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Indigenizing the Mainstream: Music Festivals and Indigenous Popular Music

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Abstract

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit music and dance practices have enacted Indigenous survivance since colonization began. Contemporary Indigenous performers within and beyond present-day Canadian borders continue this performative intervention through popular music, building *sonic sovereignty*. Rooted in dialogue with Indigenous music industry professionals and musicians, this article draws on ethnographic work with Indigenous music festivals, especially the sākihiwē festival in Winnipeg, Canada where musicians from many Nations share stages. In response to music industry barriers, Indigenous media professionals created performance spaces for First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and international Indigenous musicians. With the imposition of performance restrictions due to COVID, musicians faced new limitations. On the heels of ongoing political changes, Indigenous music professionals navigated multilayered challenges for the 2020 festival season. As uncertainty continues around music festivals in the future, the article addresses how decolonial possibilities are shifting around cultural and political change through music festival performance.

KEYWORDS: music festivals, Indigenous music, sonic sovereignty, online performance

Introduction

"Tansi, Aaniin, Boozhoo," she welcomes, and then introduces herself. Shanley Spence situates herself, and speaks to the audience, grounded in a specific place. Her welcome words, greetings in Nihithaw and Anishinaabemowin, are delivered on Treaty One territory, the original lands of the Anishinaabeg, Nehiyawak, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. She shares her English name and her spirit name and tells the audience where she is from, choosing different details as she speaks first in Nihithaw and then English:

Pukatawagan and the Lake St. Martine First Nation and Winnipeg, Manitoba on Turtle Island. Spence stands at the fork of the Red River and Assiniboine River in her hometown of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. This place has been a nexus of meeting and exchange long before it became the urban center that is her home, long before the beginning of westward colonial expansion and the formation of the Canadian nation-state. This is a place from which Indigenous musicians have long been enacting what Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor calls survivance, or the active process of resilient cultural survival (Vizenor 1999). The wind at the Forks is strong, audibly commenting as Spence speaks. The summer landscape is a rich green, the blue sky cloudless. Also commenting with her is the running river water, unfrozen at this time of the year. The Provencher Bridge spans behind Spence, the pedestrian Esplanade Riel a visual marker of 21st Century Winnipeg, and the vehicular traffic behind it an audible marker of downtown.

A hoop dancer, storyteller, and educator, Spence works with drummer Darryl Buck to open the first full day of the sākihiwē festival on Saturday, 29 August, 2020. Buck, too, introduces himself. Then he tells the audience that he wants to share teachings about the drum. He shows the back of the drum. Its taut lacing forms a pattern. Buck speaks directly to the audience about it: "We use this drum as a model. As you can see, it has four directions. Four directions that will guide us in life." Having told the audience that he grew up in what he calls a traditional family, the story he continues with is both personal and pedagogical: "In our life we utilize everything that we can in a good way. Just like the hide that is made out of this drum[sic]. An animal was sacrificed for it. We honor that animal in this sacred way by singing for it. The wood on this drum is also sacrificial from the trees." He gestures towards the skin and the frame of the hand drum. "We use it in a good way. We use it to help people. We use it to bring people together. Which is why it's the shape of a circle. We bring people together because we all are one." Then he sings an honor song that he wrote to inspire hope.

As voice and drum reverberate in this space, Buck gives an honor song at an important temporal moment of the festival. He shares his own composition as a personally meaningful message of hope. He invites the audience, internally diverse in almost innumerable ways, to make meaning from the song in a way that is personal to each listener. Before Spence begins to dance, she tells the audience about her practice. She was taught that the hoop dance is a storytelling dance and a healing dance. The story she tells is based in past and present. She tells the audience about medicine people of the past, the red willow branches made into a hoop, the need for medicine in this moment, and how dancers say and do their intentions while dancing to bring healing. How will the audience be learning with her this morning? Spence says with a smile, "you have to channel your inner child and use your imagination and see what you can see through the formations I create" during her storytelling dance. She switches to the second person, inviting you to see what you need to see in the dance. She talks about powwow spaces, and offers a friendship dance in the form of a round dance, sending a kind of invitation to the audience. Only then does she offer the more soloistic hoop dance in which her own storytelling takes center stage, even as "you" are invited to interpret it based on who you are and where you come from. What animals, plants, forms, and narration do you perceive as she dances, and as you hear the drum and song?

This is a performance. The artists present for an audience at a specified time during the music festival weekend. Their address changes as they weave through who they are speaking to and for: Spence uses "I" to talk about what she has learned about hoop dancing, Buck uses "we" to talk about how he grew up in the traditions he shares, Spence talks about an intertribal gathering like a powwow in which "we

gather as Indigenous people." Both speak with clarity and patience that could teach something new to an audience member just learning about the drum, or a listener who is layering on new stories about medicine people with what they have already heard before. They include and exclude with "we," they call directly to "you." Words in Nihithaw and Anishinaabemowin and English call to different and overlapping audiences. Expressing cultural sovereignty, Buck's singing voice speaks to his own experience, and invites the listener to hear theirs; Spence's dance tells a story that is hers to tell even as she invites the audience to see in it what they can and need to see.

