

## Music industry in crisis: The impact of a novel coronavirus on touring metal bands, promoters, and venues

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### Abstract

In March of 2020 the world began to take widespread preventative measures against the spread of a novel coronavirus through travel restrictions, quarantines, and limitations on social gatherings. These restrictions resulted in the immediate closing of many businesses, including concert venues, and also put an abrupt end to live music performances across Europe and the United States. This had immediate implications for touring bands, as bands earn most of their income touring, and many found themselves in a situation where they experienced substantial financial losses alongside negative affective ramifications. This article utilized evidence from qualitative interviews and public statements to draw inferences about the impact of COVID-19 on the music industry, with a particular focus on touring musicians and their respective managers, promoters, booking agencies, and record labels. Musicians reported negative affective and financial ramifications as a result of COVID-19, but they also reported overwhelming support from metal music fans that made the fallout from the pandemic less severe. Further inferences were drawn about how the closures of concert venues adversely impacted the communities dependent on them, as concerts serve a stimulating role for surrounding businesses.

*Keywords: coronavirus, pandemic, music industry, COVID-19, musicians, coronavirus, affect, financial loss*

### The 2020 outbreak of a novel coronavirus

The year 2020 had an immense and likely lasting negative impact on many industries, including the music industry, due to a contagious outbreak of a novel coronavirus known as COVID-19. This article provides a snapshot of how deep and how widespread the financial and emotional influence of the viral pandemic was on the music industry following the first two months of the global spread of the virus. Perspectives were drawn from two groups of interviews that are used to support evidence gathered from literature, media sources, and public funding statements to get an idea of how COVID-19 impacted the music industry beginning in March and April of 2020.

The first group of interviews were conducted with touring heavy metal musicians about how COVID-19 had impacted them, as many musicians had tours unexpectedly cancelled and were uncertain when they could perform live again. The second group of interviews were conducted with booking agencies, band managers, concert promoters, and record label employees to understand the wider impact of the pandemic on the music industry. Particular focus was given towards the emotional and financial influence of the virus. Further inferences based on public reports, GoFundMe pages, and Kickstarter webpages were made in regards to the impact that the pandemic had on concert venues, and the influence that failing concert venues had on their local communities. Before getting into the

perspectives of interviewees from countries across the United States and Europe, background is provided on the virus and evidence is provided for the psychological consequences that have followed previous coronaviral outbreaks and their respective quarantines. Many occupations were impacted by the COVID-19 restrictions, and these changes had the potential for lasting cultural, societal, financial, and emotional impact.

### **The emergence of COVID-19**

The year 2020 was one marked with struggle on a global level due to the spread of a novel zoonotic coronavirus (COVID-19) capable of infecting humans that was initially linked to the Huanan Seafood Market in Wuhan, China. The virus was first detected on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (Pan et al., 2020). Similar to other coronaviral pneumonia, the virus had the capacity to lead to acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), which made it especially dangerous for individuals at higher risk of respiratory complications. The dangers of COVID-19 became immediately apparent due to its alarmingly contagious nature (Liu, Gayle, Wilder-Smith, & Rocklöv, 2020). Although it had similarities to the SARS and MERS coronavirus, COVID-19 was more infectious than the aforementioned. The virus quickly spread from China to other countries as infected individuals travelled abroad via international flights, buses, and cruises. A mere two months after the initial outbreak, the virus had reached seemingly every area of the world. The virus was particularly widespread and dangerous because many carriers of the virus showed no or minimum symptoms, so people were sometimes spreading it without realizing that they were infected carriers (Hu et al., 2020). The onset, longevity, severity, and long-term complications for COVID-19 varied from person to person (Bernheim et al., 2020), so although most people were at low risk of exhibiting the more serious symptoms of the virus, it still had the potential to be especially problematic for vulnerable populations, such as the immune-compromised and the elderly. Scientists were quick to work towards treatments for COVID-19 since the novel nature of the virus made people especially vulnerable to it. Roughly 5% of infections required intensive care, which ran the risk of overwhelming healthcare systems across multiple countries due to millions of cases being confirmed worldwide (Murthy, Gomersall, & Fowler, 2020), and because the vulnerable populations that had developed serious symptoms as a result of COVID-19 often exceeded the number of physicians, treatments, and hospital beds that were available (Emanuel et al., 2020). At the time of this writing, promising progress had been made in developing treatments and vaccines (Gao, Tian, & Yang, 2020), but a commercial treatment was not yet available as clinical trials were still in early stages.

