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## The impact of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions on community music-making in the UK: Technology's potential as a replacement for face-to-face contact

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### Abstract

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One of the most pervasive messages about group music-making is its ability to contribute to social unity and cultural bonding. The notion of COVID-19 as a vehicle for cultural change is currently being examined in detail, particularly the development of improved digital platforms and the widespread globalism of music. The impact of community music-making in Western cultures has been extensively reported; for example, it has been shown to boost confidence, improve social skills and bring together communities. Much research has been done into the practice of using technology in the classroom, such as the inclusion of electronic keyboards and digital audio workstation (DAW) software, though success here has depended on teachers and learners sharing the same space and time to access necessary technology. In contrast, the potential and limitations of virtual, online music-making across widespread geographical locations are relatively new. It is clear that group music-making can play a key role in maintaining social unity and assuaging societal pain, and, in this extraordinary time, online alternatives can offer some form of coherence and opportunity.

This paper explores the impact of COVID-19 on group and community music-making in the UK, and the development of new models of inclusive 'musicking' that emerged during the period March – June 2020. It examines what is meant by 'community' and 'community music-making', and whether—in this modern, internet-connected world—the myriad online communities separated by location can nonetheless be considered music-making 'spaces'. It will discuss the concept of digital exclusion and its connection to social capital. The piece considers whether online musical communities can offer a tangible alternative to being with others in person and discusses the notion that every individual has the right to create and enjoy making music with others. Is it possible to facilitate models and groups online which enable these notional rights? The paper assesses the role of music in healing during the COVID-19 era, and concludes that the contribution that group music-making offers towards the development of social and emotional capital is clear, although the disparity of access to online spaces, due to economic or social disadvantage, remains a cause for concern.

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## 1. Introduction

As I write this paper, we are facing a worldwide, unprecedented situation of social distancing and lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the UK, between March – June 2020, people were only permitted to leave home to shop for essentials or travel to necessary work (for example, ‘key workers’ such as NHS staff, delivery workers, supermarket staff), for emergencies, or to exercise once a day, with a large percentage of the population working from home, or on ‘furlough’ (Department of Health & Social Care, 2020). Worldwide, schools were closed for substantial periods, affecting 1.5 billion children, across 189 countries (UNESCO, 2020). In the UK, in-person teaching ceased at the end of March 2020, except for the children of key workers as noted above (Sparrow and Campbell, 2020). In the world of music education, much tuition began to move online with resources being made available, including video instruction and advice for teachers, not least regarding safeguarding (Fossgreen, 2020; Music Mark, 2020a). In April 2020 the Department for Education launched the first online academy to provide a central set of materials for teachers and learners, including arts curricula (Oak National Academy, 2020).

All group activities, including musical activities, such as concerts, exams, lessons and rehearsals, were cancelled or postponed (The Strad, 2020). In an unprecedented move in UK education, all GCSE and A-level exams for 2020 were cancelled (Department of Health & Social Care, 2020b). However, in the space of a few short weeks, numerous online performances and examples of sharing musical resources appeared. Gareth Malone’s ‘Great British Home Chorus’ (The Great British Chorus, 2020) and the ‘Stay at Home’ Choir (Stay at Home Choir, 2020) began bringing people together with mass rehearsals and shared performances. Many amateur ensembles and orchestras started attempting online rehearsals. Remotely created video performances were shared by renowned professional groups, such as Tenebrae (BBC Classical Music Magazine, 2020). World-famous opera houses, orchestras and concert halls began sharing former performances for free (Feinstein, 2020), and artists of all genres explored live-streaming from their living rooms (Ahlgrim, 2020).

The notion of COVID-19 as a force impelling cultural change is already being examined in more detail (e.g. Lee, Baker and Haywood; 2020; Ratten, 2020; OECD, 2020). Lee, Baker and Haywood (2020: 2), in particular, explore the development of better and more useful digital sharing platforms, the widespread globalism of music and the ‘potential to spread cultural outputs around the globe faster than ever before’. The worldwide, long-term impact of COVID-19 has yet to be seen. In June 2020 the UK began easing the lockdown with a relaxing of the more severe social-distancing measures (GOV.UK, 2020) though the restrictions on live music-making – particularly for amateurs and larger educational groups – remained in place.

