COVID-19 and the UK Live Music Industry: A Crisis of Spatial Materiality

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Abstract

For the live music industry, and those who work in it, the COVID-19 outbreak has been predominantly framed as an economic crisis, one in which the economic systems through which revenue is derived from music-based products and practices have been abruptly closed off by a crisis of public health. Using Lefebvre's trialectics of spatiality as a theoretical lens, we will argue that, for live music, the COVID-19 outbreak can be seen as a crisis of spatial materiality. During a time of lockdown and social distancing, spaces of music production (rehearsal spaces, studios) and consumption (venues, nightclubs) have found themselves suddenly unfit for purpose. Drawing upon empirical data from ongoing research projects in Scotland and the Midlands, we will highlight the ways in which COVID-19 has disrupted the spatial practice of music. From there, we will argue that there is a need for new representational spaces of music, and the creation of new forms of musical-spatial practice, appropriating spaces of the domestic and the everyday, and fusing / overlaying them with new cultural meaning and (crucially for musicians) a reconsideration of value by potential consumers.

Keywords

COVID-19, live music, music industry, space, materiality, lockdown, musicians

Introduction

In the context of live music in the UK, the COVID-19 outbreak has been framed primarily as an economic crisis, in which the music-based products and practices through which revenue is derived have been abruptly and, arguably, irreparably disrupted by a global public health emergency. Reporting on the crisis, both within the industries themselves and as part of broader media discourse, has tended to express and understand its impact in quantitative terms of economic losses (Hanley), venue closures (Music Venue Trust), and spiraling job losses (Parry). However, while quantitative measures of economic loss provide an important narrative for industry organizations lobbying for government assistance, and present a compelling media narrative through which to report the crisis's impact, they have their limitations for academics and researchers seeking to understand the cultural impact of the crisis, or to offer alternative approaches through which to rethink and restructure music-based practice.

This is not to say that this crisis is not economic in nature. It is not our intention to downplay the urgent importance of such financial interventions in order to preserve music-based economies in the immediate term. However, plugging the financial gap left in the wake of this crisis may only ever be a temporary solution to what may be a seismic shift in the structure of the live music industries themselves. In order to develop and advocate for *effective* economic solutions which meet the longer-term needs of a beleaguered live music sector, it is important to understand the challenges created by fundamental changes to the ways public spaces can be occupied, and to consider how the UK's live music industry might meaningfully adapt.

We argue that the roots of the economic challenges facing the UK's live music industry are fundamentally spatial in nature. The need to reconceive, redefine, and restructure public

spaces around organizational principles of social distancing has left the vast majority of live music spaces suddenly unfit for purpose. To that end, this article seeks to frame the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the music industries as a crisis of spatial materiality. Drawing upon Henri Lefebvre's trialectics of spatiality, and subsequent developments and applications—such as Karen Dale's theory of spatial materiality, and Robert Prey's discussion of the spatiality of music streaming—we will seek to understand how live music spaces have changed, and the impact that this has had on the "lived experience of the majority of musicians and operators" working in live music (Williamson and Cloonan 320). This theoretical lens will be explored in relation to data from two ongoing research projects, focusing on live music venues in Birmingham and the current jazz scene in Scotland. In doing so, we aim to reframe the debate through the plural lived experiences of those whose creative labor produces the music industries, and use these experiences as a means to begin rethinking the spatial practice of music production and consumption.

Music, Materiality, and Space

Before we can argue for the relevance of materiality and spatiality as offering crucial insights into the music industries' experience of, and response to, the COVID-19 crisis, first it is necessary to situate these terms within the context of that argument. In doing so, we will seek to establish an approach to what Dale has termed a "social materiality," or a system wherein "social processes and structures *and* material processes and structures are seen as mutually enacting" (651, emphasis in original). This section will therefore seek to locate the crisis facing the music industries in terms of wider academic discussions of materiality, spatiality, and practice.

