
THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A R T I C L E S A N D E S S A Y S

BARBARA JABŁOŃSKA
Jagiellonian University

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INTRODUCTION

One of the important dimensions of social life is people's musical activity. As Oliver Sacks aptly notes, no matter how much musical ability and sensitivity to music are programmed into our brains, music plays a fundamental and central role in every culture (Sacks 2009: 11). It is thus a universal human practice (Podlipniak 2004), as we do not know of any society that has not developed some form of musical life. Music is therefore one of the important elements of daily life (DeNora 2004). The world of music consists of a whole network of complex socio-musical practices related to the creation, performance and reception of music. It satisfies many human needs and serves multiple functions in society. One of the important functions of music in society is communicative, that of a carrier of specific content. This fundamental function took on an even more pronounced character at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Music turned out—especially in the first stage of the pandemic—to be one of the essential elements of survival of the global quarantine. The most recent research by psychologists indicates that the role of music in coping with the crisis situation that the global pandemic entailed is undoubtedly important. According to the analysis conducted by Naomi Ziv and Revital

Hollander-Shabtai (2021) and published in article form as “Music and COVID-19: Changes in Uses and Emotional Reaction to Music Under Stay-at-home Restrictions”, music is something very personal as well as social at the same time: it allows one to both experience one’s personal emotional states and provides an opportunity to maintain relationships with others. The researchers’ findings are clear—people were definitely more likely to listen to music during the pandemic, especially in its first stages. The results also show that about one-third of the study’s participants felt that their emotional response to music during the stay-at-home restrictions was stronger than usual. As the authors point out, these findings support the idea of the social nature of music as a form of communication and highlight its importance for individuals’ sense of belonging (Ziv, Hollander-Shabtai 2021: 12).

Other evidence that music was a way of coping with forced isolation and loneliness included, especially in the initial stage of the pandemic, spontaneous balcony singing (Socha 2020), joint music-making to raise the spirits, and various initiatives on the part of musicians, that I will discuss later. It is surprising, then, what a powerful bonding and integrating force music has proven to be during the global pandemic. This text seeks to make a preliminary diagnosis of the socio-musical human practices which emerged during the pandemic, and in particular to point out the communicative processes taking place in the wider world of music. Thus, the aim of this article is to show—at the exploratory level—the spectrum of phenomena and processes which appeared (or became entrenched) in the area of the world of music in the wide sense during the COVID-19 era. The preliminary diagnosis of the phenomenon shown here may contribute to further in-depth research on the diversity of socio-musical practices that appeared during the pandemic. The text, however, intentionally omits selected fragments of the musical life of society, but rather seeks to encompass from a broader perspective the transformations of musical culture and musical practices of society (at the level of artists-musicians, audiences and musical institutions) during the pandemic.

The pandemic changed people’s lives overnight and entirely redefined many natural activities that are taken for granted. This uprooting of the routine of life and halting of its everyday flow affected most areas of social life, including artistic and musical life. As the eminent conductor and commentator on socio-musical life, Leon Botstein (2019: 353), rightly observed, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the traditions and customs of musical culture all over the world. The impact is even referred to as a “cataclysmic event in the world of music” (McLeese 2020). Musical

artists are a social group which has been affected by national quarantine, forced isolation and the closure of musical institutions in a very severe way.¹ There was the impossibility of making music together, as well as an inability to interact directly with audiences. These were difficult experiences for artists. The virus hit the world of music, in which the fundamental element is the artist-to-public relationship and the artist-to-artist relationship in the joint creation and reception of music. Social distancing and forced isolation froze all musical activity. Hundreds of thousands of concerts, live performances, festivals, competitions and other musical events have either been cancelled or postponed. This is a huge blow to the world of music—both on a macro and micro scale—to the music industry as a whole and to individual artists alike. At that time, various individual and institutional strategies of dealing with this crisis situation were born. New or modified approaches to functioning in the coronavirus-affected music world have also emerged.

Firstly, the pandemic demonstrated the great social power that music has. As Botstein points out, since ancient times music has had the power to restore hope and faith that things will be alright. The time of the pandemic showed again that music could help overcome the isolation, uncertainty, and fear of the virus (Botstein 2019: 353). Secondly, the pandemic brought to light an issue that is completely banal, if obvious: The general quarantine and “freezing” of the world of culture made humanity realize that music exists largely thanks to interpersonal relations, that it is a thoroughly social phenomenon and a form of interpersonal communication. Therefore, it is worthwhile to first discuss the social and interactive character of music.

