'Losing Work, Losing Purpose': Representations of Musicians' Mental Health in the Time of Covid-19

Driven by a growing academic and professional interest in the subject over recent years (Eynde et al. 2016; Vaag et al. 2016; Berg et al. 2018; Shorter et al. 2018; Gross and Musgrave 2020), discussions concerning the mental health and emotional wellbeing of musicians have been prevalent in the popular media over the course of the coronavirus pandemic. Much of the recent research into how musicians have coped emotionally during COVID-19 has been driven by the professional/charitable sector. In the United Kingdom, the COVID-19 Impact Poll conducted by the Musicians' Union, for example, revealed that 34% of musicians were considering abandoning their career (MU 2019), and organisations such as Music Support and Help Musicians UK both reported increases in calls for support with anxiety and depression (Waite 2020).

This chapter – building on work by Brunt and Nelligan (2020) in Australia - draws on media representations of the mental health of musicians based in the United Kingdom over the first year of the pandemic between March 2020 and March 2021, examining key themes from newspaper articles/websites, online web seminars, musicians' own blogs and social media usage. It is suggested that musicians' mental health challenges are broadly presented in two key ways: (1) employment related anxieties concerning loss of income, how their work was being treated vis-à-vis self-employed income support, and fears about their futures, and (2) status-based existential anxiety relating to a loss of meaning in their lives. This duality has been encapsulated as "losing work, and [losing] purpose" (Littlewood 2020). The chapter concludes by interrogating what these anxieties tell us about how musicians and musical work are seen and understood.

1. **Introduction:**

The impacts of the global coronavirus pandemic have been, are, and will continue to be, profound and long-lasting. However, one chooses to try and quantify these impacts, the numbers will be simultaneously both overwhelming and necessarily incomplete. Behind the dizzying figures quoted in daily news bulletins of millions of deaths or billions in lost national income are, of course, human stories and lives. Following the outbreak of COVID-19, many of these stories were framed by the differing experiences of various groups in society. In the United Kingdom for example, this was seen in discussions around the impact of the pandemic on working mothers (Fulweiler et al. 2021) or parents of young children now having to cope with the challenges of home-schooling (Aznar et al. 2021), in public articulations (and venerations) about who was considered a 'key worker' (de Camargo and Whiley 2020), or in the 'Clap for Carers' campaign where citizens would stand on their doorsteps every Thursday evening to applaud the efforts of healthcare professionals (Manthorpe et al. 2021).

These examples represented the articulation of debates about not only *who* was impacted by COVID-19 but *in what ways* they were impacted. Much of this discussion was framed in terms of privilege and the nature of the impact; for example those who were able to follow 'work from home' orders more easily (and were therefore less at risk) compared to those who worked in sectors which necessitated face to face contact (ONS 2020). What these debates highlighted was that whilst COVID-19 impacted everyone in some respects via nationally imposed lockdown measures, the impacts were experienced differently and in different ways by different people and groups in society.

Alongside considerations of the impact of the virus on *physical* health – which is both entirely obvious (death, in its worst case) and worryingly misunderstood (as seen in uncertainty around the treatment of what has come to be called 'Long Covid' (Lancet 2020)) – the impact the virus has had (and continues to have) on *mental* health has been of increasing academic interest (Kumar and Nayar 2021; Pfefferbaum and North 2020; Cullen et al. 2020). Again, the nature and experience of the impact of the

pandemic on mental health has often been framed with reference to groups of people and/or sectors of employment and the particular COVID-related stressors which might engender emotional distress in those groups. Examples have included stress amongst health care workers trying to cope with increased patient numbers (Greenberg 2020; Usher et al. 2020), loneliness and fear amongst those in care homes unable to see their loved ones (Velayudhan et al. 2020), or anxiety amongst young people following school closures and exam cancellations (McCluskey et al. 2021). The particular group of interest in this chapter are musicians, and in particular what the impact of COVID-19 has been on the mental health of musicians, and how these emotional outcomes have been represented in the media.

Musicians and Mental Health

Better understanding the mental health of musicians has been a growing area of academic enquiry over the previous decade. An emerging body of evidence suggests that musicians experience higher levels of mental ill-health than other occupational groups (Wills and Cooper 1987; Middlestadt and Fishbein 1998; Gross and Musgrave 2016, 2017, 2020; Vaag et al. 2016; Detari et al. 2020; Loveday et.al 2022) and may even have lower life expectancy (Bellis et al. 2012; Kenny and Asher 2016). A range of factors related to the psychosocial working conditions of musicians have been cited as potential sources of emotional distress including: financial precarity (Parker 2015; Berg 2018), performance anxiety (van Kemenade et al. 1995; Kenny et al. 2004; Kenny 2011), anti-social working hours (Dobson 2011), the prevalence of alcohol or substance use (Forsyth et al. 2016), high levels of pressure to succeed (Shorter et al. 2018), the negative impact of musical work on family life (Vaag et al. 2014), missing loved ones whilst touring (Kenney and Ackermann 2008; Kenney et al. 2012) and the particular challenges and stressors faced by female musicians (Conor et al. 2015; Gross and Musgrave 2020). Early evidence suggests that many of these emotional stressors were exacerbated by the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent disruption caused to this occupational group.

Whilst some scholarship has pointed towards the capacity of musicians to respond to the challenges of lockdown, for example by embracing new technologies to facilitate songwriting (Cai et al. 2021) or via new methods of performance such as livestreaming (Rendell 2020), other studies highlight the challenging nature of this period. Academic

evidence is only just emerging, but challenges have included financial distress and concerns around the future viability of their profession amongst orchestral musicians (Cohen and Ginsborg 2021), and work by Spiro et al. (2021) reported an 85% increase in levels of anxiety amongst more broadly defined arts professionals (including musicians) following the initial lockdown in the United Kingdom. Early in 2021, the charity Help Musicians released findings from a self-reported survey of 700 musicians which suggested that 87% felt their mental health had deteriorated over the course of the pandemic (Help Musicians 2021). This chapter will examine how these mental health challenges were represented in the popular media over the course of the first year of the COVID-19 outbreak to try and better understand what these representations tell us both about the mental health of musicians but also about the nature (and potential future) of contemporary musicianship in the UK.

