

Why Live Music is Integral to Canada's Culture and Communities, and How Canada's Federal Government is Combating its Dissolution During the COVID-19 Pandemic

By: Tory Rosso

I argue that the dissolution of live music is one of the most important cultural and political issues Canadians are facing today. Live music has been integral to the culture of Canada from when Indigenous peoples solely lived here, to the last several hundred years as it exists today. For musicians and patrons, live music is an extensive component of their identity and community (Van der Hoeven & Hitters, 2019).

Many groups and individuals have forged friendships, discovered talents and processed emotions in dim-lit dive bars, concert halls and the basements of residential dwellings. Surely, more than one life has been saved by the right song or concert. The positive social, cultural and mental health impacts of live music events have been extensively documented and acknowledged. In ecologies where local music scenes flourish, there are reduced crime rates, positive economic impacts and thriving cultural communities.

Consequently, the absence of live performances during the COVID-19 pandemic and its questionable longevity has created "concern regarding how and when the live music industry would recover" for musicians, venue owners and patrons alike (Gloor, 2020, p. 17). Preserving the durability of live music is fraught with a plethora of obstacles. Government funded institutions such as the Canada Music Fund (CMF) and Canada Council for the Arts who provide a baseline of public funding for Canadian musicians, industry personnel and venue owners through the Foundation Assisting Canadian Talent on Recordings (FACTOR) and the Musicaction Foundation (or La Fondation Musicaction) is a satisfactory first step (Heritage, 2021). However, I believe additional funding is required for non-commercialized music communities and venues, coupled with appropriate infrastructure to effectively support

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music communities in urban centres (Van der Hoeven & Hitters, 2019). Additionally, a greater emphasis on music in K to 12 education and scholarly circles would collectively benefit the preservation of live music in Canada. While the federal Liberal government publicly funds Canadian music, more effective policy decisions by individuals who truly care for the arts would contribute to increasing the longevity of live music in Canada.

Review of the Literature

The review of the literature focuses on the social, cultural and economic implications of live music through Van der Hoeven and Hitters (2019), Botstein's (2020) study on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on live music, as well as Canada's (2021) government and organizational advocacy for COVID-19 mitigation; they are organized chronologically.

Van der Hoeven and Hitters (2019) provide an "overview of the social and cultural values attributed to live music ecologies in urban environments" (p. 263). To determine the merit of live music communities, the pair conducted a "qualitative content analysis on music reports and strategies to assess the social and cultural values attributed to live music ecologies" (p. 265). Their study found both the social value and cultural value of live music ecologies in urban centres to be extremely beneficial to not just the communities they originated from, but to greater areas, as social capital is noted to have a positive "spillover effect" and public engagement may reduce crime (p. 266). Additionally, their study found musical creativity to breed talent development, resulting in increased overall cultural vibrancy in urban centres (p. 267).

Botstein (2020) highlights the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the American populace, particularly musicians and the institution of live music, acknowledging similar detriments have taken place in Canada and globally (p. 352). Accordingly, Botstein hypothesises and analyzes the disparity of live music, citing a lack of "meaningful

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government support for the arts” (p. 353). In addition to government and public support, Botstein requests additional academic acknowledgement, along with cultural education and indoctrination on a societal level to restore live music (pp. 358-359).

The Canada (2021) Middle East and Africa (MENA) report is transcribed as part of a speech made by the Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Canadian Heritage for the Federal Liberal Government on Aug. 7, 2021, to highlight the financial contributions the Canadian government is injecting in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (para. 1). In the article, the government breaks down their budget of \$70M CAD and briefly discusses how they are distributing the funding to provide support for Canadian artists and industry (paras. 2-4). Additionally, the article discusses the Foundation Assisting Canadian Talent on Recordings (FACTOR) and the Musicaction Foundation as the primary organizations which handle distribution of funding (para. 5). Federal Minister Guilbeault concludes the article, stating the “Government of Canada is protecting good jobs in our Canadian creative and cultural industries, for decades to come” (para. 10).