MUSIC AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON AND A FORM OF INTERACTION

Music is, without a doubt, a socio-cultural phenomenon. It performs many different functions in society, and is an inalienable element of human existence. This was already known by ancient thinkers, if only by Plato and Aristotle, who pointed out the important role music played in the people’s collective life (Plato 1958; Aristotle 1983). Thus, music has been seen as an enduring and important aspect of social life since ancient times. As Alphons Silbermann, author of the much celebrated *Sociology of Music*, wrote: “[...] music is chiefly a social phenomenon: social

¹ It is estimated that in 2020 the music industry sustained heavy losses reaching even 80% of revenues in comparison to earlier years (Savage 2020; Johnston 2020).

because it is a human product, and because it is a form of communication between composer, interpreter and listener” (Silbermann 1963: 38). Half a century ago, Silbermann also wrote the significant words that remain valid: “The sociologist of music always remembers that music is a social phenomenon which manifests itself as a social process, as a social activity, and thus requires two partners: the provider and the recipient” (Silbermann 1962: 11). He also added the still valuable thought that “[...] art, music, like the economy, law, religion, the state, etc., presents a zeitgeist of cultural-social relationships. It will then become understandable why the sociology of music is a branch of sociology, studying the circles of influence of music [...]” (Silbermann 1962: 9). A similar opinion is shared by Fabio Dasilva, Anthony Blasi and David Dees, who stress that “[...] the sociology of music is [...] not so much about music in itself as about society” (Dasilva, Blasi, Dees 1984: vii). Therefore, for the researchers of socio-musical phenomena, music is one of the important aspects of human activity, both at the individual and collective level, and the task of the sociology of music is to know the individual and collective dimensions of human activity. The time of the pandemic is a sort of social laboratory of such practices, which cannot go unnoticed at the level of scientific reflection.

Returning to the reflections on the communicative function of music, it should be stressed once again that music enables understanding between the participants of the communicative process focused around art. Music makes it possible to establish relations between the creator, the performer and the recipient of art. The processes of creation, reproduction and reception of art are all social, interactive and communal processes. Alfred Schütz, a representative of the so-called phenomenological sociology school, wrote about the interactive character of music in a highly interesting manner. He wrote a famous essay entitled “Making Music Together: A Study in Social Relationship” (Schütz 1951). For the purpose of our considerations, it is worthwhile to remember that for Alfred Schütz, music is a meaningful activity to which people ascribe certain contents, gestures, symbols. The main axis of consideration is thus “[...] the particular character of all social interactions connected with the musical process: they are doubtless meaningful to the actor as well as to the addressee, but this meaning structure is not capable of being expressed in conceptual terms; they are founded upon communication, but not primarily upon a semantic system [...]” (Schütz 1951: 76). The actions of the actors in the musical process are thus mutually oriented towards each other, as well as supported by an adequate body of musical knowledge,

and—very importantly—they are embedded in a broader socio-cultural context that ultimately makes it possible to meet the condition of inter-subjective communicability. Schütz draws attention especially to interactional rituals that enable the synchronization of actions while performing or listening to music. For a piece of music to be performed, its players must understand and communicate with one another. This is possible through meaningful gestures. As Schütz (1951: 95) notes, “[...] making music together occurs in a true face-to-face relationship—inasmuch as the participants are sharing not only a section of time but also a sector of space. The other’s facial expressions, his gestures in handling his instrument, in short all the activities of performing, gear into the outer world and can be grasped by the partner in immediacy”. This is a key point in Schütz’s interpretation of the process of musical communication. Through the mutually oriented actions of actors embedded in specific socio-cultural conditions and equipped with appropriate knowledge and competence (or more broadly: musical culture), as well as through the alignment of their streams of consciousness in internal time, musical communication between musicians is possible. Following in the footsteps of Schütz’s thinking, it can also be added that similar interactional rituals are also related to the relationship that occurs between performer and listener, sharing the same time and the same space.

