Improvisation, Musical Communities, and the COVID-19 Pandemic:
A Special Issue of *Critical Studies in Improvisation / Études critiques en improvisation*

Co-edited by Daniel Fischlin, Laura Risk, and Jesse Stewart

The COVID-19 pandemic has turned the music industry upside-down overnight and impacted music-making at all levels. Communities of freelancers, small venues, and local arts organizations have been some of the hardest hit sectors in the creative economy. Within the fields of jazz and improvised music alone, a sobering list of people who have passed away as a result of the COVID-19 virus includes Henry Grimes, Giuseppi Logan, Mike Longo, Ellis Marsalis Jr., Wallace Roney, Manu Dibango, Bucky Pizzarelli, and Lee Konitz.

Even as other sectors of the economy reopen, the performing arts remain on hold with venues closed indefinitely, festivals deferred (some until 2021), touring on shutdown, and even music lessons severely curtailed. Social distancing has foregrounded the presumptions of mobility and physical closeness that underpin music-making and music consumption, and has called into question the economic viability of current models for musical performance, consumption, curation, and dissemination. This special issue of *Critical Studies in Improvisation / Études critiques en improvisation* challenges musicians, performers, scholars, arts presenters, and other cultural workers to reflect on this extraordinary moment and begin envisaging a post-pandemic musical landscape.

Where Naomi Klein's concepts of shock doctrine and disaster capitalism articulate how moments of crisis are used to impose even worse policies on diverse populations as standard operating procedure for corporate and oligarchic self-interest, this special issue proposes an approach to crisis rooted in a form of reverse shock doctrine. By this we mean critical analysis rooted in community testimony that advocates for ways to improve conditions for disadvantaged or challenged groups—in this case, musical communities and musicians who have found themselves improvising their very livelihoods in response to the pandemic. Such analysis gathers diverse voices and perspectives in ways that allow for new initiatives, concrete community action, and innovative policy directions to be implemented as an outcome of the critical learning that moments of crisis afford. Following on Daniel Fischlin and Eric Porter's just published book, *Playing for Keeps: Improvisation in the Aftermath*, this special issue addresses the social practice of improvisation in the aftermath of crisis and the ways in which improvising musical communities model alternatives with widespread implications for addressing the pandemic.

We seek contributions relating to all aspects of music-making and music consumption in the pandemic and post-pandemic era. Two areas are of particular interest: 1) the new economics of music-making and music consumption, given the disappearance of live performance and the rise of social media and video-conferencing platforms as de facto venues; and 2) the new

intimacies of music-making and music consumption engendered by an uptick in live-streaming, the proliferation of virtual simulacrums of ensemble music-making, and the restriction of in-person music-making to one's immediate neighbours.

The volume will consist of four sections: a co-written editorial introduction; a set of academic peer-reviewed essays; a set of diverse testimonial statements across a range of experiences and sites; and a coda that gathers observations into action items and an incisive policy statement.

Contributors are encouraged to consider such questions as:

- In what ways are socially-distanced musicians and listeners using sound to improvise new social connectivities? How are informal and participatory musical communities improvising new, virtual forms of musical exchange and transmission?
- To what extent might the pandemic-generated surge of livestreaming and virtual musical communities persist in a post-pandemic landscape, and how might that impact the economics of live music performance? What inequities in the performing arts have been exacerbated by the pandemic and what forms might an equitable recovery take? Is the impetus to go online producing its own form of burnout and stress for performers and listeners?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of public and private arts funding agencies, music presenters and producers, and online music platforms during times of social distancing and in the post-pandemic era? What opportunities, if any, does the post-pandemic era offer for furthering long-term economic sustainability for musicians and environmental sustainability for the music industry?
- How has the pandemic contributed to an enhanced profile for streaming and other forms of online music, and what can be done to change the wildly asymmetrical power relations that pit the economic self-interests of high profile corporate entities that profit from online musical connectivity against the local economies of creatives? What platforms are modeling responsible behaviours in terms of supporting artists? How can these be replicated and made sustainable post-pandemic?

This special issue takes an explicitly activist stance by engaging with issues of immediate import for musicians, audiences, industry personnel, policy makers, scholars, and educators. As such, this volume will have a quick turnaround, with a goal of online publication by Fall 2020.

We seek a diverse range of submissions in a variety of formats, including scholarly articles; interviews with performers, promoters, or other industry personnel; and first-person narratives and testimonies. Scholarly articles should be 3000-5000 words. Interviews, multimedia content, and first-person narratives may be any length but we are looking for short and to the point expressions that are testimonial, have an engaged point of view, and speak directly from experience with specific examples of sites, musical practices, individual and group experience, and situational contexts and case studies. The volume emphasizes the connections contributors

see among their skills, ethical and activist positions, collaborative relationships, and performances and the larger institutional trends under which these are in the process of being subsumed, if not appropriated, during the pandemic. We encourage submissions that explore alternative writing styles—from testimony and story, to manifesto-style statements that provoke, to actual practices/exercises arising from deep practitioner experience and / or cultural difference, and so forth—all in direct relation to the pandemic and its impacts.

We are looking for aggressively concise pieces with strong points of view and voicings that avoid the distanced academic narrator—that is, we are looking for essays, reflections, and testimonies that will compel, engage, provoke, and animate our readership. After careful listening to contributors and the communities they represent, the co-editors will author a coda for the special issue that brings together a concrete set of policy recommendations and action items that community members, venues, boards of governance, online platforms, funding institutions, and the like can implement going forward in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Please send a short proposal (150–200 words) by May 15, 2020. Full-length submissions are due no later than August 1, 2020, but early submissions are strongly encouraged. Submissions with multimedia elements are welcome, including meme essays, video and photo-essays, sound and sounding essays/practices, listening lists, zines, graphic essays, multimedia and intermedial essays, and any combination of the preceding. We are accepting contributions written in French, English, or Spanish.*

Proposals should be sent to: Ariel Oleynikov, CSI/ECI Managing Editor: csi-eci@uoguelph.ca

* Spanish and French versions of this Call for Papers will be released shortly.