Cultural and Economic Implications of Live Music

Compared to other social, cultural and economic topics, little scholarly research has been conducted on the social, cultural and economic implications of live music (Botstein, 2020). However, the investigatory data and anecdotal evidence garnered by a brave few supports its function in a healthy, prosperous society which “fosters culture and creativity” (Victoria, 2011, p. 26). Van der Hoeven and Hitters (2019) discuss the examination of the social and cultural values attributed to live music ecologies in urban centres. By analyzing qualitative content in the form of reports and strategies from a host of countries (including Canada), the pair noted three separate categories for social value; social capital, public engagement and identity (p. 266) and another trio for cultural value; musical creativity,

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cultural vibrancy and talent development (p. 267). Unsurprisingly, “live music enhances a sense of belonging and allows people to connect to each other” and subsequently fosters positive mental health and creative circles (p. 266).

By attending or performing live concerts, groups and individuals may find community and explore self-identity. These groups and individuals are chiefly motivated by “escape from everyday life, socialisation and family togetherness” while attending live music events (Davies, 2020, p. 185). Undoubtedly, the “enhanced social networks and social engagement” achieved from live music mitigates mental health disparity associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and previous comorbidities (Victoria, p. 25, 2011). Similarly, Behr et al. describe another tension in cultural industries, which is chasing funding versus actual artistic creation: “The pressure to translate cultural activity into economic value has a longer history, resulting in the problem of ‘energies [being] directed into chasing funding and collecting evidence rather than achieving cultural purposes” (Behr et al., 2016, pp. 403-404).

Albeit “the pressure to translate cultural activity into economic value” renders difficulty in measuring social and cultural values tangibly, they do carry compounding and indirect economic effects (Behr et al., 2016, p. 403). For example, a study conducted in the province of Victoria in Australia found that over \$322 million was generated by live music venues in 2011 – a substantial contribution to the overall GDP of the nation (Victoria, 2011, p. 21). While the figures may be similar in Canadian context, it is indicative of the economic capability in which live music possesses.

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Table 1: Total Turnover by Victorian Venue Type (\$m; Victoria, 2011, p. 21)

Live Music Status	Bars and Hotels	Nightclubs	Cafes & Restaurants	Total
Total Turnover				
Dependent	233	17	49	299
Supported	89	7	16	112
Incidental	252	19	83	353
Total	574	43	148	764
Live Music Increment				
Dependent	233	17	49	299
Supported	18	1	3	23
Incidental	0	0	0	0
Total	251	19	52	322

Additionally, it must be noted there are many indirect economic impacts of live music. Aside from paying the musicians, techs, venues and venue employees, revenue is also generated through the sale of alcohol and food, with additional contributions made from touring musicians who may purchase fuel for their tour vehicles, hotel rooms, etc. (Van Der Hoeven & Hitters, p. 264, 2019). For example, the indirect economic outcome of touring musicians is highlighted through Neller (2021), as she states, “I always pay my band, along with the costs of food, gas, and hotels” while on tour and during recordings sessions (p. 3).

Politicians and policymakers are chiefly concerned with the economic impact of music, social and cultural values that are often overlooked. However, these social and cultural values are proven to not only enrich communities intrinsically, economically and conversely, and should be studied and enhanced (Van Der Hoeven & Hitters, 2019, p. 263). While it reigns true, live music is an incubator for social, cultural and economic ignition, and bolstering community; the next section discusses how the institution is at risk and has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

