

Angelise Roy

Dr. Luesink and Dr. Steele

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The Effects of Covid-19 on Performing Musicians

In early March of 2020, the world was shocked by the spread of a contagious virus that changed the way of living and evoked new challenges that everyone in the world had to face. The Coronavirus, also known as Covid-19, had an uprising in the United States in early March of 2020 and was declared as a pandemic. Due to the deadly symptoms of this virus, the whole world went into lockdown where businesses and schools had to be shut down in order to protect the population from getting Covid-19. Many aspects of life were impacted by this lockdown that continued to be affected even two years later. The entertainment and performing arts industry is one aspect that truly suffered during this time. It is necessary to understand the effects that professional musicians went through due to the spread of Covid-19 because society is still recovering from these effects, and it is important to help those who struggled during this time. Covid-19 had a profound negative impact on musicians in the entertainment industry financially, psychologically, and physically as the world went into lockdown and live events were cancelled.

Evidence shows that professional musicians were one group of people that was deeply affected by the spread of Covid-19. Professional musicians immensely struggled financially because they lost their main source of income as they were incapable of performing at live shows. Losing their main source of income forced professional musicians to do several small projects at once in order to make some money and it was detrimental to independent musicians who had to market themselves. Although there was some relief provided to some musicians and

organizations, it wasn't enough. The struggle with making money and not being able to play at live shows also affected the mental health of musicians. It was evident that musician's anxiety, depression, and loneliness increased when the Covid-19 hit and getting help for these problems was very difficult during the pandemic. Finally, the pandemic had a big impact on the physical health of professional musicians because people got very sick from Covid-19 and extreme cases of Covid-19 lead to infections that can change a musician's career for the rest of their life. Some musicians were more affected by this unexpected time because people differ in financial and social status, however overall, the pandemic had a negative effect on professional musicians.

Financial Impact

The Covid-19 pandemic put a substantial amount of pressure on musicians' financial situations as it caused musicians to lose their main source of income. Live performances are necessary for musicians because musicians get about seventy-five percent of their income from live performances (Hall). When the Covid-19 Lockdown was implemented in March of 2020, all concerts, festivals, and live events were postponed or cancelled. According to UK Music, musicians lost two-thirds of their income in the year of 2020, which means that a musician could go from making below the national average at \$23,059 to \$8,070 (Savage). Some governments around the nation tried to help those who work in the arts by providing them money, but it was not enough. The UK government, for example, granted a 1.57 billion rescue package for the arts, but a lot of musicians were overlooked because they did not get enough money to help them or did not get money from the government at all (Savage). Unfortunately, one third of musicians did not qualify for this relief and support (Savage). Also, a great amount of this money from the rescue package were not allocated to individual musicians, instead the money was allocated to museums, galleries, and venues ("Hundreds of Musicians Protest Outside Parliament"). The

United States also had a relief plan that President Joe Biden signed off on called the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, which was created to help revive organizations after Covid-19 dramatically affected professional musicians. They provided relief by providing full or partial salary support, facility expenses, Covid-19 protective supplies, and advertising expenses (“American Rescue Plan Grants to Organizations: Program Description”). Although this grant provides some relief, just like the UK relief plan, it only provides support to organizations and local agencies instead of to independent artists. There are also a lot of guidelines that are required to have in order to be eligible for this program, which includes, meeting the legal requirements, being a running organization for at least three years, and has to fill out a lot of important paperwork (“American Rescue Plan Grants to Organizations: Program Description”). According to a survey, eighty-seven percent of musicians in the survey expressed concerns that they would struggle with financial calamity when the furlough schemes concluded (Savage). Although these programs and grants may help a handful of musicians, it was still not enough to ensure that the majority of professional musicians were stable during this time.

Another way a musician’s income was impacted by Covid-19 was that they were not able to earn money from advertising and marketing. In the beginning of 2020, about a quarter of brands and media buyers stopped their advertising and forty-six percent decreased their spending, leaving a one-third decline in digital advertisements investments (Hall). This not only affects companies’ revenues, but also artists’ incomes because they are not being showcased in advertisements where they would earn money. For individual artists, it was especially hard to market themselves as the pandemic hit because one third of half of the independent artists that have control over their own marketing have to manage their own budget, which was difficult because they didn’t make enough money that could be allocated towards the marketing budget

(Mulligan). Also, there was a whole new influx of competitors as social media has allowed the divide between creators and consumers to close and talented amateurs use social media and their time from being in lockdown to be the artists they've always wanted to be (Mulligan).