All that Schütz wrote about almost a century ago can be applied with great success to the pandemic context in which we currently find ourselves. The pandemic has revealed that the face-to-face relationship in the shared experience of music (on the creative, performance and reception levels) is incredibly important. It showed us the importance of not only direct contact between artists, but also between the artist and the audience. Until now these issues were obvious, natural, unquestionable and, or so it seemed, inalienable. The forced isolation during the quarantine made the public aware of the fact that the live musical life may come to a complete standstill, not to say—freeze. The social quarantine, however, triggered new phenomena and processes. It is well known that individuals can adapt to changing social conditions. When reality proves surprising, people are able to adapt to it quickly, modifying their actions. As we could read in the daily *Rzeczpospolita*, when “[...] all philharmonic halls and concert halls were closed, musicians turned out to be the most active among artists, and they were the fastest in trying to find their way in the new situation” (Marczyński 2020). Therefore, it is worth looking at selected areas of socio-musical life (at the broadcasting/artistic/and reception level), tracing the most important phenomena and processes

arising in pandemic times. It is also worth asking: what socio-musical practices have emerged during the pandemic?

WHAT SHOULD REPLACE LIVE MUSIC?

The new media turned out to be what saved the world of music frozen by the pandemic. Understandably, culture moved to the Internet (even if it had been present there for a long time). In the situation of the closure of the world of music and artistic activity in various areas, the virtual space became practically the only place where members of artistic circles and recipients of musical content could function. It should be noted from the outset that the new media and the entire “multimedia infrastructure” are an attainment of mankind that has been in operation for decades. Two great breakthroughs, first analog and then digital (Kofin 2012), have made it possible to experience music together (or individually) in a dimension unknown previously. Before the media age, music was only available live. As Ewa Kofin (2012) aptly put it, the availability of music was connected solely with the natural contexts of its creation and listening. Analog and digital media have brought about a revolution of sorts in this area. Music in the media has made the musical public sphere a more open, accessible, common and everyday phenomenon. The digital stage seems to be particularly important, as it provided the opportunity to free and democratize sonic technology (Strachan 2017).

As Timothy Dean Taylor (2001) rightly shows, historically, the development of technology (first analog, then digital) has affected the way music is produced, recorded and distributed, and—ultimately—consumed. Contemporary technology has also provided opportunities for considerable eclecticism when it comes to music consumption (Taylor 2001: 19). Moreover, as Taylor (2001: 3) adds, the technological revolution in music has proved to be the most groundbreaking for the development of Western music since the invention of musical notation in the ninth century. Certainly, then, the impact of new technologies associated with both analog and digital breakthroughs has revolutionized music to such an extent that it has become ubiquitous, democratic, and instantly accessible (Nożyński 2016). Nick Prior defines the process of revolution in the world of music discussed here in terms of technological determinism, and also refers in this context to the Weberian process of rationalizing music (Prior 2018).

Obviously, in pre-pandemic times music was available both live and virtually. The COVID-19 pandemic definitely changed these proportions.

It also gave the world of music an important impetus to take advantage of the benefits of new media. The pandemic showed that musical life can still exist, just in a different form: online. Interestingly, during the pandemic, the formula of live music practically died down, and moved almost entirely to the web. This is all the more so as live music was an important component of the global music industry (Holt 2010) before the pandemic. The transformation of online practice became visible not only at the level of music reception (listeners), but also at the level of music creation and interaction (mediated communication) between creators, performers and audiences of musical content. It is therefore worth tracing the various socio-musical practices that existed in the era of the pandemic in the wider world of music—at the level of creators, musical institutions, as well as audiences—and their mutual relations.

MAKING MUSIC TOGETHER IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD

Looking at constitutive musical practices in pandemic times from the artistic and performance viewpoint, several important things can be noted. First, there is what I am working on calling “the individualized ensemble”. The times of the pandemic have shown that the face-to-face relationship in the process of collective music performance has definitely been shaken up, if not suspended, for the indefinite future. As Schütz wrote, in order for musicians to play together, there is a need for understanding, a mutual tuning-in relationship, and a synchronization of actions in external time (here and now). Given the limited opportunity or the complete impossibility of playing together (concerts, rehearsing, etc.), most music creation and recording initiatives have moved online. One can enumerate examples of such artistic activities and ventures, i.e. co-recording of musical content that is later available on the Internet for a wide audience.² Despite the impression of co-performance of remotely recorded works, it should be emphasized that each artist records his/her soundtrack separately in order to be able to combine them all together later using the latest multimedia techniques. This means that the co-creation of works is joint effort in appearance and thoroughly individualized. Thus, there is usually no place not only for a face-to-face

² One interesting example is the remote recording of Krzysztof Penderecki's *Hommage* by the teachers, students and graduates of the Cracow Academy of Music (<https://www.amuz.krakow.pl/biuro-promocji-artystycznej/projekty/koncerty-orkiestrowe/hommage-a-krzysztof-penderecki/> [accessed on 24 February 2021]).

relationship, even if mediated by the latest technologies, but even for sharing the musical “here and now” in the process of co-creating music. Aram Bajakian (2021) calls this phenomenon “being alone together”. In other words, we can say that the word “social distance” has redefined the form and character of musical practices, and has established, as it were, a “new paradigm” (Lasalle 2020).