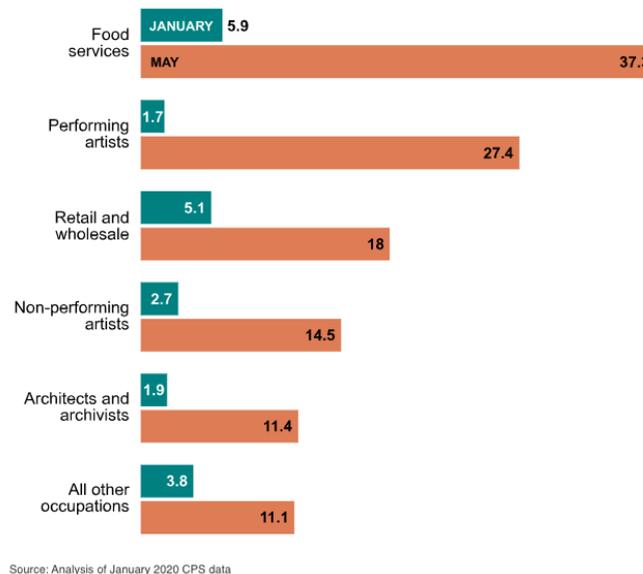
Live Music Dissolution and COVID-19 Pandemic Affect

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An already struggling artistic medium, live music was further hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic as “public life and therefore public culture were abruptly shut down in America, as they were all over the world” (Botstein, 2020, p. 352). Consequently, many musicians' careers were placed on hold, work did not exist and patrons were denied access to public live music venues (p. 353). By the same token, while many venues globally were forced to close during the pandemic; the United Kingdom estimates nearly “570,000 full-time equivalent jobs in the events sector as a whole” are at risk in an industry which draws nearly £1.3B in annual revenue (Drury et al., 2021, p. 1). Similarly in Canada, the live music industry, which “previously contributed approximately \$3 billion to national GDP and created 72,000 jobs nationwide” has been in stagnant remission and at risk of collapse (Auger, 2020, para. 2). Interestingly, it is rather surprising to see an industry which bolsters such immense cultural contributions and economic implications on the verge of a systemic subsidence. The graph below from Marrone et al. (2020) displays the significant impact of job losses faced by performing artists in the United States during 2020. Shockingly, “[unemployment] is particularly high for performing artists, of whom 27.4 per cent report being unemployed, roughly twice the fraction of non-performing artists” (para. 5).

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Figure 1: Unemployment Rates in Arts and Artist-Heavy Occupations, January 2020 versus May 2020 (Marrone et al., 2020)



In reality, the COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated the decline of musical culture and live concerts, as they had already begun to see a deterioration in North America since the year 2000 (Botstein, 2020). With this intention, it is noted live music in North America has been fundamentally “weakened by the erosion of philanthropy and the sustained absence of support from public funds” (Botstein, 2020, p. 354). Botstein argues although live music may not achieve the broad popularity it once did and consequently does not receive sufficient public funding it is inherently integral to politics, freedom, identity, culture and mental health amongst other facets (p. 356).

While the scope of this section has focused through the macro lens of live music decimation, it is crucial to consider the effects on individuals in music communities on a micro level. Nashville musician Michaela Anne Neller embodies this sentiment eloquently as she states, “The grief of this year has been challenging to come to terms with. We are enduring the loss of our careers, our livelihoods, our financial future, and our spiritual life through connecting musically with others” (Neller, 2021, p. 5). Although music is felt and

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shared by almost the entirety of the populace, its commoditization and profitability have stricken its meanings of hope and solidarity from shared North American culture without its communality being experienced (Botstein, 2020, p. 356). Neller states, “The longer this draws out, the more devastation we all experience. Venues are starting to close. Booking agencies are laying off employees. People’s lives as well as the landscape of the live music industry will forever be changed after this” (Neller, 2021, p. 4).

Accordingly, this section effectively demonstrates the economic and cultural threats imposed on the dispersion of live music. The next section discusses how both government and organizations may contribute to the advocacy and preservation of live music through monetary funding and COVID-19 mitigation.

Government and Organisational Advocacy

As previously discussed, the institution of live music in Canada exists in a fracturable state at risk of collapse. The question is, how can government and organizational efforts intervene to support its existence? Foremost, Botstein (2020) cites the importance of responsible and effective government for proactive intervention to assist with struggling music scenes during these unprecedented times.