Why is understanding the emotional experiences of this group of cultural workers vis-à-vis their mental health meaningful, and why is understanding their emotional responses to COVID-19 important? In this first instance, this chapter does not seek to advance an argument rooted in a kind of musical exceptionalism which sees the mental health challenges of musicians as *worse* or somehow *more* worthy of enquiry than other groups in society. Indeed, seeking to make a claim like this is both methodologically problematic in terms of comparing relative mental states and I suspect somewhat unpopular.

However, the ways in which musicians' careers have been emotionally experienced and understood during the pandemic are worthy of enquiry for several reasons. In the first instance, the music industries – and particularly the live music industry - were one of the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, with live music venues being amongst the first to close and the last to open. In this respect, the experiences of musicians can tell us a great deal about how workers emotionally respond to a sector in crisis. Secondly, recent decades have seen a centralising of knowledge and creativity as being central to the UK's post-industrial economy (Martin and Wilson 2018; Mould 2018). In the years leading up to the outbreak of COVID-19, sectors such as the music industries were heralded as sources of both economic value and international soft power, and thus how workers in this sector of such apparent political, social and economic importance experience their work matters.

Finally, as per the insights of Attali (1977, 2014), and more recently captured in the work of Noone (2017), the work musicians do and how they experience their work can often foreshadow changes in the wider (cultural) economy. That is, where musical work goes, other work often follows. Therefore, by understanding musicians' experiences of their work, we might derive insights about the working conditions of other workers who share characteristics of their form of creative labour - entrepreneurial, creative, precarious, reliant on networks and the development of a brand, etc. - which are increasingly common to many workers in the UK and globally.

2. <u>Method:</u>

This chapter draws inspiration from a commentary article published by Brunt and Nelligan (2020) in August 2020 during what was, at that time, the summer in the United Kingdom before the second wave of the virus returned. This short but insightful paper offered one of the first glimpses into the experiences of musicians during the coronavirus pandemic by examining the ways in which Australian musicians' mental health had been reported and represented by various forms of media in the early months of the outbreak. Their work articulated the emergence of a series of prevailing narratives around loss, forms of support, the 'new-normal', and life after COVID-19.

Building on their conceptual and methodological architecture, and with the benefit of time having elapsed, this chapter will explore the media narratives surrounding the mental health of musicians in the United Kingdom over the first year of the pandemic – from March 2020 when the first lockdown was announced, to March 2021. Data was gleaned from a variety of media sources including newspaper articles and websites, online web seminars, musicians' own blogs and social media usage. These were analysed using a grounded theory approach of constant comparative analysis to identify shared incidences in the media reports, which were then coded to reveal the emergent themes. The reports analysed were from UK media on the experiences of UK-based musicians.

This chapter will outline how two prevailing narratives could be seen, both of which tell us a great deal about the experiences of being a musician in the United Kingdom, as well as encourage us to ask challenging questions about the future of professional musicianship. Musicians' mental health challenges were broadly presented in two ways: (1) employment related anxieties concerning loss of income, how their work was being treated vis-à-vis self-employed income support, and fears about their futures. These concerns speak the uneasy co-existence between musicians in the UK and the Government whereby forms of support remain a topic of contention. In this respect, revealing the ways in which musicians' anxieties were presented during this time help us to better understand the nature of this ongoing debate around state support for the arts, as well as highlight an ongoing debate around sources of musical income and the viability of music as a career. The second theme identified related to: (2) status-based existential anxiety relating to a loss of meaning in musicians' lives. These concerns highlight the close relationship between musical work and identity, and highlight the role that belief plays in the careers of musicians and the importance of understanding how musicians construct their identities. This duality in musicians' representations was perhaps best encapsulated in a self-written article by classical musician, Amy Littlewood, for the publication *HuffPost UK*, in which she described her experiences during the pandemic as: "losing work and [losing] purpose" (Littlewood 2020). Each of these narratives will be explored below.

3. <u>Losing Work, Losing Purpose:</u>

3.1. Losing Work: Employment Anxieties

Live Music and Musicians' Earnings
Perhaps the clearest way that the anxieties and emotional distress of musicians was represented during this period relates to what we might think of as employment-based anxieties; that is, conceptualising music as work and the financial impact of COVID-19 on this occupational group. One of the most obvious financial impacts on musicians over the first year of the pandemic came from the near complete closure of the live music and events industries. Nightclubs, festivals, arenas, pubs, concert halls, theatres, and almost all venues where large numbers of people gathered to hear music

being played or performed, and where social distancing measures necessitated by the Government could not be ensured or maintained, were closed. Indeed, even as cases of COVID-19 fell and sectors of the economy began to re-open (and then subsequently close again as cases rose) throughout 2020 and in to 2021, the live music sector faced a series of profound challenges from trying to hold socially distanced shows, which were described in the press at the time as "absolutely awful" and "a nightmare" (Bulut 2020), to struggles with insurance (IQ 2020).

The impact of this on the careers of musicians as well as on their mental health was enormous. Media representations highlighted musicians experiencing this shutdown as triggering feelings of fear and uncertainty, with one article featuring musicians who suggested it was "really, really scary. For a minute, we thought it was game over" (Halls 2020), singer-songwriter Eliza Shaddad suggesting she was, at times, "inconsolable" (Hitchcock 2020), and Olly Alexander (Year and Years) reporting in *The Guardian* that the loss of musical work meant that "it all just kind of crumbled and fell on top of me" (Bakare 2020).

It is important to contextualise the economic role of live music (or at least the perceived economic role of live music) in the careers of contemporary musicians. It is well understood that musical 'work' encompasses a great deal more than playing music (Gross and Musgrave 2020, p 42). Indeed, much of the literature around creative labour amongst musicians in the field of popular music has sought to make sense of contemporary musicianship using the idea of "multiple job holding" (Menger 2003, p766) as a method of strategic risk management in an environment of uncertainty (Krueger 2019). Musicians, conceptualised in this approach as cultural or creative entrepreneurs (Dumbreck and McPherson 2015), are increasingly required to engage in the creation and exploitation of multiple forms of content and revenue-generation as part of their role as musicians. This might include sharing media online via a cultivated social media platform (and if a following is large enough, being paid for posts), running a record label, writing songs for other musicians, and/or generating income via streaming. Indeed, streaming income has become a contentious issue in recent music industry scholarship and in the wider music industries vis-à-vis its effectiveness at generating income for artists (Hesmondhalgh 2020, 2021; Hesmondhalgh et al. 2021).