Rooted in place, sometimes expansive in address, this grounded opening to the music festival performances invites the audience to be active, to learn, to really listen. For the 2020 performance, the work of speaking to many publics simultaneously becomes even more nuanced, as Spence and Buck's opening performance was livestreamed on Facebook and YouTube due to the COVID pandemic. This last wrinkle, audience watching from computers and smartphones rather than being co-present at the rivers' fork, adds another layer to the 2020 festival. Spence and Buck's performance invites the audience to reflect on festival performance in ways that predated the pandemic as well. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit music and dance practices have enacted Indigenous survivance since colonization began. As the mainstream music industry is experiencing rapid transformation, how do contemporary Indigenous performers within and beyond present-day Canadian borders continue this performative intervention through popular music festivals? And with the impacts of performance restrictions due to the pandemic, how do artists and Indigenous music industry professionals navigate the unique concerns facing Indigenous music festivals, adapt to online and hybrid formats, address inequities, and continue to build relationships in challenging times?

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, live concerts, tours, and festivals have been cancelled around the globe. Since the beginning of COVID-related shutdowns, I have been engaged with online concerts and festival performances by musicians in the U.S. and Canada. I conducted a series of interviews with musicians and festival producers about how they are working through the 2020 summer music festival season. It is undeniable that musicians in general, and Indigenous musicians in particular, have been hit very hard by the economic effects of COVID-19. These effects are likely to continue for months and years. Like everyone else, musicians are also dealing with the effects of social isolation, and some have friends or family members who have become ill or died due to the ongoing pandemic. My interviews consistently find that during times of great uncertainty, people are turning to music making and listening. Audiences and artists alike are seeking comfort, ability to process, and even escape, during this tumultuous reality.

This article begins with framing information about the effects of the COVID pandemic, centering on Indigenous musicians in the U.S. and Canada. Then, I share a focused background from music festival literature to answer two related questions: first, why are these performances so important, and second, how do festivals pose acute concerns for Indigenous musicians? In this context, I analyze how musicians are enacting sonic sovereignty through music festival performance via the example of the sākihiwē festival. Given the destabilizing impacts of the pandemic on musicians, the article focuses especially on the 2020 summer festival season, during which sākihiwē broadcast from Winnipeg, Canada with performers across North America. As uncertainty continues around music festivals in the future, the article addresses how decolonial possibilities are shifting around cultural and political change through music festival performance.

Pandemic Effects on the Indigenous Music Industry

Paid live performances are crucial for the livelihood of many working musicians. Music festivals provide the economic benefit of compensated performance, as well as networking opportunities that can lead to future work. Due to changes in industry structure, in the U.S. and Canada, "the live music industry is now worth more than the recording industry in both countries" (Sutherland 2018: 108). Economist Alan Krueger found that the vast majority of musicians—in the U.S. and worldwide—cannot rely on streaming or album sales for any significant portion of their income (Krueger 2019). Musicians are experimenting with new possibilities, yet online advertising revenue is not a reliable source for independent artists. A typical profit from YouTube, for example, is only about $4 to $6 USD per thousand views; this fluctuates based on the video length and viewer's geographic location (Church 2020). These factors make the loss of show contracts destabilizing. As a result, many festival organizers look for ways to honor contracts with artists, even when in-person performances shut down. Musicians who have long been innovating in order to be heard are continuing to do so, pivoting quickly to online festival performance and other emerging areas of the music economy to survive.

Indigenous peoples face additional barriers due to COVID, in terms of both health risks and economic wellbeing (Akee 2020; United Nations 2020). COVID infection rates on Native American reservations are four times higher than the national average in the U.S. (Rodriguez-Lonebear et. al. 2020). In Canada, Indigenous peoples are facing significant mental health challenges as a result of the pandemic (Wright 2020). First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples are also experiencing increased economic instability due to the coronavirus (Quinn 2020). Compounding these concerns, musicians report a higher-than-average concern about the pandemic (Coletto 2020).

Indigenous musicians and music industry professionals have worked for decades to gain listeners and recognition in mainstream venues (Scales 1999, Stobart et. al. 2016). Indigenous musicians have made tremendous inroads in the U.S. and Canada. For example, between 2008 and 2018, four winners of the flagship annual Polaris Prize have been Indigenous musicians, and all four of those were in or after 2014. The Indigenous music industry is an emerging economic player. In 2018, it contributed $78 million to the Canadian economy and artists averaged 23 shows over 12 months each (APTN 2019). However, the disproportionate effects of COVID pose a threat to the health, economic, and professional gains made by Indigenous communities.