In this paper, I will discuss the potential impact of social-distancing measures from a sociological perspective, exploring the availability of online community music-making, and if this can ever be a satisfactory replacement for face-to-face contact. I will examine the impact on organised music groups and structures such as traditional choirs. Case studies from choral groups highlight the wider impact of taking activity online and using such projects to support mental and emotional wellbeing in a wider sense (London Symphony Chorus, 2020; Royal Holloway, University of London, 2020). Further case studies explore informal music making with young refugees (Soundmix, 2020a), and activities within music education hubs and ensembles (Music Mark, 2020b; Nottinghamshire Local News, 2020; National Youth Jazz Orchestra, 2020). I will consider the issues surrounding digital poverty, also referred to as the digital divide, digital exclusion or the less pejorative digital un-engagement, by which I mean the impact of a lack of access to resources, technology, materials or knowledge which can be due to ‘income, employment, health deprivation and disability, education skills and [or] training’ (Longley and Singleton, 2008: 3). In addition, I will explore the potential impact on social capital, described by Bhandari and Yasunobu (2009: 480) as ‘a collective asset in the form of shared norms, values, beliefs, trust, networks, social relations, and institutions that facilitate cooperation and collective action for mutual benefits’.

## 2. Music's potential to reduce social isolation and contribute to social cohesion

A number of studies have already explored the impact of social disconnectedness on wellbeing and mental health, particularly the potentially negative impact on elderly and vulnerable communities who were already among those most at risk of isolation (Byers, Yaffe, Covinsky et al., 2010; Dhand, Luke, Lang and Lee, 2016; Santini, Jose, York Conwell et al., 2020). In addition to the widely reported impact on mental and social wellbeing, such as feelings of loneliness, absence of intimacy and lack of connectedness in personal relationships, Dhand et al. noted that 'social isolation is a potent determinant of poor health and neurobiological changes, and its effects can be comparable to those of traditional risk factors' (Dhand et al., 2016: 605). In younger people, the need for social interaction and access to cultural spaces as a contribution to wellbeing has also been widely reported (Konlaan, Bygren and Johansson, 2000), as evidenced in the case studies later in this paper.

One of the most pervasive messages about group music-making is its ability to contribute to social unity, and act as a form of cultural bonding (Hallam, 2015; Juslin, 2008; Sloboda, 1985; Welch, 2005). It provides the participant with the ability to communicate with others (De Nora, 2000; Malloch and Trevarthen, 2009; Trehab, 2003) and also experience a particular form of empathy, described as 'co-pathy' (Koelsch, 2013: 209). Equally, positive emotions can be experienced and shared through cohesive group work. Sloboda (1985) suggests that group music-making is fulfilling because the very act of being creative with others, being part of the process to generate a 'whole', contributes to the experience of social bonding. Koelsch (2013: 230) writes extensively about this particular form of self-awareness and cognitive feeling brought about through making music with others, which is '...the sense that inter-individual emotional states become more homogeneous (for example, reducing anger in one individual, and depression or anxiety in another)'. Making music with others is a fundamental human behaviour (Dewey, 1925/1989; Schulkin and Raglan 2014; Welch, 2005). Feelings of wellbeing and interconnectedness through group and community music-making are widely reported, both as stimulation of the body's 'feelgood' chemicals (endorphins, oxytocin) and through being a vehicle for aiding stress-relief, recreation, enjoyment and promoting rehabilitation (Grape, Sandgren, Hansson et al., 2002).

In addition, human contact is a basic need (Harlow, 1958), and making music with others facilitates such connection. Similarly, Maslow (1943: 378) examined essential needs for human fulfilment, particularly regarding the predictability and safety of our own surroundings. In the current, unprecedented circumstances we are facing, both contact with others and the safe, predictability of our environment have been reduced or compromised.

While this paper examines more formal music-making, it is worth noting that in Italy, viral videos of communities spontaneously bursting into song were widely shared (Thorpe, 2020). Corvo and de Caro (2020: 248) found that:

In this case, conversely, the singing network was completely spontaneous and free from rules. The use of singing as a coping strategy as well as to improve the sense of cohesion is evident. Individuals used their identity—in terms of songs chosen—to avoid feelings of loneliness and to enhance their mood in these times of uncertainty.

The immediate impact of social isolation on mental health is being studied in detail. Torales O'Higgins et al. (2020: 319) suggest that 'the emerging mental health issues related to this global event may evolve into long-lasting health problems, isolation and stigma. Global health measures should be employed to address psychosocial stressors, particularly related to the use of isolation/quarantine, fear and vulnerability among the general population'. An ongoing project studying the 'psychological and social experiences of adults in the UK during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak' (Fancourt, Bu et al., 2020) is releasing a weekly report on survey findings, looking at key variables such as psychological response, relationships, behaviours, happiness, boredom and financial concerns.