Secondly, there is what I call “the globalized virtualization of music practices”. The ability to record music remotely has entirely freed artists from time and space constraints, giving them the opportunity to create music in all sorts of artistic configurations. During the pandemic, a great number of remote music recording initiatives have sprung up, providing artists with space for entirely new forms of musical communication by artists and for crossing geographical and temporal boundaries. Moreover, globalized musical culture has never been so close to what Max Weber wrote long ago when he discussed the phenomenon of music rationalization (Weber 2009; Darmon 2015). By revisiting Weber’s assumptions, one can certainly argue that the global quarantine has accelerated in an unprecedented way a type of musical practices that would certainly not have emerged so rapidly in normal (non-pandemic) times. A good example of this is the initiatives of artists remotely recording pandemic songs, such as *One World. Together at Home*. An excellent example from Poland is the virtual concert of choirs of 14 Polish technical universities,³ which — using the latest multimedia techniques (including interactive 360° recording and adaptive, ambisonic sound)—“sang together” the song *O ziemi polska* [The Polish land].

Thirdly, there is what, for the purposes of the present analysis, I call “the domestication of the musical public sphere”. A significant number of musical works (both classical and those that can be included in the broad category of popular music) show—in the visual sphere—the home contexts of the singing and playing artists. Thus, the stage has moved to the home couch or a comfortable armchair. This is an extremely interesting aspect of socio-musical practices that emerged on a massive scale during the pandemic. Of course, artists have long shown the domestic context in which they live, but the times of the pandemic has imposed this

³ This was initiated by Professor Mariusz Mróz, conductor of the Gdańsk University of Technology choir. As one can read on the website of the Gdańsk University of Technology, “members of particular ensembles from the universities in Białystok, Gdańsk, Gliwice, Kielce, Koszalin, Cracow, Lublin, Łódź, Opole, Poznań, Rzeszów, Szczecin, Warsaw and Wrocław were selected and prepared by their conductors and are recording their vocal parts at home.” See <https://chor.pg.edu.pl/nagrania>.

context, as it were, by definition. Since we all stay at home, artists also show themselves to the public at home, in informal clothes, in domestic situations, with pets and household trinkets on the shelves. A case in point is John Bon Jovi's latest version of the song *It's my Life (Live from Home 2020)*. Or a song entitled *Sunny* performed by Billie Eilish & Finneas.⁴

Fourthly, it is also what I call the musical empowerment of society. As I mentioned earlier, music has the universal power to unite and encourage people—even in socially difficult times. It is also an art form through which emotions, feelings, and socially shared narratives describing reality are expressed. In keeping with Susanne Langer's way of thinking, one can say that it is possible to convey certain emotional states through music. In this sense, music is semantic, containing emotional meanings (Langer 1976). The time of the pandemic has revealed with particular force this old truth about music. Musical artists, expressing various kinds of emotional states in their musical productions (ranging from fear and anxiety to optimism and joy), have turned their works into a kind of message to society that joins the broader musical discourse in the public sphere. There are many examples of this type of songs, especially those recorded by artists of the pop music genre in the broad sense. Songs that describe "covidian" reality and the emotions associated with it include The Rolling Stones' *Living in a Ghost Town*,⁵ or the song written by John Bon Jovi and fans *Do what you can*.⁶ A song recorded by Polish artists also comes to mind: *Wszystko będzie dobrze* [Everything will be fine], begins with the words "This song's meant to cheer you up / To pick you up and carry you away".⁷ The initiative of Adam Sztaba, leading to the recording of the song *Co mi Panie dasz* [What will you give me Lord],⁸ met with a wide response in the musical public sphere. More than seven hundred Polish artists (both musicians-instrumentalists and well-known singers) took part in recording it. It became a kind of anthem of the pandemic. Importantly, the song conveys both the mood of fear and suspension caused by forced isolation during the pandemic, as well as hope for a better tomorrow.

And fifthly, it is also the type of socio-musical practices which have been known for a long time, but have appeared again with particular force in the musical public sphere. I am referring here to the mobilizing and educa-

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJuHn8JzhP0> [accessed: 24.02.2021].

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNNPNweSbp8> [accessed: 24.02.2021].

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vh6ctK7ONo0> [accessed: 24.02.2021].

