-opened, the continuing restrictions seemed to be working against them. Thankfully, one year

later in the fall of 2022, the busy schedule of the Cabaret is full again.

Robert Barrington comments on the lack of communication between the relevant government bodies and the venues and says that it would be “nice to see that they're trying to understand our problems and address them instead of allowing all these grey areas to exist” (personal interview, November 23rd). Paul Clark agrees that the communication in regard to the constantly updated policies and regulations could have been improved: “When a new set of rules comes out, you try to figure out what that means for your business, maybe you've tried to contact somebody at the provincial level by email or phone, but there's really nobody to talk to, there's nobody to get specific information <from>. So that's been the most stressful part, trying to make sure that you're following the rules, but having absolutely nobody to ask if you are” (personal interview, November 24th, 2021).

Some musicians felt similar to the venues about the lack of governmental support: “I've never really felt like this province has ever really pushed (for) artists” – shares Dwight Abell (personal interview, December 11th, 2021). Others, however, remained more positive. Sandy Powlik, for example, compares BC with its southern neighbour and notes that there are more grants and support opportunities in Canada than in the United States (personal interview, October 29th, 2021). Angie Faith acknowledges that there is a lot of competition to get the limited funding, but still says she was grateful for the opportunities provided by the governmental fund (personal interview, November 5th, 2021). She, however, adds that she would like to see more grant opportunities offered to emerging artists over the signed artists (since labels have money) (personal interview, November 5th, 2021). For example, Amplify BC offers only \$500 to emerging artists and \$2,000 to established artists, while, in Angie’s opinion, it is the emerging

artists who need access to larger funds (personal interview, November 5th, 2021; Therrien, 2020).

The interviewees were also quick to suggest what kind of support they would like to see from the government. Both Megan Emanuel and Zach Gray suggest grants for purchasing recording equipment and gear ([personal interviews, November 22nd, and December 13th, 2021). “Those are pretty simple things and very cheap for the government to do, and sometimes not super cheap for musicians” - adds Zach alluding that this kind of support should be easy for the government to offer. Other ideas of support included a better tax structure, more medical benefits, and the introduction of the city’s Night Mayor, “somebody that <would be> a connection between the nightlife and music industry in Vancouver and the city”, quoting Paul Clark (personal interview, November 24th, and Justice McLellan, personal interview, November 28, 2021).

Significantly, both artists and venues would like more direct and open channels to the government to convey their needs. Many stated that they also wanted greater recognition on the part of the government for the contributions that they make to the broader cultural and aesthetic qualities of Vancouver. And as some of the challenges of the live stream experience illustrate, there is a need for government to recognize the ongoing significance of venues as integral parts of the scene, with which artists remain interdependent, so that supports are approached in a holistic manner to enhance all the ecosystem's organisms.

8.0 Conclusion

In the fall of 2021, the British Columbia provincial health authorities allowed the resumption of face-to-face cultural events with specific mandates (vaccine passports, masks, distancing) in place. Since then, live music events have been gradually re-appearing and the number of live streams has been slowly decreasing. This transition to the “new normal” has marked the end of the significant era for live streams; as soon as the tours and performances were allowed again, the “band-aid solution” has been pushed into the background. Over the next year, countless tours of all scales were occurring internationally with artists eager to go back on the road and the stage. The social elements of the live performance were back in place, and at every concert in the fall of 2021, it felt like they were a big reunion, with emotional words shared from the stage and the audience.

Using the Vancouver independent music scene as a case study, and based on the testimonies shared by the interviewees, my thesis explored the relationship between digital and physical spaces in Vancouver in aiming to answer the following research question: *how have digital live streams transformed the relationships within the Vancouver independent music scene during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

The thesis demonstrated that virtual space was not a replacement for the live experience, but more of a complement, particularly useful for certain kinds of communications. It contributes to the nascent literature on music and the COVID pandemic. And in alignment with the findings of Ng and Thompson (2021) and Rendell (2021), the interviewees for this thesis agree on the liminal role of live streams, confirming that live streams are in-between live shows and pre-recorded music videos, and can never become both. As Quader (2021) argues, live streams cannot replace actual performances; the interviewees attest that since live stream

performance and live concerts each represent their own, separate medium with distinct aesthetics and communication dynamics.

The pandemic experience, therefore, has only confirmed the importance of proximity between the artist and the audience, as Hahm et al. (2022) contend. The lack of connection was the main flaw of the live streamed experience and the main reason the popularity of live streams for performances did not last once the music venues reopened and people felt safe enough to come out. This speaks to the ongoing importance of spatial proximity within the music scene; music is a social experience, and the atmosphere is what draws people to live concerts. And it underscores the critical role that music venues play in enabling such a social experience. This atmosphere is impossible to recreate during live streams, hence they should not be compared to live concerts but, yet again, viewed as a separate medium.

The particular strengths of the live streaming medium are that it allows artists to experiment with visual formats (in the case of more high-budgeted streams), and/or provides a different experience for listeners if the artist is playing from the comfort of their home. In the latter case, the “casual” live streams helped artists to become independent videographers and camera operators, and taught them to improvise, experiment, and pick up many other skills. Overall, the pandemic has further pushed independent artists to become professional multitaskers and explore new skill sets (grant writing and reviewing, camera skills, producing, and promoting). The importance of multitasking has been reimagined during the pandemic when artists became less dependent on both space and other people (Hracs, 2012, 2015).