Canada (2021) highlights the contributions and tactics the Canadian Federal government is implementing to support Canadian musicians and live music in Canada as part of the Canada Music Fund (CMF) regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. On Aug. 7, 2021, the Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Canadian Heritage for the federal Liberal Government emphasized their investment of over \$70 million from 2021-2024 that was established to subsidize and support both Canada’s live music community and Canadian musicians through the COVID-19 pandemic (Canada, 2021). Guilbeault notes, “It makes sense to help our live music sector, as our artists, technicians and entrepreneurs are among

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those affected the most by the COVID-19 pandemic” (Canada, 2021, para. 10).

One channel of the government's funding is distributed through the Canada Music Fund (CMF) which helps ensure “a diversity of Canadian music artists connect with audiences everywhere” (Heritage, 2021, para. 1). A broad breakdown of funding promises to deliver a sum of \$50 million in COVID-19 related financing in 2021-2022 to Canada’s live music sector and musicians through the CMF to mitigate the financial repercussions the country's music industry has endured throughout the pandemic (Canada, 2021). Additionally, “a two-year extension of the \$10 million supplemental annual funding for 2022-2023 and 2023-2024” will be implemented to bolster the support of Canadian artists, promote their works and offer export activities and skills development (Heritage, 2021, para. 7). The government explains the importance of these industry supports as follows:

By acting now and investing in the live music sector, the Government of Canada is protecting good jobs in our Canadian creative and cultural industries, for decades to come. It makes sense to help our live music sector, as our artists, technicians and entrepreneurs are among those affected the most by the COVID-19 pandemic. I can't wait to enjoy live music together again, and I'm sure neither can you!” (Canada, 2021)

The federal government distributes much of their arts funding through the FACTOR for English markets and through Musicaction for the Francophone musician populace (Canada, 2021). Another facet of public music funding in Canada is the Canada Council For The Arts, which operates as a “federal, arm's-length Crown corporation created by an Act of Parliament in 1957 to foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts” (Info source, n.d., para. 6) Working with government advisory, the CCA effectively provided \$315.4 million in grants in 2020-2021 to approximately 7,073 artists (Funding, n.d.). Grants may be especially beneficial to non-commercialized artists who are equipped with immense revenue streams. To emphasize, government funding is crucial to the integrity of live music as “[without] additional government intervention, a staggering 96% of live music venues and stakeholders say they will not be able to remain open in the near

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future” (Auger, 2020, para. 2).

Through proactive investment in live music and the arts, the Government of Canada is providing security in the creative and cultural sectors. However, when compared to other national governments, Canada’s contributions may appear dismal by contrast. Notably, governments in Europe and Asia have guaranteed the financial security and livelihood of artists, restored institutional subsidies and reinstated education in a host of artistic disciplines. Music is a shared tradition in many of these cultures and artists are both prized and fundamental (Botstein, 2020). The European Union boasts a €2.5 billion budget for culture which “exclusively supports the culture and audio-visual sectors” encompassing approximately seven million artist careers (Eu boost for culture, 2021, para. 3). To put this into perspective, the EU’s budget translates to roughly \$3.6 billion CAD, overshadowing the Canadian federal budget 47 times. Granted, the Canadian government is certainly making strides in their funding of public arts and live music. However, there is undoubtedly room for additional resources to support live music. Although funding is integral to the conservation of live music, it is essential to briefly explore policy and infrastructure to the conversation.

Given the undeniable merit of social and cultural values of live music in urban centres, Van der Hoeven and Hitters (2019) study displays the importance of urban planning for live music as effective infrastructure is integral to the success of cultures and music communities in urban centres. The authors reflect on this sentiment by stating “urban policies should not just mitigate the negative impacts of popular music (e.g. noise and anti-social behaviour near venues), but also enhance its positive impact on the urban environment” (Van der Hoeven & Hitters, 2019, p. 268). The imposed statement may translate to re-evaluating liquor and noise laws, venue permits and building codes to appropriately suit thriving live music ecologies. By and large, both academics and policymakers may find the Van der Hoeven and Hitters (2019) study useful in incorporating

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live music into urban planning and infrastructure.