Context for Festivals and Indigenous Musicians' Participation

Festivals have been credited with significant social effects: connecting people, developing audiences, linking emerging with established artists, encouraging intercultural dialogue, and participating in ongoing positive social change (Deventer 2015). Music festivals play social and economic roles for musicians and audiences, which have become especially important in an age of digital media (McKay 2015). Physically distanced music making has become *required* during the global pandemic that started in 2019. However, musicians have used remote collaboration before. Often, this is a practical consideration that happens before music reaches an audience, such as when a producer shares a new beat through file transfer, allowing a rapper in a distant city to work with it immediately. It has also appeared, occasionally, for large-scale performances. Pauline Oliveros

inspired a telemusicking experience for which Mark Dresser and Sarah Weaver conducted almost 30 musicians across three sites who used Skype, iChat, iVisit, Google Docs, and cell phones to coordinate a collaborative soundpainting performance (Borgo 2013: 323). This inspired future distanced performances, in which performers attempted to work through issues in the technology. Even Dresser, who served as a main organizer, reflected that this kind of presentation is "not a substitute for live performance." (Borgo 2013: 324). Yet, because of pandemic conditions, online music festivals have become a substitute for live performance, at least temporarily. This shift can be heard directly in the changes in the 2020 sākihiwē festival, which also offers an opportunity to analyze the unique circumstances that are at play for Indigenous music festival performance.

The sākihiwē festival began as Aboriginal Music Week, a festival composed of concerts, workshops, and networking events. The Winnipeg-based event occurs in a prominent location for the Indigenous music industry in Canada and internationally. The city's location at a cultural and geographic crossroads was emphasized by Shanley Spence and Darryl Buck in the segment that opened this article. Winnipeg is home to an internally diverse urban Indigenous community, and is the seat of broadcaster Native Communications Incorporated, the national headquarters of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, as well as regional and international festivals that include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis musicians, such as Manito Ahbee, Festival du Voyageur, and the Indigenous Music Awards.

In 2018, the festival was renamed sākihiwē, meaning "love another" in Cree, a name gifted by Sundance chief David Blacksmith. The artist roster from sākihiwē, and its parent organization Aboriginal Music Manitoba, is used by broadcasters such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for booking and airing Indigenous musicians. The festival presents emerging and experienced First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and international Indigenous musicians. Along with its far-reaching goals of supporting musicians and getting their music to new ears, the festival has a local focus, to "take music to less fortunate Indigenous families in Winnipeg so they can participate in the arts without sacrificing their family responsibilities, personal safety, or ability to make ends meet" (sākihiwē festival 2020a). In order to build relationships locally as well as internationally, music professionals coordinate efforts with community organizations in Winnipeg, notably those that connect with the city's diverse urban Indigenous community. The festival responds to structural inequities by expanding access to live professional popular music.

Concerns for Indigenous Music Festivals

Around the world, the concretization and commodification of Indigenous expressive practice is a risk in festivalized settings. A rich literature on the creation of "heritage" and its display problematizes the relationship between performances of music and dance, performers, and listeners (Grant 2019; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995; Teves 2011). Much of this literature imagines a settler or non-Indigenous audience for whom audible cultural difference is put on display. As Kilisala Harrison explicitly identifies, arts practitioners often face the reality of a diverse, and often non-Indigenous or mixed audience (1) even when working with a mandate to serve Indigenous peoples (Harrison 2019). The colonialist power dynamics that underpin these relationships create inequitable structures that deprivilege Indigenous musicians. Given these inequities, musicians and industry professionals deploy strategies to choose what they share and do not share, to frame

their music and performance as they see fit, and to use the performance stage as a platform for the messages they wish to convey.

Musicians, music scholars, and scholar-musicians have detailed the familiar process in which festivalization leads to a regularized performance. For example, Catherine Grant identifies how improvised musical water percussion became codified when a group of practitioners discovered the interest of tourists. In Vanuatu, Mwerlap-speaking women started making Etëtung, or water percussion, into a livelihood activity when visiting Europeans started paying to hear it. Performers later took their music to festivals around the world (Grant 2019). The move from community-based practice to staged performance brings with it all of the attendant concerns about power, representation, and commodification that arise when participants make a new version of an Indigenous practice with paid performance for outsiders in mind.

These issues persist with resultant concerns about co-optation, particularly in festivals that celebrate neoliberal multiculturalism and other forms of nationalism. Writing about a Bolivian context, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui argues for a broad applicability across Latin America and beyond, in which official multiculturalism conceals ongoing forms of colonization. She describes a rural land-based stereotype of Indigenous peoples that ascribes to them "an almost theatrical display of alterity" (2012:99). In large-scale performance situations, these essentialized stereotypes of musico-ethnic difference risk being performed, naturalized, and sold as part of a multicultural festivalization. Canada is no stranger to this phenomenon. Debates about the inuksuk and Inuit throat singing being redeployed to represent Canada on the international stage stretch back before the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, which used these cultural practices as branding markers. The Indigenous people who are mischaracterized in the process of official multiculturalism are not truly heard; the "anonymous masses" for whom performances are staged, Cusicanqui asserts, "play out the theatricality of their own identity" (Cusicanqui 2012: 100) as Indigenous cultural practices are decontextualized and shift to serve symbolic functions for others.