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCA6dbG1K80> [accessed: 24.02.2021].

⁸ <https://tvn24.pl/kultura-i-styl/kiedy-wroca-koncerty-adam-sztaba-o-muzyce-w-czasach-pandemii-4785395> [accessed: 24.02.2021].

tional function of music in society. It mainly has to do with the communicative and performance function of musical pieces, which are intended to encourage certain functions (such as washing hands and social distancing), or to discourage others (such as leaving home unnecessarily). Examples worth mentioning include songs like the cover entitled *Sweet Caroline*... *Wash your hands* performed by Neil Diamond. An analysis of the mobilizing function of this “covidian” song was conducted by Eric T. Lehmann (2020) in his text entitled “Washing Hands, Reaching Out—Popular Music, Digital Leisure and Touch during the COVID-19 Pandemic”. For another excellent example, see Elise Cournoyer Lemaire’s (2020) analysis of the communicative function of pandemic songs in “Extraordinary Times Call for Extraordinary Measures: The Use of Music to Communicate Public Health Recommendations against the Spread of COVID-19”.

And from our Polish musical public sphere comes to mind a song by Artur Gadowski titled *W domu siedź* [Stay at home].⁹ As I mentioned earlier, most “covidian” songs of this type serve to make people do certain things. It is well known that music can have a significant impact on the shaping of pro-social behavior and attitudes (Greitemeyer 2009), and this influence is often even better and more effective than other forms of social communication and social campaigns (Lemaire 2020). Indeed, studies have shown that messages conveyed through music are extremely effective and can reach a wide audience, getting the attention of millions in an instant (Lemaire 2020). Moreover, the global crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the need for effective communication of recommendations to society at large the world over. Music has such a special power because, as Tarr, Launay, and Dunbar (2014) rightly point out, it reinforces social bonds. This in turn translates into a global solidarity and the achievement of common goals (Lemaire 2020). Thus, the musical message here has proven to be an excellent form of delivering specific content and modeling social behavior in a globalized pandemic reality.

MUSIC INSTITUTIONS AND ARCHIVES—POPULARIZING MUSIC ONLINE

Yet another dimension of the considerations undertaken here are the socio-musical practices that were developed during the ongoing pandemic at the level of musical institutions. They were and are aimed at adapting to the new conditions forced by the pandemic. The essence of the matter

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yWg1vvvF10> [accessed: 24.02.2021].

is reflected in the statement of the director of the Institute of Music and Dance, Katarzyna Meissner, who said the following about the coronavirus reality in the world of music: “Change. Culture is trying to adapt to new conditions, although we need more creativity online.” So words like “change” and “online” capture the essence of what has happened recently in the world of music and culture and of what virtually all music institutions had to face. Significantly, each such institution has certainly dealt with it in its own way (working out its own strategies, taking advantage of aid programs, or looking for solutions to sustain the artistic activity and maintain an audience). This is a challenge both globally and locally (Betzler, Loots, Prokúpek, Marques, Grafenauer 2020).

According to surveys conducted by CBOS in 2020, 16% of respondents found that of all the measures imposed during the national quarantine, the closure of cultural institutions, cinemas, theaters, museums, and the cancellation of concerts were the most arduous (CBOS 2020). So how have music-related institutions adapted to new pandemic conditions? It is worthwhile to list the most important phenomena and processes that can be seen in this area. Firstly, there is the digitalization and archiving of musical content. Of course, this is nothing new in the digitalized culture in which we live. Nevertheless, the time of the pandemic has accelerated this process. Secondly, there is the mass of archived and digitalized music content widely available to the general public, either in paid or free streaming. Thirdly, there is the attempt to maintain an interactive relationship with the audience through social media and technological instruments that make it possible to build a connection with the audience. Fourthly, there is also the popularization of musical content beyond the context of the local musical public sphere and reaching out with musical offerings to audiences on a global level. Given the vast number of examples of such practices, I will only mention a few. One of them is the free streaming services provided, for example, by the Metropolitan Opera, as well as the virtualization and mass sharing of musical events. Another example, one from Poland, is the Cracow Philharmonic’s initiative *The Krakow Philharmonic in the Internet*, thanks to which archival recordings of concerts, among other things, are made available and the relationship with the audience is maintained. It is worth emphasizing that a significant part of actions popularizing music are based on free and universal access to musical content. This means that, like never before, music lovers have access to excellent music content as well as unique concerts and recordings. Despite the unquestionable advantages associated with digitalization and making cultural products widely available, a phrase

reflecting the situation of music institutions during the pandemic—“music trapped in the Internet”—seems appropriate.