However, the role of live music as a primary (even principal) method of income generation has gained increased prominence in the minds of musicians and within areas of music industry economics (Naveed et al. 2017). The economic logic went that in a post-digital creative landscape where content – i.e. music as digital content – could be duplicated and replicated at zero marginal cost, the ability to create scarcity and thus derive economic value from music itself (and its associated digital content) had become increasingly squeezed for all but the most famous musicians. Therefore, against this backdrop, live music – as a non-duplicable, experience-based form of cultural practice – acted as a bastion against digitalisation and thus something that could be sold, and indeed sold profitably. In other words, playing live was understood by many as the basis of musicians' economic lives, a phenomenon which Holt (2010, p 243) described as "the new economic centrality of live music".

Certainly, live music is not *just* an economic phenomenon. It is also a social and cultural experience too which produces social and cultural value (van der Hoeven and Hitters 2019) from which musicians derive more than simply financial reward. While I will explore these other intangible and symbolic forms of 'profit' in section two, for the purposes of the analysis in this section, the economic role of live music in the careers of many musicians cannot be understated. Whilst it is worth interrogating the validity of the idea that live music can be, and is, a financial panacea for musicians engaged in precarious artistic work (which of course for many musicians it is certainly not (Williams 2020)), live music has nonetheless become a central characteristic in the economic lives of many musicians. Following the discussed closure of live music venues, a survey by Help Musicians in 2020 suggested that 98% of respondents had lost the majority of their income as a result of COVID-19, and 55% of their respondents were currently earning no money at all from music. A similar report from UK Music suggested that live music revenues would fall by 85% in 2020, translating into a two-thirds loss in income by musicians. One of the narratives that emerged in media representations of musicians publicised alongside these early studies concerned anxiety and uncertainty emanating from the ways in which this loss of income translated into other feelings of loss; a loss of (perceived) control, a loss of confidence, a loss of a social group, etc. In this context, Littlewood (2020) suggested; "a fear of the unknown can be a major trigger of anxiety and stress". Musicians described being

"heartbroken" (Macdonald 2020) as their income fell "immediately and brutally" (Ralston 2020) in a situation described by one musician as "totally catastrophic financially, emotionally, socially and creatively. Everything I've worked so hard to achieve has just crashed to the floor" (Whitby 2020).

Musicians, Money and the Government: Are We Viable?

The loss of earnings from live music highlights one of the other central features of musicians' anxieties during this period, namely that if one of their key forms of income has been removed as a result of Government policy, to which forms of Government support might they (or *should* they) be entitled? The United Kingdom enacted one of the most comprehensive systems of state support of all OECD countries over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic known as 'The Furlough Scheme' or 'Job Retention Scheme', whereby the state effectively stepped in to pay a percentage of the average salary of workers while their employers were, at least in theory, temporarily unable to pay them. For employees with demonstrable hours and salaries under the Pay as You Earn (PAYE) system of taxation in the UK, this scheme was relatively straightforward to administer using taxation records available from the UK tax office (known as Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, or HMRC).

However, almost as soon as the scheme was announced there were voices of concern raised around how this would be administered for self-employed workers, and, indeed, musicians are largely such workers (UK Music 2020a, p7). The resulting manifestation was the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) which was open to self-employed individuals or partnerships registered as trading in the two previous tax years, with profits of no more than £50,000. However, it quickly emerged that a large number of musicians (and other creative workers) were not eligible for support under this scheme for a variety of complex reasons around eligibility (UK Music 2020b). Indeed, data from the Musicians' Union (2021) suggested that as many as 50% of musicians did not qualify for any kind of support whatsoever under the SEISS, and were therefore reliant on only basic forms of unemployment benefit (known as Universal Credit) or statutory sick pay if they were themselves unwell.

The resulting collision of the loss of income from live music occurring alongside widespread ineligibility for Government support engendered a squeeze on musicians'

earnings, which were already low. A report for the Intellectual Property Office by Hesmondhalgh et al. (2021, p 7) suggested that, even before the pandemic, "more than a third of musicians (37%) reported earnings of £5,000 or less from music in 2019 and nearly half (47%) earned less than £10,000. 62% earned £20,000 or less from music in 2019 … Median reported income for women in 2019 was £13,057, whereas for men it was £20,160". For many musicians, the situation was represented as entirely intolerable, with many reporting difficulty coping. Help Musicians (2021) presented findings from a survey which showed 70% of respondents feeling unable to cope financially, and some reporting feelings of having been 'abandoned' by the UK Government (Higgins 2021). Musicians reported the challenges of having to "live life on a financial knife-edge" (Macdonald 2020), and classical musician Miriam Davis told *Classic FM*; "on top of the sadness and anxiety of the virus situation, every musician I know is now facing bankruptcy" (ibid).

The response by the Chancellor of the Exchequer – Rishi Sunak – to economic concerns and anxieties such as those discussed here, and the subsequent backlash to his response in much of the media, highlights the tense and uneasy relationship between creative workers and the state. In his Winter Economy Plan speech, delivered in the House of Commons of September 24th 2020, the Chancellor stated: "We need to create new opportunities and allow the economy to move forward and that means supporting people to be in *viable* jobs which provide genuine security", adding that the first role of Government interventions was to "support *viable* jobs" (GOV 2020, emphasis added). The response from many working in the music industries was understandable upset at the implication that their work was, therefore, *not* viable.