In Canada specifically, the state policy of multiculturalism is often reflected through the metaphor of the mosaic: communities are created as disparate pieces that are placed alongside each other to create the whole of the nation. National narratives often describe Canada as being founded by British and French colonists, with more recent versions including First Nations and other Indigenous groups as well (2). Those counted as "visible minorities" within Canada through official multiculturalism are constructed at a remove, discursively decentered regardless of how long they have lived within, or been citizens of, the current nation-state. As Rinaldo Walcott observes, multiculturalist policy "characterizes these others as people with static cultural practices located both in a past and elsewhere" (Walcott 2003: 116). Reflecting on the ongoing presence of Black Atlantic cultural practices in Canada, Walcott observes, "official multicultural policies … support this idea through a discourse of heritage—in Canada heritage always means *having hailed from somewhere else.*" (Ibid.: 118). This is related to a well-documented process in which Indigenous groups are discursively located in the past in order to serve state goals (3). Building on Walcott, I find that the Canadian modernist multicultural nation-state locates nonwhite Canadians in an elsewhere, and Indigenous peoples in Canada in an elsewhen. Heritage, as frequently performed in festivals and on music stages, can be problematically dislocated in space and time.

Indigenous peoples in Canada and "visible minorities" face the oscillating problems of hypervisibility and invisibility. Reflecting on the consumption of Filipinx queer culture as part of what she calls the Canadian "multicultural art

scene," Casey Mecija found that she and her band "felt burdened with the task of responding to what others demanded of us." (Mecija 2018: 119). As Marissa Largo explains, "When minoritized subjects are made visible within official multicultural discourse in Canada, such visibility often continues to legitimize the interests of the nation-state, and reproduce colonial and neoliberal narratives." Being seen, or heard, is not the same as being taken seriously and listened to. She continues, "Simply being visible in various sectors of society such as arts and culture does not guarantee social justice and inclusion" (Largo 2018: 99). Given the weighty concerns of musical stagnation, co-optation, and nationalist interests, the manner in which, and audiences for whom, Indigenous music festivals come together are impactful. Particularly given negative experiences in which some musicians have been othered at different performance events, self-definition—everything from a musical group deciding how to present their bio and photos on the festival publicity materials to choosing how to frame their music for the listening audience on the day of the show—is imperative. Music festivals that prioritize Indigenous leadership and attend to internally diverse audiences can operate in cultural spaces where narratives are made, offer real creative choices to a diversity of Indigenous performers, and strategically choose more productive narratives for the groups they serve.

Sonic Sovereignty on Stage: Transformational Listening

Faced with limiting and limited representation within mainstream cultures, performance by Indigenous artists can use these very stereotypes to alter, and even deconstruct, the ideas behind them. For this transformation, as Mishuana Goeman explains, "Native performances imagine different sets of power relations between Native people and settlers by presenting us with complicated visions that, rather than distance themselves from pop culture and its wooden Indian figures, cannabilize it, producing a visual sovereignty that deals with the hegemonic structures of settler societies" (Goeman 2011: 8). Native performances are able to "cannibalize" the limited figures of "Indians" in pop culture, chewing them up in a practice of sovereignty. In this way, creative, even destructive, misuse of stereotypes becomes inverted, and creates wholly different power relations.

In the face of ongoing challenges, musicians are responding with expressions of *sonic sovereignty*, or an embodied practice of Indigenous self-determination through musical expression. A wide range of Nation-specific notions of sovereignty have existed in North America since long before colonization began. Settler efforts to disappear Indigenous governance structures have diminished the recognition of some of these structures, but they have not erased their ongoing relevance. Sovereignty, often defined in relationship to European-derived land rights, has been productively expanded to include cultural sovereignty, bodily sovereignty, food sovereignty, linguistic sovereignty, representational sovereignty, visual sovereignty, radical sovereignty, and intellectual sovereignty, among others, as well as self-definition and determination (Doerfler et al 2013; Barker 2017; Duarte 2017; Harjo 2019) (4). As Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill have productively theorized, decolonial action in the present requires supporting Indigenous sovereignty struggles that recognize varied lived realities across Native communities (2013). Working through sonic sovereignty invites engaging the powerful relationships that emerge from performer-listener interactions and the embodied nature of collective music participation. With an ear towards the way music-making and music-listening can create a nonlinear experience with time through music's unique

relationship with memory and imaginative possibility, it is adaptable to specific contexts and not limited by Euro-American notions of musicality.

A self-described launchpad for Indigenous artists, sākihiwē creates a space in which artists leverage the transformational potential of the stage, challenging stereotypes head-on through conversation with audiences and each other. This sometimes takes the form of artists addressing preconceived notions of what it means to appear Indigenous to others. At the 24 June online concert, rapper The OB explains that he identifies as urban and wears his hair short, but that he grew up in a Cree household and feels the strong connection through his mother to the Opaskwayak Cree Nation. He starts a song that responds to misperception, rapping frustration about "how they overlook us" in front of his camera set-up. At the same show, pop artist Alexis Lynn talks about how some people say she doesn't "look" Indigenous, as a blue-eyed, fair-skinned person, and that she appreciates being accepted by her Indigenous relatives anyway. Preconceived notions of phenotype, dress, and geographic location are just a few of many limiting beliefs that musicians call out together.