Is this a demise of the live streamed shows? As a primary form of performance, yes. The live stream fatigue has taken its toll and connecting in person is desired by both the artists and the spectators. However, the skills learned over the course of the pandemic, whether it’s live

streaming or other non-creative tools, are still being utilized by artists on a day-to-day basis. Also, artists with a bigger international following, Dan Mangan for example, have been obviously inspired by the pandemic experience. Mangan continues to cultivate his geographically dispersed online community, by creating new digital spaces for fans to interact with each other and Dan and get access to his exclusive content. Hence, Dan's pandemic experience has inspired the artist to create his own both virtual and translocal community of fans and to further foster these connections (Rendell, 2021). Overall, this thesis corroborates Rendell's (2021) contention that three types of scenes, as defined by Bennet and Peterson's (2004), are not relevant in the context of COVID live streams. Local, translocal, and virtual scenes fuse together to create their own, exclusively remote - yet linked to the distinct qualities of geographical location - kind of scene. This new scene has been pandemic-specific and for the most part, short-lived. As of late 2022, streaming platforms and video formats are still used by artists but for purposes other than live performance. Based on my own observations, musicians started using videos more frequently to make announcements, connect with fans, and share recorded performances or music videos, and in this way expand the scope of their scene beyond the limits of Vancouver (Straw 1991. 2015).

While the pandemic has brought to light both the advantages and limits of live streaming for the independent music scene, it has also highlighted some critical policy lessons stemming from the continuously precarious nature of key actors in Vancouver's independent music industry. and the need to engage with both physical and digital spaces. Zach Gray called Vancouver "the city of cultural sandcastles" for a reason (personal interview, December 13th, 2021). Its culture is unsustainable and is not built to last, and once artists and venues, most of whom are living from paycheque to paycheque, are impacted by a global emergency, surviving

gets even harder. This precarity underscores the disconnect between existing government initiatives, where there is limited recognition of music's contribution to the city's vitality, and the needs of the independent music scene. The findings highlighted above, for instance, show the critical role of physical venues and live concerts for the scene; yet many restrictions seemed to be only harming the independent venues. And, on the whole, artists and venue operators felt more supported by advocating organizations, the community, and each other than they did by the government. It suggests the need for more channels by which music industry actors can voice their needs to the government and greater recognition on the part of the government of the important role of music in the city's cultural landscape - a role that is evident by the strong connections among members of the scene and strong dedication from the audience. The findings suggest that government should provide support so that musicians can access both physical spaces that allow for proximity and in-person connections and virtual platforms that promote network expansion and marketing. Such support could come in the form of potential subsidies for rents and equipment for both venues and artists and specific funding for digital-based training and initiatives.

It is important to note that not all challenges and lessons faced by the local music scene are specific to Vancouver. The current case study can provide insights into other cities facing similar challenges. In Toronto for instance, many independent artists and venues are also under threat of losing their spaces (DeMara, 2022). Future research can provide a more comparative lens on how other cities are coping with the potential links between the physical and virtual, what supports they have and what gaps in support exist.

Live music is back, and right now Vancouver artists seem to be benefiting from the best of both worlds: they get to perform live in front of real audiences and implement the variety of

skills learned during the pandemic in order to boost their careers. The sustainability of such a historic moment and the lessons it provides, however, remains to be seen and offers a sobering reflection on opportunities and challenges of the 'NO FUN' city to overturn its label.

References

- Aronsen, L. (2010). *City of Love and Revolution: Vancouver in the Sixties*. Vancouver: New Star Books.
- Arts and Crafts. (2022). *Official Website*. Retrieved from <https://arts-crafts.ca/>
- Aspri (2021, April 12th). B.C. reports 3,289 new COVID-19 cases over three days, as total deaths top 1,500. *Global News*. Retrieved from <https://globalnews.ca/news/7753293/bc-covid-19-update-april-12-2021/>
- Attali, J. (2009) *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (9th ed.). Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
- Barna, E. (2017). The perfect guide in a crowded musical landscape: Online music platforms and curatorship. *First Monday – Peer-Reviewed Journal on the Internet*, 22 (4).
- Bennett, A. (1999). Subcultures or neo-tribes? Rethinking the relationship between youth, style, and musical taste. *Sociology*, 33 (3), 599–617.
- Bennett, A. (2004). Consolidating the music scenes perspective. *Poetics*, 32, 223–234
- Bennett, A., Peterson, R.A. (eds) (2004). *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Bergeman, B. (2019). *The Performer-Audience relationship During Live and Remote Musical Performances*. (Unpublished Master's Thesis). The University of Hawai'i at Manoa.