The fast spread of the virus resulted in widespread closures across the globe, with bans being placed on large gatherings, which had an immediate impact on multiple industries, including the restaurant and music industries. In areas where the virus was especially rampant, local and federal governments mandated quarantines. The degree of restriction during the quarantines was dependent on the country, city, and region. For instance, some areas only required the strict quarantine of infected individuals, whereas others, as was the case in many areas of the United States, required that individuals stay at home unless they were deemed 'essential employees' by the government or unless they were leaving their homes to acquire food or essential supplies. In addition, the closing of restaurants, workplaces with many employees, and schools led to immediate consequences for families. Many individuals found themselves either unemployed, temporarily without income, or in a position where they still had to work, but had children at home that conflicted with their work obligations due to

the cancellation of school for the remainder of the school year. Worse yet, the movement and expectation towards having parents homeschool their children was not feasible for many working parents, and even those that had the time to homeschool their children were likely not properly equipped or trained to do so (Cavanagh & Fox, 2020).

### **The emotional consequences of a pandemic**

Large-scale pandemics and their resulting conditions of quarantine have significant affective consequences. People worldwide, and in particular in occupations that required travel or large gatherings, were beginning to feel the effects of quarantine in March of 2020. Although many industries and employees were affected, healthcare employees were impacted the most intensely and adversely. They had to deal with the sometimes gruesome symptomology and deaths of COVID-19 patients, the continual anxiety-inducing risk of getting themselves infected, the continual stigma associated with close proximity to infected individuals, and having to cope with having insufficient supplies, including surgical masks and respirators. During the early stages of the COVID-19 global quarantine and isolation, it had not yet been made clear what safeguards were in place for mental well-being for healthcare employees or the general population, or what the full extent of the psychological ramifications would be for isolated individuals, however, inferences can be drawn from previous pandemics. Negative psychological affective responses, including depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), have been documented during other pandemics, including during the spread of the SARS coronavirus in Toronto, Canada (Hawryluck et al., 2004; although see the work of Hull, 2005). PTSD symptoms were especially prevalent for healthcare workers during that quarantine (Reynolds et al., 2008) and during the 2015 MERS coronavirus outbreak (Lee, Kang, Cho, Kim, & Park, 2018). The negative stigmatization associated with these diseases was a consistent concern for both infected individuals and hospital employees (Maunder et al., 2003). For the general public, longer periods of quarantine were associated with increased prevalence in psychological distress, including confusion and anger (Brooks et al., 2020). These negative psychological statuses are the result of ambiguity about the respective disease and incarceration (Barbisch, Koenig, & Shin, 2015). According to Brooks et al., these symptoms can be reduced by officials quarantining individuals for no longer than required, providing clear rationale for quarantine and information about protocols, ensuring sufficient supplies are provided, and making altruistic appeals to maintaining public health. Of particular importance, especially for vulnerable populations, was to continue to exercise during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jiménez-Pavón, Carbonell-Baeza, & Lavie, 2020), although this was increasingly difficult for some, since many gyms and fitness centers were among the small businesses that had closed as a result of the federal restrictions on large gatherings.

### **Occupations at financial risk**

Countries, including the United States and across Europe, began to take widespread measures to slow the spread of the virus in March of 2020. These measures included limiting public gatherings, quarantining individuals and cities with confirmed cases, limiting travel, and closing schools and restaurants for dine-in customers. These closings resulted in millions of people losing their jobs in the United States (Long, 2020), with 700,000 jobs lost in March alone (Keshner, 2020). Seven million small

businesses were at risk of closing permanently (Powe & Wagner, 2020). These closings also had immediate negative ramifications on the stock market (Watts, 2020). A survey by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and MetLife found that 43% of businesses would close permanently without substantial government assistance or a dramatic change in economic conditions.

### **Music occupations at financial risk**

Among the businesses at risk of permanent closure were the venues that host concerts, and the employees that worked at concert venues were largely among those that had lost their jobs. A survey conducted by the National Independent Venue Association concluded that as many as 90% of music venues in the United States would permanently close without substantial federal funding beyond the measures that were already in place (Pasbani, 2020). The reason that independent music venues were especially at risk was because they were among the first businesses to close as a result of the pandemic and they would be among the last to reopen due to their dependency on large gatherings. Venues had zero revenue without concerts despite having continued bills to pay, and the ability to open at partial capacity was not economically feasible since most fees associated with concerts are fixed, and so music venues largely couldn't fully reopen until sometime in 2021 which would result in a loss of nine billion dollars in ticket sales alone. These restrictions combined with public anxieties about contagion at concerts meant that live concerts and the venues that held them could not persist. As noted by Rivero (2020), the COVID-19 situation hurt six core occupations that are all tied directly into live music events: '1) the arenas and stadiums who employ office staff, security, technical, and many more...all the way through to concessions, 2) the trucking, shipping, and logistics required to move equipment around daily, 3) the travel and lodging industries, which are deeply intertwined with live events. Crews of people are driven around on tour buses, fly major airlines daily and stay in hotels each night in-between, 4) the production vendors who supply all of the equipment to make these events happen, 5) the artists, speakers, hosts, and all of the on-stage talent, as well as the promoters, event organizers, and their logistics teams, and 6) those that design the shows themselves — individuals, studios, agencies and more.' All of these occupations would require an extended period of time to recover because concerts can take months or even years to plan, and due to financially successful concerts being dependent on large, close-quarters gatherings, it was unclear how long it would be until music consumers would feel comfortable attending live concerts and returning to their regular live event consumptive behaviors. Concerts venues and promoters were reluctant to host concerts too soon, as this could put concert attendees at risk of contagion and ultimately reflect poorly on their businesses, and lower concert attendance could result in financial losses for venues and promoters.