The study of culture, and the mediation of cultural meaning, has long been intimately entangled with discussions of the material world in which they are situated. The concept of materiality, in relation to the study of culture, is concerned with how the "material character of the world around us is appropriated by humanity" (Graves-Brown 1), and how, in turn, social and cultural structures are shaped by their embeddedness within the material world. Rather than simply referring to the material qualities of a particular artifact, object, or space, to talk of materiality is to engage with the relationships through which such material qualities are created and understood as meaningful within systems of society and culture. We use the term materiality here as a shorthand for the entanglement of socio-cultural meaning and the "inescapable situatedness" of human existence within corporeal experience (Kallinikos et al. 6)—the ontological position that social meaning cannot exist outside of the influence of the material world. The meanings of material objects cannot be understood outside of their social context. Likewise, the meanings and practices of culture and society cannot be said to exist independently of their corporeal context.

Recent scholarship by Will Straw, Andy Bennett and Ian Rogers, and Iain Taylor has highlighted the importance of an attentiveness to notions of materiality in studying popular music cultures. Questions of materiality are important in understanding music as a social thing, because such questions attend to the ways the aesthetic qualities of music, and the performative and cultural practices which produce them, exist in entanglement with what Straw describes as music's "material extensions" (231), the artefacts which constitute music's material culture. From the instruments through which it is composed and performed, to the physical audio formats through which it has been distributed and consumed, to the emerging digital materialities of devices and interfaces, music is experienced as part of systems of material

culture. This is not to claim that music can *only* be understood in terms of its material extensions; rather, it is an assertion that music cannot be fully extricated from, or experienced outside of, such systems. The objects and artefacts of music's materiality are "imbued with culture, language, imagination, memory" in such a way as to resist their reduction to "mere object or objectivity" (Dale 652). In short, in seeking to understand the socio-cultural and economic meanings of music within society, we see a sensitivity to its materiality as a crucial component of that analysis.

If, as we have argued, the production and consumption of music's cultural meaning has an inherent and important materiality, then it follows that music is also inherently spatial. It exists and resonates within a given space, and its meanings are colored and shaped by that space. Part of this is owing to the meanings associated with particular spaces of music performance. A rendition of a piece of music in a rehearsal space has a very different cultural meaning to a rendition of that same piece in a concert hall, even if there is little tangible difference in terms of the performances. Likewise, the rendition of a song by an artist to a near-empty venue during a pre-gig soundcheck exists as something different from their performance of that same song to an audience in that same venue-space a few hours later. Given the inescapable situatedness of music, any discussion of the significance of its materiality is also, by necessity, a discussion of the space in which it is situated.

In theorizing the significance of space as processes of production and consumption, Lefebvre's trialectics of spatiality provides a useful set of tools through which to understand how such cultural meanings are produced within, and by, spaces. In particular, Lefebvre's work is useful in seeking to understand the relationship between notions of space and the production and consumption of music as part of capitalism. For Lefebvre, capitalism is not

simply concerned with the production of things *within* space but is actually acutely concerned with the production of space itself. It seeks to appropriate and dominate pre-existing spaces by reframing them in terms of "alienating relations of production" under capitalism (Lefebvre 49), while also actively producing new spaces through the creation of new sites and forms of consumption. This might refer, for instance, to the gentrification of urban areas through processes of 'aestheticization' (Mathews) or social (re)construction (Pérez), the expansion of existing models of consumption into new, online spaces (Prey), or the emergence of new cultural practices amongst consumers once they enfold online spaces into their everyday routines (Lim; Hamilton; Hamilton and Raine; Woods).

For Lefebvre, space is not some kind of fixed entity that 'pre-exists' human interaction. Rather, it can be seen as something which is fluid and dynamic, which is actively produced through sociality, in a "constantly mutating process" (Peters 2). This process can be broken down into three 'aspects' of space, which Lefebvre refers to as "spatial practice," "representations of space," and "representational spaces" (38).