- Brand, G., Sloboda, J., Saul, B., Hathaway., M. (2012). The reciprocal relationship between jazz musicians and audiences in live performances: A pilot qualitative study. *Psychology of Music*, 40(5) 634–651.
- Bretous, M. (2022, January 31st). How to Go Live on TikTok + Top Features You Should Use. *Hubpost.com*. Retrieved from <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/going-live-on-tiktok>
- Bryman, A., & Teevan, J. J. (2005). *Social research methods*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Campbell, M. (2021). *Permission to be loud: Struggling with urban development contradictions in the Vancouver Music Strategy*. Thesis in Master of Urban Studies, Simon Fraser University
- Campbell, R. A. (2001). *Sit down and drink your beer. Regulating Vancouver's Beer Parlours, 1925 - 1954*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Carrigg, D. (2021, October 19th). B.C. allowing full capacity for concerts, sports events, weddings and parties. *Vancouver Sun*. Retrieved from <https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/covid-19-restrictions-lifted-in-b-c-allowing-full-capacity-for-concerts-sports-events-weddings-and-parties>
- Casemajor, N., Straw, W. (2017). The Visuality of Scenes: Urban Cultures And Visual Scenescapes. *Imaginations* 7:2, 4-19.
- Castells, M. (1996). *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 407-459.

- CBC News. (2020, May 19th). What's allowed to open in Phase 2 of B.C.'s restart plan? *CBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-reopening-economy-covid-19-phase-2-1.5575506>
- CBC News. (2021, April 8th). End of vaccine pass program in B.C. has restaurants ready to welcome more dine-in customers. *CBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/vaccine-card-ends-1.6412799>
- CBC Radio. (2017, August 29th). Documenting Vancouver's punk history. *CBC Radio*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/q/tuesday-aug-29-2017-louise-penny-dave-and-virginia-grohl-1.4264940/documenting-vancouver-s-punk-history-1.4264991>
- Chapman, A. (2012). *Liquor, Lust and the Law: The Story of Vancouver's Legendary Penthouse*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press; 1st edition.
- Chapman, A. (2014). *Live at the Commodore: The Story of Vancouver's Historic Commodore*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press; Illustrated edition.
- Chapman, A. (2020). *Vancouver After Dark: The Wild History of a City's Nightlife*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Chernoff, W. (Host). (2022, March 2nd). Ian Cromwell - Locals Lounge (Episode 39). [Audio podcast episode]. *Rhythm Changes*. Retrieved from <https://www.rhythmchanges.ca/ian-cromwell-locals-lounge-ep-39/>
- Collins, R. (2020, July 3rd). Vancouver's live music venues risk closure as pandemic restrictions continue. *Daily Hive*. Retrieved from <https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/vancouver-live-music-venues-closures-pandemic>

- Colorado State University (2021). *Writing@CSU Writing Guide*. Retrieved from <https://writing.colostate.edu/guides/>
- Cox, G. (2022, January 18th). B.C. reopens gyms and exercises facilities, extends restrictions on gatherings and events. *Check News*. Retrieved from <https://www.cheknews.ca/b-c-health-officials-to-give-covid-19-update-on-status-of-gym-closures-limits-on-gatherings-939522/>
- Cummins-Russell, T.A. and Rantisi, N.M. (2012). Networks and place in Montreal's independent music industry. *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe Canadien*, 56, 1, 80-97.
- Crisp, M. (2021). The response of community musicians in the United Kingdom to the COVID-19 crisis: An evaluation. *International Journal of Community Music*. 14 (2&3).
- Dacks, D. (2021). Streaming into the Unknown. *Critical studies in improvisation*, 14 (1), 1-3.
- Datta, A. (2020). 'Virtual Choirs' and the Simulation of Live Performance under Lockdown. *Social Anthropology*, 28 (2), 249-250.
- Daubney, A., Fautley, M. (2020). Music Education in a time of pandemic. *British journal of music education*, 1-9.
- Dobuzinskis, A. (2008, November 12th). YouTube ventures into live event webcasting. Reuters.com. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-media-youtube-idUSTRE4AB40U20081112>
- Faulder, L. (2020, March 26th). Live and learn: Artists and audience figure out new ways to see and be seen. *Edmonton Journal*. Retrieved from

<https://edmontonjournal.com/entertainment/local-arts/live-and-learn-artists-and-audience-figure-out-new-ways-to-see-and-be-seen>

Fink, L.K., Warrenburg, L.A., Howlin, C., Randall, W.M., Hansen, N.C., Wald-Fuhrman, M. (2021). Viral tunes: changes in musical behaviours and interest in coronamusic predict socio-emotional coping during COVID-19 lockdown. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8(180).

Florida, R. (2002). *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*. New York: Basic Books.

Fontana, K. (2011). *Fresh at Twenty: The Oral History of Mint Records*. Toronto: ECW Press.

Forbes. (2020). The Future of Music Streaming: How COVID-19 Has Amplified Emerging Forms Of Music Consumption. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kristinwestcottgrant/2020/05/16/the-future-of-music-streaming-how-covid-19-has-amplified-emerging-forms-of-musicconsumption>

Fox Cabaret. (2022). About. *The Official Website*. Retrieved from <https://www.foxcabaret.com/about>

Frith, S. (1988). *Music for Pleasure: Essays in the Sociology of Pop*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Garland, E. (2020, March 27th). This Is How You Can Support the Independent Music Industry During COVID-19. *Vice*. Retrieved from <https://www.vice.com/en/article/akw8xk/how-to-support-independent-music-coronavirus>

- Gastown. (2022). Directory: Guilt & Co. *The Official Website*. Retrieved from <https://gastown.org/directory/guilt-co/>
- Gelder, K., Thornton, S. (Eds.), (1997). *The Subcultures Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Gieryn, T. F. (2000). A Space for Place in Sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 463-496.
- Godschalk, D.R. (2004). Coping with Conflicts in Visions of Sustainable Development and Livable Communities. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 70(1): 5-13.
- Government of British Columbia. (2021). B.C. launches restart plan to safely bring people back together. Retrieved from <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021PREM0037-001008>
- Government of British Columbia. (2021). *BC's Restart: A plan to bring us back together*. Retrieved from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/info/restart> on June 9th, 2021.
- Gu, X., Domer., N., O'Connor, J. (2021). The next normal: Chinese indie music in post-COVID China. *Cultural Trends*, 30:1, 63-74.
- Hahm, J. B., Byon, K. K., Hyun, Y.A., Hahm, J. (2022). The show must go on: The mediating role of self-assessment in the relationship between performers' technology acceptance and satisfaction level with remote performances in Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Technology in Society*, 68(101855).

