

**How Has Covid-19 Impacted The Community Musician? The
welcome, hidden costs, adaptability and recovery in practice.**

Carol Bowden

York St John University

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Professor Lee Higgins

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Abstract

As COVID-19 spread across the UK and the government implemented nationwide lockdowns in March 2020, community musicians found themselves without work and facing financial insecurity. From face-to-face, in-person delivery with groups both large and small, many were induced to move their music communities online, in many cases through having to make adaptations and quickly learning how to deliver remotely. Developing remote delivery practices and then emerging from lockdown to face-to-face delivery, with adaptations and precautions in place to adhere to government guidelines, community musicians were challenged extensively through this period to find a way to recover from the restrictions of the pandemic and return to in-person delivery.

From conversations with six community musicians living and working in the North East of England there is a resilience and responsiveness to the pandemic that has seen this group of musicians emerge from the pandemic with a wider range of skills and greater confidence in their work, better able to advocate for themselves and their participants. Their conversations have become a 4-part series of The Community Musician podcast which partners this work.

Keywords: *lockdown, online, community music, ethics of care, relationships, participants, pandemic.*

Aims

Through recorded conversations with community musicians in the North East of England, this research project will take the form of a case study. Participants will reflect on their work pre- and post-COVID and during the lockdown periods in 2020. Comparing the differences and similarities, through coding their conversations, and exploring the key issues that the pandemic brought to their practice, this research will also be presented as a single series of 4 podcast episodes that will be hosted on my website. By exploring literature in community music that has its focus on community music practice pre- and post-pandemic, this research will consider the on-field experiences and the accomplishments of the community musician during this period.

Introduction

I have been a community musician working across the North East of England for over 16 years, employed for most of that time by an arts organisation. I have worked on a range of collaborative projects with arts, education, and health organisations, with early years, families, young people, SEND and adults, traveling across the breadth of the North East to deliver across a range of communities. During lockdown I was fortunate to receive furlough, but then I was made redundant and had to become a freelance practitioner in a world that was just opening from lockdowns. I had started my master's degree during this time and had to take a year out to consider my future and build my work profile. It was during this time that I did a lot of self-reflection and had so many conversations with other community musicians that I realised that our experiences would resonate with others. There were so many similarities across our experiences and so much learning that we shared, I feel that reflections from community musicians working during this period, as well as reflecting on my own journey, has the potential to feed into the research on the impacts of the COVID pandemic on community music practice, and reframe what it means to be a community musician in this post-COVID-19 world.

The lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic brought about the closure of venues, arts organisations and with it, many job losses across the cultural sector. Many community musicians, during this time, turned to delivering their work online so that participants could access their sessions from home and stay connected to their communities. This led to a hybrid of working practices when the lockdowns were lifted, and social-distancing guidelines meant that music making could return to face-to-face but with precautions in place (Bradbury et al., 2021; Dons et al., 2021; Sandt et al., 2021).

Being able to access the arts during this period was a way for people to cope with the extraordinary phenomenon we were all experiencing together, and to help cope with loneliness, isolation, and the impact this would have on our mental health (Bradbury et al., 2021; Crooke et al., 2021; Sandt et al., 2021; Youngblood et al., 2021). This was as relevant for the wider community as it was for the community musicians who found themselves without work, experiencing a significant impact on their financial security and feeling disconnected from their communities.

There has been much research into the period during the pandemic and the online responses to delivery and creative practice (Crisp, 2021; Crooke et al., 2021; Dons et al., 2021; Foulkes, 2021; Jaber et al., 2021; Sandt et al., 2021; Serafino, 2019; Youngblood et al., 2021). As a result of this project, it is hoped that this case study will inform further research, for example that which looks at the impact the pandemic had on culture and community, from experiences of online creative practice, the impact of the pandemic on freelance arts practitioners, the digital divide, or how to connect through online communities. It is also hoped that it will add to the dialogue of what is a community musician, what makes a community musician, and what is community music through encouraging further research, discussion, learning exchanges and exploration into practice (Camlin, 2015; Higgins, 2012; Bartleet & Higgins, et al., 2018; Deane & Mullen, 2013; Veblen & Olsson, 2002).

This research project will implement conversations with six community musicians, who live and work in the North East of England, who will share with us their experiences pre- and

post-pandemic and how they coped during the lockdowns. Exploring how their practice was impacted by COVID-19 through their relationships with their communities, how they adapted their practice to online delivery, what emerging from the lockdowns looked like to them and their practice, and what their practice looks like in this post-pandemic world. This research will also help to inform and support the future of practising and emerging community music practitioners in the event of a future pandemic through the value of shared experience.

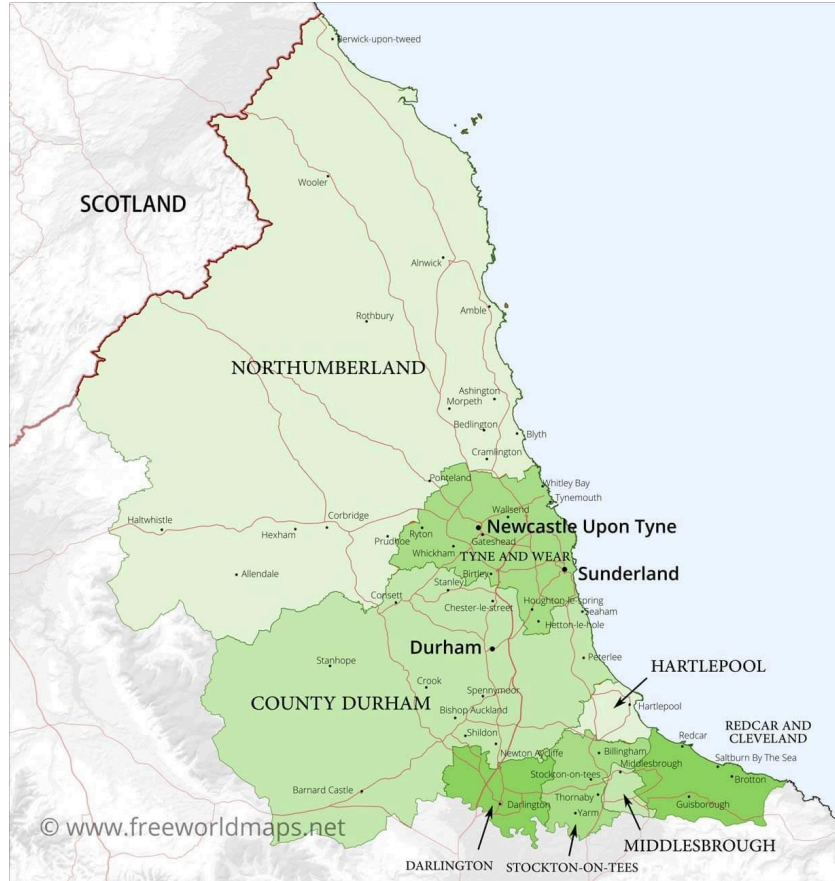
The Research Area - North East of England

The North East of England (Figure 1.) was chosen as the area of research as I live and work in this region. Having a wide network of community musicians in the area, and having worked extensively across the North East, I can easily travel to engage with the research participants, who all work across this region. The North East of England encompasses an area of around 3,317 square miles. All but one of the musicians who participated in this research travelled the breadth of this region for their work weekly.

There are 13 local authorities within 3 combined authorities of North of Tyne, North East and Tees Valley. The three counties that make up this area are Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham, and North Yorkshire. A 1996 reform split Cleveland, once a county, between Durham and N. Yorkshire. The North East of England are predominantly Labour voters.