This upset turned to anger on social media when a Government advert from 2019 resurfaced showing a picture of a ballerina tying her pointe shoes alongside text which read: "Fatima's next job could be in cyber (she just doesn't know it yet). Rethink. Reskill. Reboot". The Department for Culture, Media and Sport was forced to distance itself from the advert and describe it as "crass". Many musicians responded with anger, with jazz saxophonist Binker Golding telling the *Financial Times*; "I'm angry … I cannot fathom the level of idiocy involved. It shows how much disrespect they have for the arts" (Fildes 2021). The #WeAreViable hashtag emerged on Twitter, which eventually grew into an organisation which sought to represent, in their words, "ALL sides of live

entertainment industry" (We Are Viable UK 2020). Across social media and in the wider popular and music press, musicians expressed their fury, hurt and upset at the suggestion their profession was not economically viable, with some Tweets from this period including: "Rishi Sunak can f*ck right off if he thinks I'm going to retrain" (Hayhurst 2020), and "Retrain my arse. Been training for this my whole life. #WeAreViable" (Volpe 2020).

However, this debate raises a fascinating question: is musicianship, in fact, economically viable? As per the findings above, nearly half of musicians in the UK earn less than £10,000, a figure which has been relatively stable over the past decade (Musicians' Union 2012). Indeed, this suggests that for many, music-making is not economically viable. Indeed, more broadly, has musical work *ever* been economically viable? If we trace the ways in which musicians have historically earned money and survived, we can see that systems of support in the form of patronage either by the church, royal courts, or the state were required to financially support musicians (Blanning 2010).

In recent history in the UK, musical production has often relied on systems of state support to facilitate it in the absence of viability. Some of this support has been direct, such as the New Deal for Musicians scheme under New Labour in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Cloonan 2002, 2003), while other forms have been more indirect, such as the notion that 'the dole [a colloquial term for unemployment support] made Britain swing' (O'Rorke 1998), or the fact that council housing and state-funded youth clubs were central to the development of grime (Hancox 2018). Certainly, there is a suggestion that streaming has increased the number of musicians for whom a career is economically viable, with 1,723 artists in 2021 (solo musicians and groups) calculated to achieve the "one million UK streams per month … minimum threshold for making a sustainable living out of music" (Hesmondhalgh et al. 2021, p 8). Data such as this led Lee Parsons (CEO of Ditto Music and Opulous) to suggest in *Music Business Worldwide* in January 2021 that "there's never been a better time to be a recording artist" (Parsons 2021). And yet, we can see that for many musicians, music alone does not provide a sufficient income for them to live, which when exacerbated during the pandemic required increased reliance on forms of support including friends/family/parents (Barnes 2021), direct or indirect state support, grants and

bursaries (many of which provided a lifeline for musicians during the pandemic such as the Help Musicians Coronavirus Financial Hardship Fund, for example), or from complementary forms of employment such as teaching. The challenges faced by musicians during the COVID-19 crisis however lead one to wonder what the relationship with the state as a mechanism for financial support *should* be? In other words: how should we support musicians, if at all? That is, when we value music, should we be driven by financial metrics and the economic value of music, or broader (but less tangible and harder to measure) concerns of music's social, cultural, human, ritual, and symbolic value, and indeed, what would this look like in practice?

3.2.   Losing Purpose: Status Anxieties

Musicians, Identity and Crisis

For many of the musicians seen in media representations over this period, the financial strain brought about by the loss of live music and difficulties in accessing state support produced fears and anxieties which were profound and existential. These fears and anxieties were linked to a loss of identity and meaning in their lives. Szostak and Sulkowski (2021) described this period as having trigged an "identity crisis of artists". It is worth pausing here to briefly reflect on this conceptualisation of COVID-19 as having triggered a 'crisis' amongst musicians, something which has recently been explored in the work of Ptatscheck (2021), and her study on the impact of the pandemic on EDM (Electronic Dance Music) musicians in Germany. Bringing together key contributions in the field such as Simmich et al. (1999) and Dross (2001), she draws on Cullberg's (1978) definition of crisis as "a situation of a generally painful nature that suddenly arises due to a crisis occasion with subjective valence and that suddenly threatens psychological existence, social identity, and security". In doing so, she suggests that understanding how musicians define and understand their 'social identity', is key to understanding the ways in which they responded to the crises engendered by COVID-19. In this respect, the following section will draw on what we know as being central characteristics of a musicians' social identity.

In what form did we see these crises of social identity – what I have referred to herein as status anxieties around a loss of purpose - represented in the media amongst musicians in the UK during the first year of the pandemic? The first of these concerned

the loss of the joy derived from the sociality of music, whether this was playing live, or songwriting as a collective process. With reference to playing live, as suggested earlier, there is a social and ritual value to this kind of musical practice which musicians say brings them great joy, meaning and healing. This very practical loss of the physicality of being a musician led a Plymouth-based musician to report that "it's hard mentally to feel like a musician anymore … I don't feel like a musician when I'm not playing live" (Green 2021). Music as live performance and the shared ritual of music being produced socially, whether the writing of songs at home in a bedroom or large-scale group recordings in expensive studios, are well-known as central sources of joy in musicians' lives and are often spoken about as the moments of deep and profound connectivity between music-makers and their audiences (Gross and Musgrave 2020, p71). The removal of this musical sociality represented a significant absence in the working lives of musicians, with classical musicians in the summer of 2020 suggesting; "we are numb to the possibility of not having the beauty of sound and of expression" (Roberts 2020), and singer Emily Barker saying it left her "feeling purposeless" (Fildes 2021). Indeed, scientific evidence has pointed towards the phenomenon of 'social flow' (Keeler et al. 2015) whereby group bonding via collective singing has been seen to reduce stress and arousal measured in levels of plasma oxytocin and adrenocorticotropic hormone (ACTH).

Recent work by Daffern et.al (2021) on the experiences of group singers in choirs moving their work online during COVID-19 suggested that the online space struggled to meaningfully replicate these benefits – what they described as the 'magic' – of in-person music-making. Indeed, as suggested, we saw many musicians over the first year of COVID-19 respond innovatively by performing live online or conducting songwriting sessions over Zoom, with findings from Australia for example suggesting these transitions online had only a limited impact on musicians' activities (Quader 2021). However, media reports from this period suggested that for many musicians, the experience was one of loss. The musician Rosin Murphy (Moloko) in an interview with *Sky News* at the time, powerfully said that the loss of musical livelihoods for musicians meant "you might as well kill a part of them" (Hitchcock 2020). A Brighton-based DJ and producer told the organisation *Youth Music* that he experienced what he called "a musical depression where I really didn't see the point in making anything" (Robinson 2020).