Covid-19 affected celebrity musicians and non-famous musicians in different ways financially. During the lockdown, celebrities were not deeply affected financially because they have a generous amount of money where they do not have to depend on live performances in order to stay wealthy. Non-famous musicians, however, rely on these live shows because they are their main source of income and without the live shows, they would not have a way to make a living. One group of non-famous musicians that were affected by Covid-19 was an ensemble consisting of 400 self-employed musicians that protested outside of Birmingham's Symphony Hall in the UK to push the government to provide more subsidy and support to freelance musicians. These musicians protested by playing twenty percent of Holst's Mars to highlight the fact that out of the very limited amount of self-employed musicians, they can only claim a maximum of twenty percent of their income from the government, which is not nearly enough for them to make a living ("Hundreds of Musicians Protest Outside Parliament"). This protest was supported by the Musicians Union, which consists of more than 32,000 UK performers. Within the Musicians Union, seventy percent have lost more than three quarters of their work during the pandemic and half are not qualified to receive money from the UK government's self-employed income support program, which caused many independent musicians to struggle with their financials ("Hundreds of Musicians Protest Outside Parliament"). Independent musicians were deeply affected by Covid-19 because many musicians had to work on different revenue streams in order to keep making a living as a musician because they could not have live performances that would allow them to take off in their career. To build their career during this

time, they would have to produce music, teach music, collaborate with other artists, work with sponsors, and sell merchandise in order to gain revenue (Mulligan). More independent artists began to teach online classes and sell their worn-out equipment as a way to earn more money during this time as well because they would have to do anything to have an income and get off the ground as an artist (Mulligan). Caleb Caudle, for instance, is an independent artist that was about to go on tour for his third album called, *Better Hurry Up*, when Covid-19 hit. He compared cancelling his tour to a farmer that loses their crops because independent artists work so hard to prepare for tour by spending all of their own money for the press, radio, and merchandise and it is devastating if that is all taken away. Caudle and other independent musicians rely on merchandise and ticket sales from live shows in order to gain a profit after spending so much money on the preparation of tour (Hudak and Hudak). When an independent artist spends so much money on their live shows and promotions for their album, just for it to be cancelled, it is a waste of money, and it is hard for them to come back from that. According to Caudle, “Financially an album release tour will carry you through the year. You’re using that tour to catapult the rest of your year and build the momentum” (Hudak and Hudak). Building a career and a reputation in the music industry is hard when an artist cannot promote themselves through a tour, which ultimately brings them a few steps back in advancing in the music industry. At the time that Caudle was interviewed, professional musicians were deciding on whether they should cancel or postpone their tour due to Covid-19. He said, “For independent artists such as myself, we can’t afford to make those calls at this point. I really only get a full team around me—a publicist, radio promo—about four months every two years, if I’m lucky, when an album comes out” (Hudak and Hudak). As you can see, independent musicians don’t have the resources to

continue to promote themselves and make music like famous musicians do, which unfortunately affects them financially in a negative way.

Some celebrities recognize that there are inequalities financially that have a huge impact on people's lives and try to help those who need it. For instance, the singer, Niall Horan, put together a virtual performance on November 7, 2020, where his fans paid for tickets to watch him perform at the Royal Albert Hall on a livestream. Horan's goal was to sell 70,000 tickets and the revenue that earned from the tickets went to Horan's crew members, who lost their jobs during the pandemic. Many of Horan's crew members had to go find other jobs that were not related to the music industry in order to have a steady income due to the pause in touring ("Niall Horan Announces Virtual Gig to Support Concert Workers - CBBC Newsround"). Horan explained, "I'm obviously one of the lucky ones, but not everyone is as lucky as me. So, we need to do what we can" ("Niall Horan Announces Virtual Gig to Support Concert Workers - CBBC Newsround"). As you can see, celebrities can afford having a whole year off performing in live events, while non-famous performers cannot.

Since so many performing musicians struggled with having a steady income due to the Covid-19 pandemic, companies such as Universal Music Group, Live Nation Entertainment, Spotify, Amazon Music, YouTube Music etc. helped musicians by donating money during this hard time (Hall). UK Music also helped by getting a VAT exemption on concert tickets, which stands for "Value Added Tax" and is a European "consumption tax assessed on the value added to goods and services" ("What Is VAT?"), asking the government to form a "targeted relief" for musicians that do not qualify for the self-employment income support policy, and a live music insurance scheme (Savage). The shift to digital media and performing on livestreams led to finding other ways to earn money. For instance, musicians can use memberships that promise

consumers access to early and exclusive content, have paid virtual performances, or use paid-commenting features in order to gain income (Hall). According to Tencent Music Entertainment in China, more than eighty percent of Tencent Musicians that used these incentives had their income increase by over fifty percent (Hall). Although this helps musicians a lot, musicians continued to struggle financially during this time.