Figure 1.

North East of England.



Note: Image obtained from

<https://www.freeworldmaps.net/europe/united-kingdom/northeastengland/>

The North East is one of the most economically deprived regions in the UK (Jarrett et al., 2020; Johns, 2020) with a higher reduction in government funding than most other places in the UK (Hastings et al., (2015) and one of the economically hardest hit areas by COVID-19. Government funding to local authorities and the welfare system across the UK has been drastically cut over the years, seeing a loss of 27% to Local Authority spending power, some services experiencing a cumulative loss of 45%, and social care spending has fallen by 14% in more deprived areas with cuts contributing to “rising levels of inequality” (Hastings et al., 2015).

This inequality has had a disproportionately negative impact in the North East of England, where it has been impacted with a 20% reduction in local government spending, with resilience and recovery reduced (Johns, 2020). Child poverty has historically been high in the North East, with the proportion of children living in working households rising, due to several issues such as changes in social policy, austerity, insecure work, the cost of living rises and the impact of COVID (Round & Longlands, 2020).

The North East Cultural Partnership (NECP) conducted a survey in 2020 across arts and culture organisations, SME's and Freelancers. Their findings for freelancers and SME's were:

- 65% face financial losses of between 50 to 100%
- 34% said that had lost all work and events with a particular impact of the self employed
- Only 17% of freelancers said they could access government support
- 46% said the Government support for SME's was not relevant to their organisation

From The Case for Culture Analysis of NECP COVID-19 Survey on Arts & Heritage Sector (2020) to the question “What are the top 3 practical things which funding agencies (e.g.: Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund) and local authorities can do to help your organisation deal with the consequences of Coronavirus?” many were in relation to easier access to funding and better financial support, with one telling response as “encourage organisations to think of corporate social responsibility’ (p.8). In the article from Eleanor Belfiore (2021), “Who cares? At what price? The hidden costs of socially engaged arts labour and the moral failure of cultural policy” she supports this approach:

arguably, appropriate funding that allows for freelancers to be fairly paid and for project participants (who are often vulnerable and/or experiencing disadvantage) to be properly supported, both during and in the aftermath of a funded activity, should be a funder's responsibility. (Belfiore, 2021. p11)

During the writing of this research across 2022/23, musicians that I have spoken to were noticing Covid variants, flu, Strep A, and other winter bugs running rampant, and that there is inevitably a direct hit on participant numbers across projects. People across the UK, as well as the North East, are also struggling with the cost-of-living crisis and are less likely to invest in attending sessions where a charge is expected. Because of this there remains the risk that community musicians must cancel sessions, in response they take a financial hit and potentially lose participants through the lack of continuity. The impact of COVID on the population, and the vulnerable and disadvantaged, and the UK response to any further pandemics, is still to be determined (Bramwell, et al, 2022; Iwasaki & Putrino, 2023). The concerns of the past three years are still present, highlighting the vulnerability of the freelance practitioner.

Questions

The reflective conversations for this research were guided by the following four open-ended questions:

- What did your practice look like before COVID?
- How did you adapt your practice during lockdown?

- How has your practice changed since the pandemic?
- Reflecting on your practice and the challenges you have faced, have you adapted your practice and personal investment into your work?

These questions came from reflecting on my own journey during this period. Going from the relative comfort of employment with an organisation, to delivering online, to becoming a freelance worker and the vulnerabilities that come with it, I wanted to share and compare my journey through the COVID-19 pandemic with others like me.

Literature Review

This literature review will explore key publications that discuss community music and community music practice, as well as publications on culture and the arts, and the impact on health and wellbeing during the pandemic. It will make clear the purpose of the rationale behind the questions asked of the research participants by framing the situation of the community musician in the North East of England.

Pre-Pandemic - The Community Musician

Community music is a realm of practice that is as diverse as the people involved in it. Many have tried to conceptualise community music, as interventions, education, social development, health and wellbeing, relationships, and inclusive arts practice (Bartleet & Higgins, 2018; Camlin, 2015; Deane, 2018, Higgins and Willingham, 2017; Veblen, 2007). To try to explain the term community music, Lee Higgins (2012) describes it as “an active intervention between a music leader or facilitator and participants” (p.21). Taking place in a range of settings, with every age from early childhood to the elderly, with varying degrees of ability, there is a “belief in the value and use of music to foster intercultural and interpersonal acceptance and understanding” (Veblen & Olsson, 2001. p2). Not to be confused with music therapy or music education, it is becoming more recognised that community music can span both sectors as an interventionist approach in non-formal and educational settings. It can also be used to influence social and cultural change, through exploring identity, politics, giving voice to the marginalised and changing the lives of individuals through empowerment and ownership (Bartleet & Higgins, 2018; Deane, 2018; Dunphy, 2018; Deane & Mullen, 2013; Higgins, 2012; Lines, 2018; Veblen & Olsson, 2001; Webster & Buglass, 2005; Willingham & Carruthers, 2018).

The participation of the arts as a fundamental human right has shown to be a mechanism for social change, through individuals and communities, and by enhancing the quality of life and in gaining collective identity and empowerment through creative expression (Deane & Mullen, 2013; Dunphy, 2018; Rimmer, 2018; Smilde, 2018). For collaborative, nurturing and trusting relationships to engage participation, and foster social engagement and empowerment, much of the responsibility is on the shoulders of the musician as they are the “people on the ground” with whom participants engage and build relationships with the understanding that “all humans are inherently creative and inherently musical” (Higgins & Willingham, 2017, p. 74).

Community musicians are described as “boundary walkers” by Higgins (2012. p.6), inhabiting the margins of other professions and in a position to “question and challenge dominant forms of practice.” Contextualising that boundary walking comes with an energy to reshape practice and develop communities through inclusivity and empathy, the “act of making music together is an act of hospitality” (Higgins & Willingham, 2017. p.65) understanding that “personal and social engagement and growth of participants is as important as their musical engagement and growth” (Bartleet & Higgins, 2018. p.9). The community musicians themselves will often describe themselves as going the “extra mile”, with their time, which is often in addition to that which they are paid for, financially, by the impact of additional time and investing in resources, and also with psychological and emotional costs, through the process of care that they practice with their participants (Belfoire, 2021; Higgins, 2012).

There is also the learning culture seen as a reciprocal process. Community musicians will be learning alongside their participants, revealing that “their skills have developed as part of the natural evolution of their practice” (Camlin & Zesserson, 2018, p.716) and that the coordination of practice and engagement is an activity of social participation allows for meaning, identity, practice, and community (Higgins, 2012; Wenger, 1998).

Camlin (2015) suggests that a community musician develops their practice as an amalgam of “experiences, skills, perspectives and people, which have informed its development in our particular situation” (p238). The practice of being a community musician is ever-changing due to the experiences you have in flexibility of practice, working with more people, ages and abilities, and the more situations you encounter to engage and adapt to. Being able to quickly “read the group,” their interests and skill levels, and engage them in appropriately challenging, stimulating, and creative musical activities can result in “strong social bonds that go beyond any formal learning contract” (p242).

Higgins theoretical framework (2012, p.10-13), steeped in philosophical learning and debate, frames community music practice around the ideas of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction, that community music sets out to “encourage musical access through intervention and resistance to closure” (p11). He also frames community music as an act of hospitality whereby “community music seeks to celebrate difference both at the level of the individual and through our distinctive localities and contexts” (p12), through the welcome of an open door, and that community musicians themselves are “dreamers” striving for the equality of opportunity, something unforeseeable and “becoming something new” (p172).