Understandably, outside of policy, funding and infrastructure, Botstein (2020) has introduced several tactics which may be implemented to restore the culture of live music, these include: a return to intensely local music, an expansion of music repertory and curation, public performances outside of concert halls and bars, increased funding for music education, cross-disciplinary inclusion with other artistic mediums and a request for scholars to “reinvent themselves as ambassadors and teachers who use language to encourage the love of music in the communities in which they reside” (p. 359). The latter suggestion rings true as finding scholarly articles to support this paper were few and far between when compared to other current political discourse. The combination of these approaches would provide both direct and indirect support and be highly beneficial to the overall health of the live music industry.

In collaboration with substantial funding, effective policy and infrastructure, secure COVID-19 mitigation is also essential to the structure of successful live music ecologies. The next section will discuss how both government and private venues may implement effective COVID-19 mitigation tactics into their overarching strategies.

COVID-19 Mitigation Case Study

Outside of the conversations of funding and infrastructure, adequate COVID-19 mitigation is another essential tactic which must be employed when venues are hosting live music. Fortunately, Drury et al. (2021) provide insight on the behavioural risks and possible mitigation strategies which may be implemented by both music and sports venues in compliance with relevant government regulations and authoritative event managers as COVID-19 hospitalizations and infections begin to decline to ensure safe re-openings. As COVID-19 “spreads between people through close contact, including droplets and aerosols,” live music venues are especially vulnerable to the spread of the virus (Drury et al., 2021, p.

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2). Davies describes the challenges for organizations due to any emergency changes such as the pandemic: “Unless festival organisations are innovative in developing high-quality online alternatives, have saved for a ‘rainy day’, or their customers are prepared to roll their ticket purchases over to next year, they are at risk of liquidation without government intervention, as per many of the small-medium enterprises within the tourism and hospitality sectors. In reality, short-term intervention by the government may provide some initial help” (Davies, 2020, p. 186).

Their study describes several key variables aimed at deciphering public behaviour regarding the virus including group identities (dominant ideologies of a particular crowd), norms (how a particular group interacts physically and psychologically) and trends in public behaviour, citing “focus on proximity behaviours, since physical distancing has been a key mechanism for preventing transmission” (Drury et al., 2021, p. 3). Drury et al. also noted key behaviours to deliver a COVID-19 mitigated event include managing crowd flow and density, mask enforcement, effectively located hand-hygiene stations and minimizing shared-touch surfaces (p. 4). For maximum effectiveness, it is recommended the preceding suggestions shall be coupled with positively reinforced COVID-19 messaging and of course frequent cleaning at venues (p. 5).

The authors reiterated the effectiveness of their strategies by confirming their “recommendations for a communication strategy that will enable the public and staff to engage with these behaviours is based on what we know about the identity processes and social norms that govern behaviour” (Drury et al., 2021, p. 4). By implementing the suggested tactics, music and sports venues can greatly mitigate COVID-19 infections at their venues (Drury et al., 2021).

Conclusion

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The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on already struggling live music communities must not go unnoticed. From the data gathered, anecdotal evidence and the case study provided in this text, it is eye opening to witness how such an incubator of culture, social fitness and economic contribution may become neglected in these unprecedented times. Live music venues were the first to close and the last to open in the COVID-19 pandemic. Their existence thrives on public support and effective infrastructure. While many politicians and policy makers may be removed from the cultural hub which is live music, it is imperative they are made aware and properly respond to this lesser known ‘pandemic.’ By implementing a progressive amalgamation of government and organisational funding, effective infrastructure and policy, foundational cultural indoctrination, and secure COVID-19 mitigation, it is entirely possible for live music to exist as the thriving pantheon it once was.

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