Performing urban Indigenous modernity can productively destabilize notions of rurality and past-ness that are often projected onto contemporary musicians (Giroux 2018; Goeman 2011; Przybylski 2018; Tucker 2011). Festival director Alan Greyeyes identifies the performances' twin goals to "educate" a general audience, and to "inspire Indigenous youth." The first goal can be accomplished by creating a moment of encounter, in which audience members can be surprised into confronting biases of which they may or may not have been aware. He explains, "when Canadians see and hear incredible music coming from Indigenous artists, I think that helps them realize that we are just as unique and gifted as their loved ones." The performances offer an opportunity for audience members first to appreciate skilled musicians sharing their artistry in a professional setting. During the musical events, audiences, who include settler listeners, newcomer listeners, Indigenous listeners, and listeners of mixed heritage, can carefully attend to the performers on stage. Listeners who experience surprise or cognitive dissonance are able to reckon with those feelings in the space of the performance. Greyeyes phrases this encounter in generative terms, suggesting that the moment of realization helps listeners hear Indigenous popular musicians as skilled, and to equate these performers with those audience members already know and love. This is both a process of normalization, he suggests—the performers are equated with those already known to listeners—and of appreciation—the giftedness and skill of the professional musicians can impress listeners who may be surprised by their exceptional talent.

sākihiwē's first goal is related to the second, that of inspiring Indigenous youth, in that the process to "educate" audiences comes from the implicit learning of hearing skilled Indigenous popular musicians rock a festival stage in a normalized manner. sākihiwē intentionally creates performance opportunities for established and developing Indigenous artists so that Indigenous musicians aspiring to careers in the music industry have viable options for future performance; these options are performed to them in the space of the concerts. The musicians onstage have significant creative control, choosing music and presenting themselves as they wish rather than as a tokenized performer. The goal of inspiration is further accomplished through audience-artist interaction, as well as through mentorship between emerging and established artists.

The kinds of implicit learning that Greyeyes identifies happen through the structure of the festival. Skilled musicians are given opportunities to perform for internally diverse audiences, who find a variety of meanings in the very fact of their

performance, depending on how each listener is situated. Musicians' professional presence can educate and inspire various listeners. And onstage, some musicians engage in explicit teaching opportunities as well. If musicians choose to do so, the spoken and sung story that musicians perform can teach listeners, including youth. As storyteller, musician, and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson identifies, storytelling is "a decolonizing process with the power to recall, envision, and create modes of resurgence and contesting cognitive imperialisms" (Simpson 2016: 19). Listening through sonic sovereignty, a festival performance becomes a stage in which interweaving forms of storytelling are possible: artists tell stories in music, through lyrics and non-verbal elements of the songs they create, through the stories they tell on stage, and through interactions with fellow musicians and audience members as stories unfold in real time.

Adjusting to Online Festival Performance

The sākihiwē festival changed in 2020 from a June in-person festival to a series of singer-songwriter roundtable concerts every Wednesday in June and July, and mentorship programming and more online concerts in August. As the festival team explains, "We feel strongly that the arts have the ability to make the world a better place and the words and music of Indigenous people are needed now more than ever." They credit the teams at their partner organizations, who are "on board to make the sākihiwē festival work for Indigenous families, Indigenous artists, fans of live music, and our supporters, when the time is right" (sākihiwē festival 2020b). The organization's musical programming, mentorship, and family activities culminated with special online concerts, featuring 22 musical acts, from 28 to 30 August. Organizers encouraged audience members to follow public health guidelines.

With rapid shifts in the music industry due to health and safety concerns, all music festivals had to make adjustments. These include other Indigenous music-specific events. For example, The Tkaronto festival, originally scheduled as a new in-person festival in May 2020 produced by the 50/50 Performing Arts Collective, moved its first-ever event to online, livestreamed at www.tkmf.ca. Responding to the COVID crisis, Tkaronto festival organizers shared, "Though live music events continue to get put on hold, the spirit of music continues to be stronger than ever. That's why Tkaronto Music Festival has decided to help keep that spirit alive by moving the debut of our incredible Indigenous talent online!" (Tkaronto Music Festival 2020b). The event spanned 15-17 May 2020, and presented a traditional opening and closing, workshops, and a wide variety of artists: singer-songwriters, DJs, rock musicians, hip hop artists, a blues musician, artists playing pop influenced by traditional Anishinabek and Onkwehonwe music, and indie rock blended with Inuit throat singing. This festival was new for 2020, but aims to draw on the collective wisdom of organizers Cynthia Lickers-Sage, Candace Scott-Moore, Ian Maracle and Adam Moffatt for future events in Toronto. Speaking to a wide audience, the collective was formed to "produce Indigenous arts events and grow audiences for Indigenous performing artists," and the vision is for "all Canadians to support Indigenous musicians equally as they do settler musicians" (Tkaronto Music Festival 2020a).