- Hamilton, W. A., Garretson, O., Kerne, A. (2014). Streaming on Twitch: fostering participatory communities of play within live mixed media. *CHI '14: Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1315–1324.
- Hasegawa, R. (2021, March 11th). B.C. lifts mask mandate for nearly all indoor public spaces. CTV News. Retrieved from <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/b-c-lifts-mask-mandate-for-nearly-all-indoor-public-spaces-1.5815353>
- Hash, P. M. (2021). Remote learning in school bands during the COVID-19 shutdown. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 68(4) 381–397.
- Hilvert-Bruce, Z., Neill, J. T., Sjöblom, M., Hamari, J. (2018). Social motivations of live-streaming viewer engagement on Twitch. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 84, 58-67.
- Howard, F., Bennett, A., Green, B., Guerra, P., Sousa, S., Ernesta, S. (2021). *It's Turned Me from a Professional to a "Bedroom DJ" Once Again': COVID-19 and New Forms of Inequality for Young Music-Makers*. Sage, Young Editorial Group, 1-16.
- Hracs, B., Grant., J. L., Haggett, J. (2011). A tale of two scenes: civic capital and retaining musical talent in Toronto and Halifax. *The Canadian Geographer*, 55 (3), 365-382.
- Hracs, B. (2012). A Creative Industry in Transition: The Rise of Digitally Driven Independent Music Production. *Growth and Change*, 43 (3), 442–461.
- Hracs, B. (2015). Cultural Intermediaries in the Digital Age: The Case of Independent Musicians and Managers in Toronto. *Regional Studies*, 49 (3), 461–475.

- Hracs, B., Jansson, J. (2017). Death by streaming or vinyl revival? Exploring the spatial dynamics and value-creating strategies of independent record shops in Stockholm. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 0 (0) 1–20.
- Hudson, A. (2020, July 15th). Concerts Are Returning to Canada — and Here's What They Look Like. *Exclaim.ca*. Retrieved from https://exclaim.ca/music/article/concerts_are_returning_to_canada_and_heres_what_they_look_like
- Kamel, N., Nordby, L., Haro, H., Swearingen, C. (2019). *The Effect of the Canada-U.S. Border on the Vancouver, BC, and Seattle, WA, Music Network*. Border Policy Research Institute Publications.
- Influencer Marketing Hub (2022). Glossary. *Facebook Live*. Retrieved from <https://influencermarketinghub.com/glossary/facebook-live/>
- Influencer Marketing Hub (2022). *What is TikTok?* Retrieved from <https://influencermarketinghub.com/what-is-tiktok/>
- Instagram.com. (2022). *What is Instagram?* Retrieved from <https://help.instagram.com/424737657584573>
- Judd, A., Zussman, R. (2021, December 22nd). COVID-19: B.C. to ban indoor organized events, shut nightclubs, and keep home gatherings small. *Global News*. Retrieved from <https://globalnews.ca/news/8464883/bc-covid-update-tuesday-december-21-new-restrictions/>

- Kotyk, A. (2020, March 20th). 'Weird silver lining': Vancouver artists stream shows to empty audiences during COVID-19 pandemic. *CTV News Vancouver*. Retrieved from <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/weird-silver-lining-vancouver-artists-stream-shows-to-empty-audiences-during-covid-19-pandemic-1.4860467>
- Kotyk, A. (2021, January 28th). Scroll through this timeline of the 1st year of COVID-19 in B.C. *CTV News Vancouver*. Retrieved from <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/scroll-through-this-timeline-of-the-1st-year-of-covid-19-in-b-c-1.5284929>
- Kurucz, J. (2018, July 11th). City's music strategy aims to fix what's plaguing Vancouver musicians. *Vancouver is Awesome*. Retrieved from <https://www.vancouverisawesome.com/courier-archive/news/citys-music-strategy-aims-to-fix-whats-plaguing-vancouver-musicians-3079208>
- Kruse, H. (1993). *Subcultural Identity in Alternative Music Culture*. *Popular music*, 12 (1).
- Kruse, H. (2010). Local Identity and Independent Music Scenes, Online and Off. *Popular Music and Society*, 33 (5), 625-639.
- Laskin, D. (2006). *Storybook Vancouver: Pervasive brooding in a beautiful setting - Travel & Dining - International Herald Tribune*. The New York Times.
- Lawrence, G. (2016). Expo 86: A troubled legacy. *Vancouver is Awesome*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vancouverisawesome.com/courier-archive/news/expo-86-a-troubled-legacy-3031499>
- Lee, D., Baker, W., Haywood, N. (2020). Coronavirus, the Cultural Catalyst. *Research Gate*.