The first of these aspects, which Lefebvre refers to as "spatial practice," is concerned with space as perceived through the lens of the everyday and corporeal experience. This aspect is concerned with "space as perceived through our senses" (Prey 4) in which space is understood in relation to physical experience. As Dale has noted, as well as being actively and phenomenologically experienced, such conceptions of space are often "taken for granted through the habits of the body" (657). As such, experiences of spatial practice are understood through our own "habituated ways of engaging our bodies with a certain materiality" (657) and our subconscious familiarity with particular organizations of space. The second aspect of Lefebvre's spatial triad is what he calls "representations of space," or conceived space. Spatial

practice refers to the meanings contained within the corporeal and physically experienced aspects of space; representations of space can be taken to refer to the cultural meanings of space and the "deliberate construction of space to embody certain conceptualizations in materialized form" (Dale 657). For Lefebvre, this is the dominant space within society and, by extension, for any system of production and consumption. The third, and final, aspect of space is what Lefebvre refers to as "representational space," or space as "directly lived through its associated images and symbols" (39). This is the space in which corporeal, material space is overlaid with 'imagined' or symbolic spaces—a fusing of physical and cultural.

While these three aspects can be difficult to disentangle in terms of our embodied experience of social space, they offer a useful conceptual framework for thinking about the materiality of space as something which is simultaneously experienced as material / embodied and as cultural / imagined. Lefebvre uses this to talk about the difference between "dominated (and dominant) space, which is to say a space transformed—and mediated—by technology, by practice" (he uses examples of military and state power here, but commerce could equally be applicable) and "appropriated space," referring to a more loosely defined category of organic adaptations of spaces in line with the needs of a particular group inhabiting them at a given time (164). As we shall demonstrate in the subsequent sections, these conceptualizations of space provide a useful theoretical lens through which to explore and understand the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak in transforming both the physical experience and cultural meanings of music-based spaces.

Musical-Spatial Crises in Context

In seeking to apply Lefebvre's trialectics of spatiality to the crisis currently facing the UK music industries, we have drawn upon data emerging from two ongoing research projects. The

first focuses on changes to the lives of Scotland-based jazz and blues musicians as part of a

government-funded project.[1] The second, funded by the Creative Industries Policy Advice

Centre (PEC), focuses on the "UK live music industry in a post-2019 era," and was initially

designed to explore how the live music ecology of Birmingham is constituted, and its

approaches to challenges related to national and international change.[2]

Each of these projects began before the UK government responded to the pandemic,

and each aimed to consider significant issues facing the music industries; namely the impact of

changing political and policy environments (most notably Brexit), the impact of venue

closures, and the fragility and limitations of the jazz and blues scenes in Scotland. However,

within the rapidly transformative context of crisis, each of these projects has come to be

dominated by the impact of COVID-19, as musicians, audiences, venue owners, and, indeed,

researchers attempted to refocus and reconfigure their work. It is important to note that this is

not only a crisis of spatial practice for those who produce and consume music but also for

those seeking to study it.

Crises of Musical-Spatial Representation

Data from these projects resonates with the position set out at the beginning of this article, that

the COVID-19 crisis has had a significant transformative effect on the representational spaces

and practices of live music in the UK. The challenge, from the perspective of venue operators

and gig promoters, is the need to re-conceive existing physical spaces of music performance in

the face of new requirements around social distancing. These challenges have been the focus of

a number of ongoing conversations taking place amongst local industry stakeholders. The

quotes below are reproduced from online posts with permission of those quoted. With regard to

the ongoing easing of lockdown restrictions and the reopening of pubs and restaurants from the

4th of July, and the subsequent 10 p.m. closing time announced in September, there is widespread concern over the apparent absence of consideration or provision for the resumption of live music. Adam Regan, owner of The Hare and Hounds, a pivotal venue for the independent music scene located in the Kings Heath suburb two miles south of Birmingham city centre, expressed the following concerns on Facebook (quote reproduced with permission):

> We've been looking at different models for the last few weeks. None of them make great reading sadly. And now we're expected to take contact details on entry, monitor other doors to prevent people coming in without giving their details and provide table service. The staff to revenue ratio isn't workable. We're far from throwing in the towel but it's increasingly hard to see us not losing more money than we have during lockdown.