However, perhaps even more powerful were the anxieties experienced by musicians over this period concerning their fears that they might not be able to *be* musicians anymore. Much of this related to the practical economic realities of undertaking a form of creative work which was already highly financially precarious, the vulnerability of which was painfully exacerbated following the effective closure of the live music space. The scale of the problem certainly varied depending on the survey, but figures from the Musicians' Union COVID-19 Impact Poll (2020) found that 34% of musicians were considering leaving the industry, a figure which was as high as 64% in a survey of 568 musicians by the organisation Encore Musicians (2020). Building on these sets of data, Help Musicians reported in a survey of their members that 66% felt that they had 'no purpose' anymore.

This speaks to perhaps the most central social identity musicians have: their identity as musicians. Being a musician is understood to be one of the core ways in which musicians understand their identity (Ascenso, Williamon and Perkins 2016; Beech et al. 2016), and in this sense they are seen to very much embody their labour; their musical practice defines their human identity. Indeed, as work by King and Pierce (2019) found in their study of rock musicians; 'music is life'. In this context, the concept of a sense of self emerges as a helpful one to make sense of these experiences of loss amongst musicians over this period. Oyserman and James (2011, p 117) describe the concept of a sense of self in their work on possible identities as a "mental concept, working theory about oneself, stored in memory and amended with use. It is a working theory about who one is, was and will become". A musicians' sense of self is tied to their musical identity. There is then, for musicians, a clear link between work, identity and meaning, and a fracture or breakdown in this link will inevitably lead to challenging feelings and the triggering of emotional stressors around self-worth. In other words, if I cannot be a musician anymore, then what will I be? Indeed, who am I? What am I?

The identity a musician forms as being a musician, which is forged over years and even decades of emotional and financial investment, and the relationship they have with music-making and the (imagined) role it plays in their life and future, is not one which is let go of easily. Indeed, this attachment to creative work has been

conceptualised as sharing certain similarities with passionate forms of romantic attachment (McRobbie 2016). In this context, Oyserman and James (2011, p 125) go on to note that: "once a possible identity has been formed … it is only let go of with great reluctance". Their work, and that of others on the psychology of identity, can help us better understand why this crisis was experienced as so emotionally distressing for some musicians by acting as a conceptual bridge between the economics of musicianship during COVID-19 and the ways in which this was seen to impact musicians psychologically.

If being a musician is central to a musicians' sense of self, then imagining a 'possible self' where one is no longer a musician is necessarily painful. Musical careers are, in many respects, reliant on the suspension of disbelief; the harnessing of a quasi-religious faith in ones' own abilities to realise one of the most intangible human creative forces to produce a few minutes of magic. It is, in many respects, ironic that for a workforce who so often use a piece of musical computer software named Logic, that the work itself often seems to defy logic. Therefore, musicians are encouraged to believe in themselves and belief is central to musicianship.

But what happens when economic reality shatters psychological belief? Being concerned that one might no longer be able to be a musician necessitates the construction and imagining of an undesired future self (that of a non-musician), and studies have suggested that a discrepancy between an individuals' current self (in this case, a musician) and an undesired or feared future self (a non-musician) can impact wellbeing (Ogilvie 1987; Carver, Lawrence and Scheier 1999; Phillips, Silvia and Paradise 2007). In other words: "feeling too close to an undesired possible identity is worse for well-being than feeling far from a desired possible identity" (Oyserman and James 2011, p 140). Simply put, imagining life as a non-musician – and giving up this identity - can be destabilising and upsetting, and the representations of the struggles of musicians over this period suggest that COVID-19 ultimately forced many of them to engage in this upsetting act of imagining.

4. <u>Conclusion</u>

This chapter has sought to delineate the prevailing media narratives around musicians' mental health challenges over the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom. Certainly, much of the media coverage during this period concerned the reporting of the surveys conducted by organisations such as Help Musicians, UK Music and others which rapidly and powerfully sought to capture this mood and communicate their findings. The findings presented here have been taken from a smaller body of UK-based press reports which featured the voices of UK musicians themselves and might be thought of as adding a new or extra dimension to these existing reports.

It has been suggested herein that the challenges of musicians were, principally, focused around employment challenges and identity challenges, captured by Littlewood (2020) in her article for the *HuffPost* as a loss of work and a loss of purpose. This duality was also wonderfully captured in a piece for *Sky News* during this period as: "Shattered livelihoods … [and] shattered dreams" (Hitchcock 2020), and by Australian flautist Ana de le Vega as it being a period of time defined by "nothing financially and nothing for the soul" (Macdonald 2020).

It is worth highlighting that the pieces analysed for this chapter did not only show musicians' mental health as being negatively impacted by the pandemic. Indeed, a number of pieces included musicians reflecting on the ways in which the year in question had been helpful and had a number of unexpected benefits. Examples of this included musicians citing being free from "being tired all the time" (Hall 2020) or others relishing the time "to breathe, to slow down" (ibid). For others, they spoke of the wonderful sense of community which developed amongst musicians as they collaborated together and helped each other, or that the year had been a "wake up call … to find this balance" (Barnes 2021). Indeed, academic work by Szostak and Sulkowski (2021) drew on the Artistry-Creativity-Entrepreneurship Matrix in order to highlight entrepreneurial responses to the crisis by musicians, a concept reflected in the popular music press with organisations such as MIDiA reporting that "there have been signs of resilience and creativity in the face of adversity" (Mulligan 2020). Many

musicians responded to the first year of COVID-19 in innovative ways and reports featured them seeing the lockdown as a time of great opportunity, and it is important to acknowledge this balance. However, the prevailing narratives were the more negative impacts outlined in this chapter.