- Lee, S. S., Peterson, R.A. (2004). Internet-based Virtual Music Scenes: The Case of P2 in Alt.Country Music. In Bennett, A., Peterson, R.A. (eds). *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual*. (pp. 187-204). Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Leyshon, A. (2001). Time - space (and digital) compression: software formats, musical networks, and the reorganisation of the music industry. *Environment and Planning, A* 33, 49-77.
- Leyshon, A. (2003). Scary monsters? Software formats, peer-to-peer networks, and the spectre of the gift. *Environment and Planning D, Society & Space*, 21, 533–558.
- Leyshon, A. (2009). The Software Slump? Digital music, the democratisation of technology, and the decline of the recording studio sector within the musical economy. *Environment and Planning*, 41, 1309-1331.
- Lindsay, B. (2021, December 17th). B.C. limits indoor gatherings, cancels New Year's Eve events as Omicron picks up speed. *CBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/british-columbia-covid-restrictions-1.6290309>
- Lopez, J. (2019, April 17th). Vancouver's Shrinking Nightlife Scene Is Bringing Artists Closer Together. *The Vice*. Retrieved from <https://www.vice.com/en/article/3k3z3y/vancouver-shrinking-nightlife-scene-is-bringing-artists-closer-together>
- Margolies, D. S., Strub, J. A. (2021). Music Community, Improvisation, and Social Technologies in COVID-Era Música Huasteca. *Frontiers in Psychology*, V.12.

- McCormick, R. (2017). *Opening Up Community Music Venues in Vancouver*. Unpublished Master Thesis, Simon Fraser University
- McLean, H. (2020, March 29th). Vancouver DJ performs weekly balcony sets after 7 pm cheer. *Daily Hive*. Retrieved from <https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/vancouver-dj-balcony-set-7-pm-cheer>
- Mouillot, F. (2022). The social and cultural dimension of ‘platforming’ live music: the case of the Hong Kong independent music scene during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Popular Communication*.
- Narassiguin & Garnes (2020). The influence of COVID-19 on Twitch audience: How lockdown measures affect live streaming usage? *Upfluence*.
- Ng, K., and Thompson, S. (2021). COVID-19 and the Creative Music Ecology. *Critical Studies in Improvisation*. 14 (1), 1-6.
- Onderdijk, K. E., Acar, F., Van Dyck., E (2021) Impact of Lockdown Measures on Joint Music Making: Playing Online and Physically Together. *Front. Psychology*, 12:642713.
- Onderdijk, K. E., Swarbrick, D., Van Kerrebroeck Bavo, M. M., Vuoskoski J. K., Maes Pieter-Jan, L. M. (2021). The Role of COVID-19, Agency, Presence, and Social Context in Facilitating Social Connectedness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12.

- Orton, T. (2021, April 13th). B.C. music sector drums up three years' funding to the tune of \$22.5m. *Castanet.net*. Retrieved from <https://www.castanet.net/news/BC/330824/B-C-music-sector-drums-up-three-years-funding-to-the-tune-of-22-5m>
- Ozer, B., Ustun, E. (2020). Evaluation of Students' Views on the COVID-19 Distance Education Process in Music Departments of Fine Arts Faculties. *Asian Journal of Education and Training*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 556-568.
- Palamar, J.J., Acosta, P. (2020). Virtual raves and happy hours during COVID-19: New drug use contexts for electronic dance music partygoers. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 1-4.
- Pickersgill, M. (2006). From Nuisance to Amenity: Exploring Planning Policy Alternatives for Live Music Venues in Vancouver. *Master's Thesis, University of British Columbia*.
- Quader, S. (2021). How the Central Sydney independent musicians use pre-established 'online DIY' to sustain their networking during the COVID-19 pandemic, *The Journal of International Communication*, 28:1, 90-109.
- Recksiedler, D., Nasar, H. M. (2021, October 13th). Vancouver Canucks capacity limits at Rogers Arena under review, says Henry. *City News Vancouver*. Retrieved from <https://vancouver.citynews.ca/2021/10/13/vancouver-canucks-capacity-arena-review/>
- Rendell, J. (2021). Staying in, rocking out: Online live music portal shows during the coronavirus pandemic. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. Vol. 27(4) 1092–1111.

Rickshaw Theatre (2022). About. *Official Website*. Retrieved from

<https://rickshawtheatre.com/about/>

Ross, A (2020, October 19th). B.C. announces 2nd wave of COVID-19, as it confirms 499 new cases and 2 more deaths over the weekend. *CBC News*. Retrieved from

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/covid-19-update-bc-oct-19-1.5768415>

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.

Rumball, E. (2020, March 27th). People around the world applaud healthcare workers fighting coronavirus (VIDEOS). *Daily Hive*. Retrieved from:

<https://dailyhive.com/mapped/people-around-world-applaud-healthcare-workers>

Sassen, S. (1991). *The Global City*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Sassen, S. (2011). The Impact of the New Technologies and Globalization on Cities. In A.

Graafland and D. Hauptmann (Eds.), *Cities in Transition*. Stylos series, Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 649-658.

Scott, A. J. (1999). The US recorded music industry: on the relations between organisation, location, and creativity in the cultural economy. *Environment and Planning*, A31, 1965-1984.