To give another example of the widespread and global risk to music venues, 556 venues were identified as being at risk of permanent closure in the United Kingdom (Jackson, 2020) without more government assistance than what was being provided. The closing of venues would have direct ramifications on the communities they served too, as it was estimated in the United States that small venues produced ten billion dollars' worth of income for their adjacent communities, as venue attendees generally spend \$12 on economic activities such as eating at a restaurant for every \$1 spent on a concert ticket (Levy, 2020). Organizations like the National Independent Venue Association sought federal assistance for music venues in the United States, but these issues extended beyond the closure of venues into how attendees of concerts would react in a post-COVID-19 world. A poll from Nielsen

Music and MRC Data found that 21% of respondents would not start going back to concerts for at least five months after the pandemic ends. A 2% minority said that they would never go to a concert again (Levy, 2020). The apprehension of music fans to attend concerts meant that the financial difficulties for venues, concert promoters, bands, and their surrounding communities could extend far beyond the encompassed time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similarly, the closing of concert venues and the bans against gatherings of people also prevented musicians from touring or performing their music live, which is detrimental to bands financially as concerts provide bands with 75% of their income (Pasbani, 2020). In addition, other people involved with concerts, including musicians, crew members, venue workers, music engineers, tour managers, promoters, bookers, directors, accountants, instrument technicians, lighting technicians, soundboard operators, and others found themselves without work due to the indefinite cancellation of all concerts, and in some instances, venues had to lay off many employees just to prevent themselves from going under (Hissong, 2020).

Members of the World Health Organization suggested that it might not be until October of 2021, approximately a year and a half after the time of this article, that concerts and other large gatherings could return in normal capacity, which had already resulted in a loss of billions of dollars from cancelled entertainment events alone (“A Year Without Concerts? Artists and Tour Promoters Prepare For The Worst,” 2020). This strain on the music industry financially also extended beyond live performances, as there were growing concerns that the COVID-19 situation could indirectly have further negative impact through other means. Many countries saw an impact on their postal services, which manifested in higher shipping rates or a complete federal prevention of shipping between certain countries. In some areas, COVID-19 also put postal services at risk, since having individuals quarantined at home meant more people shopping online. For example, the increased strain on the United States Postal Service (USPS) had the potential for the USPS to be forced to permanently close within a matter of months. Media mail and other services provided by the USPS are budget options for shipping physical music and merchandise both nationally and internationally, so the closing of those services could have a major impact on the music industry by making the purchasing of music much more expensive as a result of increased shipping costs, which could make it unreasonable for independent record companies to continue with such high shipping rates per album sold (Hogan, 2020).

### **Example evidence of an immediate impact on the music industry**

Some perspective into the initial reactions of music fans and the scope of the COVID-19 situation can be drawn from record label Cruz Del Sur Music. The label posted a statement on their official Facebook page on March 12<sup>th</sup> that highlighted the immediate expansiveness of the issues caused by COVID-19 within the metal music community. The post proposed ways to alleviate hardships on the metal community and ways to help broaden understanding about how COVID-19 was impacting the music industry:

‘1) Don’t stop ordering stuff if you meant to do so. As said, goods are not contaminated. So if you feel comfortable ordering from Amazon, you can as well be ordering from us or any other company. 2) Don’t be upset if your order is delayed 1-2 days. Please understand that there might be some delays with the delivering of your order... 3) Don’t

blame bands who cancel their shows... 4) Don't blame organizers who cancel their shows. Don't ask for IMMEDIATE refund of your money if a show or a festival is cancelled. What should organizers do? Cancelling months and months of hard work and investments is a serious problem for them and of course they're not planning to steal money from you. But the situation is out of their/our hands. We have to follow our government's decisions. And if these decisions include shutting down venues and pubs, there's not much owners and organizers can do. So don't press them to refund you immediately. We all understand the value of money as we know money comes from hard work. At the same time, all of us, producers, bookers, bands - we all invest money producing records, shows, entertainment. We are not big corporations. We will not solve the problem firing 200-300 people, because that's what others will do when the crisis will hit them. We all are heavy metal lovers who decided to invest our money and time into something we love. We have no bank backups, nobody from the "system" is going to help us. There will definitely be time for refunds, [and] for special deals on future shows. Just, if possible don't panic. 5)Take it easy and enjoy the music we all love! IN UNION WE STAND!'