Camlin explains that there is a diversity of community music practices that, when practitioners themselves try to explain what community music is, often “merely emphasise our differences” than “articulate what unites us” (p.234). It is safe to say that the concept of community music, and the musician facilitating music in communities, encompasses several principles and practices and yet is fluid in interpretation, responding to the needs and purposes of its participants and engaging in reciprocal relationships of learning. The debate as to what community music is, and what a community musician is, is still in exploration through research and practice.

In summary, community music is a continually changing process of creative practice based on a reciprocal relationship of creativity, engagement, and participation. It has the potential to initiate change in society and be an interventionist approach for self-empowerment. Community musicians are at the centre of this practice, facilitating the welcoming spaces where the creativity takes place, and the communities participate. In short, community music is a practice that is forever in flux and responsive to change.

COVID-19 and Community Music

In the early months of 2020, a highly contagious disease was spreading around the world. Social distancing measures were put into place and entire countries were confined to their homes. The UK’s response was considered inadequately slow (Bramwell, et al, 2022) taking three months from the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the country. On the 23rd of March, the UK government implemented a nationwide lockdown, people were confined to their homes

and businesses and venues were closed, resulting in the cancellation or postponement of in-person community music activity.

During the early months of COVID lockdowns, The Case for Culture North East conducted a survey on the Arts & Heritage Sector of the North East of England, analysing the impact expected from the pandemic. They discovered that, of the 86 freelancer/self-employed arts practitioners who responded, only 17% were able to access the Government support package with 40% being unsure whether they were eligible. This lack of support in accessing financial stability during such an impactful period impacted freelance artists (Crooke et al., 2021), many of whom were working with vulnerable groups within the community. Depression across the country rose due to isolation, financial instability, and the impact on health and wellbeing (Foulkes, 2021; Leach et al., 2021; Youngblood et al., 2021).

To stay connected with their communities, a lot of musicians began connecting through online sessions and meetings, via video-calling platforms on places such as Facebook Live, Zoom and Teams (Crisp, 2021; Crooke et al., 2021; Dons et al., 2021; Foulkes, 2021; Jaber et al., 2021; Sandt & Coppi, 2021; Youngblood et al., 2021). They would initiate singing from balconies, windows, and pavements (Foulkes, 2021; Sandt & Coppi, 2021), walk through their communities, speaking to people over fences, finding ways to stay connected with them. This was a new way for many musicians to work and was a demonstration of how adaptable and flexible practitioners are. They were responsive to the need for emotional connection using music in defiance of the pandemic and in the shared trauma that people were experiencing (Foulkes, 2021; Sandt & Coppi, 2021; Jaber et al., 2021). The sharing of a sense of purpose, in

overcoming the isolation and making connections, was cited as being part of the building of identity, leading to social bonding and supporting health and wellbeing (Crooke et al., 2021; Sandt and Coppi, 2021; Youngblood et al., 2021).

There were many challenges, both personal and professional, in taking their sessions online and into a virtual space, from digital poverty, impacts on self-esteem and financial insecurity, technical issues such as delay or Wi-Fi connectivity, separate physical spaces impacting the person-centred approach, to name just a few (Crisp, 2021; Jaber et al., 2021; Crooke et al., 2021; Serafino, 2019). Some projects could not be made to work online and there were participants who could just not connect, either emotionally or technologically, with online learning/workshops (Crisp, 2021; Youngblood et al., 2021). With little research, at the time, into the effectiveness of this method of working, it was a huge risk for many to take and was all very much a learning process for practitioners. There were positives such as being “virtually” invited into people’s homes with the “welcome” being a reciprocal process, demonstrated in Dons, De Witt, et al’s 2021 article where one of the musicians noted “[i]t felt like we were on a house visit, sitting together and sharing something” (Dons et al., 2021. pp.11) as well as supporting their own mental health and wellbeing through connecting with others musically, as stated by another musician when he said ““To be able to work with music during this crisis is a gift” (Dons et al., 2021. p13).

To summarise, the pandemic made a significant impact on the working practices of community musicians and how they connected with their communities. They were impacted financially and emotionally, while trying to continue working by developing new skills and

finding new ways of practice, while following the constantly changing advice from the government. They explored and found ways to stay connected to their communities, supporting not just their own health and wellbeing but that of their participants. These new ways of practice and the ability to deliver projects online has given them an advantage for coping during potential future pandemics.

Post-Pandemic - The Community Musician

With contact tracing in place by September 2020, local restrictions were in place to avoid another lockdown although there were social distancing measures in place and limits as to how many people could gather and where. However, the inconsistency meant that local authorities and the public found it difficult to follow. Mass vaccinations began in May 2021 with cases of COVID-19 remaining high and variants emerging but by the end of July 2021 the easing of restrictions had been introduced by the government as “Freedom Day”. However, this did not signify the eradication of COVID-19, or its variants and people were still at risk of contracting it, particularly the most vulnerable (Bramwell, et al, 2022).

Musicians and participants were keen to return to in-person music making, following guidelines as best as they could, to rebuild their creative and social networks as much as the need to get back to a version of normal life (Crooke et al., 2021). The lack of the social aspect of human connection through in-person music delivery had had an impact on the wellbeing of participants and musicians alike (Crisp, 2021; Youngblood et al., 2021) and, despite the positive experiences of connecting through online music activity, the in-person experience was highly sought. In *Music as Social Life* by Thomas Turino (2008), he argues that participation in music

making is “valuable for the processes of personal and social integration that make us whole” and is important to “people’s understanding of themselves and their identities” (p1-2).

Despite government assurances, COVID-19 is still present and the risks of contracting it, and of the prevalence of long COVID, are still under research (Bramwell et al., 2022; Iwasaki, 2023). The responsibility to react to future epidemics, and to allow their participants to have the power to make choices in precautionary action, leaves a community musician in a precarious position of vigilance (Crisp, 2023).

Summary

The past few years have seen significant changes to the practice of community musicians and this literature review has highlighted several social impacts that this cultural field has been facing, finding challenges as well as victories. From exploring new ways of connecting with their communities, either online, social distancing or with vulnerable communities in mind that are shaping how a project is delivered, they have also found the challenges empowering both for themselves and their participants, and the new ways of practice have blended into the way they deliver post-pandemic. Their empowerment during this period has given them the confidence to advocate better for themselves and their communities. There was also uncertainty as to what the cultural landscape would look like when the country began emerging from lockdown. In his article for the *International Journal of Community Music* (Vol 14, 2+3), Matthew Crisp poses the question “has this time of experimentation opened the way to a new community music methodology that can shape the creative future of a country devastated by a global pandemic?” (p136). It is hoped that from this research, and through the conversations with community

musicians, their experiences will help us to explore this question and inform us of the current landscape of community music. It is also hoped that this research could facilitate further exploration into what it means to be a community musician and a freelance practitioner.

In summary, the pre-pandemic community musicians, despite the ongoing discourse and views as to what community music is, have developed a range of skills that have made them adaptable and resilient to the phenomena of the pandemic (Crisp, 2020; Sandt & Coppi, 2021). Their skill in the welcome, collaboration, nurturing trust, and empowerment through recovery has seen them evolve during a remarkable and traumatic period. The community musician is, above all else, a human, who has experienced the trauma of the pandemic alongside their communities, and sharing this experience, they have found ways to navigate through it using music as the medium of conversation and recovery (Crisp, 2020; Crooke et al., 2021; Sandt & Coppi, 2021; Youngblood et al., 2021).