These concerns directly relate to functionality and economic viability of a public house that relies on collective practices related to live music to constitute a representational space. They were echoed by Jez Collins, founder of Birmingham Music Archive and a freelance consultant working in the live music economy of the city (quote reproduced with permission):

> It's the worst scenario. Gov't support is being radically reduced without supporting the independent sector who have to bear the costs (financially and emotionally) of putting in place measures to ensure social distancing is adhered to in the full knowledge that it's not financially viable to open once they've done the work so you are stuck in a no-win position. And that's before you even talk about the margins for live events at 1/3 of capacity.

The significance of such dramatic changes to how such spaces are represented and conceived

cannot be overstated. Conceived spaces, as Lefebvre explicitly highlights, are "the dominant

spaces in any society (or mode of production)" (39). If music-specific spaces such as venues

cease to function as sites of music performance and experience, then they must eventually

cease to be conceived as such by those performers, industry workers and consumers who

collectively help define them as such—and assign associated cultural meaning and value to

these spaces—through their on-going practice.

　　　Data from research into the live music ecology in Birmingham highlights how this

process has already started. An interactive online map generated by the project was published

on the 1st of June 2020, and contained information related to 198 venues with B-prefix

postcodes. These ranged from large capacity venues such as the Resorts World Arena and

Birmingham Symphony Hall, through to smaller, independent venues located across the city.

The interactive tool—initially planned as part of an ecological mapping exercise—now

constitutes a record of the immediate pre-COVID-19 landscape for live music in the city. Key

questions for the project are now concerned with how many of those venues will re-emerge

from the present crisis, and what steps collectively and individually have been taken to ensure

that survival. Equally, and sadly inevitably, this project will document the experiences of live

music venues who have not managed to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis. To illustrate this

crisis in music-spatial representation and despite some of the temporary coping mechanisms

that certain venues have adopted regarding online activities such as live streams, the research

team are currently unable to establish contact through email or other online channels with 60%

of the 198 venues. In short, these venues have not only temporarily ceased to exist as physical

spaces in the city, but they are—for the time being, at least—also failing to manifest as

representational spaces in other, non-physical environments. Although it is far too early to suggest that these venues may not return, their lack of visible activity at this present time is concerning. The potentially rapid collapse of a wide swathe of independent and corporate live music venues due to loss of earnings during this period of lockdown and social distancing cannot be compared to the ebb and flow of music venue establishment and closure throughout music history.

Crises of Musical Spatial Practice

The challenges facing live music spaces to reconceive the physical constraints of venues to meet new requirements of spatial practice have knock on effects for the musicians who rely upon them as sites of performance for their own practice. For many musicians, the proclaimed crisis of the music industries was keenly translated into everyday difficulties: from the immediate loss of earnings as venues were closed and festivals canceled, to the sudden reliance upon home recording, live streaming, and solo or carefully edited group performance. The impact of the lockdown on self-employed musicians with several income avenues is aptly summarized by Maggie,[3] a saxophonist in her 40s:

> It's completely decimated all my work. I'm very lucky that I live with a partner who still (for now) has a job so I'm not homeless and won't go hungry but I still have my own expenses / debts. I don't qualify for any self-employed help as I don't ever earn enough (make enough profit), I don't qualify for Universal Credit as I live with a partner. I haven't explored any other financial help as I feel there will be other folk who need it more. I will be ok possibly until the end of the summer but after that I'm going to really struggle. I had some private students but more of them are elderly and were

not comfortable with the idea of online lessons, so I've lost most of them. (Interview

with Raine, 22 May 2020)