This statement was a call for unification that draws attention to a number of factors that immediately impacted multiple parties as a result of the COVID-19 situation. Record labels, and especially smaller, indie record labels, were seeing a decrease in sales following the widespread quarantines. It is not clear if this decrease was solely due to apprehension about mail carrying the COVID-19 virus, a public assumption that had little scientific basis (Levin, 2020), or if it was partially the result of many working-class metal fans no longer having a source of income due to unemployment or a work hiatus that came as a result of COVID-19 shutdowns. It could also be that metal fans then had to prioritize their expenditures towards other things, like bills. Either way, indie record labels are often dependent on that income (Messick, 2020), so it put many records labels at financial risk. In addition, the factories that mass-produce compact discs and vinyl for new releases from indie record labels were largely shut down as they were not considered 'essential' workplaces, so this caused a delay for many albums to be released. Another aspect that the statement by Cruz Del Sur Music pointed out was that music fans will likely be upset at the cancellation of upcoming, highly anticipated shows that they were planning on attending, so the record label attempted to quell those frustrations away from bands and promoters, as both were only following suggested protocols from federal officials and scientists for the safety of fans. The cancellation of concerts also meant that individuals that bought their tickets in advance would need to be refunded, and fans that quickly demanded these refunds could put a strain on the promoters. Preorder ticket sales are often invested in other aspects of a concert, such as on accommodations and payments for bands, expenses towards putting on a concert, and promotion of the concert. Due to this, it isn't necessarily the case that a promoter would have all of the money available from presale tickets in the event of an unexpected cancellation, which meant that they would need to reacquire the money before refunding ticket buyers, since many of the costs associated with concerts are potentially non-refundable. This meant that many concert promoters would take a financial loss from the COVID-19 related concert cancellations and postponements, even if the concert was cancelled well in advance.

Even if the concert did continue, the bookers could have similarly taken a loss, as apprehension about acquiring COVID-19 had the potential to curtail attendance.

## **The pivotal impact on the music industry in March & April 2020**

Many musicians are dependent on touring for income, either as their sole income or as a supplement to other jobs. Besides this financial dependency, live music performance can also greatly improve the affective wellbeing of musicians (Lamont, 2012), which is of special importance in the metal music community given that metal musicians and fans often have higher levels of mental health conditions than the general population (Messick, Aranda, & Day, 2020). The sudden nature of mandated event cancellations, including the announcement that flights from Europe to the United States would be restricted (BBC News, 2020), left many bands in an unfortunate predicament. These bands immediately found themselves in one or more of the following situations: 1) A tour that they had already commenced had been ended prematurely, 2), a tour that they had already invested in had suddenly been cancelled, and/or 3) the band faced risk of being quarantined in a foreign country with limited resources due to sudden travel restrictions. The fallout of each of these three events are discussed in detail in the section that follows. In order to understand these ramifications, heavy metal touring musicians were interviewed that had experienced at least one of the three scenarios. Regardless of which scenario most affected each interviewee, all of them were facing an uncertain future with no clear date for when they could resume concert performances. The impact of COVID-19 on touring musicians, followed by the impact on impact on bookers, promoters, managers, labels, and venues, and then predictions from both groups of interviewees about the music industry after COVID-19 are discussed in the subsequent section.

### **The impact on touring musicians**

Concert tours can be notoriously difficult on touring musicians, as they often require extended periods of travel in cramped sleeping and living arrangements confined to a bus or van and a limited or inconsistent sleep schedule. They have infrequent access to showers and bathrooms, and they frequently survive under strict and/or unstable budgetary constraints. The touring lifestyle also requires many hours of travel and the continual uncomfotability that comes with adjusting to new time zones as bands travel between cities and/or countries. Despite this, many musicians love touring and playing live due to the intense, positive reaction they experience when they perform their music live as fans will enthusiastically cheer, dance (e.g., mosh & headbang), and purchase band music and memorabilia. On top of the difficulties touring musicians normally experience, they experienced further ramifications due to COVID-19. The most obvious way that COVID-19 could impact a musician is if they actually became infected, as was the case with Chuck Billy of U.S. thrash metal band Testament and Krzysztof Drabikowski of Polish black metal band Batushka. The large array of human contact that comes with concert crowds, venue employees, and stagehands caused both of the aforementioned to catch the virus, and thankfully both recovered. There were also subtler and more lasting ramifications for touring musicians regardless of their interaction with the virus, including financially and emotionally, so a series of interviews were conducted to get a greater understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on touring musicians.