Research Design

The design of this research is to be presented as a case study. Case study research is often applied in practice-based research that is related to the social sciences, such as architecture, education, and social work, originating from the field of anthropology and often used to inform on the development of societies and cultures (Denscombe, 2014; Johansson, 2007; Noor, 2008). It is a strategy of asking questions to try to understand a given situation and form a hypothesis that attempts to “explore a host of factors that may be influencing a situation” (Hancock et al., 2021, p8). Noor (2008) describes case study research is an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence” (p.1602) that, through observation and experience, identifies common patterns across a range of cases. Case study research is the process in which many experiences, relationships or processes are presented as an illumination of a particular event or phenomenon (Denscombe, 2014). The reflective conversations in this research are examples of the participants making sense of their world during and after the pandemic, are presented as shared experiences and are sources of evidence of common patterns that emerged.

Participants and Recruitment

The participants were identified from the author's network of musician connections across the North East of England. They were invited, through email invitations, to participate in the research, with the author providing options for the interviews to take place at a time and location convenient to them. They were invited to contribute to one conversation with the option of a second interview dependent on availability. All participants were made aware of the ethics

protocol approved by York St John University, whose policies are in accordance with The Concordat to Support Research Integrity and the UK Research Integrity Office's (UKRIO) Code of Practice for Research.

All six participants gave consent to their involvement and to being identified by name in the research results. Each participant worked across many musical communities, from working with preschool children to the elderly, and across music genres from opera to electronic music making. With the range of communities and genres it was considered of interest to identify the common themes that could emerge through the diversities of practice of being a community musician.

Conceptual Frameworks

Community music in the UK has grown out of the dominant history of music as a refined art of learning only afforded by those with the financial means, through the transporting of music from other cultures as people arrived from post-colonised countries, and the civil rights activism of the 1960's and 70's, into the community development and interventionist art form of the 1980's and onwards (Deane & Mullen, 2018; Higgins, 2012; Kelly, 1984). From this, there have been various conceptual frameworks in trying to understand and articulate the practice of community music. This research does not endeavour to build a theory from its findings, however, it did draw on two specific frameworks in its investigation into the cultural and social phenomenon of the pandemic, ethics of care and communities of practice.

The first framework that I drew from was that of ethics of care which is described by Held as “the values of trust, solidarity, mutual concern, and empathetic responsiveness” (2005, p. 16). The community musician is working to the morals of care, whose interests are “intertwined with the person they care for” (Held, 2005, p. 13). Tied in with the concept of hospitality, of the ‘welcome,’ it is also a form of reflection, of the endeavour to make connections and decision-making through creative and critical action (Lines, 2018). Although not a theory identified as a theory of practice, none of the participants spoke directly about any theory, the ethics of care was an apparent practice within the community musicians participating in this research. In fact, they spoke often of the relationships they have with their communities and were considerate of how the pandemic was affecting them, how they could stay in contact and how they could prepare to return to working face-to-face with them. Belfiore sees the ethics of care as one of the ‘hidden costs’ of the community arts practitioner, and one in which arts institutions should take some responsibility for, with her article calling for a “‘critical recharge’ of cultural policy research that highlights the need for fresh critical scholarship focused on questions of social justice and equity relating to both artists’ labour conditions and practices of arts project funding” (2021, p. 15).

Then there are communities of practice as a social theory of learning, placing learning in the context of lived experience and social participation. Wenger (1998) summarises the components of social participatory learning as the following. See also figure 2:

1. Meaning: a way of talking about our (changing) ability - individually and collectively, - to experience our life and the world as meaningful.

2. Practice: a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action.
3. Community: a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognisable as competence.
4. Identity: a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities. (p. 5)

Figure 2.

Components of a social theory of learning: an initial inventory. (p.5)



Note: Image obtained from <https://www.scribbr.com/apa-examples/image/>

Data Collection

The research was conducted with six community musicians who took part in recorded conversations. There were three participants who could contribute to one conversation each, and three who could contribute to two conversations. The second conversations helped to delve further into their experiences and to recover information lost during technical issues during their first conversations. Overall, nine conversations took place. The conversations were recorded and took place at the availability of the musicians, usually between locations where they were working and in spaces that were not always acoustically rich. Their generosity of time was very appreciated and, although it took some coordination to arrange, it was heartwarming to know that they were all busy with their work.

The recorded conversations with musicians were guided by four open-ended questions, themes emerged and common patterns across the range of conversations were identified. The multiple streams of data derived from their responses to the questions were compared using NVivo qualitative analysis software to uncover themes in their experiences. This enabled the multiple voices of the participants to emerge, share their experiences and uncover similarities that will inform an understanding of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of community musicians in the North East of England.

The interviews took place over a three-month period at the convenience of the research participants, in locations and at times that fit in with their work schedules. Due to the nature of their working schedules and the scope of the North East area, the interviews took place in a variety of settings, each acoustically affecting the quality of the recordings. This meant that the

sound quality of the recordings of conversations varied due to external noises and acoustics of the space, despite using the exact same recording equipment. This will become apparent when listening to the podcast episodes that partner this research. These locations were chosen to fit in with the participants' working week, usually taking place during lunchtime, and between the musicians moving from one location to another for delivery of sessions. The locations included their homes, my own home and community buildings.

The conversations were recorded using an iPad and Shure MOTIV V7+ podcast microphone with the Shure Audio application, as well as a Zoom H2 Handy recorder. Notes were also taken during the conversations to aid memory and as a backup in case of technical issues. Using the Otter.ai online transcription service, the quality of the recordings and the strength of some of the North East accents did make some of the transcriptions difficult to decipher, however, much of the content of the conversations were not detrimentally impacted. The sound issues will become apparent when parts of their conversations are broadcast on my website via the podcast, “The Community Musician.” The transcriptions were then coded using the NVivo data analysis software.

Interviews and Questions

Through recorded conversations, the participants reflected on their work pre- and post-COVID and during the lockdown periods during 2020. The reflective conversations were guided by the following four open-ended questions that moved them from pre-covid practice to the present day.

- What did your practice look like before COVID?
- How did you adapt your practice during lockdown?
- How has your practice changed since the pandemic?
- Reflecting on your practice and the challenges you have faced, have you adapted your practice and personal investment into your work?

The conversations with participants were subjective, formed through their experiences and interpretation of events and their emotional responses to the social phenomenon of the pandemic. The participants were interviewed separately, no group conversations took place, so all conversations stand alone as individual experiences. Permissions were gained from every participant to use their conversations for this research and to identify them by name. In the findings section of this paper only their first names will be used to identify their quotes, with their full names being used in the podcast recordings.

Data Analysis

This case study research was viewed through a phenomenological lens by exploring how the participants' lived experience through the pandemic impacted them and their practice. Phenomenology is an approach concerned with how people experience their lives and/or the larger world and how they interpret them (Denscombe, 2014). It is a form of social research that is reflective and reliant on the experience of the individual (Denscombe, 2014; Hancock et al., 2021; Sokolowski, 2012), which, in short, uncovers “the inherent logic of that experience or phenomenon, the way in which it makes sense to its subjects” (Dukes, 1984, p.199). It was anticipated that the community musicians who took part in this research would have similar

experiences of the shared phenomena of the pandemic, which in turn could be reflected in the wider community of musicians across the UK. The phenomena of the COVID-19 pandemic saw a sharing of identity and a sense of collective purpose spreading across societies (Van Bavel et al., 2020). The sense of connection, that is deeply rooted in human instinct (Wenger, 1998), meant that the communities that musicians were working in, and building, were the lifeline that they were seeking to find strategies to keep connected to during the pandemic (Crooke et al., 2021; Dons et al., 2021; Sandt & Coppi, 2021). Through approaching this research using a phenomenological lens, the focus was concerned on how things were experienced first-hand by the participants and how they made sense of their lived experiences (Denscombe, 2014; Dons et al., 2021; Johnson, 1990). This study viewed all participants' experiences, comparing the differences and similarities, and through coding and exploring the key issues that the pandemic brought to their practice the findings will be reported under the key themes that emerged.