5. References

Ascenso, S., Williamon, A. and Perkins, R. (2016) Understanding the wellbeing of professional musicians through the lens of Positive Psychology, *Psychology of Music*, vol.45(1), pp. 65-81.

Attali, J. (1977) *Bruits: Essai sur L'Economie Politique de la Musique*. Presses Universitaires de France.

Attali, J. (2014) *Noise: The Political Economy of Music,* trans. Brian Massumi. University of Minnesota Press.

Aznar, A., Sowden, P., Bayless, S., Ross, K., Warhurst, A., and Pachi, D. (2021). Home-schooling during COVID-19 lockdown: Effects of coping style, home space, and everyday creativity on stress and home-schooling outcomes. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*, vol.10(4), pp. 294-312.

Bakare, L. (2020) 'It all crumbled': pop stars on mental health in the age of Covid, *The Guardian*, 24th August 2020. Available online at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/aug/24/it-all-crumbled-pop-stars-on-mental-health-in-the-age-of-covid

Barnes, M. (2021) The Year of No Gigs, *MixMag*, 6th January 2021. Available online at: https://mixmag.net/feature/year-of-no-gigs-dj-pandemic-lockdown

Beech, N., Gilmore, C., Hibbert, P. and Ybema, S. (2016) Identity-in-the-work and musicians' struggles: the production of self-questioning identity work, *Work, Employment and Society*, vol.30(3), pp. 506-522.

Berg, L. (2018) The Nightlife Ain't No Good Life: Musician Work Stress Impacts Mental Health, paper presented at the 2018 Performing Arts Medicine Association International Symposium, June 28th-29th 2018.

Blanning, T. (2010) *Triumph of Music: The Rise of Composers, Musicians and Their Art*, Harvard University Press.

Brunt, S., and Nelligan, K. (2021). The Australian music industry's mental health crisis: media narratives during the coronavirus pandemic. Media International Australia, vol. 178(1), pp. 42-46.

Bulut, S. (2020) The UK's first socially distanced gig looks absolutely awful, *Dazed*, 12th August 2020. Available online at: https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/50099/1/the-uk-s-first-socially-distanced-gig-looks-absolutely-awful

Cai, C., Carney, M., Zada, N. and Terry, M. (2021) Breakdowns and Breakthroughs: Observing Musicians' Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic, *CHI '21: Proceedings of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, Article no. 571, pp. 1-13.

Cloonan, M. (2002) Hitting the Right Note? The New Deal for Musicians, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, vol.54(1), pp. 51-66.

Cloonan, M. (2003) The New Deal for Musicians: Teaching Young Pups New Tricks? *Music Education Research*, vol. 5(1), pp. 13-28.

Cohen, S. and Ginsborg, J. (2021) The Experiences of Mid-Career and Seasoned Orchestral Musicians in the UK During the First COVID-19 Lockdown, *Frontiers in Psychology,* vol. 12; 645967.

Conor, B., Gill, R. and Taylor, S. (2015) *Gender and Creative Labour*. Wiley.

Cullberg, J. (1978) Krisen und Krisentherapie. Psychiatrische Praxis, vol.5, pp. 25-34.

De Camargo, C.R. and Whiley, L.A. (2020) The mythologisation of key workers: occupational prestige gained, sustained…. and lost? *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy,* vol.40(9/10), pp. 849-859.

Carver, C. Lawrence, J. and Scheier, M. (1999) Self-discrepancies and affect: Incorporating the role of feared selves, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol.25, pp. 783-792.

Cullen, W. Gulati, G. and Kelly, B. D. (2020) Mental health in the COVID-19 pandemic, *QJM: An International Journal of Medicine*, vol.113, issue 5, pp. 311–312.

Daffern, H. Balmer, K. and Brereton, J. (2021) Singing Together, Yet Apart: The Experience of UK Choir Members and Facilitators During the Covid-19 Pandemic, *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol.12, article 624474, pp. 1-16.

Detari, A. Egermann, H. Bjerkeset, O and Vaag, J. (2020) Psychosocial Work Environment Among Musicians and in the General Workforce in Norway, *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 11, p. 1315.

Dobson, M.C. (2011) Insecurity, professional sociability, and alcohol: Young freelance musicians' perspectives on work and life in the music profession, *Psychology of Music*, vol. 39(2), pp. 240-260.

Dross, M. (2001) *Krisenintervention*, Hogrefe.

Dumbreck, A. and McPherson, G. (2015) *Music Entrepreneurship*, Bloomsbury Publishing.

Fildes, N. (2021) Musicians sing the blues as Covid and Brexit devastate sector, *Financial Times*, 6th February 2021. Available online at: https://www.ft.com/content/64f285c8-7f9b-4a5e-8663-eea7db0d0078

Forsyth, A., Lennox, J. and Emslie, C. (2016) 'That's Cool, You're a Musician and You Drink': Exploring Entertainers' Accounts of Their Unique Workplace Relationship with Alcohol, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 36(2), pp. 85–94.

Fulweiler, R.W., Davies, S.W., Biddle, J.F., Burgin, A.J., Cooperdock, E.H.G., Hanley, T.C., Kenkel, C.D., Marcarelli, A.M., Matassa, C.M., Mayo, T.L., Santiago-Vasquez, L.Z., Traylor-Knowles, N. and Ziegler, M, (2021) Rebuild the Avademy: Supporting academic mothers during Covid-19 and beyond, *PLoS Biology*, vol.19(3), e3001100.

GOV (Her Majesty's Treasury and The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP) (2020) *Speech: Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak on the Winter Economy Plan*, HM Treasury. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-of-the-exchequer-rishi-sunak-on-the-winter-economy-plan

Green, A. (2021) Financial devastation and mental health battle for Plymouth musicians in lockdown, *Plymouth Herald*, 7th February 2021. Available online at: https://www.plymouthherald.co.uk/whats-on/music-nightlife/trail-devastation-mental-health-battle-4973074

Greenberg, N. (2020) Mental health of health-care workers in the COVID-19 era. *Nature Reviews Nephrology* vol.16, pp. 425–426,

Gross, S. and Musgrave, G. (2016) Can Music Make You Sick? Music and Depression. A Study into the incidence of musicians' mental health. Part 1 – Pilot Survey Report, *Help Musicians UK/MusicTank.*

Gross, S. and Musgrave, G. (2017) Can Music Make You Sick? Music and Depression. A Study into the incidence of musicians' mental health. Part 2: Qualitative Study and Recommendations, *Help Musicians UK/MusicTank.*

Gross, S. and Musgrave, G. (2020) *Can Music Make You Sick? Measuring the Price of Musical Ambition*, University of Westminster Press.