VIRTUAL AUDIENCES IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

The last but not least important aspect of the considerations undertaken here is the reception of musical practices. It is worth mentioning selected phenomena and processes which appeared in the times of the pandemic—the times when the musical life shifted almost entirely to the Internet. The fact that there exists a virtual audience for musical content has not been known for a long time. But as the possibility of experiencing live music was eliminated or greatly limited, the reception practices have changed on an unprecedented scale and all over the world. Thus, it is worthwhile to mention such phenomena as (1) the virtualization and networking of the musical public sphere, (2) the privatization of the musical public sphere, as well as (3) online musical deliberation, (4) the convergence of musical practices, (5) the culture of real virtuality, and (6) the power of audiences and the democratization of the musical public sphere. All these phenomena and processes were recognized in pre-pandemic times. Nevertheless, the fact that culture and art have found themselves trapped in the Internet has intensified them. Paradoxically—the virus turned out to be a kind of catalyst for music in the virtual world.

Firstly, the phenomenon of virtualization and networking of the musical public sphere deserves some attention. As Ivo Supičić points out music is “[...] an expression of a collective experience” (Supičić 1987: 91). He also adds that while music was once reserved for individuals, today it belongs to the masses (Supičić 1987: 89). One can also add, following Naomi Miyamoto, who implements Jürgen Habermas’ notion of the public sphere to the world of music, that the public sphere concerning art requires more than just discussion and deliberation — it requires space to host an artistic event (Miyamoto 2013: 104). Making a brief historical reference, it is worth recalling that the musical public sphere was born when paid concerts appeared, making music available to those who wanted to participate in musical life (Mika 2018). As Bogumiła Mika rightly notes, “lively discussions about art (and thus music) were held by the bourgeoisie in cafés and private cultural circles. The exchange of views also became institutionalized in the form of criticism published in magazines, of which —dedicated to art—more and more were published from the eighteenth century onwards” (Mika 2018: 140). The development of analog media, followed by the digital revolution and access to new media, improved

the exchange of views on musical topics and also opened up musical content to the general public. Thus, from the moment the digitalized forms of production, distribution and reception of music became widespread, one can speak of the virtualization and networking of the musical public sphere. Nevertheless, as Michał Jaczyński points out, “the merging of the spheres of music and new media brought about a terminological problem related to the type of participation in the process of reception of art. The answer to this problem was provided in the 1990s by Irmgarda Bontinck. Following Heinrich Bessler, she distinguished two categories of participation: *Umgangsmusik* and *Darbietungsmusik*. The foundation of the former is shared, active experience of music—being part of a certain community of listeners. The second consists in separating the individual listener from the artwork; it is to this category that the cited author included music associated with mass media [...]” (Jaczyński 2015: 13).

The participatory experience of music was further curtailed in the era of the pandemic when, due to restrictions, it became impossible to experience musical events in common. One solution turned out to be live streaming of concerts, which replaced traditional forms of participation in music events. An excellent example demonstrating the specificity of these musical events is the research conducted by Femke Vandenberg, Michaël Berghman and Julian Schaap. They address the social practices of online participation in live streamed concerts in the COVID-19 era. The authors focus on exploring old and new social rituals that emerge during virtual techno-party concerts in the Netherlands. In particular, they are interested in the process of producing a collective consciousness and a sense of community in times of social isolation by examining the posts of virtual techno-party participants (Vandenberg, Berghman, Schaap 2020). The content analysis of concert attendees’ comment posts clearly indicates how much fans miss face-to-face contact during live concerts, which is expressed both through emoticons and phrases like “it is just painful to watch this from the couch, when all I want to do is be there with you guys dancing (3 sad face emojis)” (Vandenberg, Berghman, Schaap 2020: 8). Thus, this captures the idea of the solitary listener experiencing media mediated musical experiences in home isolation.

Secondly, the pandemic has brought about a phenomenon that can be briefly called the re-privatization of the musical public sphere. This means that experiencing music is not—as it used to be—possible in publicly shared contexts or, as Stockfelt (1991) wrote, in appropriate listening situations, such as concerts, festivals, recitals, performances, etc. Due to the lack of opportunities to listen to live music (and, moreover, to

share this activity with other listeners), the experience of music has been “trapped” in private and individualized contexts. The sharing of the musical “here and now” by a larger number of listeners has thus become virtually impossible, which has also prevented the sharing of musical experiences, tastes and opinions in the heat of the moment. This is an extremely interesting aspect of the transformation of musical practices, resulting from the closure of cultural institutions and depriving people of the possibility of gathering as a musical audience.