While the disruptions faced by musicians clearly have significant economic implications for

those concerned, they can be seen as a crisis of spatial practice—one which poses larger

challenges to musical practice itself. For jazz—a genre centered on "creative decisions made

within real-time performance" (Black 340), requiring "spontaneous, creative thought and

interaction with others" (Black 339), and creating unique and irreplicable performances

(particularly in free jazz)—live music is paramount. For several jazz musicians interviewed,

the move from the sociable and collaborative spaces of jam sessions, rehearsal rooms, and

recording studios to solo music-making at home jarred with their expectations of jazz music

production and performance. Making music during lockdown has also highlighted their

limitations as solo players, the restrictions of affordable live stream technology, and the extent

of their own technical skills. As Alex, a double bassist in his 30s realized: "Musically, I'm

fairly on my own … I'm used to playing/practicing with other people since my instrument is an

accompanying one" (interview with Raine, 18 May 2020). For Alex, and many others like him,

this crisis doesn't just threaten income—it poses serious existential questions about music as a

spatial practice and whether certain practices can survive the loss of particular music spaces.

The implications of such crises of spatial practice extend beyond the world of jazz and

the experiences of musicians. Work by Emma Webster et al. found that live music offers a

unique experience to audiences because it "is where the performer-audience interaction is the

most fundamental part of the experience," "allows audiences to inhabit the same physical space

as the artists," "is different each time, unlike recorded music," "offers an opportunity for

escapism," and "underpins a shared experience" (5). Furthermore, Webster et al. found that

audiences involved in the study valued live music venues as "sites of memorable experiences," that these places "become a part of people's life stories," and that many were viewed as key "places where something significant happened for the first time" (7). The materiality of the venue itself also held value and significance, from historic symbolism—"a reputation or history which enhances user's experiences" and the conference of this "status [onto] performers"—to a venue's acoustic qualities, creating a "good sound" (7).

The live music venue, then, is an intricate part of the live music experience for both audiences and musicians. Equally, the spatial attributes—the cultural and physical aspects—of other music spaces are intricately linked to the musical practices that they house. The recording studio, a place of focused and dedicated work, where each minute counts (literally). The jam session in the back room of a pub, crowded with familiar faces, of fierce but friendly competition. And the concert hall offering audience members both exquisite acoustics and a long history of expectations, of hushed contemplation and applause at the correct moments. It is unsurprising, then, that the temporary closure and continued uncertainty surrounding social distancing regulations has significantly disrupted the practices of the live music industry. For many genres, the live music experience lies at the heart of practices of production and consumption, with live-streaming considered by some to "diminish the art." This valuing of the "live" experience further compounds the current spatial crisis.

COVID-19 and Representational Spaces

As highlighted in the accounts of music practitioners above, we can see that music practices have been impacted by changes in the spaces available to musicians. With the sudden loss of such spaces, new ways of inhabiting space and conveying shared meanings and values are necessary. Data from the Birmingham-based project, for instance, highlights that some venues

in the city have quickly established online responses to closure that are sometimes coupled

with the development of interim/replacement revenue streams, or crowd-funding activities. For

example, The Sunflower Lounge—an independent venue located in the city centre, a few

hundred yards from Birmingham's main New Street railway station—has been creating daily

live-streamed sessions as a means of maintaining a connection with their customer and

performer base. Others, including DigBrew and 1000Trades (independent live music venues in

the Digbeth and Jewellery Quarter districts of Birmingham), have created online content as a

means of developing home delivery revenue streams (of beer, food or merchandise). The

emerging picture across the city depends to a large extent on the resources available to

venues—particularly where venues sit within the existing UK Government furlough scheme—

but nevertheless the researchers note two main findings. Firstly, the online activities of venues

and promoters are largely reputational and linked to the fostering of community; beyond a

handful of examples of home delivery services or crowd-funding, venues are yet to derive

revenue streams that are able to fully compensate for the curtailment of their core live music

activity. Secondly, despite this, it would appear that customers and musicians continue to offer

vocal support and solidarity with venues, which suggests a willingness (at least for the time

being) for all stakeholders to continue to engage in practices that render live music venues as

semi-functional representational spaces.