Halls, E. (2020) From number one to nothing to do: musicians on surviving the pandemic, *The Telegraph*, 14th October 2020. Available online at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/music/artists/number-one-nothing-do-uk-musicians-surviving-pandemic/

Hancox, D. (2018) *Inner City Pressure: The Story of Grime*, HarperCollins UK.

Hayhurst, O. (2020) Tweet – 6th October 2020, 12.20pm. Available online at: https://twitter.com/OliHayhurst/status/1313439006424784896?s=20

Higgins, C. (2021) Has the UK government abandoned the arts? *Apollo Magazine*, 26th February 2021. Available at: https://www.apollo-magazine.com/uk-government-response-arts-ed-vaizey-charlotte-higgins/

Hitchcock, A. (2020) Culture Interrupted: 2020 devastated the arts – can young musicians survive the blow? *Sky News*, 23rd December 2020. Available online at: https://news.sky.com/story/culture-interrupted-2020-devastated-the-arts-can-young-musicians-survive-the-blow-12166157

Holt, F. (2010) The economy of live music in the digital age, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 13(2), pp. 243-261.

IQ. (2020) All write now? Insuring events in the age of Covid, *IQ – Live Music Intelligence*, 27th August 2020. Available online at: https://www.iq-mag.net/2020/08/all-write-now-insurance-age-covid/

Keeler, J.R., Roth, E.A., Neuser, B.L., Spitsbergen, J.M., Water, D.J.M. and Vianney, J.-M. (2015) The neurochemistry and social flow of singing: bonding and oxytocin, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, vol.9, article 518, pp. 1-10.

Kenny, D. (2011) *The Psychology of Music Performance Anxiety,* Oxford University Press.

Kenny, D. and Ackermann, B. (2008). Optimizing physical and psychological health in performing musicians. In: S. Hallam, I. Cross and M. Thaut (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Music Psychology,* 1st ed. London: The University of Oxford, pp. 390-394.

Kenny, D. and Asher, A. (2016) Life Expectancy and Cause of Death in Popular Musicians: Is the Popular Musician Lifestyle the Road to Ruin?, *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, vol. 31(1), pp. 37–44.

Kenny, D., Davis, P. and Oates, J. (2004) Music Performance Anxiety and Occupational Stress Amongst Opera Chorus Artists and Their Relationship With State and Trait Anxiety and Perfectionism. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, vol. 18(6), pp. 757–777.

Kenny, D., Driscoll, T., Ackermann, B. (2012) Psychological well-being in professional orchestral musicians in Australia: A descriptive population study, *Psychology of Music*, vol. 42 (2), pp. 210-232.

King, B.E. & Pierce, D. (2019) "Music is life": Identity, challenge, and passion in the occupational patterns of male young adult rock musicians, *Journal of Occupational Science*, vol. 27(2), pp. 204-215

Krueger, A.B. (2019) *Rockonomics: A Backstage Tour of what the Music Industry Can Teach Us About Economics and Life,* Currency

Kumar, A. and Nayar, K.R. (2021) COVID-19 and its mental health consequences, Journal of Mental Health, vol.30(1), pp. 1-2.

The Lancet (2020) Facing up to long COVID. *Lancet (London, England)*, *396*(10266), 1861. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)32662-3

Littlewood, A. (2021) (A) Musicians Like Me Are Losing Work, And Purpose. I'm Worries About Our Mental Health, *HuffPost UK*. Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/coronavirus-performing-arts_uk_5f15b5d8c5b619afc404b356

Loveday, C., Musgrave, G. and Gross, S. (2022) Predicting anxiety, depression and wellbeing in professional and non-professional musicians, *Psychology of Music* (forthcoming)

Macdonald, K. (2020) "Every musician I know is now facing bankruptcy" – the impact of coronavirus cancellations on classical artists, *Classic FM*, 13th March 2020. Available online at: https://www.classicfm.com/music-news/coronavirus-cancellations-impact-musicians/

Manthorpe, J., Iliffe, S., Gillen, P., Moriarty, J., Mallett, J., Schroder, H., Currie, D., Ravalier, J. and McFadden, P. (2021) Clapping for carers in the Covid-19 crisis: Career reflections in a UK survey, *Health and Social Care in the Community,* pp.1-8

Martin, L and Wilson, N (2018) *The Palgrave Handbook of Creativity at Work*, Palgrave

McCluskey, G., Fry, D., Hamilton, S., King, A., Laurie, M., McAra, L. and Stewart, T.M. (2021) School closures, exam cancellations and isolation: the impact of Covid-19 on young people's mental health, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, vol. 26(1), pp. 46-59.

McRobbie, A. (2016) *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries*, Polity Press.

Menger, P. (2003) Artistic Labor Markers and Careers, *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol.25, pp. 541-574.

Middlestadt, S. E. and Fishbein, M. (1988). Health and occupational correlates of perceived occupational stress in symphony orchestra musicians. *Journal of Occupational Medicine*, vol. 30(9), pp. 687–692.

Mould, O. (2018) *Against Creativity*, Verso Books

Mulligan, M. (2020) Independent Artists: Pathfinding Through a Pandemic, *MIDiA*. Available online at: https://www.midiaresearch.com/blog/independent-artist-creativity-and-innovation-in-the-age-of-covid-19

Musicians' Union. (2012) *The Working Musician*. London: Musicians' Union. Available online at: https://musiciansunion.org.uk/MusiciansUnion/media/resource/Guides%20and%20reports/Education/The-Working-Musician-report.pdf?ext=.pdf.