### 3. The sociology of community and group music-making

Higgins (2012a: 114) speculates that ‘communities can be based on ethnicity, religion, class, gender, or politics. They can be located in villages, towns, cities, or cyberspace. Communities can be large or small, local or global, traditional, modern, or postmodern’. MacQueen, McLellan et al. (2001: 1929) suggest that the concept of community is ‘...a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings’, although in the modern, internet-connected world, we know there exist myriad communities online who are not joined by location. Bradshaw (2008) explores this as ‘post-place community’, where groups may be formed without geographical ties. Schippers (2018) define community music-making under three main contexts: as an ‘organic’ phenomenon (for example, non-formal, developed and maintained within the community in which they began); as an ‘intervention’ (based on a perceived need within the community, such as addressing antisocial behaviour among young people, or a community choir for the elderly); and ‘institutionalised’ community music (for instance, where this has been formalised into an organisational structure, perhaps for political reasons, or to monitor and evaluate measurable outcomes, thus creating a more ‘formal’ learning environment). Schippers and Bartleet (2013: 30) examine this yet further, suggesting a framework—the nine domains of community music—that includes key qualities and outcomes of community music projects, which may address one or more of the following: infrastructure, organisation, visibility/PR, relationship to place, social engagement, support/networking, dynamic music-making, engaging pedagogies, and links to schools.

The wider impact of ensemble and community music-making in Western cultures is extensively reported. In the UK, Kokotsaki and Hallam (2011) found that young people taking part in ensembles at university, either as a leisure pursuit or form of future study, reported an overall positive impact on personal, social and musical development. Group and community music-making has been shown to boost confidence, improve social skills and bring together communities (Kokotsaki and Hallam, 2007; Daykin et al., 2017; Williamson and Bonsor, 2019; Daykin et al., 2020).

Bartleet et al. (2018: 14) explore detailed strategic work with young people in challenging circumstances, finding that the ‘holistic and transformative effects of community music’ contribute to personal, social and musical development. Adult amateur groups and community choirs offer opportunities for leisure time, and participants report improved social skills, wellbeing, creativity, widening friendships and social networks (Carlucci, 2012; Clift, Hancox et al., 2008; Pitts, 2004). Community music groups, such as the Soundmix case study below (a non-formal music project, working with unaccompanied young refugees and asylum seekers) can also contribute as a form of therapy or social intervention, to engage potentially ostracised groups and promote positive life outcomes (Andsell and De Nora, 2012; Hallam, Creech et al., 2014), and encourage social cohesion and wellbeing, such as with offenders (Henley, 2012; Wilkinson and Caulfield, 2017). However, Green (2009) highlights that music can also be used in divisive and exclusive social contexts and subcultures, such as rap, grime and hip hop, and music educators have a responsibility to ensure these are recognised and ethically addressed.

Community music therapy has long been used as a vehicle for promoting personal and social change in disenfranchised, disconnected or traumatised communities (Andsell, 2002; Andsell and De Nora, 2012; Dillon, 2010; Hallam and Burns, 2017). The Soundmix project in Croydon, South London, has been working with young, unaccompanied refugees and asylum seekers in music projects for over a decade (Soundmix, 2020a). The weekly, drop-in workshops aim to improve musical ability through learning an instrument, singing or song writing, develop self-expression, improve confidence, promote inclusion and citizenship, and perhaps most importantly, reduce self-isolation. This mission is achieved through strong social networks and community practice developed throughout the face-to-face sessions. As an organisation that historically delivered all its work in person, a very large part of its mission involves developing connectivity and personal interaction, empowering young people through increased confidence (Soundmix, 2020b). The workshops have always been developed while considering the often-challenging life circumstances and potentially traumatised backgrounds participants may have as

unaccompanied young refugees and asylum seekers (Beck, Bolette, Lund et al., 2018; Pfeiffer, Sachser, Tutus et al., 2019).