Psychological Impact

The wellbeing and mental health of performing musicians is another aspect that suffered during the Covid-19 pandemic. The majority of musicians and other performing artists struggled with anxiety, depression, feelings of loneliness, and sleep at the peak of the pandemic. One study that highlights this idea examined the wellbeing of performing arts professionals during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this study, qualitative data was drawn from 385 performing arts professionals during the Covid-19 lockdown. In terms of work, seventy-nine percent of the performing arts professionals switched from working in person to working online. Working online has a lot of negative factors including having technical barriers like the lack of access to relevant technology in homes and bad internet connection and having less time spent working, in fact, seventy-one percent of the performing arts professionals had a decrease in the amount of time they spent working, which ultimately leads to losses of opportunities for performing arts professionals and causes them to have a decrease in income. Fifty-three percent of the respondents in this study faced financial problems, which caused an increase in depression, loneliness, and anxiety. Clinical psychologist and musician, Dr. Ezra Feinberg explained that “it is not even about, ‘How do I keep going with this’ as much as it is, ‘How do I figure out a way to continue to live, to live in my apartment, to put food on the table?’” (Facebook et al.). Unfortunately, eighty-five percent of respondents in this study had increased anxiety, sixty-three

percent of the respondents felt lonelier due to an association with living alone and not having as much social interaction, and sixty-nine percent of respondents had three or more depressive symptoms with females and non-binary people having higher depressive scores than males. According to psychotherapist, Dr. Courtney Grimes, as a result of tours and sessions being canceled, anxiety started to escalate and intensify. Musicians lost a special connection that they had with their fans while on tour and from meet-and-greets, which caused a lot of fear and uneasiness (Facebook et al.). Musicians care about their fans a lot, therefore, many feared that their fan's health and safety would be compromised due to Covid-19. For example, Caleb Caudle explained how he worried that he is "responsible for going through with these shows and having people gather together. That is something that weighs on you" (Hudak and Hudak). Overall, professional musicians struggled with their mental health due to the uncertainties that came with Covid-19.

Older musicians were less impacted by Covid-19 because they already had established a reputation, which was helpful in terms of having people that wanted to collaborate with and having younger students to teach. While on the contrary, younger musicians were still building their career and it was more difficult for them to have opportunities during the pandemic because they had less connections, which can be discouraging (Spiro et al.). This goes along with the idea of motivation and how musicians who were in the middle of growing their career may lose their motivation collaborate or practice because there were less opportunities for them during Covid-19. There are two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is when a person completes a task for personal satisfaction such having a challenge, curiosity, enjoyment, and purpose. Whereas extrinsic motivation is when a person completes a task due to external rewards or consequences such as power, praise, and competition

(Nickerson). It is important for the young musicians to be more internally motivated because it was proven that musicians that were motivated by external factors were negatively impacted during the pandemic and that they were less likely to allocate time for rehearsing than those who were internally motivated (Fram et al.). According to the self-determination theory that was created by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, external rewards such as money weakens internal interest (Nickerson). Therefore, since musicians rely on their extrinsic incentives such as money and fame, their intrinsic interest decreases and when the extrinsic incentives disappear or lessens during the pandemic, they are left with very little motivation to make music.

It is very common for professional musicians to go to therapy and get to get help from professionals, but with the spread of Covid-19, it was very difficult to make an appointment with a therapist. In 2019, before Covid-19 existed, Record Union ran a study that found that seventy-three percent of freelance musicians had anxiety and depression due to the production of music (Facebook et al.). Therapist, Dr. Lee Norton explained that eighty percent of his clients work in music, and they all asked for help about their anxiety before the pandemic started, but “now, most of them are facing an economic crisis as well, which can resurrect feelings of dependency and powerlessness, and create existential anxiety and identity”. From a study on wellbeing of performing arts professionals, forty-five percent of the 385 performing arts professionals got help for their health and wellness during the pandemic (Spiro et al.). It is important that professional musicians go to therapy or receive support from their loved ones during the pandemic because the pandemic adds so much stress and anxiety due to the fear of the unknown. During the lockdown it was very hard to make therapy or doctor appointments that were in-person due to the constant spread of Covid-19. This had a big impact on those who needed medications to help calm their anxiety and other mental health issues. For example, Ellis, a

singer who has depression, anxiety, and premenstrual dysphoric disorder explained that Covid-19 would have less of a negative impact on her mental health if she was taking medication during lockdown, but she feared going to the doctor about it due to the state of the world (Facebook et al.).