Musicians were contacted following public comments that they made on the social networking website Facebook through either their personal pages or their official band pages about the COVID-19 situation influencing their touring events. This included communication of concerns about the potential cancellation of concerts, statements of concert or tour cancellations, statements about being negatively affected by concert cancellations, or statements in regards to travel concerns that would stem from the virus. After informed consent was provided, an interview was conducted with each musician about how COVID-19 impacted their band and themselves. Information from other sources, such as GoFundMe pages (online webpages that ask for donations), are included to provide a deeper perspective about the influence that COVID-19 had on touring musicians beyond what could be generalized from the included interviews and to further contextualize the influence of the virus on musicians and the venues that hold their concerts. Questions were developed and tailored to each musician to understand the impact that COVID-19 had, financially and emotionally, on each interviewee and their respective bands. The size, popularity, country of origin, and age of each band varied, but commonalities emerged regardless of these differences. The following seven musicians were interviewed and a brief description of the scenario that influenced each are included below:

- **Chris Pervelis, founding guitarist of New York metal band Internal Bleeding.**  
Internal Bleeding had to cancel their planned European tour.
- **Devin Swank, vocalist of Ohio metal bands Sanguisugabogg and Limbsplitter.**  
Sanguisugabogg had months of planned tour dates cancelled or rescheduled. Limbsplitter had to delay the release of their new album since they could not tour to promote it.
- **Enrico Schettino, guitarist and composer for Italian metal band Hideous Divinity.**  
Hideous Divinity had to cancel their planned European tour.
- **Lille Gruber, founding drummer of (initially) German metal band Defeated Sanity.**  
Defeated Sanity had a North American tour cancelled 4 days into a planned 30-day tour.
- **Phil Tougas, a guitarist based in Canada that plays in Chthe'ilist, Eternity's End, First Fragment, & others.**  
Chthe'ilist's first extensive North American tour was cancelled, which was to be in support of the Finnish metal band Rippikoulu, a band that had musically influenced them.
- **Tom Knizner, guitarist and vocalist in Chicago metal band Cardiac Arrest**  
Cardiac Arrest's spring tour in support of Finnish metal band Demilich was cancelled.
- **Tucker Thomasson, guitarist and vocalist of Indiana metal band Throne of Iron.**  
Throne of Iron's European music festival appearance was cancelled while they were on board flights to Europe, and they consequently faced concerns about being stranded in Europe without income due to immediate and unexpected travel bans.

### **Financial ramifications for touring artists and venues**

Although many bands weren't transparent about the costs involved in cancelling a tour due to COVID-19 restrictions on group gatherings, travel bans, and quarantines, it is possible to get an idea from some of the GoFundMe accounts that have been set up to recoup their losses. For instance, progressive metal musician Devin Townsend had to cancel a spring 2020 tour, and as a result, he launched a GoFundMe page with the goal of raising \$50,000 with the following explanation:



'Hey all, I know this is undoubtedly the least appropriate time to ask for this, as I'm sure we're all trying to figure out what to do in these troubled times, but the cancellation of my recent tour had significant financial implications and with no idea how to make income for the next while, I am asking for some help to sustain my family whilst being able to continue working on new musical ideas. As with any significant tour, the investments of putting up a good show with a fantastic crew and band are massive. There's lightning rigs, video screens, tour busses, work visas, merch production & logistics, international flights and a ton of other things that require financial backing and when a tour gets cancelled due to government restrictions there's no insurance policy in place to cover any of that. As with so many of my peers (and people in general of course) dealing with the same problems, it means that I'm struggling to keep the business afloat.'

Another example can be found in the United States tour that was planned from March through April by Finnish metal bands Insomnium and Omnium Gatherum. The bands played only the first show of the tour, which took place in Philadelphia, before the COVID-19 situation resulted in the cancellation of the tour and their immediate return to Finland. These two bands jointly launched a GoFundMe that received €48,685 in only three days before they stopped the donation service from acquiring any further funds. In their initial explanation on the GoFundMe page, organizers of the fundraiser explained their situation:

'The purpose of this fundraising is to help Insomnium and Omnium Gatherum recover from the big financial loss of having to cancel their North American tour due to the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in government bans and restrictions. Bands only played one show in Philadelphia and then they were forced to return back to Finland... Bands had already invested a large amount of money to tour production, flights, visas, bus, crew, tax waivers and bureaucracy etc. Not to even mention band members' personal investments or the loss of income for 5 weeks... Any kind of sum, big or small will help us getting the bands back on their feet so we can continue touring and making music. Thank you for your support.'

Another example can be found in the GoFundMe page for Italian power metallers Rhapsody, who had to cancel their Latin American tour and following that, were asking for \$40,000. They faced an additional level of pushback in regards to their travel plans, since they were residents of Italy and the viral pandemic was especially bad in Italy, resulting in stricter guidelines for Italians in particular (Sylvers, 2020). The statement on their GoFundMe read:

'We're in big trouble. As you all know, the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic has been causing havoc in pretty much everyone's lives and our band is just another one of thousands in the touring industry affected by it. We have been forced to postpone our Latin America tour after two dates, as well as the upcoming European tour coming up in the months of April and May. Due to these cancellations, we have lost a tremendous amount of money in non-refundable flights as we are not able to get money back for flights even though we are not allowed into a number of countries as we are Italian. So,

we set up this GoFundMe campaign to ask for your help. If you can't take part in this, it's perfectly ok. But if you are able to, we would greatly appreciate any sort of contribution you can make to help us get back on our feet and continue on, be able to reschedule Latin American tour properly and bring to you the music you love, and a live experience you will not forget.'