Many practices, however, are difficult to translate, such as the earlier example of

Maggie's tuition of older and less technologically skilled musicians or the frustrations of venue

owners at having to reconfigure the spatial practices of live music. The removal of particular

places represents not only a barrier to the creative labor of individuals, but a deeper and more

symbolic rupture between the practices of music creation and collective listening and the

spaces that have become a central phenomenological element of these experiences. However, this disruption of the established spaces of music practices also heralds a potential time of change and new directions, with emergent forms potentially representing the seeds of a blended on/offline live music offering and a recalibration of control within the music industry.

In the case of the Scottish jazz scene, the changing nature of audience expectations and musician practices provided a useful bridge in the form of the music video. An established form within popular music more widely, the production of videos is not yet the common practice of the twenty jazz musicians interviewed. This exposed a generational and genre-related division within the scene, with experienced, older musicians primarily focusing on audience engagement through live gigs looking on with interest and trepidation as their younger (and significantly cross-genre) peers reached online audiences through this additional offering. With low funds, many of these videos channeled a "DIY aesthetic," shot by band members using affordable equipment and in local spaces, using skills either self-taught or developed at college or university. Upon the national lockdown announcement, these practices and equipment were essential tools for musicians who are keen to continue to engage with their audiences and (ideally) to monetize these in an attempt to make up for lost income. However, it must be noted that technological ability is not the only factor for success with online video, as concurrent marketing materials and audience engagement activities are required to effectively reach either an established audience, or capture the attention of new audiences. Emerging artists are also struggling to make these methods work for them and are particularly impacted by the loss of informal music-making and audience-developing spaces, such as the regular jam sessions in Glasgow's pubs and bars.

The access to and comfort using equipment at home also offered some musicians a means to stream "live" performances, requesting "donations" from their online audience, a few buoyed by the promotional backing of Scottish jazz festivals and promoters. Equally, band sessions were composed, individually recorded, edited, and released. These practices, however, were not seamless and unconsidered continuations of pre-lockdown techniques but different ways of performing, collaborating, and producing music.

In providing solutions to this crisis, there is also an opportunity for music professionals to increase their control over these changes and to subvert the dominant economic contexts of live performance and spatial practice. However, it must be noted that, in addition to exposing generation gaps between musicians, this study also highlighted the continuation of intersecting gendered experiences and the impact of musicians' economic situations. Increased childcare responsibilities during the Scottish school closures were commented upon by all women musicians with children and had a dramatic impact on their practice time, mental health, and general productivity. Although the movement of music industry conferences and skills training online (and reduction or removal of session costs) offered musicians with childcare responsibilities an opportunity to engage without having to leave the house, these women (as primary caregivers in their family) simply did not have the time. Equally, for musicians with limited savings, mortgages to pay, or ineligible for housing benefits (e.g. living with their working partner), the mental health impact of mounting bills and employment uncertainty made any level of productivity impossible.

For jazz musicians and audiences alike, lockdown represented a fundamental disruption of musical place, moving the valued and authenticating experience of live music out of reach. As a result, musicians have constructed new forms of spatial practice within spaces they now

inhabit: the living rooms, kitchens, and bedrooms of lockdown. For many of us, the work Zoom call has made public what was previously private, bookcases reorganized to provide a professional backdrop, little corners of rooms kept clear and well-lit. For Harrison, a vocalist in his twenties, live-streams do not "recreate that feeling of sitting in a gig," but they do continue to create a feeling of shared experience between musicians and audience (interview with Raine, 27 May 2020). Many musicians also consciously created what they saw as an "intimate" spatiality, not only through the curation of domestic physical space and lighting but also through informal introductions and chat between pieces. Through these live(streamed) performances, musicians were inviting the audience into their private life and taking control of the spatiality of their music.