Some musicians saw the Covid-19 lockdown as something that helped them be more creative and take a break from the stressors that came with Covid-19. Erin Bass, Shinedown's bassist, has struggles with anxiety and depression, but used songwriting as a way to cope. Whether the songs that he wrote during this time were good or bad, it allowed him to maintain his creativity and it served as an outlet for him during these stressful times (Facebook et al.). Bass also tried finding a purpose by raising more than \$200,000 with his band from their song, "Atlas Falls" for Direct Relief, which is a nonprofit aid foundation that distributes equipment such as masks, gowns, etc. to hospitals (Facebook et al.). This was a good way to make use of this stolen time because they made a difference in the world, while also doing what they love. Harry Styles is another musician that saw, is a pop star that has been working nonstop since he was sixteen as he traveled the world with his band called One Direction and later went on to do independent works. In Styles' 'Harry's House' interview with Zane Lowe, Styles viewed the pandemic as a break from constant chaos from touring. He said, "For a really long time, I was terrified of what my life was if I was not up here doing music like on a show doing something, and then you are faced with a time when you cannot do that and it does not matter how much money you have, does not matter where you live, does not matter that you cannot travel, you cannot go outside your house. Suddenly, you are forced to not be this musician guy, you are forced to be a friend, a brother, a son" ("Harry Styles - Zane Lowe & Apple Music 'Harry's House' Interview"). He was able to focus on life outside of music for the first time in a long time

and reflect on himself as a human, not just a musician. Another singer-songwriter named Delacey tried to stay positive and said, “There are many people around the world who have it way worse than me. I will get to play shows one day when we are all healthy and safe again” (Facebook et al.). Although some artists might believe that the Covid-19 had a positive impact on their mental health, evidence shows that the majority of musicians struggled with their mental health during Covid-19.

Physical Impact

Not only did Covid-19 have a toll on the income and mental health of musicians, but it also had a negative effect on musicians’ physical health. Covid-19 is acquired through direct contact, indirect contact, and airborne particles (Helding et al.). The transportation of airborne particles is the reason for most Covid-19 cases due to the different sizes of particles that float in the air and taken in by the respiratory system (Helding et al.). Singing affects the transmission of particles because medium-sized particles, which are about 1 to 5 μm are transported in high volumes during singing (Helding et al.). Medium-sized particles contains a high viral load, which is the amount of the virus that a person is susceptible to. They also are able to float in the air for long periods of time trying to find low air passages that have an immense viral load and a higher chance of contaminating a person (Helding et al.). Singers are at even a bigger risk of infection because the reverberation of the fluid film causes the production of medium-sized particles (Helding et al.). Any problems with the respiratory system whether they are extreme or not, it could have a long-term effect on a singer’s career because they rely on their functionality of their respiratory system when they sing. Covid-19 can cause damage to vocal fold function by infecting the ACE2 receptor which exists in the muscles of the chest, lungs, and abdomen, which all affects vocal functionality (Vance et al.). Symptoms of temperate vocal fold paresis are vocal

fatigue and inability to have a wide vocal range (Helding et al.). The vocal fold could also tear as a result of people coughing from Covid-19 (Vance et al.). Those with extreme cases of Covid-19, had to go through intubation, where doctors would stick a tube down a patient's throat to help them breathe. It was normal for patients to get dysphonia and dysphagia after this tube would be taken out. Covid-19 can cause permanent lung damage, which can cause pulmonary dysfunction in mild or severe ways, both could end a singer's career. (Vance et al.) Unfortunately, these symptoms would only be diagnosed or acknowledged by doctors or music teachers, instead of non-singers, but with Covid-19, it was harder to make appointments to get singers' voices checked out and "access to comprehensive laryngological evaluation, dynamic voice assessment, and stroboscopy has been limited by the pandemic" (Helding et al.). Having these physical effects also had an impact on the musicians' mental health. For example, in one study, musicians who had suffered an injury due to Covid-19, could not play their instrument and caused them to feel destroyed and empty (Helding et al.). Music is people's whole life and when that one constant in someone's life ends, it can be very traumatizing and disheartening.

Conclusion

Covid-19 has affected every individual in the world in a negative way, including musicians in the music industry. Musicians had a decline in their main source of income due to the cancellation of live events and even though they still received help from organizations, it wasn't enough. Musicians faced many mental health challenges regarding anxiety and depression, which affected their daily lives as humans and musicians. They also risked hurting their physical health including obtaining a vocal disorder or getting sick in general during the pandemic. In general, pointing out the negative effects that Covid-19 had on professional musicians is very important because it is essential for people to be aware of how Covid-19

affected their community as the music industry continues to recover from the initial spread of Covid-19. Although Covid-19 had a handful of positive affects in all categories regarding income, mental health, and physical health, evidence shows that the negative outweighed the positive effects and shows that Covid-19 mainly had a negative effect on Musicians in the music industry.

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