Schloss, W. A. (2002). Using Contemporary Technology in Live Performance: The Dilemma of the Performer. *Journal of New Music Research*, Vol. 31, No. 1

Scott, A. J. (1999). The US recorded music industry: on the relations between organisation, location, and creativity in the cultural economy. *Environment and Planning*, A31, 1965-1984.

Shepert, E. (2022, June 17th). Vancouver ranks 3rd most expensive city in North America.

Vancouver is Awesome. Retrieved from <https://www.vancouverisawesome.com/local-news/vancouver-ranks-3rd-most-expensive-city-in-north-america-5490661>

Showcase BC. (2022). *The official website*. Retrieved from <https://showcasebc.ca/>

Side Door (2022). *The official website*. Retrieved from <https://sidedooraccess.com/site/about>

Sim, J., Cho, D., Hwang, Y. and Telang, R. (2020). Virus shook the streaming star: Estimating the COVID-19 impact on music consumption. *Marketing Science*, 41(1).

Stahl, G. (2001). Tracing out an Anglo-Bohemia: Musicmaking and myth in Montreal. *Public*, 22-23.

Stewart, M (2020, April 13th). Creative B.C. launches online hub to livestream entertainment, pay musicians. *CTV News*. Retrieved from <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/creative-b-c-launches-online-hub-to-livestream-entertainment-pay-musicians-1.4894548>

Straw, W. (1991). Systems of articulation, logics of change: Communities and scenes in popular music. *Cultural Studies*. 5:3, 368-388.

Straw, W. (2015). Some Things a Scene Might Be. *Cultural Studies*, 29:3, 476-485.

Taylor, I. A., Raine, S., Hamilton, C. (2021). Crisis as a Catalyst for Change: COVID-19, Spatiality and the UK Live Music Industry. *Journal of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music*, 10(1).

- Terasawa, H., Matsubara, M., Goudarzi, V., Sadakata, M. (2021) Music in Quarantine: Connections Between Changes in Lifestyle, Psychological States, and Musical Behaviors During COVID-19 Pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychology*.
- Therrien, A. (2020, April 11th). Provincial government planning online concert to support BC musicians. *Daily Hive Vancouver*. Retrieved from <https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/bc-music-grants-livestream-coronavirus>
- Thibault, A. (2020, March 15th). How COVID-19 is affecting B.C.'s arts and entertainment industries. *CTV News*. Retrieved from <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/how-covid-19-is-affecting-b-c-s-arts-and-entertainment-industries-1.4854294>
- Time Out. (2006). *Time Out Vancouver*, 1st edition.
- Toon, I. (2000). Finding a place in the street: CCTV surveillance and young people's use of urban public space, in: D. Bell and A. Haddour (Eds). *City Visions*, pp. 141-161. Harrow: Pearson Education.
- Twitch.com. (2022) Twitch Official Website. *About Twitch*. Retrieved from <https://www.twitch.tv/p/en/about/>
- Usinger, M. (2020, March 13th). COVID-19 concerns leading to cancellations of concerts at the Vancouver club level. *The Georgia Straight*. Retrieved from <https://www.straight.com/music/1372431/covid-19-concerns-leading-cancellations-shows-vancouver-club-level>

- Van Evra, J. (2017). 15 things about the ground-breaking, pants-dropping, object-hurling — and now reuniting — Canadian band Slow. *CBC*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/q/blog/15-things-about-the-ground-breaking-pants-dropping-object-hurling-and-now-reuniting-canadian-band-slow-1.4426700>.
- Vandenberg, F., Berghman, M., Schaap, J., (2020). The ‘lonely raver’: music livestreams during COVID-19 as a hotline to collective consciousness? *European Societies*, 1-12.
- Weichel, A. (2022, February 15th). B.C. lifting capacity limits, reopening bars and allowing dancing, but vaccine passport to stay. *CTV News BC*. Retrieved from <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/mobile/b-c-lifting-capacity-limits-reopening-bars-and-allowing-dancing-but-vaccine-passport-to-stay-1.5781924>
- Yeung, T. Y. (2020). Did the COVID-19 Pandemic trigger nostalgia? Evidence of Music Consumption on Spotify. *Covid Economics*, (44), 154-185.
- Yin, R. K. (1981). Case study as a serious research strategy. *Science communication*, 3 (1).
- Yoshida-Butryn, C. (2020, June 18th). Vancouver concert venues worry about their ability to survive the pandemic. *CTV News*. Retrieved from <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/vancouver-concert-venues-worry-about-their-ability-to-survive-the-pandemic-1.4988754>
- Zoom.Us (2022). *Official Website*. Retrieved from <https://zoom.us/>
- Zussman, A., Azpiri, J. (2021, April 20th). People 40+ in B.C. can book AstraZeneca vaccine as province sets up hotspot clinic. *Global News*. Retrieved from

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7769963/bc-astrazeneca-covid-19-vaccine-40-plus-hot-spots/>

Zussman, A. (2021, October 19th). B.C. to end capacity limits for indoor events in most regions.