The sample size of participants and their experiences in this research project are in no way representative of community musicians in the North East of England, without taking into consideration other areas of the UK. It appears that, from this sample, community musicians are thriving, however there appears to be little documentation that people working in the arts and culture sector did not recover or have found their work impacted in other ways by the pandemic. I would suggest that, until the research is taken to uncover how many community musicians were lost to other careers through the impact of the pandemic, that this is just a small window to the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on currently practising community musicians.

A relational bias exists through the personal relationship I have with the musicians who were approached to participate in this research. They came from my own network of community musicians who have all supported each other over the years, staying in contact and recommending each other for projects. I approached several musicians who I had connections with and who were all currently working in the North East of England. All but one of the musicians were child-free and therefore held fewer obligations and felt the financial impact in separate ways, as would have been felt by those with families to support. This does not lessen the impact, only changes their responses to it. Some had other responsibilities to vulnerable members of their family who they were in lockdown with, for example. It could be suggested that further research could take place with community musicians who had families to support during this time, or those who had to take account of immuno-compromised family members or account for their own health issues.

There are community musicians who have started their careers either during or since lockdown, with young people being reportedly higher than average, whose careers did not survive or who have moved into other professions (Bradbury et al., 2021). However, the participants of this research had all been working in the sector for 5 years or more before the pandemic hit and had built resilience and relationships with their communities to be able to find ways to navigate through it. There were some who questioned whether they should change careers, as they were in doubt as to the availability of work post-pandemic, but all of them saw their positions as community musicians as part of their identity. It would be interesting, through further research, to understand the impact that the pandemic had on newly qualifying, early career community musicians during this time and have their perspective of their practice.

The participants of this research approached the pandemic as a chance to learn. They were responsive to their communities and supported them in learning alongside them, particularly in the practice of online delivery. Some had considered leaving the profession but had found that their identity was in being a community musician. The theory of communities of learning is based on the natural responses of humans to interact, create ritual, find identity and culture (Cross & Morley, 2009; Merker, 2009; Wenger, 1998). It is this natural impulse that saw many people responding to the pandemic through engagement in the arts online (Bradbury et al., 2021).

Themes

Welcome includes the relationships with their communities that all participants talked about. They each have a wealth of experience, talking about the variety of communities that they work with and how each of their communities were uppermost in their minds when the pandemic struck, throughout the lockdowns and how to emerge from isolation. They were concerned for their mental health and wellbeing, and the connectedness that was at risk with the lack of music making during lockdowns and during social distancing when restrictions were in place. As is described by Higgins (2012), the welcome is the invitation, the “hospitality at the centre of their practice” (p138) and was therefore an expected theme that would emerge. It was interesting that such a fundamental part of their practice, and what ensures that their participants are engaged and creative within their sessions, and in doing so building their community, was at such significant risk during the pandemic.

Hidden Costs emerged as something that is not obvious to those who do not work in community music, but one which is recognised amongst community musicians. It relates to the financial, emotional, and psychological impacts for socially engaged artists (Belfiore, 2021). Through the act of hospitality and nurturing relationships with their community members, there is an emotional responsibility that the community musician carries (Belfiore, 2021; Camlin, 2015; Higgins, 2012) which naturally impacts their own emotional wellbeing. There was also the financial impact that the pandemic brought, with work coming to an abrupt halt, from the confusing information and applications for government financial support, and historically from the anecdotal evidence of cost of time and investment in resources and administration (Belfiore, 2021; Case for Culture, 2020; Crisp, 2020; Dons et al., 2021). This theme emerged from the instances where participants spoke of their personal challenges, whether with their wellbeing or their financial insecurity, and those of their participants, as well as the additional work, both time and financially, that went into learning and delivering online sessions.

Adaptability emerged as community musicians are known to be “boundary walkers” (Higgins 2012) who are reflective, reactive, and responsive to change. From their ability to work in collaboration with other artists and cross-sector settings, and within health, education, and community settings. They are responsive to the changes within a workshop, from flexible facilitation, whether that be from the variations of the number of participants in the room, new participants arriving mid-project, changes in individuals' circumstances (health, wellbeing, etc.) or learning needs, to changes with their venue, temperature, facilities, resources available. They also have to be adaptable in their employment from funding constraints, short term contracts and disparities between organisations pay rates as well as societal changes, such as government

policies, austerity, rise in depression, etc. (Belfoire, 2021; Dons et al., 2021; Higgins, 2012; Smilde, 2018). In short, they must be adaptable. From the conversations with the participants, it was clear that they all had much learning to do to be able to move their sessions online, keep communications open and find other ways of connecting with their communities. Some lost employment and became fully freelance, learning how to budget and manage their time, and there were examples of working with their funders to find new ways of using their funding to learn and develop.

Recovery comes from the conversations about the above three themes. They talked about how the relationships recovered when sessions went back to face-to-face and how they made that happen with government guidelines in place. They also talked about how they approach their work, better managing themselves, be that financial, emotional or time investments. The adaptations they made during this period were also spoken about, how they have taken the learning from the period of the pandemic and are now implementing that in their current practice.

I have created sub-themes to distinguish and bring focus to the main theme. For ‘Welcome,’ I have used two sub-themes, one to highlight the breadth of experience that the participants have and the variety of hospitable spaces they nurture, and the other to focus on the relationships that they have with their communities. Within ‘Adaptability’ there emerged four sub-themes that helped to support the variety of adaptations that they had to make throughout the pandemic. Their reliance on their own creative communities of practitioners, the new skills they had to learn to deliver online, both technical and delivery, and the success stories to show that they had found ways to overcome difficulties. ‘Hidden Costs’ looks at the financial and health

and wellbeing impacts on themselves and their participants, and 'Recovery' had two sub-themes focussing on the emergence from lockdown and the learning that the participants had taken from the whole experience.

Findings

Welcome

The breadth of experience.

When Camlin (2015) describes the dialogue that is questioning what a community musician is, he says “in striving to articulate what unites us, we often merely emphasise our difference” (p234). I found through our conversations that the title “community musician” was often replaced with a variety of titles, reflecting the various practices of the work of the musicians in the research. However, there were noticeably clear similarities.