These restrictions have not only had financial ramifications for touring artists, but also for the concert venues that host their shows. For instance, Reggies is a popular music venue in Chicago, Illinois that hosts a multitude of metal concerts annually. Reggies temporarily closed due to their inability to host any concerts due to the group gathering restrictions, so they hosted a GoFundMe page requesting \$10,000 to help bring in income for their employees and help keep the business afloat while COVID-19 restrictions remained in place. Similarly, Saint Vitus Bar in Brooklyn, New York, which is known worldwide for hosting quality metal concerts, put up a Kickstarter asking for \$15,000 to keep their business afloat. Text on their Kickstarter page read:

'The coronavirus pandemic has shaken the world, and unfortunately the live music & nightlife spaces are heavily affected as a result. For the past 9 years, Saint Vitus has been central to the metal & music community in Brooklyn, and we're using this Kickstarter as a means of working through this unusual time. Think of this page as a virtual Vitus, and our way of keeping Vitus alive until we can hang out in person again... We got into this game because we've been involved in all facets of the [metal music] scene. We're musicians, we're bartenders, we're sound guys & gals, we're photographers, we're artists, but before we were any of that, we were fans. We're honored to be a part of this weird, loud community and we want to make sure that Vitus continues to serve it after the pandemic. We know that we can do it (after all, how many show reviews have you seen where bands have "leveled" or "destroyed" Saint Vitus?), but we'll need your help to get there.'

Further perspective can be drawn from the GoFundMe for Black Circle, a popular brewery and metal music venue in Indianapolis. They were asking for \$10,000, and their page read:

'Our government is not doing enough to prevent certain calamity in the service industry. Unemployment claims are now over a month in cue, PPP funds are running low and the process is, despite its aim, clumsy and without clarity... Our staff is our family. I'm so proud of how they have banded together to help one another. I've done the best I can to hold this together, but now we could use your help... Funds donated to this campaign will aid in basic daily necessities for our staff, utilities, rent, etc. We are truly humbled by the support of our community thus far. In a couple of months, we hope to return the favor and be back supporting all of you again.'

The band members that I interviewed shared some further insight on the toll of these expenditures on touring bands. Although none of the bands offered a total cost, some noted specific costs that are

included in touring. For instance, Chris mentioned the cost of flights in his report of Internal Bleeding's potential financial losses due to the cancellation of their European tour:

'Some of the guys rely on the income from the band to help supplement their base income [from their other jobs], so it's going to be difficult in that respect. Fortunately, we played things wisely and held off on some expenses before our European tour, so we didn't take a huge financial hit. That being said, if we lose the airfare we paid for, that will be a \$4,000 loss.'

Tucker similarly reported a potential \$4,000 loss in travel expenses as a result of Throne of Iron's flight to Europe to perform at the Up The Hammers music festival in Greece. The band had planned to recoup that money through merchandise sales at the festival, but the festival was cancelled while they were on the plane to Europe. Simultaneously in the United States, Defeated Sanity played only four out of thirty planned shows in their North American tour before their tour was cancelled. They had paid for flights to and from the United States, they had rented the necessary equipment to tour, and they had printed enough merchandise to last them for the entirety of their planned tour. Due to its abrupt cancellation, they had spent a large sum of money that they had expected to make back through merchandise and ticket sales. Similarly, Phil Tougas reported that he was in debt after he had spent thousands printing merchandise for Chthe'ilist's upcoming United States tour that was subsequently cancelled. In addition to financial losses as a result of money spent on tours, the pandemic also meant that bands could experience financial losses in album sales too as a result of decreased online sales, the inability to sell albums through concerts, and delayed album releases due to album manufacturing closures. Many bands and record labels, including the band Limbsplitter, had to delay the release of their upcoming albums since they could not tour to promote the album. Devin Swank explained:

'For Limbsplitter it [the pandemic] has put a hold on us releasing our second full length album because without shows there's really no way for us to promote our release and as for Sanguisugabogg it was planned that we would be out on the road for 8 months this year; some dates have fortunately have been rescheduled but a lot of plans had to just get scrapped and with the uncertainty of the shows we had rescheduled it's definitely set us back in some ways of where we thought we would be.'