Subsequently, the COVID-19 pandemic posed a real and immediate challenge to ongoing operations. The weekly workshop was moved online early in April 2020, with digital resources being made available for those who were able to access them, such as downloadable videos and tracks (Soundmix, 2020b). Almost 100 14-16 year olds attended online workshops during the period April-July 2020, a slight increase on the previous term of weekly drop-in sessions (Leacock, 2020, personal communication, 30 July) and support plans were in place for those who did not have access to instruments in their places of residence, including 'delivering instruments to participants for home use (where requested); all tailored to communicate with and support the needs of a client group with limited and varying levels of English language skills' (Soundmix, 2020b). The project managers noted that being able to move provision online at short notice meant that the potentially negative outcomes of losing the weekly connection achieved through the workshops was averted:

This move to a largely digital presence helped to minimise the impact of the virus on our activities and those we engage with – namely, the young people who rely on Soundmix to provide a safe space where they can express themselves, gain confidence in their learning, abilities and achievements, and have fun connecting with others – at the most crucial and needed of times (Soundmix, 2020b).

Future plans and the potential date for re-introduction of face-to-face workshops are still uncertain, though the work will remain online for the foreseeable future (Leacock, 2020, personal communication, 30 July). Project managers note that moving delivery online has potentially had a longer-term impact on how the project is managed and delivered, considering that retention and engagement of young people could potentially improve if some sessions were available to access digitally. They state that 'positively, the pandemic has given us the opportunity to review and reconsider how we might shape and deliver our services in the future, in a way that will allow us to extend our reach and increase our impact; improve our work and ways of working; and broaden our connections, networks and partnerships' (Soundmix, 2020b).

#### **4. The emergence of community in online music-making**

Much research has been done into the practice of using music technology in the classroom (Buckingham, 2012; Himonides and Purves, 2012), though this depends on teachers and learners being in the same place to access such technology (for example, classroom keyboards and digital audio workstation software). This type of work has evolved in UK education in the last 30 years and is linked to existing models of classroom music making, such as pair work, small group performances (Albert, 2019; Savage, 2007) and the emergence of the inclusion of popular dance music to the curriculum (Hein, 2017; Kruse, 2014).

The concept of virtual, online music-making across widespread geographical locations is relatively new; Eric Whitacre's virtual choir of 2009 was a significant demonstration of the theoretical possibility of bringing large numbers of individually recorded videos together to form a whole, virtual performance (Whitacre, 2017). The Kitchen Orchestra (Dubber, 2011) explored alternative examples of collaborative online music-making, with audience members engaging with performers from a jazz ensemble in the run-up to the event itself, via an online mediation, contributing to the content of the final performance. This notion of interactivity could be considered part of Small's concept of 'musicking' (1998)—that is, making music, creatively, for music's sake—in a much wider field of broader participation and collaboration, where the audience members are contributing to the final performance, though not physically taking part. Perhaps most significantly, there is potential for a complete revision of the

hierarchical structure previously seen between performer and listener, and further development of the Performer-Audience relationship (Newton, 2014).

In the instrumental world, the ‘online orchestra’ was a collaboration between Bristol University, Cornwall Music Education Hub and the Philharmonia Orchestra, from 2014-16. This ground-breaking project explored ‘burgeoning network technologies and creative approaches to composition to give people in remote communities access to large-scale ensemble music-making’ (Rofe and Prior, 2017: 1). This project explored ‘telematic performance’, that is any performance taking place over a telecommunications network, such as the internet (Rofe and Reuben, 2017), to bring together musicians from across remote areas of Cornwall to form an orchestra. The concept of using telematics for remote education is not new, and was being explored as far back as 1994, in Australia (Oliver and Reeves, 1994), but had not yet been explored for large-scale ensemble music-making. Numerous technical and technological issues were explored, such as latency (the time delay between systems) (Rolf and Reuben, 2017), and quality of equipment (Geelhoed, Prior and Rofe, 2017). Perhaps most importantly from a musical perspective, Hargreaves (2017) reflected on the impact of both the technical issues and the bringing together of geographically remote young musicians in a large-scale orchestral performance. Rofe, Geelhoed and Hodson (2017: 268) found an impact on the participants themselves, who ‘actively felt the impact of their remote geographical location as a barrier to engaging in musical ensembles, which led to excitement at the potential offered by telematic performance’. The report concluded that there was ‘significant potential for telematic performance to increase opportunity and access to music-making for people living in remote locations, or indeed for any other musician (for instance, people with mobility problems, or those confined to their homes, hospitals, prisons and so on) for whom travel prohibits participation’ (Rofe et al., 2017: 273). It is clear there is potential for such online, remote ensembles to work in the future, with adequate equipment and investment in resources.