Naveed, K., Watanbe, C. and Neittaanmaki, P. (2017) Co-evolution between streaming and l9ve music leads a way to the sustainable growth of music industry – Lessons from the US experiences, *Technology in Society*, vol.50, pp. 1-19.

Noone, T. (2017) 'Why Musicians are the Canaries in the Coal Mine', *Eureka Street*, vol.27(16), pp. 30–32.

Office for National Statistics. (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by occupation, England and Wales: deaths registered up to and including 20 April 2020.

Available at:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/covid19relateddeathsbyoccupationenglandandwalesdeathsregistereduptoandincluding20thapril2020

Ogilvie, D.M. (1987) The undesired self: A neglected variable in personality research, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* vol.52, pp. 379-385.

O'Rorke, L. (1998) 'How the Dole Made Britain Swing', *The Guardian*, 6th January, pp. 10-11.

Oyserman, D. and James, L. (2011) Possible identities, in Schwartz, S.J., Luyckx, K. & Vignoles, V.L. (eds.) *Handbook of identity research*, Springer, pp. 117-145.

Parker, S. (2015) *Results of the Musicians' Well-being Survey: Creative realities for music professionals in Australia*, The School of Psychology, University of Queensland. Available
at: https://www2.psy.uq.edu.au/~uqspark8/BriefingReportUQMusicianWellbeingStudy.pdf

Phillips, A., Silvia, P. and Paradise, M. (2007) The undesired self and emotional experience: A latent variable analysis, *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 26, pp. 1035-1047.

Pfefferbaum, B. and North, C.S. (2020) Perspective: Mental Health and the Covid-19 Pandemic, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 383: pp. 510-512.

Ptatscheck, M. (2021) Never Waste a Crisis!? – The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on the Mental Health of EDM DJs, *IASPM Journal*, vol.11(1), pp. 38-55.

Quader, S.B. (2021) How the Central Sydney independent musicians use pre-established 'online DIT' to sustain their networking during the COVID019 pandemic, *The Journal of International Communication*, doi:10.1080/13216597.2021.1989703

Ralston, W. (2020) Coronavirus might kill the music industry. Maybe it needed to die, *Esquire*, 8th May 2020. Available online at:
https://www.esquire.com/uk/culture/a32360709/coronavirus-music-industry/

Rendell, J. (2020) 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), pp. 1092-1111.

Roberts, M.S. (2020) Violinist Tasmin Little warns of 'cultural desert' as 400 musicians perform in Parliament Square Protest, *Classic FM*, 6th October 2020. Available at:
https://www.classicfm.com/music-news/coronavirus/400-musicians-parliament-square-protest-nicola-benedetti/

Robinson, K. (2020) Unlocked: Seven aspiring young musicians and their experiences of music during the coronavirus lockdown, *Youth Music*. Available online at:
https://youthmusic.org.uk/unlocked-youth-music-report

Shorter G.W., O'Neil, S.M., and McElherron, L. (2018) Changing Arts and Minds: A Survey of Health and Wellbeing in the Creative Sector, *Inspire – Wellbeing for All*. Available at: https://www.inspirewellbeing.org/media/9236/changing-arts-and-minds-creative-industries-report.pdf

Simmich, T. et al. (1999) Empfehlungen zur Behandlungspraxis bei psychotherapeutischen Kriseninterventionen, Psychotherapeut vol. 44(6), pp. 394-398.

Spiro, N., Perkins, R., Kate, S., Tymoszuk, U., Mason-Bertrand, A., Cossette, I., Glasser, S. and Williamon, A. (20210) The Effects of COVID-19 Lockdown on Working Patterns, Income, and Wellbeing Among Performing Arts Professionals in the United Kingdom (April-June 2020), *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11:594086

Szostak, M. and Sulkowski, L. (2021) Identity Crisis of Artists During the Covid-19 Pandemic and Shift Towards Entrepreneurship, *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, vol.9(3), pp. 87-102.

UK Music (2020a) *Music By Numbers*, UK Music. Available at: https://www.ukmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Music-by-Numbers-2020.pdf

UK Music (2020b) *Response to Inquiry into the Future of Self-Employment (October 2020)*. Available at: https://www.ukmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/UKM_Draft_Self-Employed_Submission_Final.pdf

Usher, K., Durkin, J., and Bhullar, N. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and mental health impacts. *International journal of mental health nursing*, vol. *29*(3), pp. 315–318.

Vaag, J., Giæver, F., Bjerkeset, O. (2014) Specific demands and resources in the career of the Norweigan freelance musician, *Arts and Health,* vol. 6(3), pp. 1-18.

Vaag J., Bjorngaard J.H., Bjerkeset O. (2016) Symptoms of anxiety and depression among Norwegian musicians compared to the general workforce, *Psychology of Music*, vol.44(2), pp. 234-248.

van der Hoeven, A. & Hitters, E. (2019) The social and cultural values of live music: Sustaining urban live music ecologies, *Cities*, vol. 90, pp. 263-271.

van Kemenade, J. F., van Son, M. J. and van Heesch, N. C. (1995) 'Performance Anxiety Among Professional Musicians in Symphonic Orchestras: A Self-Report Study', *Psychological Reports,* vol. 77(2), pp. 555–562.

Velayudhan, L., Aarsland, D., and Ballard, C. (2020). Mental health of people living with dementia in care homes during COVID-19 pandemic. *International Psychogeriatrics,* vol. 32(10), pp. 1253-1254. doi:10.1017/S1041610220001088

Volpe, L.L. (2020) Tweet – 13th October 2020, 8.32pm. Available online at: https://twitter.com/LukeLaVolpe/status/1316099507063529472?s=20

Whitby, W. (2020) Playing In, *Bido Lito!,* issue 109, September 2020. Available online at: https://www.bidolito.co.uk/feature-playing-in-2020/

Williams, J. (2020) 'Three people in a car, and we still lost money': was live music broken before Covid-19, *The Guardian*, 20th August 2020. Available online at: https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/aug/20/tour-lost-money-live-music-broken-covid-19-concerts

Wills, G. I., and Cooper, C. L. (1987). Stress and professional popular musicians. *Stress Medicine*, vol.3(4), pp. 267–275.