

# Editorial Introduction to the Special Issue on Crises at Work: Potentials for Change? What Have We Become, My Sweetest Friend?

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The launch of the call for this special issue of *IASPM Journal* on 8 July 2020 came amid the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the advent of travel bans and the proliferation of video-based conferences, as well as digital-based network productions and virtual concert formats, numerous new artistic artefacts and economic realignments quickly emerged in such an exceptional and threatening global situation. Unfortunately, it became clear that state support for popular music was not to be expected in many countries, which further increased the pressure, worsened precarious working situations and aggravated the mental health of artists and other actors of the music industries.

One of the worst-hit sectors in popular music was the live music industry. Concerts in 2020 came to a sudden halt, and the festival summer was almost completely wiped out, bar a handful of shows in car parks and socially distanced green field sites. Concerts moved online as live or pre-recorded events. There may be different views on the extent to which such events can replace the immersive feeling of a live concert with its *communitas* and shared experience of liminality. Online events did, however, offer us a substitute culture and a platform to process our feelings, share our thoughts, and an alternative way to socialise. They also provided artists with a way to connect with their followers and, in some cases, a

way to mitigate the impact of diminished income from the loss of live music revenue.

Fast forward to 2021, there is a sense of hope. While many of the big music festivals – Glastonbury, Wacken Open Air or Tomorrowland – have been cancelled for the second year in a row, there is optimism. In the UK, Download Festival ran a sold-out pilot event in June 2021 with a limited number of 10,000 music fans, overseen and monitored by Public Health England to study ‘transmission risk, the suspension of social distancing and face coverings over several consecutive days [...] to ensure that events later this summer can go ahead safely’ (downloadfestival.com 2021). With a sense of optimism, empowerment has set in. One example is the UK Metal Merger crowd-funding campaign for Stagehand crew relief (UK Metal Merger 2021a). This campaign, initiated by metal musicians, raised money (between March and June 2021) for stage crews who did not have access to emergency funds. With a charity song plus music video (UK Metal Merger 2021b), a live online concert (Total Rock Radio 2021) and a charity prize draw (Crowfunder.com 2021), means were raised to help stage crew members financially and ensure appropriate mental health support. The pandemic has brought solidarity within the music scene to the fore.

In other areas, lockdowns have catalysed developments and forced a reflection on established practices. In music production, remote collaboration has been further accelerated, as has the shift to digital music production in domestic spaces instead of traditional recording studios. Music education has been considerably challenged, especially in the areas of music performance and production. This forced change of practices has led to increased engagement with blended learning, which may enrich future curricula and help align professional timetables with personal commitments through virtual meetings, benefitting faculty and students alike. But the forced move to the home office has also exacerbated and brought to the fore underlying gender and racial inequalities due to homeschooling and dissimilar professional responsibilities. It can only be hoped that the increased awareness of such inequalities will kindle societal and institutional reflection and provide an impetus for change.

In the academic discussion, our call for this special issue was followed by several calls for reflection on the pandemic at national and international levels, addressing similar focal points and leading to the formation of networks such as ‘Musicovid’ (Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics 2021) and a series of online events and national case studies (1). As one of the first academic publications to emerge from COVID-19, this special issue is now coming out about one and a half years after the beginning of the various restrictions, effects and personal as well as structural reorientations. This crisis, unforeseeable in its extent, was only one of the reasons for dealing with crises and their transformative potentials. We took *crises* as a broader framing: as possible blockades of creative processes, economic threats, excessive demands on people or systems, but also as an opportunity for change. These potentials lead, for example, to new forms of appreciation, a reconsideration of ecological or ethical values and the establishment of new networks and methods for creative projects and work. We are pleased that we were able to find some of these aspects within the numerous submissions and that the international researchers contributed theoretical reflections and empirical evidence on contemporary crises – COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter resonated with our authors the most. The special issue contains both full articles and personal statements. We hope that this will give space to diverse voices and actors, addressing national specifics and international similarities, and highlight the complexity of these crises.

With reference to the construction and perception of spatiality, Ian A. Taylor, Sarah Raine and Craig Hamilton discuss potentials for change in the context of live music venues and industries. Extensive power relations are identified, and controversial strategies for appropriating spaces are critically discussed. The considerations are illustrated by independent, grassroots approaches and explained as possibilities for a profound transformation of the English live music and festival industry. Also focusing on live music, Magdalena Fürnkranz examines how artists in the Viennese popular music scene have explored the potentials of digital technologies to connect with fans and network with peers and the industry, highlighting socially produced differences and social inequalities regarding gender, class, body and generation.

In her extensive study involving interviews with EDM DJs, Melanie Ptatscheck discusses artists' current mental health conditions in dealing with the exceptional situation triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic through a retrospective perspective of those affected. She finds that the crisis worsened the already poor mental health of creatives but may also have the potential to improve health by motivating them to reflect on their professional practices and change unhealthy behaviours.

In his article, Juan de Dios Cuartas reconstructs recent developments within digital music production with a focus on remote music collaboration. Here, the focus is on real and virtual spaces, delocalisation and an interpretation of the processes and products, utilising Bakhtin's theory of centrifugal and centripetal forces in social and creative practice to explore the nostalgia for places and technologies.

Wonseok Lee and Grace Kao address another form of crisis in their article by analysing the connections between the Black Lives Matter movement and the Korean fan organisation BTS-ARMY. The authors show the economic and media potential that lies within fan cultures and how these can, in turn, influence popular music cultures and political developments, both nationally and globally.

In addition to these full scholarly articles, this special issue contains four shorter personal statements on current crises, two on COVID-19 and two on Black Lives Matter. In his audio statement, Ioannis Tsioulakis describes the impact of the pandemic on professional musicians in Greece, noting that previously unorganised artists finally came together to collectively fight the industry's already precarious conditions, which were exacerbated by the pandemic. Martin Lücke comments on cultural policy in Germany, describing how structural inequalities in funding – established state-funded culture and independent popular music – are aggravated by COVID-19, and asks how the pandemic could be an impetus for change.

Jason Huxtable calls for a consideration of our own complicity as higher education lecturers in the forms of systemic racism that have normalised anti-Black thought and action and proposes an action of White Allyship. Mirko M. Hall explores how hip hop's soundscapes and consciousness might serve as a utopian beacon, arguing that this artistic movement not only creates new musical and political spaces for cultural creativity and critique but also continues to serve as a transformative horizon of hope that fosters resistance.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the Editorial Team of *IASPM Journal*, in particular Mary Fogarty, Raquel Campos, Xavier Villanueva and Serouj Aprahamian, the copyediting team and the anonymous peer-reviewers for their invaluable contributions in bringing this special issue together.

## Endnotes

1 See, for example, Paul Carr's research on the impact of COVID-19 on the Welsh live music industry (<https://paulcarr.org/category/covid-19>; accessed: 17 July 2021) or the blog posts of the 'Working in Music' network (<https://wim.hypotheses.org>; accessed: 17 July 2021).

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