## **5. Unequal social and emotional capital and digital exclusion**

Hanifan (1916: 130) references social capital as ‘those tangible assets [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit’, and it has been explored in detail by Keeley (2007). Bourdieu (1983/86: 16) suggested that ‘social capital is made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital’. Jones (2010: 291) considers that ‘musicking can uniquely foster the development of social capital’. Langston and Barrett (2008: 16) explored the development of social capital within a community choir setting and found that ‘choirs that embody strong community connection, individual autonomy, bonds and fellowship greatly enhance the chances of successful creation of social capital, by binding together people of similar interests and backgrounds to create an environment of mutual cooperation, friendship and goodwill’. Jones and Langston (2012: 127) explore the amalgamation of social, and community music and find that ‘in addition to fostering musical skills development, such organisations create opportunities for reciprocity and obligations, empower participants to develop networks and maintain or improve their community connectedness, and create shared norms, values, and trust’. It is also worth considering, particularly in a time of great trauma, the experience that group music making can have on increases in emotional capital, as evidenced in improved self-esteem, self-regulation, optimism and confidence (Cottingham, 2016).

Later in this paper I will discuss if online communities of music-makers can offer some alternative to face-to-face contact in times when the latter is scarce. However, this assumption is based on the understanding that households not only have access to equipment with which to get online (and have adequate resources for the number of persons in each household), but also have the suitable technology (such as the right kind of computer and connection) and knowledge to be able use such equipment to participate in music-making. Perhaps the most significant limitation of online music-making from a sociological perspective is the concept of digital poverty, or digital exclusion, and the contribution to social capital as outlined above. In 2018 a significant percentage of the UK population (5.3 million

adults in the UK, or 10.0% of the adult UK population) had no access to the internet at home, as reported in the Internet Users, Labour Force Survey (Office for National Statistics, 2020).

The Department for Education has published guidance for schools to help address the issue of digital poverty, with procurement of laptops, tablets, and 4G wireless routers for the most disadvantaged (Department for Education, 2020). Without access to such resources, children and adults alike from less privileged backgrounds are at risk of the attainment and achievement gap being widened further. Coe, Weidmann, Coleman and Kay (2020: 4) found that ‘school closures will widen the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers, likely reversing progress made to narrow the gap since 2011’, but offering support to engage suitable online teaching and learning may mitigate that impact. There is evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic has been bringing communities together, with an increase in volunteering (Butler, 2020) and the regular Thursday evening ‘Clap for Carers’ during April and May 2020, showing public appreciation for NHS and key workers (Clap for Carers, 2020). However, Wright, Steptoe and Fancourt (2020: 1) explore longitudinal data of the impact across a broad socio-economic spectrum from the first three weeks of lockdown in the UK and conclude that ‘there were clear inequalities in adverse experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in the early weeks of lockdown in the UK. Results suggest that measures taken to try to reduce such adverse events did not go far enough in tackling inequality’. However, Putnam (2000: 299) explores trends in social engagement and participation, including civic, political and religious, and suggests that becoming ever more socially disconnected from one another has a negative impact on our ‘stock’ of social capital. It is unclear yet what the impact of COVID-19 will be on individuals, communities and wider relationships.

## 6. The role of technology in creating meaningful remote musical participation

Waldron (2018: 2) posits that online spaces can provide a sense of community similar to that found in person, particularly with regard to online musical communities, which

... manifest as either ‘self-contained’ online communities in and of themselves (i.e., they exist only in virtual space with no overlap with a correlating offline community), or as an active online ‘place’, which exists in addition to an already established offline music community (i.e., the latter being a ‘convergent community’—it occupies spaces in both online and offline locales).

Creating such online communities allows for connection where there may not be any other option, but it can also overlook the importance of in-person human contact, particularly in music-making scenarios. Higgins (2012b: 5) outlines the ‘distinctive traits that constitute community music practitioners’, including being committed to the concept that every individual has the right to create and enjoy making music with others, and consciously facilitating models and groups in which to do so. Mullen (2002) contributes that community music delivery constitutes facilitating not teaching, and that outcomes for community music groups are less rigid than those in formal teaching and learning. This concept could lend itself more to online music-making, which leans towards the experience of creatively musicking with others, rather than focusing on strict educational outcomes, noting that formal, informal and non-formal strategies can be found in a variety of places. Folkestad (2006) outlines many formal and informal ways of learning, as does Veblen (2012) who describes that ‘people learn in varied ways throughout their lives, at dissimilar rates, with varied purposes in mind’. Mullen (2002: 4) also outlines the role of the community musician, as opposed to a teacher, as

... a bounded facilitator, convening the group, clarifying, acting as guardian of the process, not using their position to impose or to teach but to inquire, to echo and affirm. Sometimes the role of reason is not enough, people may come to music seeking an inner transformation and the community musician may find themselves having to take on the role of the neo-shaman.