The reliance upon home-based technologies for collective music making and recording has also created opportunities for international collaboration and independent music production. One previously city-based improvising group has been extended to include improvisers from across the world, and many other musicians have established new collaborative and international relationships with players which they hope to develop through post-lockdown projects. Those most prolific during this time are the musicians skilled in-home recording and mastering techniques, and it is notable that funders such as PRS Foundation are temporarily allowing requests for home studio equipment. Beyond the economic survival of musicians, it is also significant that this reconsideration of music spatiality moves away from both the dominant spaces and the dominant economic structures of the music industry. With the continuation of social distancing, it is likely that a blended approach to live music performance will be necessary, in the short-term at least, and it is notable that these home-based practices place increasing power into the hands of musicians. However, this power has

been allocated unequally, benefiting musicians who can access the skills, equipment, time, and drive to create during a difficult and uncertain time. As PRS Foundation have pre-empted, the continued exposure of inequality in relation to musician gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity, and generation in light of COVID-19 must therefore be considered by industry organizations and government task groups alike when deciding upon supportive provisions. The future of the live music industries will not ultimately benefit from a broad-brush approach to support.

Conclusions

 In creating this article and continuing with the fieldwork for the projects referenced here, we experienced our own crisis of spatiality as popular music researchers. From working collaboratively to attempting to study live music when no live music was actually happening, our spatial materiality was also disrupted. Work that seeks to understand the post-COVID-19 music industry landscape will need to make sense of absences as well as creative activities, rapid changes in practices, the use of new spaces and the actions that inscribe meaning upon them, and a range of different responses from across the industry—from sole musicians to international corporations.

The purpose of this article is not to argue that such issues are *not* economic in nature. Rather, we argue that live music's spatiality and its economic viability are fundamentally linked. We believe that a successful economic response to this crisis must be able to account for the changing realities of objective space—such as reduced capacity, limited operating hours, and social distancing measures—and the *perception* of such spaces by both audiences and musicians. Arguably, it is a failure to understand these spatial realities which (at least in part) has hindered the UK government in designing and offering economic support which truly

meets the needs of an embattled live music and events sector. Industry support and funding schemes relating to the impact of COVID-19 must therefore not only mitigate short term issues through the provision of financial support but must also seek to provide support for reshaping the UK's live music offering in response to new and challenging spatial realities. It must focus on laying the foundation for long-term cultural change, future-proofing the industry for additional crises, and making the most of the opportunities that this time of crisis offers.

As media-driven global campaigns focusing on continued racial inequality and gender imbalance within the music industry have demonstrated, the structures and spaces of the music industry are no longer fit for purpose for all. Like many other industries, the dominant spaces of music production and the systems that coordinate its consumption are riddled with gender inequality and harassment, racism and essentializing, musician exploitation and corporate gains. It seems likely that a return to "business as usual" post-COVID-19 may not be possible, but equally it may also not be universally desirable. By considering the COVID-19 period as a spatial crisis for music industry professionals through the frame offered by the work of Lefebvre, popular music researchers and industry professionals alike have the opportunity to redraw the conceptions and practices that underwrite the economic functionality of live music.

Notes

[1] Research undertaken by Sarah Raine and Haftor Medbøe (Edinburgh Napier University) on the contemporary jazz and blues scenes in Scotland (PLACE funded).

[2] Research undertaken by Craig Hamilton, Patrycja Rozbicka (Aston University) and Adam Behr (Newcastle University) on the live music industry in Birmingham, UK responses to local, national, and international policy change. This project is funded by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC), which is led by Nesta and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. For further information on the project to date, see Rozbicka et al.

[3] All names of interviewees from this project have been changed to ensure anonymity. This research was undertaken in accordance to the Edinburgh Napier University research ethics and approved by an internal ethics board.

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