As festivals adjusted, many delivered grant funding to artists despite the shift online. Given financial instability within the music industry in crisis, supporting artists during the pandemic is particularly important; musicians' ability to accept performance opportunities that further their self-determination is feasible only if

they are meaningfully compensated for their time and skills. Support can be delivered in the form of following through with performance fees, offering skill building for online performance, and continuing to create ways for artists to reach listeners during physical distancing requirements.

Once in-person concerts stopped, music professionals faced a steep learning curve. sākihiwē used Zoom as a platform for the songwriter concerts, which it shared with listeners through YouTube and Facebook. For each concert, three musicians, or small groups sheltering together, had the opportunity to do a remote session with the festival's technical consultant before the livestream. Festivals and performance venues have a whole staff of professionals whose job it is to make the sound experience seamless, but suddenly, performers were being asked to carry most of this labor on their own. Like many parents, music professionals with kids worked to balance childcare with work while schools and daycares were closed. This limited time for regular work tasks, so the additional labor of learning and operating new technical requirements presented a real challenge.

For the sākihiwē performances, a host kept the show flowing smoothly, and invited the musicians to take turns sharing songs. The hosts were Lindsay Knight, a Nehiyaw artist who has been rapping under her stage name Eekwol since the 1990s, and festival director Greyeyes. Audience members commented live on Facebook or YouTube. Andrina Turenne, who performed in the 17 June concert, found that interaction between musicians helped fill the void that opened when live shows stopped. "It was amazing to sit with artists and have conversations and reflections on our songs," she explains. "As artists, we look for those connections with audience or with each other, it's what we translate into our songs. It's connection and emotion."

The round-robin format has been used by many festivals. It allows for conversation between the musicians, though they cannot hear their fans live at home. Some musicians have adapted well to this distanced performance style, managing to make videoconferencing software feel personable in isolating times. Singer-songwriter William Prince joked with fellow musicians that he felt like they were on an episode of Hollywood Squares, turning the iconic Zoom gallery view into something almost intentional. His stage banter-turned-Zoom banter enlivened a summer sākihiwē concert.

Artists work with the technical challenges and sterile performance conditions of streaming video, and their teams also face new obstacles. Senior Artist Management Associate Vanessa Kuzina of Six Shooter Records, who works with William Prince, identifies a range of emerging management concerns—what platforms to use, how to make music videos or promote albums in pandemic times, what to write into contracts for online shows, how to work with artists and audiences who lack reliable internet connections, and how to keep artists financially solvent.

Facing the pandemic, many people feel scared, frustrated, and alone. The connections that musicians and audiences create with each other are particularly needed in these moments. In live performance, artists produce sound waves that connect to listeners' ears; groups of people sing and dance as a collective at a festival stage, even if only for the duration of a show. Musicians and industry professionals reflect on the need to connect with ourselves and each other through music. At the beginning of the pandemic, watching livestreamed music "was really exciting and really emotional," Kuzina describes. "It's still quite emotional watching these livestreams. … That feeling, that sense of connection that we were all longing for." Even online, the physical feeling of soundwaves vibrating a listener's body continues, and the livestream space offers a virtual room for connection with musicians and fellow fans.

In this atmosphere, online concerts provide an experience of connectivity, albeit an altered one. Turenne centers the artist-audience exchange in her own musical practice. "Such a huge part of why I love performing, and why I do what I do, is the *rapport*. The connection that you have with an audience," she explains. The relationship created between listeners and performers gives the event its meaning. Turenne elaborates that this is due to "the fact that it is an audience and an artist and collaborating on an energy for an evening, or for a moment."

The possibilities in livestreams expand because they extend a performance's reach past a single moment in time. Many festivals leave a livestream posted after the event. This builds listener-viewership over time, and it is also practical with a global audience. Even with careful consideration for the best time to go live across time zones, artists miss some potential listeners for whom their show plays at an awkward time of day or night. Whether they watch live or later, a subset of listeners is finding benefits from watching from their own homes. Additionally, certain arts venues can feel less welcoming to differently abled guests, for example pop concert venues that lack seating. Venue location and reputation can also reinforce class-based forms of inaccessibility or feelings of unwelcomeness, so listeners who have trouble travelling to or do not feel comfortable in formal arts venues may prefer online streaming.

Addressing Inequities

The move of festivals online makes longstanding inequities stark. As long as access to reliable internet and connected devices is uneven, some listeners will consistently lose out. Greyeyes worries about audiences who lack the tools needed to make the jump to online listening: "We can't take the music to Indigenous families in Winnipeg this summer and I worry that these folks, who need the arts just as much as their Canadian counterparts, don't have the same access to laptops, tablets, smartphones, and online content as other audiences." Turenne elaborates: "COVID is posing some challenges in terms of bringing that aspect live. It's really important to keep in mind that accessibility to internet and computers is not a universal. It's still cutting some people out of the equation."