Dillon and Brown (2010: 33) explored the idea of ‘meaningful’ content of virtual ensembles and how meaning is found in ‘personal, social and cultural experiences’. This study, using software called ‘Network Jamming,’ found that relationships developed based on shared symbolic interactions, and offered a framework for participants on how to relate to and work with others. They suggested that, just as the experience of working creatively within an ensemble provides a framework for how to behave, an online forum offers the opportunity to develop and maintain similar relationships (Dillon and Brown, 2010: 35). Biasutti (2018) found that participants in an online collaborative composition study, which included the creation, sharing and recording of new material, agreed it was an effective informal learning activity. Greene (2007: 167) also explored the concept of jamming in near real time, and the developments of further collaborative online software for bands, [eJamming](#). This technology focuses on the problem of latency, as also explored with the ‘online orchestra’, discussed by Rofe and Reuben (2017). More recently, the app [JamKazam](#) has seen 335,000 users of their free monthly sessions since the beginning of the pandemic (Knopper, 2020).

The video-sharing platform Zoom has seen a massive increase in usage, particularly for choirs and singing groups, since the pandemic began: ‘its measurement of annualised meeting minutes jumped 20-fold, from 100 billion at the end of January to over two trillion in April [2020]’ (Turk, 2020). Despite heavily reported issues with latency and connection (Making Music, 2020b) this platform quickly became the favoured sharing resource of amateur and professional music organisations. The ‘Zoom Choir’ has become synonymous with making music in lockdown, particularly given the concerns around singing and the dissemination of aerosol particles as noted below.

While many lay users have found software to be lacking in allowing live, concurrent or ‘synchronous’ music-making to take place, there are programmes being developed, such as [Jacktrip](#) with Stanford University in the US, offering encouraging audio technology to reduce latency issues to a more tolerable value in the future (Cáceres and Chafe, 2008), though, for this and other software to work well, it is necessary to have certain equipment and connections, and for participants to be located relatively near to each other. The introduction of video conferencing creates further complications. Such latency issues have contributed to many finding that Zoom is unable to facilitate group music-making in real time; however, music leaders have found a number of solutions that enable choir members to enjoy the feeling of togetherness in music-making, either through live singing sessions whereby all participants are muted so they can only hear themselves and the track and conductor, or through the submission of individual video and audio recordings to a click or backing track, compiled using video editing software to form a whole (Making Music, 2020a). This alternative way of making music asynchronously online has been more common during this lockdown: individuals record separately, and these performances are then edited together to appear as one (for example, Gold, Himonides and Purves, 2020). The technology which enables such performances is in fact no different than the sound-on-sound studio technology which has enabled musicians to record in the same space (such as a recording studio) without having to occupy it at the same time. What is new—that we no longer have to share either space or time—is due in part to modern digital audio workspace (DAW) software, which enables access to studio quality technology on everyone’s laptop, tablet or smartphone (Ashbourn, 2021).

It is now easier than ever to connect globally, sharing music, ideas and concepts – the globalisation of musical culture could be a paper in itself, but here I will merely touch on the suggestion that sharing creativity across the world has never been easier (Burgess and Green, 2009; Gibson, Luckman and Willoughby-Smith, 2010).

In May 2020 the Choir of Royal Holloway, University of London, released ‘[Can You Hear Me](#)’ with the soprano Laura Wright, a commission from composer Thomas Hewitt Jones with lyrics by Matt Harvey, highlighting issues around social isolation, loneliness and despair. Proceeds from the single will be donated to a selection of UK-based mental health organisations. The process to create a high-quality release-ready recording was challenging (as outlined above): ‘each choral scholar was sent the music and a recording of the backing with a click track. In materials connected to the release, it was noted that ‘the



hard part is the editing process, getting all the voices perfectly lined up, and also improving the sound quality from recordings made on mobile phones', and that some work was done in post-production by the world-famous Abbey Road Studios (Royal Holloway, University of London, 2020) The recording, during lockdown, was an emotional experience for all members involved. Rupert Gough, Choir Director, noted the impact on the young people of the choir:

All the musicians involved hope that the music will bring comfort and strength to many. They have enjoyed creating this single but they themselves face loneliness and despair as our singers are unlikely to be able to unite and sing together as a musical family for some time to come. Mental health was already an ever-increasing problem amongst university students and now, more than ever, we need to stay strong. (Royal Holloway, University of London 2020).