There were 47 responses across all the conversations about their roles as community musicians. Asked about their work pre-pandemic, the conversations led to a range of responses with noticeably clear similarities between the musicians. They were initially asked to describe their job/role and they all responded in a variety of ways. The descriptions ranged from community musician, singer/songwriter, musician, music leader, educator, composer, music teacher and music facilitator, with some giving themselves several titles to encompass the range of what they do. For the purposes of simplicity for this report, they will be referred to as musicians:

I suppose I'm a singer, who has diversified in lots of different directions. (David)

It was clear that the musicians I spoke to worked with a range of ages and abilities, from babies and preschoolers, through primary and secondary ages, young people, families, adults, and the elderly. There was also the diversity of musical genres and disciplines:

So, I was working with early years, in the looked-after, looked-after children. And I was delivering some West African percussion ensemble work, and I was doing a little bit of, sort of working with adults and children with disabilities ... my own company as well, so I was doing some delivery of groove-based loop, digital music making. (Jim)

The scope of the community musician was in the skill to deliver a “real mix of styles and approaches” (Laura) and has often been described as “wearing a lot of hats”:

The balance of which hat was on the most was probably different, was probably very different. (Katie)

The breadth of their employment would include a range of commissioned work, one-off projects, long term contracted projects, employment with an organisation/charity:

I would say at that point was maybe 60% employed, 40% freelance/self-employed. (Ashleigh)

All but one mentioned that they were working on projects with vulnerable participants, either through health or circumstance:

It's a space for young people that can't, that are struggling to engage within mainstream educations. (Ashleigh)

Relationships.

Almost everyone (44 references across 6 conversations) spoke about the relationships they had with their participants, how they were integral to participant engagement, how important these relationships were to themselves and the social impact that creating a welcoming space can achieve:

Like the art or the creativity is like, it's the foil, isn't it? And then all this other stuff happens because you've got that focus of we're going to do something creative, but all of that other stuff, building networks and bonding with people and laughing and telling each other what, what's happened in your life, that, that's a really important part of it all, isn't it? (Bridie)

Their inclusive approach has built trust within their communities, and they have gained social capital to support some of their communities through the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021:

A lot of the choir did return, the choirs retained really high numbers, and I think the reason for that, I think there's a lot of reasons, I think, yes, they valued it, and they wanted to keep doing it. They wanted to see each other and maintain that sense of community so that there was something to come back to afterwards. (Bridie)

Musicians were finding that their participants, in some cases, were proactively working toward keeping their community together:

The choir were very hot on staying in touch with people, as long as those people want to be kept in touch with, so sending letters to people, find out somebody's been unwell, and phone people up, that sort of things. (Bridie)

The overall responses to this theme demonstrated the ability to diversify and to connect with participants on a meaningful level are skills that I believe have allowed this particular set of musicians to be able to adapt to the circumstances created by the pandemic. Their skill set in working with a wide range of ages, abilities and approaches, their inclusive approach to learning and their skill level in creating safe and engaging environments for their participants shows a level of “relational approach to learning” that can create strong social bonds with their participants, with them feeling “accounted for, not just as learners, but as human beings” (Camlin, 2015, p242).

Adaptability

Communities adapt to social changes, and community musicians are adept at responding to the communities they support and work with. Their ability to be responsive and reflexive, be proactive and self-manage (Coffman, 2009; Smilde, 2018) has given community musicians, and notably the participants of this research, the ability to respond to the pandemic and find ways of working with their communities.

The supportive community.

Lockdown revealed that there was a lot of support from various networks and communities, with musicians, artists, technicians, and organisations supporting, sharing their knowledge and expertise, adapting funding to continue facilitation or research, and supporting one another. Of the nine research participants, they all were grateful for the varieties of ways they were supported during the pandemic.

A technician posted this really comprehensive document about how to lead a session on Zoom, how to lead a choir session on Zoom, the kit you needed, what settings you needed, put Zoom on, like, and it was incredible. (Bridie)

They carried on paying us for our time to research, buy kit. (Jim)

Developing tech skills for online delivery.

Everyone spoke about some of their work moving online, how for some it was a very new concept and they had to learn how to use the technology, build confidence in themselves and their participants to engage online.

I had to just get really comfortable with technology really, really fast. Because I knew if I didn't, that I wouldn't have a job to come back to basically. (Bridie)

They was a lot of new skills to develop with regards to setting up and working the technology:

I wrote a document about how to access Zoom, how to click on the link, and kind of what it means in as basic language as I could, you know, with lots of print screen images and things just to make it super accessible. (Laura)

Developing facilitation skills for online delivery.

Out of every conversation there were 35 mentions about how the musicians had to adapt their facilitation to engage with their participants during online delivery:

My teaching style has adapted, because it's very different when you're sitting next to a piano student or you're standing next to a flute student, you can show directly what you're doing, you can adjust things, but on zoom, you had to demonstrate. I think you have a more rounded view about how to get a message across. (Laura)

Difficulties with online delivery.

Moving to online delivery meant a host of adaptations and numerous outcomes to consider. There were many difficulties that they and their participants were facing with getting online, such as tech poverty and Wi-Fi capabilities:

My Wi-Fi is super unstable, so I bought myself a ridiculously long ethernet cable so every time I was due to do a zoom, I had to weave it through the house, above curtains, you know, on pictures through to my music studio. (Laura)

Well, I work with vulnerable adults, and they mostly didn't, weren't able to engage for straightforward reasons of not having a good enough connection, not having enough phones and/or tablets or whatever. (David)

There were also issues with connectivity during sessions that impacted on the engagement between participants and musicians:

I think it's really difficult if you're working with people who worked really hard to like, build the trust up with, and then technology lets that connection down. It's, it's both a technological connection, but also an emotional connection that's then kind of damaged by that. (Bridie)

Some participants and groups were unable to engage online, either through lacking in confidence, not understanding the technology or finding the process stressful:

The other thing I had was the dementia friendly group, but that demographic and that age group, it was really difficult for them to access it, it just wasn't really beneficial for them, it was more stressful. And getting online before they even got to the good bit, which was the music. (Laura)

Musicians also found that delivering online had an impact on their health and wellbeing. They found that having to adapt to how to emotionally engage with participants was difficult for everyone:

And I could remember being completely floored with the exhaustion of a zoom meeting.

(Katie)

A lot of your normal toolkit isn't, isn't usable anymore, like, just sensing how people are feeling in the room. (Bridie)

Success stories.

Despite the difficulties of working online and the adaptations that musicians had to make to facilitate online sessions and engage with their participants, there were a few musicians who had positive experiences of delivering online:

We did Let Out The Noise (young person's singing group), which did happen before COVID, but then we took it online, we found it worked better online. (Ashleigh)

Through this theme there emerged a sense of social capital, where there was a real coming together of communities through the phenomena of the pandemic. Talking with the musicians, they all valued the importance of community during the period of lockdown, from musicians and artists supporting each other by sharing information and knowledge. They

responded to the pandemic by being proactive, sharing information, learning from other's experiences, learning new skills to stay connected to their communities, troubleshooting with each other, and having new and interesting experiences in how to be a community musician during a pandemic. They communicated, adapted, and worked with their participants to stay connected, with music almost becoming secondary to the importance of connection. There were definite areas where working online was not possible, with the vulnerable and those with dementia/Alzheimer's, whereas the younger generation were more receptive to working online. All talked about the human connection, of being in a physical space with their participants, as having an impact on their ability to create a welcoming space and commenting that "nothing beats the real thing" (David).

Recovery

The arts and culture sector started showing signs of recovery by April 2021 it was recognised that engagement in arts and culture needed to be supported to aid in the health and wellbeing of the population (Bradbury et al., 2021). These signs of resilience of the community musician (Crooke et al., 2021; Sandt & Coppi, 2021) were apparent in the relationships and connections made with their participants as much as their creativity was a tool for collaborative activities.

Emerging from lockdown.