Global News. Received from <https://globalnews.ca/news/8279160/bc-capacity-limits-events-ends/>

Extra Materials

Appendix 1: Streaming Platforms Used by the Interviewees

Platform	Characteristics	Communication w/audience	Users (interviewees)
Twitch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video streaming platform owned by Amazon • Specializes in video game streaming • Other activities/channels such as music and art (Twitch.tv, 2022). • The usage of Twitch for music live stream purposes skyrocketed in the middle of March 2020 (Narassiguin & Garnes, 2020). 	Live chat	HOWND
YouTube	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A free video-sharing website that stores both official and user-generated video content. • YouTube enabled its “Live” option in 2008 (Dobuzinskis, 2008). • The platform is known for its combination of the DIY ethos, ease of use, and open sensibility (Margolies & Strub, 2021). 	Live chat	Reid Zakos, Dan Mangan, Paul Clark (Guilt&Co)
Instagram Live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instagram is a free photo and video-sharing app • Instagram Live is a built-in feature that allows registered users to “go live” and start broadcasting their videos in real-time. Their followers usually get notified when a user goes live. (Instagram.com, 2022). • Instagram Live is considered more of a “pocket” and ‘on the go” version of a live stream platform, as Instagram is mostly used on phones. 	Live chat, as well as an opportunity to let your followers “request” to join the stream.	Phoenix Lazare, Charlie Kerr, Zach Gray
Facebook Live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook Live is a feature on the social media platform Facebook that uses the camera on a computer or mobile device to broadcast real-time video (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2022). 	Live chat	Sandy Powlik, Angie Faith

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook Live was launched in 2016, to allow brands “to showcase their raw authenticity” (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2022). 		
Zoom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoom is a communications platform that allows users to connect via video, audio, phone, and chat (Zoom.us). • Similar to joining any Zoom meeting, Zoom concert attendees should first receive a link to access the show. • Unlike the majority of platforms, camera and microphone access for the viewers can be enabled. 	Live chat, Camera and microphone access if enabled	Ian Cromwell, Dan Mangan, Phoenix Lazare
TikTok	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TikTok is a fast-paced video-sharing app that allows users to create and share short videos, on any topic (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2022) • Going “live” on TikTok allows one to engage with their followers and build community (Bretous, 2022). • TikTok live also allows independent artists to reach wider audiences and get more exposure (Phoenix Lazare, personal interview, October 20th, 2021). 	Live chat	Charlie Kerr, Phoenix Lazare

Appendix 2: Interviewees Table

Interview Date	Name	Stage name	Gender	Interview Format	Category	Affiliation
10/20	Phoenix Lazare	Same	F	Zoom	Musician	Phoenix Lazare, Fawkes & Hownd
10/26	Justin Kelley	HOWND	M	Zoom	Musician	HOWND, Fawkes & Hownd
10/29	Sandy Powlik	Lola Parks	F	Zoom	Musician	Lola Parks
10/30	Kelli Rothwell	N/A	F	In person	Photographer (Categorized as Venue in Methodology)	Lost in Concert
11/3	Michelle Lee Runs	MzShellz	F	Zoom	Musician	MzShellz
11/5	Angela Ongaro-Fatiaki	Angie Faith	F	Zoom	Musician	Angie Faith
11/9	Reid Zakos	Same	M	Zoom	Musician	Reid Zakos
11/22	Megan Emanuel	Same	F	Zoom	Musician, live stream host	Megan Emanuel, Parkside Studio
11/23	Mo Tarmohamed	N/A	M	In person	Venue	Rickshaw Theatre
11/23	Robert Barrington	N/A	M	In person	Venue	Rickshaw Theatre
11/24	Paul Clark	N/A	M	In person	Venue	Guilt & Company
11/28	Justice McLellan	Same	M	In person	Musician	Blue J, Babe Corner, Harlequin Gold
12/2	Charlie Kerr	Same	M	Zoom	Musician	Hotel Mira
12/9	Ian Cromwell	Same	M	Zoom	Musician, live stream host	Ian Cromwell, Locals Lounge
12/11	Dwight Abell	Same/dwi	M	Zoom	Musician	The Zolas, dwi

12/11	Adam Fink	Same	M	In person	Musician, venue operator	Fox Cabaret, ACTORS, Blue J, Art D'Ecco
12/13	Zachary Gray	Same	M	In person	Musician	The Zolas
1/6	Darlene Rigo	N/a	F	In person	Venue	Fox Cabaret
1/6	Noah Kamis	N/a	M	In person	Venue	Fox Cabaret
1/20	Dan Mangan	Same	M	Zoom	Musician, live stream host	Dan Mangan
			7W/13M			

Appendix 3: COVID Restrictions Timeline (In Relation to Music and Art)

March 16th, 2020: Provincial Health officials order all bars and venues to close indefinitely. All gatherings with more than 50 people are banned (CTV News, 2021).

May 19th, 2020: Gatherings of 50 people maximum are allowed with active COVID safety protocols in place (CBC News, 2020; CTV News, 2021). This is when the Fox Cabaret temporarily reopened for 50 people seated, and Guilt & Company started hosting their hybrid streams “from the venue”.

October 19th, 2020: Second wave of COVID. Entertainment spaces go to shut down indefinitely (Ross, 2020).

April 2021: The third wave of COVID, entertainment is still closed (Azpiri, 2021). The first dozens of COVID vaccines become available to general public (Zussman and Aspri, 2021).

September 2021: The vaccine passports policy comes into an effect. Passports can be used to access non-essential businesses, including indoor event spaces (CTV News, 2021).