## 7. **Community and connection: the practicalities of music-making in lockdown in the UK**

A number of communities, unable to perform together or meet in person, have taken to connecting regularly online, not to rehearse or perform, but simply to gather, and talk, or do quiz nights, reinforcing that group and community music-making is often just as much about the community aspect as the music. It has even been argued that the social aspects of musical groups, that is the community and conversation (about music or otherwise), can be subsumed under a broader definition of 'musicking' (Odendaal, Kankkunen, et al., 2013; Campos Valdere, 2019). Multiple online resources have been created in a very short space of time, with organisations around the world sharing experience and insights. In the UK, 'Making Music' – the UK's membership organisation for leisure-time music – have created substantial resources for amateur groups and music leaders on staying connected, noting that making music with others 'goes beyond the music, and is as much about social connections and shared creativity - all of which have been hit hard by COVID-19' (Making Music, 2020a).

Group singing has been a particular area of concern, due to issues surrounding potential spread of the virus through aerosol particles, as well as the close contact with others required to facilitate group music-making, and the potential for airborne spread of the virus (Anderson, Turnham et al., 2020; Asadi, Bouvier et al., 2020; Morawska and Milton, 2020). Loudon and Roberts (1968) found that particles generated through singing did increase the dissemination of tuberculosis, emitting six times more than in normal speech. However, the most recent study into the potential transmission of COVID-19 through aerosol droplets and particles disseminated by singing (published in August 2020) reported that while there is a rise in aerosol mass in singing, which increases with volume, early conclusions suggest that it does not produce significantly more aerosol than speaking loudly, though there is a general consensus among community groups (many of whom may include participants who are in more vulnerable categories) that the risk is increased. These findings will hopefully encourage groups to return to performing in the near future, paying attention to social distancing measures and adequate ventilation of rehearsal and concert spaces, though naturally there is still some reticence and concern around such activities (Gregson, Watson, Orton et al., 2020).

A further amateur choral project highlighted the importance of continuing to make music together, even if not able to do so in person, and also confirmed the capacity of music to support, nurture and heal at a time of national anxiety. In June 2020, the London Symphony Chorus, one of the UK's most well-respected and best-known large symphonic amateur choruses, launched a musical tribute to health and care workers who have died of COVID-19. Entitled 'Never to Forget', the new commission by Howard Goodall CBE was designed as a 'virtual, visual and acoustic memorial project dedicated to UK health and care workers who have died in the COVID-19 pandemic' (Jonze, 2020). This [recording of one hundred singers](#), accompanied by members of the London Symphony Orchestra, made individually during lockdown, was released on YouTube and social media on 5 July 2020, to coincide with the anniversary of the founding of the NHS. The London Symphony Chorus noted that it 'wanted to acknowledge and pay tribute to those who have lost their lives caring for others and hope[d] to bring

some comfort to the bereaved, by letting them know their loved ones have not been forgotten' (London Symphony Chorus, 2020).

Both this project, and the one undertaken by the Choir of Royal Holloway noted above, plus the vast number of 'virtual choirs' to be found online emphasise and highlight the importance of music, and, in these cases, singing, in promoting wellbeing, togetherness and social cohesion during difficult times, as outlined by Daykin, Norma, Meads et al. (2017).

In the education space in England, many Music Hubs, the government-funded 'groups of organisations—such as local authorities, schools, other hubs, art organisations, community or voluntary organisations—working together to create joined-up music education provision' (Arts Council England, 2020) moved swiftly to create meaningful and effective online tuition for the children and young people with whom they work, with support from Music Mark, the UK membership body for music education (Music Mark, 2020a).

Recreating the group ensemble experience online presented innumerable challenges. Lincolnshire Music Hub undertook a vocal and instrumental project early in lockdown, a video performance of '[We're Still Standing](#)' performed by the Boston Youth Jazz Orchestra (Music Mark, 2020b). The ensemble had continued to meet remotely during lockdown at their usual weekly time to retain some semblance of normality and structure, and the project was created from conversations during these sessions. The Area Manager for Lincolnshire Music Service, Lee Hextall, outlined the challenges presented by such a project:

I had never presented to groups of young people online before and quickly learned the limitations of the various virtual meeting platforms. I am an experienced music leader but found myself talking too much because it's tricky to read the group reaction. In our track thankfully there were no tempo changes or pauses! These would need to be scored imaginatively. Arranging and creating guide media is essential to the success of these projects. (Music Mark, 2020b)

Feedback from the young people involved was positive:

I found learning "We're Still Standing" on my own a bit tricky but Lee sent me a special piano recording which I learned off by heart at home. When I was ready, my Mum filmed me lots of times on her phone until I got it just right. She was so happy she cheered at the end which was kept in the video! (Isy, participant in Lincolnshire's 'We're Still Standing' project, Music Mark, 2020b, online).