Emerging from lockdown was a slow and careful process. Everyone spoke about the transition from a pandemic world into a post pandemic world, where infection control was still

paramount, social skills had taken an impact and the confidence in being in a space with others had been hit, not just of their participants but of themselves:

There was a lot of like, projection of yeah, come on, this is great, innit. And I was like, I'm not sure it is actually, I don't know how I feel about this. Took me quite a while. (Jim)

I mean, there was a lot of vulnerable people out there before the pandemic hit. And yeah, they basically, they suffered a great deal and you can't just put those pieces back together again. (David)

There were participants or groups who took longer to feel comfortable with getting back to working face-to-face. There was caution from some of their participants, particularly those who were vulnerable:

And when things started opening up again, I had a couple of sessions that stayed online a bit longer. So, I had a couple of students that stayed online until it was really safe. You know, until people were really comfortable. I found there was a lot of anxiety around letting someone into your home. (Laura)

They also endured losses during that time. Some lost participants due to death through COVID or other health related issues, other participants were not comfortable in returning because of their own health issues or those of family members, and it was noted that mental health issues had affected many of the already vulnerable participants:

Definitely lost people everywhere, due to fear, there's a lot of people who got into conspiracy theories, you know, vulnerable adults who, you know, got weird information.

(David)

To encourage participants to return, the musicians, or the organisations/partnerships they were working with, had to find ways to support their participants in returning to face-to-face classes. Protocols had to be put in place that aligned with the current information from the government, which was constantly changing, difficult to navigate and to keep up to date with:

Because the guidelines were so difficult to navigate through, um, you know, and to understand what it meant, and, you know, depending on the group size and whatever, you know, it wasn't easy. (Laura)

There was also the additional work that it would take in managing the groups and the space that their sessions would take place in.

It eats into the time that, you know, that you prepare for things. It was less about the music initially because it was more about making sure you get this bit right. (Laura)

They also spoke about how their participants responded to returning to music making with them.

There was a real feeling of people wanted it back. Because they felt like, you know, they, they needed something positive to look forward to. (Laura)

Once the country opened and face-to-face delivery was allowed to commence, there were still many hurdles to overcome, from ensuring that participants felt safe and welcome, groups lost members due to death and illness, and COVID was still being spread amongst groups and musicians. This also highlighted the vulnerability of freelance workers:

I've had COVID four times now. And you have that thing of, well, I'm not positive now but my husband is, well, he's not positive now, but my little boy is, and we've had that on a couple of occasions. And you've got to then go to, you know, all the different stakeholders in what we do, you have to go to them individually and go, How do you feel about this? And then navigate that. And yeah, it does, sort of brings up the lack of security in, in our work. (Katie)

However, with the new skills in online delivery, it meant that the research participants were able to deliver a hybrid blend of online and face-to-face sessions:

And when things started to open up again, I had a couple of sessions that stayed online a bit longer, until it was really safe. (Laura)

A new approach.

Everyone spoke about their returning to working face-to-face, the adaptations they made to their delivery that they have carried over, how they have changed their approach to the kind of work that they take on and how they are much more considerate of their own mental health and wellbeing.

Going back to face-to-face delivery was not as easy as they had anticipated:

Actually, it was almost, not, well, yes, it was more stressful, that period of going back out there and tentatively sort of putting, dipping your toe in the water of live stuff again, has been music more stressful, because it's an, it's a complete unknown. (Katie)

There were some ways that the musicians had changed the way they delivered when working online that they then took forward into their practice since returning to face-to-face sessions.

I found that I had to take notes whenever I was doing anything zoom related, because there would be those gaps or those stutters. So I filled notebooks of just random scribbles and what scales they played. What I suggest that they do, and I still do that now after. So it's been quite nice to add it in. (Laura)

Every musician talked about how they are more considerate of their own health and wellbeing since the pandemic, and how they are now careful in the projects they are choosing to take on.

So that is absolutely my first port of call is, what do I want to do? Where do I want to go to do the job? How much do I want to work? And so really kind of putting yourself first.
(Laura)

We are currently living in a post-pandemic world where COVID-19 is still infectious. Despite the government no longer advising preventative measures, musicians are still working with caution:

So, some things like spatial awareness and being aware of, like keeping distance and being aware that I'm not going to be breathing any germs over people, etc., etc. (Jim)

There was also a bit of comfort taken in knowing that they had developed their practice to working online and that this was something that they could offer participants, whether for reasons of health, distance, or future pandemic lockdowns:

*And it still is an option, which I suppose is nice to have, you know, fingers crossed?
Should anything like that happen again, you know, that I would feel comfortable knowing it's an option. (Laura)*

Despite the concerns over the availability of work post-pandemic, and the loss of projects they had previously been working on, the musicians were finding that they were working as much as they did pre-pandemic.

I got quite a lot of new students, you know, just enquiries came flooding in. (Laura)

So that I actually have a steady income now, whereas I didn't so much before COVID, I've got much more work that is regular. (Katie)

From the results of this theme, a picture emerges of a group of musicians who have navigated an incredibly stressful period, understanding that their responses to this were reflected in how their participants would be feeling, and trying to adhere to government guidelines. Understanding the guidelines, and the science that went with it, was also a new set of skills that they had to develop if they were to emerge successfully and begin delivering face-to-face sessions again. They had to consider the spaces they were facilitating in, their participants, particularly those who were vulnerable, how to support their participants through grief and trauma, and they had to manage all of this alongside their own uncertainties and stresses.

There surfaces a group of musicians who used their experiences of the pandemic to develop themselves emotionally and professionally. There does not appear to have been a conscious forward motion to achieve this but that they reflected and developed in ways that unconsciously benefited them when the lockdowns were lifted.

Hidden Costs

As discussed in Belfiore's 2021 article "Who cares? At what price? The hidden costs of socially engaged arts labour and the moral failure of cultural policy" for the European Journal of Cultural Studies, there are "hidden" costs that are shouldered by socially engaged practitioners, such as emotional and financial costs. Alongside the financial impact of the pandemic, the musicians I spoke to all worked with participants from vulnerable or disadvantaged backgrounds. As Belfiore states:

There is something distinctive in the experiences of socially engaged artists working with participants who are from disadvantaged backgrounds, displaced, vulnerable or at risk of various forms of social exclusion. This uniqueness relates to the personal, psychological costs and the ethical dilemmas artists face (p.2)

Financial impact.

Starting from the first lockdown on 23rd March 2020, it was anticipated that cultural workers would suffer financially as venues and projects were cancelled and that the sector would lose jobs with the closure of arts organisations. Financial support from the government was insufficient, with musicians finding they were not eligible due to the government's lack of understanding of the multiple income streams (self-employed/short contract/zero hours/etc.) of employment in the sector (Bradbury et al., 2021, p. 23-25). This was reflected across all the conversations with the research participants.

I think there was a period of panic, like, which I think for everybody that happened.

(Bridie)

Some participants of this research had considered leaving the profession due to concerns about community work to return to and the need to find financial security:

I did apply for other non-related musical jobs, I did consider not going back into music when things opened up again, and I wasn't sure whether the work would be there.

(Laura)

Everyone spoke about the vulnerability of working freelance and how that impacted them when the country went into lockdown. The financial insecurity of being freelance was highlighted during this period:

So, it just came flooding down. It was just like, the shutters came down and everything.

So, it was blind panic, you know, really, I would say is the best way to describe that, because I knew that the majority of my income was self-employed based. (Laura)

However, there were also stories of being able to access financial help and funding being adapted to continue with projects. These were really appreciated in helping to keep the musicians afloat:

I mean, I was in a very fortunate position because Newcastle City Council, who fund Connects Audio, they'd already budgeted for us, even though we're freelance, and so they said, well we have no idea how long this is gonna go on, so we'll honour our contracts to you and we want you to use the time, to find out the best way of working online. (Jim)

Health and wellbeing.