### *Attempts to recover financial losses*

Many bands were dependent on the dedication and support of their fans to help bail them out of the detrimental financial situations that followed COVID-19 related tour cancellations. Whereas some bands had started a GoFundMe page to recoup their losses, Lille Gruber of Defeated Sanity came up with a different plan. He called on fans of his band through a Facebook post to buy their printed tour merchandise over a three-day period while they remained in the United States, so that they could recoup as much money as they could before the members of Defeated Sanity returned to their respective home countries. Their merchandise was put up on an online store with an additional option to give the band tips (i.e., additional donations). Fans placed 300 orders in those three days. Somewhat ironic of the situation they found themselves in, among the merchandise Defeated Sanity had an abundance of were bottles of antibacterial sanitizer appropriately branded as 'defeated sanitizer.' Hand

sanitizer was an in-demand item that many grocery stores had a shortage of as the general public used it as a defense against the spread of COVID-19 (Kavilanz & Yurkevich, 2020). Lille explained his plan and how fans helped save his band from taking major financial losses:

‘We had to empty all of the band’s savings in preparation for this tour. We hoped to make them all back and generate enough money to give each member enough to compensate for lost work at home. We would have lost it all if our American fans wouldn't have supported so tremendously. I thought of the plan that we ended up doing. Stay with a friend -Kyle Christman [drummer known for his work in Indiana metal bands Human Filleted, Sarcophagy, and Gorgasm] - and send all the leftover merch to everybody who wanted it and was able to support. Fans saved our fucking asses! Amazing people sent \$1 - \$80 tips on top of that. This way we didn't go bankrupt! Our fans are the best.’

Throne of Iron and Chthe'ilist also had success with fans supporting them by purchasing online merchandise, thus lessening the extent of their losses. Just to be clear, it was not the case that every band that had to cancel a tour would take a monumental loss. It was dependent on the extent of their travel expenses (e.g., traveling overseas) and how dependent each band was on touring income. For example, Tom Knizner explained that Cardiac Arrest generally only play a handful of shows a year, so they were not dependent on income from playing shows. He told me that his band was not promoting their merchandise during the COVID-19 situation to help music fans prioritize their disposable income towards bands that were in greater need of financial support:

‘We have our merch; we have our band fund. Right now, I'm not going to promote buying stuff from us because we don't need it as this is not our sole income. Like I said, we [all the members of Cardiac Arrest] all have jobs. The band is a self-sustaining hobby, meaning we make the right decisions and no money comes out of our pockets to do stuff. Not playing shows or selling stuff right now is not going to hurt us in the least bit. But don't get me wrong, I feel bad for people who depend on their band as a living, however, metal never paid the bills.’

There is one prominent explanation for this outpouring of financial dedication by metal fans: it is representative of a fundamental cultural norm. From their inception, metal fans are taught about fundamental codes of behavior, like what can be observed during the aggressive rhythmic dance known as moshing (Riches, 2011; 2012). In this dance, metal fans enthusiastically shove one another during a concert. When a fan is accidentally shoved to the ground, the cultural norm is for all members of this ‘mosh pit’ to stop shoving and immediately help the person stand back up so that they avoid injury. It is likely this fundamental ideal in metal culture – to help up one that has fallen – that explains why metal music fans so quickly and vigorously aid struggling bands and musicians.

### Emotional ramifications

Touring musicians saw their activities come to an abrupt stop as the bans on all non-essential travel, the bans on the gathering of large groups, and the closing of non-essential businesses, including concert venues, made for an inevitable inability to play music in front of live audiences. These interviews were conducted with musicians mere days or weeks after bands had to indefinitely postpone their live performance activities, and even in this short span of time, touring musicians reported negative and powerful psychological consequences in their well-being and change in life. Monetary issues aren't necessarily anything new for independent touring musicians, however, what is novel is the extent to which the COVID-19 situation impacted touring musicians emotionally. Band members found themselves unable to practice with their bands, unable to tour, and unable to play in front of the audiences that they so adored. For many musicians, playing live is a source of great pleasure and connectivity with their fans, serving as both solace and as a cathartic release from daily stressors, and it is a crucial part of why they choose to be musicians. In order to understand how the *loss* of performing live made musicians feel, it's important to first understand the affective *gains* as a result of playing live. Devin of Sanguisugabogg explained how playing live made him feel:

'Honestly it's the greatest feeling ever. Only a few things can come close. Writing music and coming up with lyrics, patterns and vocal styles is awesome but performing is where it is all at for me so I can showcase all the hard work I put into my craft.'

Chris of Internal Bleeding also described the importance of playing his band's music for his fans:

'It means the world to me. When I am on stage, my 52 years of age simply melt away and I feel like I am 20 years old again. It's the most important outlet I have, and being denied that is akin to being denied oxygen.'

Enrico of the Italy-based metal band Hideous Divinity explained how profound the experience of playing live was for him, as it served even a meaning-making role:

'As obvious as it may sound, it still is the reason why we do all this. When you play in front of people, your music comes alive, and so do you. It's both fulfilling and cathartic, in its most classical meaning. It doesn't matter how long the trip to get to the venue was, the lack of food or showers, the sleep deprivation - you jump on stage and it's all like washed away. You stop asking yourself existential questions about why you're doing it, and all acquires meaning.'