In a neighbouring county, Nottinghamshire Music Service took the opportunity in lockdown to strengthen and develop relationships with other international youth ensembles, namely the Jugendorchester Stadt Karlsruhe, the youth orchestra of Nottingham's German twin city, Karlsruhe. Described as a 'musical time capsule project', the piece, again made using individual home recordings, was premiered on [the Hub's YouTube Channel](#) in July 2020 (Nottingham Local News, 2020).

The National Youth Jazz Orchestra, unable to hold courses in person, created a 'Virtual Academy' with several resources for their young musicians (National Youth Jazz Orchestra, 2020). The resources enable musicians to join in with a virtual Big Band. Videos are introduced by NYJO tutors, with instruction and guidance provided. Musicians can access all the parts available as wished and mute the part they are playing to join with the ensemble.

NYJO's Artistic Director, Mark Armstrong, noted the importance of this work:

We are at a unique moment in time when our communities have been separated, and it is crucial that we don't allow our young musicians to feel disconnected. As always, our mission is to

inspire, educate and bring people together; for now, we need to look at doing this in new ways (Scotney, 2020).

In addition to the musical resources shared online, NYJO were particularly concerned with the mental health and wellbeing of the young people they worked with during lockdown. A page of resources to support these issues was made available on the ensemble's website ([Virtual Academy](#)), with links to external support agencies and simple advice to stay connected and avoid anxiety, including quotes from the young people themselves:

I've been finding the lockdown has brought a whole mix of different feelings out. I've been on my own in a house in London, so I do miss human contact that's not over the phone. I've really focused on eating well and keeping fit, with yoga and meditation really helping to keep my mind in check! I'm busy with music and there's always things to do, but I have often found it hard to motivate myself (NYJO Trombonist quoted in Wilson, 2020, online).

## 8. Concluding Thoughts

It is clear that community and group music-making are important to personal and social development, and, in this extraordinary time of lockdown, online alternatives can offer some form of coherence and opportunity for music-making. The contribution that group music-making makes towards the development of social and emotional capital is clear, although the disparity of access to online spaces and robust technologies, due to economic or social disadvantage, is understandably a cause for concern. There is so much we cannot yet know about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, not least in terms of the possibility of a global recession, or the longer-term impact on society. The effect of lockdowns on community music-making is substantial, and there are certain groups who will be more adversely affected by the issues outlined in this paper: older people, disabled people, and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In the case of a recession, widespread poverty could challenge access to the technologies needed for musical engagement and learning unless governments and national providers step in to offer funding, equipment and support to protect this invaluable cultural activity. With the prospect of the continuation of the pandemic and potential repeated lockdowns, the role of these organisations will be increasingly important, aside from the benefits to health and wellbeing, in ensuring vulnerable groups are not marginalised further. There is evidence to suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic is bringing communities together, and in some cases creating new ones, though the longitudinal data examined by Wright et al. (2020) highlights clear inequalities, particularly in those communities listed above as vulnerable to additional adversity.

The long-term impact of this unprecedented situation around the world has yet to be seen sociologically, economically or educationally, but one thing is clear: music and related communities of musical practice have enormous power to bring people together and to heal, connect and soothe in times of difficulty.

Advances in technology have ensured that we can now make music together in a variety of ways when in-person activity is not permissible, though we must ensure that those from disadvantaged communities who need and desire music most in their lives are also able to access it in future. It has long been accepted that group music-making can have a huge impact on community building, and in these unprecedented times, we have seen the immense creativity and innovation of musicians across the world adapting and developing new ways of working. These new online communities have helped ameliorate social disconnection during COVID-19 by generating a reach that may have been even broader than localised community music making as we knew it. In the future, such online communities may serve to benefit groups in society who may be impoverished or excluded from traditional music-making, either through a lack of face-to-face musicking opportunities or by issues such as geographical location, health concerns or other barriers to access.

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