October 2021: The indoor capacity limits are conveniently lifted right before the Canucks season. Proof of vaccination is required (Zussman, 2021).

December 17th, 2021: The surge of the Omicron Variant. 50% capacity limits are in place for large venues (1000 people or more) (Lindsay, 2021).

December 20th, 2021: Urgent change of the restrictions: seated events to be reduced to 50% capacity regardless of the size. Most New year’s gatherings are cancelled. Timeline for these restrictions: Dec. 22 at 11:59 p.m. until Jan. 18, 2022 (Judd, Zussman, 2021).

January 18th, 2022: Capacity restrictions on indoor events are extended until February 16th (Cox, 2022).

February 16, 2022: Most of the long-term restrictions, besides mask mandates and vaccine passports, have been lifted (Weichel, 2022).

March 11th, 2022: Indoor Mask mandate lifted (Hasegawa, 2022).

April 8th, 2022: Vaccine Card Program has been lifted (CBC News, 2022).

Appendix 4: Interview Questions

Musicians

- What would you say are the main characteristics of the Vancouver music scene? How would you describe it?
- Would you say the Vancouver music scene has changed during the pandemic? If so, how?
- Have you had any concerts planned when the world got “shut down” in March 2020?
- When did you play your first live stream?
- What was your main intention behind planning live streams?
- Please provide a breakdown of live streams you’ve held so far (please include live music performances, video chats, anything else that you think should be included). (Does not have to be precise. I can ask to submit a list separately from the interview)
- How much time do you spend preparing for a stream vs a live show? What goes into this?
- Do you remember your first live stream? How did it feel? Has this feeling evolved/changed during the pandemic?
- What live stream platform do you prefer and why?
- Has your preference changed during the pandemic?
- Would you agree that live streams are the music venues of the COVID era?
- Have you used any special effects during live streams?
- Please talk about what makes your live streams different from the live streams of other artists.
- What are the main advantages of live streaming?
- Do you have a single most memorable live stream experience and if so, what made it memorable? Please elaborate.
- Is there a live stream of another artist that you remember most? What made it memorable?
- What are the main disadvantages of live streaming?
- How do you get audience feedback while streaming?
- Please talk about your relationship with the audience during live shows vs during live streams

- How do you interact with audiences during live streams?
- Does virtual reality make you feel closer or further away from the audience?
- Have you felt supported by your fans during the pandemic?
- Do you think live streams are helping you gain popularity outside Vancouver?
- Would you say the demographics of your audience have changed during the pandemic?

- Where have you streamed from? Please share your thoughts on the benefits and challenges of the location (or locations) from which you stream?
- Please talk about your perception of space during live streams
- Would you label a live stream platform “a space”?
- How do you maintain the sense of community within the Vancouver music scene during the pandemic?
- Is there collaboration between artists during the pandemic? If so, can you provide an example?

- Have you received any recovery grants during the pandemic?
- Are you familiar with any governmental policies introduced in order to support musicians?
- Overall, do you feel supported by the city/the province (during the pandemic)? If yes, please explain how. If not, please explain why.
- What kinds of government supports would you like to see?
- How do you see the future of the Vancouver music scene? How would it differ from its pre-pandemic forms?

Venues

- What would you say are the main characteristics of the Vancouver music scene? How would you describe it?
- Would you say the Vancouver music scene has changed during the pandemic? If so, how?

- Please list all the ways your venue has been affected by the pandemic.
- How have you responded to these changes? Please talk about any measures you have taken in response to challenges presented by COVID? (e.g. live streams, merch sales, fundraisers).
- Have you received any recovery grants during the pandemic?
- Are you familiar with any governmental policies introduced in order to support the venues?
- Overall, do you feel supported by the city/the province (during the pandemic)? If yes, please explain how. If not, please explain why.
- What government supports would you like to see?
- How many shows (approximately) you had to cancel or postpone in March 2020? How did it feel? Walks us through that experience.
- When have you decided to use your venue as a stage for live streams?
- Please provide a breakdown of live streams you've held so far
- Do you remember hosting your first live stream? How did it feel? Has this feeling evolved/changed during the pandemic?
- Do you have a single most memorable live stream experience? and if so, what made it memorable? Please elaborate.
- Have any watched any especially inspiring live streamed concerts by other venues/spaces? Please elaborate
- What was your main intention behind hosting live streams?
- Is the process of booking artists for live streams different from that for a live show?
- Do the artists usually reach out first, or do you suggest they perform a live streamed concert in your venue? Please elaborate.
- How much time does it take to prepare for the stream vs the live show?
- Please explain in what ways planning of a live show is different from planning a live stream

- What are the safety measures you need to take to allow artists to live stream from your venue?

- What live stream platform do you prefer and why?
- Has your preference changed during the pandemic?
- Would you agree that live streams are the music venues of the COVID era?
- What are the main advantages of live streaming?
- What are the main disadvantages of live streaming?
- What is the significance of live streams broadcasted “From the venue”?
- Do you know if the people watching those streams are primarily fans of the artists or your venue?
- Do you know of any people watching your live streams from afar (not located in Vancouver).
- Is there a way for viewers to share their feedback on these live streams? If yes, please talk about this feedback
- How are these streams affecting the relationship between physical and digital spaces in Vancouver?
- How do you see the future of the Vancouver music scene? How would it differ from its pre-pandemic forms?