This division extends to artists, as well. Indigenous musicians living in remote areas face additional barriers. For example, Inuk musician Riit could not access the internet speeds required to participate in a livestream from her home in Nunavut, and parcel shipment speeds were also limited. Instead, for a summer 2020 show, she recorded at home, sent a hard drive on a commercial plane, and had a manager pick it up at Toronto airport. If highspeed internet were more widely distributed, opportunities would extend further, especially to Inuit and other remote artists. As soon as online performance becomes the prominent mechanism for hearing music, the digital divide silences voices that many listeners cannot hear.

For musicians who do make the move online, additional barriers can emerge. The manners in which internet-mediated spaces are often unwelcoming for the sometimes-overlapping groups of women, nonbinary people, and nonwhite performers create additional challenges. Online participants deriving amusement from harassing others is a known phenomenon, as music scholars such as William Cheng have noted (Cheng 2012). Threats, online harassment, and physical violence offline that starts from online aggression are all real concerns; both threats and the continuing enforcement of structural bias disproportionately impact women, especially women of color (Noble 2018; Bartlett et al. 2014). Kuzina, whose record company represents some notable female Indigenous musicians, notices that

contracts need special new clauses for online concerts. When I asked her about audience interaction, she elaborated that it is necessary to "ensur[e] that there is a way to moderate comments and audiences so that there isn't inappropriate behavior and bullying or sexist or racist commentary that's happening in the stream. It should be moderated and managed. That's something that we're building into our contracts and waivers right now as well, so that [everyone] can go in to that performance and feel that it's a safe environment."

Festival scenes will take time to rebuild after COVID; some of the types of connectivity that have arisen online are likely to continue. While the music industry falters, it also faces opportunities to rebuild. Noting biases that the sometimes-overlapping groups of women, nonbinary people, and Indigenous people face, Greyeyes calls festival organizers to make change. He explains "As a curator and a member of the community, it's super important to me not to marginalize Indigenous women" and "to give new voices an opportunity to have a festival experience so that they're better equipped to participate in events outside of the Indigenous community." As music professionals and audiences navigate these concerns, possibilities for decolonial action emerge, as increasing equity for Indigenous musicians of all genders can become a shared and active priority. At their best, creating safe spaces for musicians and listeners to self-define, musical encounters can enact and build relationships as participants listen to each other.

Music Performance and Relationality

sākihiwe presents artists across (and who cross) music genres. Genre identification is a highly racialized process in the mainstream music industry (Lena 2012; Mahon 2020); representation across genres is significant as Indigenous music festivals such as sākihiwē and Tkaronto offer performance spaces for artists in rock, hip hop, folk, pop, country, dance, experimental, and other genres. Within the concerts, individual artists are presented with their own specificity, implicitly fighting the alterity that Cusicanqui warns may be on festivalized display.

Refusing both pat categorization and shallow equivalencies, a music festival can provide opportunities for artists to engage the hyper-local. When they travel to festival grounds, musicians bring stories of home, and reference places and communities sonically in their music. The plural is notable here: many artists have stories to tell that weave together many places. The bio for singer songwriter Caley Watts, for example, begins, "Caley Watts is a Cree singer-songwriter and artist from the West Coast. She was born and raised in the remote Bella Coola Valley, located within the vast wilderness of the Great Bear Rainforest in British Columbia." (Watts 2020). When she performed during the August festival weekend at sākihiwē, she spoke with the host about being a Cree artist outside of Cree territory, and described how the valley in which she grew up impacts her artistry. When artists do not travel but broadcast from home, as is possible in online festivals, the local can emerge in video of and from place, in addition to these other markers. When she performed, Watts' hyper-local, the Bella Coola Valley, was reflected in her lyrics, and it was also sonically and visually evident because she chose to play outside on her family's land. That scene, with fluttering vibrant green leaves and the sound of a running river, was part of the sonic experience of her performance; Watts referenced and sang to and in that particular space.

While sovereignty is sometimes defined narrowly as a legal land right, expansive versions, such as that engaged in sonic sovereignty, entail creative expression and the ability to frame how one is heard. Indigenous peoples are inherently sovereign,

and yet, as Marisa Duarte (2017) recalls, "sovereignty is ongoing work" (142). Sonically articulating already-extant sovereignty, musicians call for its recognition and express its continued enactment.

For many artists, festivals offer opportunities to build connections with other artists that deepen during the event and extend beyond it. Indigenous popular musicians perform to wide audiences at diverse music festivals that do not specifically cater to Indigenous musicians. These mainstream events, for the artists who can access them, are part of successful career strategies. And still, the welcoming environment of an Indigenous popular music festival is helpful to many. "We're trying to do away with the cultural isolation that you would experience at a non-Indigenous event," Greyeyes explains, "it's just about providing opportunities for us to be ourselves."