Thirdly, instead of this, the practices of sharing musical experiences, tastes and opinions, through various portals and online forums, were reinforced during the pandemic. These provided a space for discussing musical issues, expressing tastes, and maintaining contacts between artist and audience. This phenomenon of expanding the musical public sphere and musical deliberation is nothing new in mediated reality. As Kenton O’Hara and Barry Brown (2006) have long noted, the ways in which we listen to music and acquire it, exchange it, give it to each other, talk about it, and present our musical resources, are excellent examples of self-expression and establishing relationships with other people. Pandemic times have shown that this type of communication allows for the survival of circumstances in which music (and therefore musical audiences) has been confined to the space of the Internet. It is also worth noting that during the pandemic, interesting practices emerged between the artist and the audience, consisting of the artists co-creating new musical works together with the audience.

Fourthly, the convergence of musical practices, as well as their densification in the virtual public sphere, is an important phenomenon. According to Marek Jachimowski (2012: 39), “the densification of media spaces in all forms of communication has changed the relations not only between the forms of communication, but above all between the senders and addressees of messages, as well as the messages themselves. This gives rise to new social, cultural, civilizational, organizational, economic and legal consequences of the functioning of not only the media. These changes generate qualitatively new communication phenomena.” The convergence of musical practices also applies to situations in which musical reception is combined—at the communicative level—with broadcasting and participation, as Henry Jenkins wrote about, if in a different context, some time ago.

Fifthly, this brings us to the notion of a culture of real virtuality. Some time ago it was already noticed that culture is becoming more and more networked and virtual. As Karolina Śmigielska points out, referring

to Manuel Castells' concept, the image of real-virtual culture is closely related to spaces of flows "[...] where music enthusiasts and [...] artists scattered around the world create a network where they exchange their finds and creations and inspire each other" (Śmigielska 2017: 175). Not only are these archives shared and reproduced, they also provide an excellent example of a matrix of human practices related to music. As the author notes, "contemporary musical culture is both ephemeral and eternal" (Śmigielska 2017: 175). Pandemic times have further cemented this unavoidable process.

And sixthly, it is worth mentioning the last important attribute of the contemporary musical public sphere which has become even more obvious and pronounced in pandemic times. This is the democratization of the musical public sphere and the power of the audience associated with it. The very idea of the democratization of music was already noticeable in the era of analog music, and it gained momentum in the era of digital music. However, it was not until the forced "escape" of the world of music to the Web that the process of full digitalization of musical content, made available on a mass scale to the audience, began. This means that all those interested (and possessing the necessary competences) can participate in a digitalized, open and universally accessible musical public sphere. This also entails the phenomenon of "audience power", which has been noted for some time now. For ever since the institution of paid concerts emerged in the eighteenth century (Mika 2015), audiences have gained the power to decide which musical works are popular and which are not. The power of the audience is particularly evident today, in an era of a digitalized public sphere in which artists and performers compete for listeners. When artists are deprived of the possibility to perform concerts and play live music, this contact remains only virtual. Thus, in times of pandemic, the power of the audience has been strengthened; through their musical preferences, tastes and opinions, they decide what is popular in the musical public sphere and what remains on its margins (for example, the number of views of a given song on YouTube, the number of subscriptions or likes). This phenomenon, combined with contemporary musical omnivorism (Szpunar 2017) and the diversity of musical tastes (Domański et al. 2020), makes the contemporary musical public sphere even more complex and fragmented.

WHAT'S NEXT? (IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION)

A number of research initiatives are currently emerging to illustrate the phenomenon of pandemic music practices. One of the more interesting

ones is a project by musicologist Melanie Wald-Fuhrmann of the Max Planck Institute, who is coordinating a large-scale study of the experience of music (at both the performance and reception levels) in the COVID-19 era (Essmann 2020). Also of interest is the international study of young musicians described in the article “The music experience. “It’s Turned Me from a Professional to a ‘Bedroom DJ’ Once Again: COVID-19 and New Forms of Inequality for Young Music-Makers” (Howard et al. 2021). This paper describes the pandemic experiences of 77 young (18–35 years old) musicians from Australia, the UK and Portugal. Among other things, the interviews revealed a rather positive aspect related to the adaptation of young musicians to the pandemic situation. The artists indicated, among other things, more time for making music, listening and creating music. It also became possible to focus more on oneself and one’s inner experiences, and this entailed greater peace and quiet in order to create music. In this sense, musical creation in pandemic times became more of an individual than a collective endeavor. New models and strategies of artistic creation also emerged. However, this has sharpened inequalities in the artistic market (Howard et al. 2021).