There were 34 responses to this theme from most of the participants. They spoke about their response to the first lockdown of March 2020 and the impact that it had on their health and wellbeing:

Lockdown was, I found myself, it was either fight or flight, and I just went for the fight. (Ashleigh)

Online delivery was a way to connect with their communities, continue working and to earn money, however, the majority of those working online mentioned how it impacted on their wellbeing:

And I could remember being completely floored with the exhaustion of a Zoom meeting, and apparently, it's because of the cognitive, too much cognitive information. (Katie)

Like many of their participants, they also had to consider the ramifications of returning to face-to-face delivery:

Yeah, I lost a family member during lockdown, and I've currently got two very poorly family members, you know, so that, those are the things that matter. (Laura)

Taking care of their own mental health and wellbeing has seen our research participants approach their work in a new way, considering the impact that it might have on them, taking on projects that align with their morals:

I'm getting better at deciding what's for me and what's not for me, or what I agree with, what I don't agree with, and if I have the same morals as somewhere. (Ashleigh)

And I think, kind of learning to switch off is a really big thing in this world, learning not to be present all the time. (Katie)

Overall, they felt that, because they had managed to endure the pandemic, develop new skills, and begin focusing on their own health and wellbeing, that they had built their resilience for the future:

Because I think having survived the lockdown, I feel much more robust about what I can and can't do. (Bridie)

Participants health and wellbeing.

They were also very conscious that their communities were also going through the experience and were keen to connect with them:

It's really just a way of surviving and keeping our groups that we had going, together, and because they want it, and they need it in a way that they didn't need it before. (David)

Working with so many people, it was understandable that they would lose participants during lockdown, either due to ill-health or to COVID-19. They talked about navigating that with their groups and sharing the grief with them.

And some of our members had died. And that was really, really hard. But I very much as the MD made the decision that we deal with this head on, we don't hide from it, we don't shun from it, we honour people. (Bridie)

They recognised that confidence and social skills were a challenge for some of their participants in returning to sessions:

Their mental health has just taken a real battering, they don't have the confidence any longer to join a group, even though perhaps it's not actually to do with the fear of COVID anymore, it's just that those social skills and the kind of confidence to get involved in things, it's kind of dilapidated to sort of withered away a bit. (Bridie)

In response, and to build confidence in their participants to return to groups, musicians took measures to support their return:

So, we had to think really, really carefully about creating an environment that was safe, but also was inclusive, because what we didn't want to happen is that only the strongest came back. (Bridie)

The immediate financial impact of the lockdowns was something that most of the research participants were happy to talk about despite its having been a negative period that brought with it many concerns. However, they appreciated the support they could access, namely those who were given furlough through employment contracts and funders who continued their funding to support transition into online practice. The instability of working as a freelance practitioner was brought into the spotlight during this period, where some considered leaving the profession.

Their mental health and wellbeing were affected, due to the impact to their financial security, navigating a new way of working through online delivery, the uncertainty of whether there would be work once the country emerged from lockdown, and the concern for the vulnerabilities within their own families and their communities. However, they found ways to control their emergence from lockdown by following guidelines and consulting with other practitioners and their participants and finding support from others to help them to manage the new ways of working:

I think our, our little North East art sector did an absolute blinder; you know, because I think people did just, would absolutely, selflessly help each other out. (Bridie)

Conclusion

This report shows the community musician as having great resilience in being reflective and responsive, adapting and recovering from the pandemic. It is not apparent how deep the impact of the pandemic has been, but what we are seeing is that they are approaching their work differently. They are approaching their work moralistically, there is a new focus on what it is they are doing and the value of what it is they are doing, raising the bar of the quality of the work that they want to be doing and the quality of the impact on both participants and themselves. This new approach has the potential to impact the work, potentially impacting how things are funded, as they demand fairer wages. They are stronger in advocating for themselves which may initiate changes in policy for better support, not just for creatives but also for their communities. However, this is all long-term thinking, but I think the impact of what has happened during covid, what the community musicians have experienced has certainly changed their outlook to an extent on what it is that they do and what makes them a community musician.

It appears that any uncertainty during the lockdowns as to whether there would be work available after the pandemic was unfounded as all participants were busy with a variety of projects. What did become clear is that they are more aware of the choices they make in accepting work, aligning themselves with projects that would give them social capital. This also aligned with their heightened awareness of their own health and wellbeing and that of their participants, working on projects that had social and health benefits to their communities. What has been apparent is that this group of community musicians were highly equipped with the

skills in the welcome, in nurturing trust and collaborating with others and were able to adapt to the challenges of working through and emerging from the pandemic.

The breadth of demographics that the musicians worked across was a demonstration of their skill set but also of their adaptability. Because of this, they did not all label themselves as community musicians per se, but they clearly demonstrated that they are ‘boundary walkers’ (Higgins, 2012), able to create hospitable spaces with a variety of people, across a range of genres, liaise with funders and their communities to evolve in response to the phenomenon of the pandemic, and engage in reciprocal relationships of learning.

Online learning itself brought many questions to the fore. There were successes and challenges, with each musician feeling confident that they could return to online delivery if another pandemic arose. However, challenges were marked in that they were working with vulnerable communities who had difficulty accessing music online, either through digital poverty, technical skills, or emotional ill health. They also had their own difficulties that were reflected in those of their participants. Overall, it was felt that engagement online was a stopgap before returning to face-to-face delivery and further research could determine whether online engagement could have the same benefits of supporting health and wellbeing as in-person music making.

I believe from this research that community music has gone through experiences that have changed the community musician. Community music itself is still “an active intervention between a music leader or facilitator and participants” (Higgins, p.21) however, they have all had

the shared experience of the pandemic that has impacted them emotionally, psychologically, and financially. Communities have become closer due to this shared experience, the ethics of care are in higher consideration both for those in their communities who are vulnerable, and in preparation of future pandemics. It is apparent that the ethics of care sits squarely on the shoulders of the community musician, highlighting Belfiore's concerns that arts institutions, and funding bodies have "failed to fulfil their own responsibilities towards both artists and participants" (Belfiore, p.14).

We are, at the time of writing, no longer socially distancing, there are no government guidelines for how to socialise, little pressure to mask, and lateral testing is no longer compulsory. There has been a shift in society that has impacted health and well-being, development, poverty, and education that could see the community musician's role take on a more therapeutic role. There are still vulnerable communities and there is still the possibility of infection spikes or a new variant, which will mean that community musicians will have to make further adaptations. This group of research participants have shown they can adapt their practice and, of the musicians who took part in the research, they are all conscious of this shift within their communities, and within themselves, and are seeking new ways of working, developing stronger networks, and sharing experiences as reciprocal relationships of learning.

This research shows how community music is not necessarily about music. It is, as Bridie put it on page 35 "Like the art or the creativity is like, it's the foil, isn't it?" Community music is a space where people share, learn, find identity, meaning and purpose, where the community musician is a member of this space, facilitating the community.

Further Research Suggestions:

1. What has happened to the community musicians whose careers did not survive the pandemic and why did they not make it through?
2. Were there any differences in how COVID-19 impacted community musicians with children to support, to those who did not?
3. How did COVID-19 impact community musicians who had immuno-compromised family members and/or their own health issues? How were they able to navigate the pandemic?
4. What were the experiences of emerging community musicians pre- and post-pandemic?
5. What are the benefits to supporting health and wellbeing through online music engagement?
6. What can arts organisations and funding bodies learn with regard to considering the ethics of care in their financing and support of a project?

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