Festivals focused on the needs and priorities of diverse Indigenous performers play a professional development role for an important reason: Indigenous performers continue to face structural barriers to funding and training support. A recent study finds that a majority of Indigenous musicians in Canada have never been awarded any grant funding (APTN 2019: 61). Musicians report significant barriers to professional development, and indicate this as a major goal of theirs. One representative respondent requested "better access to professional development." This need is particularly acute in music technology and career management; fewer that 10% of Indigenous musicians learned about the business of music in college, university, or music school (Ibid. 59). Other studies find similarities in both barriers to professional development and Indigenous musicians' desire for additional training in the United States (Cunningham 2007).

Even when music industry projections are grim, professionals find possibilities for some amount of financial gain and audience connection through online concerts (Hissong, Milliman, and Wang 2020). Given this reality, a focus at a 2020 concert is instructive: During the July 22 sākihiwē performance, singer-songwriters talked live—with each other and with the livestreaming audience—about their home studio recording setups. Sandra Sutter, Damase Elis, and Alexis Lynn shared details about which microphones and interfaces they use, and discussed how they approach the learning curve for being their own technical teams. In addition to new equipment and technical proficiency, the ability to pivot to streaming performance also requires independent musicians to navigate new provisions in contracts.

Some artists have teams to help them advocate for their interests when recording livestreams. William Prince, who performed at sākihiwē, works with management to address contracts. Vanessa Kuzina explains that even for festivals that have been around for decades, the livestreaming aspect is new. As a result, she and her colleagues are developing their own contracts to cover "protections for the artist and their intellectual property." Between this growth edge, and online promoters who are trying to set up concerts for the first time, she explains, "it's pretty wild out there."

Most Indigenous musicians in Canada are self-managed (APTN 2019); they rely on fellow performers and others in the industry as they make decisions in this changing performance scene. In terms of who sākihiwē is presenting, Greyeyes says: "Most of the artists we're presenting aren't being booked by other festivals or promoters during the pandemic, so we're the first live streaming experience for them and I think that's an important role that we need to play."

As more responsibilities shift to the musicians, professional development relationships between musicians and industry workers will continue to be crucial. This extends through technical setup to contract writing, promotion, and, particularly for Indigenous popular musicians, image management. Building artists'

careers comes in humble steps. A festival like sākihiwē intentionally works with more established and emerging artists. Some artists will learn how to write a bio in the manner that fits them best. Others develop competencies in creating invoices, reading tech riders, and optimizing press kits. As Greyeyes mentions, for new talent in particular, “Everyone starts from the same place, and I keep on reminding myself: that is why it's important to give new voices an opportunity.” Being able to express themselves as they wish takes financial stability, technical know-how, and performance opportunities to reach audiences. Sonic sovereignty is expressed through music, and it requires tangible resources in order to be enacted over and over again.

Once again, the relationships built between musicians and audiences come into focus. Staged performances at festivals can distance people from each other, and ossify or spectacularize living cultures. If undertaken with critical attention to these potentially damaging outcomes, public festivals can alternately create moments of encounter that are mutually transformative. How do performers shape their concerts? How are people listening? How is the space of performance curated to address possible barriers, and to encourage people to listen to each other? The festivals in discussion here are presented not as uniform or perfect models, but as events in which organizers and musicians work to create meaningful spaces of exchange. Given the acute concerns for Indigenous musicians at festival performances, event participants will benefit from thinking through potential pitfalls, and forward into possibility. Thinking through sonic sovereignty, musicians determine how they wish to present themselves and their music, and may even choose not to share certain music or stories when it does not feel appropriate. Staged events can create opportunities for musicians to listen to each other and learn from fellow performers. With open and attentive ears, some listeners can be surprised by their responses as they listen, be invited to change or expand their viewpoints, and even transform their expectations based on listening encounters. Listeners learn, as from Spence and Buck, more about their own music cultures, or new aspects about those of their neighbors, or entirely new perspectives on musics that were previously unknown to them. This change takes sustained, dedicated resources, labor, skill, and attention. Through this work, possibilities to transform and extend relationality continue even as the music industry faces ongoing challenges and changes.

Endnotes

1. There is not a binary between Indigenous and non-Indigenous musicians or audiences. Some musicians, for example, identify as Indigenous and of mixed heritage; individuals’ self-identification can change over time and based on context. The term “mixed” does not hold all of the complexities of identification, but its use here follows its use by some performing musicians to talk about their self-identification. Concert audiences are often heterogeneous on many levels.

2. Details on the mosaic image, changing national narratives, and relationship to Canadian multicultural policy can be found in Bannerji 2000; Day 2000. For specific application of these to musical performance, consult Przybylski 2020.

3. The mythologization of the past is unpacked in Hall, 1996.

4. Some of these definitions and operations of sovereignty are Nation-specific; many have aspects that are applicable to multiple contexts of Indigenous sovereignty.

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