Looking more broadly at public discourse about the problems faced by the music world in pandemic times, it is also worth mentioning research that demonstrates the normalizing power of media discourse about the traumatizing experience of the music world’s freeze. This study was conducted by Australian researchers showing how the media create narratives describing pandemic reality using the example of the Australian music business and its associated mental health crisis. These narratives oscillate around issues such as “[...] (1) acknowledging grief and loss, (2) supporting creativity and well-being, (3) adapting to the new normal and (4) envisaging a post-pandemic future” (Brunt, Nelligan 2021: 42). This last aspect seems to be of particular sociological interest. What’s next then? How will the virus affect the world of music and what will be the outcome? What will the world of music look like after the pandemic?

As Daniel Lee, William Baker, and Nick Haywood note, it is difficult to predict the long-term effects that the social distancing due to the pandemic will have on the cultural world. However, the virus will certainly act—if it has not already acted—as a kind of cultural catalyst (Lee, Baker, Haywood 2020). It will bring (if it has not already done so) new practices to the world of music, linking even more strongly—in hybrid mode—the live musical scene with the virtual one. Paradoxically, then, the pandemic will contribute to social progress and the development of new socio-musical practices that will allow music to be experienced,

shared and co-created even more broadly and fully at the performance level. Here are the most important advantages of the pandemic situation in which the world of music has found itself: 1) even more intense globalization of music—going beyond local public musical spheres in the case of live concerts; dissemination of music on an unprecedented scale; 2) even greater digitalization of musical content (databases and archives of musical content) commonly available to the mass audience; 3) strengthening the cultural amalgamation (Hannerz 2007)¹⁰ of musical content and the acceleration of the development of a global *oecumene* for sharing musical content; 4) strengthening of the phenomenon of musical omnivorism through wider and more universal access to musical content; 5) popularization of local musical micro-cultures through sharing musical content; 6) formation of a new, globalized musical audience (global audience), more aware, aesthetically sophisticated, and skillful in searching for musical content. And in the case of artists: 1) new ways of establishing and maintaining contact with audiences and fans, and 2) new strategies for making money in the music industry. Ultimately, this leads to the accelerated digitalization of music and culture—a process already underway for some time. However, this will surely be another breakthrough in the world of music, admittedly forced by pandemic times, but ultimately—acting as a catalyst for music culture.

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¹⁰ Cultural amalgamation is understood here after Ulf Hannerz (2007)—as cultural diversity and the fusion of cultural content in the process of its exchange in the global *oecumene*.

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Abstract

The time of the pandemic has redefined most areas of social life, including the world of music in the broad sense. Paradoxically, the virus itself turned out to be a kind of culture catalyst. The aim of this article is to present—at the exploratory level—the subject of people’s practice of music during the COVID-19 pandemic. The text will discuss selected aspects and processes related to the practice of musical. The main focus will be on showing how the musical life of society—confined to the Internet out of necessity—has evolved during the pandemic.

key words: music, media, culture, Polish society, COVID-19 pandemic, sociology of music

WIRUS JAKO KATALIZATOR KULTURY?
REFLEKSJE SOCJOLOGICZNE NA PRZYKŁADZIE PRAKTYK MUZYCZNYCH
W CZASACH PANDEMII COVID-19

Barbara Jabłońska
(Uniwersytet Jagielloński)

Abstrakt

Czasy pandemiczne przedefiniowały większość obszarów życia społecznego, w tym także szeroko pojęty świat muzyki. Sam wirus zaś — paradoksalnie — okazał się swoistym „katalizatorem kultury”. Celem artykułu jest ukazanie — na poziomie eksploracyjnym — problematyki muzycznych praktyk w czasach pandemii COVID-19 na pierwszym etapie jej trwania. W tekście omówione zostaną wybrane zjawiska i procesy związane z praktykami muzycznymi — zarówno na poziomie nadawczym, jak i odbiorczym. Główną osią rozważań będzie próba ukazania, w jaki sposób życie muzyczne społeczeństwa — uwięzione z konieczności w Internecie — uległo przeobrażeniom w czasach pandemicznych.

słowa kluczowe: muzyka, media, kultura, społeczeństwo polskie, pandemia COVID-19, socjologia muzyki