

A GENERATION OF EMERGING ARTISTS RELY ON THE RETURN OF LIVE MUSIC

by Nick Clarke



While no-one needs telling how life-changing the last 10 months have been, for huge swathes of people there has been one constant: music.

Whether you've swapped the morning commute for a morning workout or simply have more time to get ready for your day, music is usually the accompaniment that gets people going.

One would think that with increased streams and listening time – evidenced by how Twitch's Music and Performing Arts category rose by 524% during lockdown, musicians would be a small segment of the population that would be benefitting from the lockdown period. Wrong.

Reports have shown that the UK music industry will halve in size due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As long as live gatherings are banned, so too are festivals and live music events, which for a huge number of artists, and the industry itself, contribute massively to the overall level of revenue raised.

The simple fact is, unless you're already a global superstar, the money made from streaming platforms simply isn't enough to sustain a living. A perfect example is violinist Tamsin Little, who despite racking up millions of streams over six months, was only paid £12.34.

In April 2020, popular online game, Fortnite, collaborated with Travis Scott to launch 'Astronomical' – a live album release event that took place within Fortnite, which nearly 30 million people watched and was deemed an innovative success by almost all industry experts.



However, a key element to this release's success was the fact Travis Scott was already a star, who would attract an audience into the millions, regardless of the content on offer.

If Travis Scott didn't have the last five years to build himself as an artist, and his audience, then the show would have never taken place.

This is best illustrated by Netflix's documentary 'Look Mom I Can Fly', which charts Scott's rise to stardom and the vital role that intimate, smaller gigs played. Without those gigs, there would be no 'Astronomical', there might not even be a Travis Scott.

Despite this, there have been various efforts to try and level the playing field. The vast majority of festivals in the UK in 2020 all attempted to host a virtual event of some sort.

Boomtown, a popular house and techno festival, put on '[The Lost Chapter](#)', a virtual festival, which included over 25 hours of live streams. Boomtown has grown a reputation for hosting emerging acts, and while this event was brilliant for awareness of those artists, its bank balances will have still remained largely stagnant.

An innovative and alternate method was found in the Netherlands. Dutch trumpeter, Ellister Van Der Molen, led a small group of musicians that performed '[balcony shows](#)' where people would simply stand on their balcony and enjoy the music from below.

Ellister was being paid by Upperbloom, a Dutch start-up, which decided to use its marketing budget to host these shows. While this shows an innovative and thoughtful approach to the situation, it's still not scalable and wouldn't generate enough revenue to continually be an option for up-and-coming musicians.

The music industry has certainly been one of the areas most impacted by the lockdown; however, there are certainly ways going forward for the industry to emerge from this crisis with a fresh outlook on how to operate.

Firstly, event organisers will have to work with artists to find new ways of putting on shows which people can attend. One way would be to host the event twice, with a limited capacity at each event, allowing for a socially distanced show that will hit its full capacity over a longer period.

While this comes with added costs and complications, it may come down to customers willing to pay a premium to get back to seeing their favourite artists perform.

For smaller artists, the rise of listening parties – events where artists release new music, but the audience remains seated and listening to the music in a more relaxed environment – could be a legitimate way forward.

These would be brilliant for emerging artists who aren't quite at the level of booking larger shows and also provides revenue streams for spaces that host the event.

As well as this, there could even be some huge positives to take from this challenging period. Artists can begin to use the innovations we've found throughout lockdown at real events – an example being Travis Scott employing an AR experience at his shows where his avatar from Fortnite towers over the stage to complement his on-stage presence.

As well as this, DJs could live-stream their own content from behind the booth, utilising a platform like Twitch, which would see them paid for their efforts.

While these are certainly aspects that could improve the live experience in the future, it's getting to that point that is the problem.

The past months will have bankrupted countless musicians and without some sort of government funding, we may lose an entire generation of musicians due to financial implications beyond their control.

The government have since announced a [£1.57bn Culture Recovery Fund](#), with £3.36 million earmarked for the 'Emergency Music Venues Fund' which will hopefully go some way in preserving the rich musical talent found throughout the UK. However, only time will tell if it's enough to keep the industry afloat in the coming months and years.