Based on the affective importance of a live performance for each musician, it is unsurprising that the loss of that experience due to environmental factors beyond control would cause psychological duress. Chris Povelis, who I had originally invited to an interview prior to the cancellation of Internal Bleeding's tour, had publicly confirmed their upcoming European tour's cancellation mere moments before we spoke. I was able to hear his reaction to their tour cancellation immediately after its occurrence:

'I just posted the official postponement of the tour on all our social media sites. This is truly heart-breaking for us. We've been working towards being on a major European

tour for a long time and now that we finally secured one, it has all come crashing to the ground. I completely understand why it has been postponed, but it's heart-breaking nonetheless.'

There were a number of different scenarios that bands had to face. All of them included a lack of touring in the immediate future, but many experienced tour cancellations while they were in the middle of a tour, some of required significant travel and travel expenses. Prior to these cancellations, many bands had growing anxieties about tours that had been planned internationally. President Trump enacted a 30-day travel ban from 26 countries that was to go into effect shortly after he announced the ban on March 14<sup>th</sup> (Coronavirus: US travel ban on 26 European countries comes into force, 2020). This sudden announcement that immediately went into effect without European consultation left many musicians in a state of panic as it was unclear if they would become stranded abroad or be able to afford an emergency flight. Similar travel bans were implemented in other countries. Some bands, such as Indiana-based Throne of Iron, were traveling to a tour destination when they heard the news. Tucker Thomasson of Throne of Iron heard while he was on a flight from the United States to Europe. It is not within the financial capabilities of many bands, including Throne of Iron, to be able to book last-minute, unplanned flights. In addition, they also did not have the monetary capability to afford living expenses if they ended up stranded in a foreign country for an indefinite amount of time. Tucker explained what went through his mind when he heard about the banning of international flights:

'The worst case scenario was exactly that, the fear of being stuck on another continent with limited funds potentially for a month... so as soon as the travel ban was announced, I started thinking a little bit proactively about what our best course of action would be. When the festival was announced as cancelled, we then decided that it would be the most expedient and best option to, rather than proceeding to Greece, rebook our return flight as best we could to get back to the United States. I had made our fans and people at the festival aware of what was happening so there was a huge rush of fan support for us and a lot of merchandise sold to help fund us having to get tickets back to the United States should we need it.'

Similarly, members of New York's Internal Bleeding had growing concerns about being stuck in another country before their tour had commenced. Chris explained,

'Even before the tour was postponed, and while the crisis was developing, we had a lot of concerns about being stuck in Europe. We kept in close touch with our management, the booking agency and the other bands and monitored the situation closely. We finally made the right call to postpone it. In a way it was a great relief, because we were really scared of being stranded in Europe.'

Outside of anxieties about possibly being stranded overseas, bands also faced uncertainty about when they could perform live again, and they had to cope with being deprived of the experience of playing live. Chris described how he was feeling after acknowledging uncertainty about when he could perform live again:

'I hate to admit it, but depression is already setting in... I have experienced a wide range of emotions ranging from sadness and letdown to fear and paranoia. I am starting to settle into the reality of it all and will just have to resign myself to it and ride it out.'

Devin Swank noted that being unable to tour allowed his bands to prioritize writing and recording new music, however, he still experienced intense negative feelings due to the uncertainty of when he could play live again, although he found some comfort in a sense of communal relatedness with other musicians, as they were going through the same experiences:

'I have my good days and my hard days I guess you could say. Sometimes I enjoy the break and being able to be at home more instead of on the road is sweet and also bittersweet. It also keeps us more focused on writing and recording which is sick but it's no substitute for the feeling I get playing. I feel worthless not being on stage and the uncertainty bums me out but every other band and musician is dealing with the same shit so at least we're all in this situation together.'

Phil Tougas of Chthe'ilist had more conflicted feelings about being unable to play live due to how critical he tended to be of his own performances:

'It's a love and hate relationship. On one hand, playing in front of a crowd is the most powerful feeling in the world and I would do everything to live on the road and do it every day. I was made for this lifestyle. On the other hand, I've played hundreds of shows in my life across 25 countries, and there's only about 5% of these shows that I would say I've put on a performance that I would deem satisfactory in my own musical standards. Is it because it has taken decades for me to attempt to overcome personal, physical and mental issues? Or is it because I push myself too hard and am too picky with myself and how I play? Probably a mix all of these. I should also practice way more. Luckily these days I've gotten better at handling all of this.'

Enrico Schettino explained how the lack of touring in his life would make him feel incomplete, and he noted that a lack of performances could also impact the quality of Hideous Divinity's live show when they resume touring:

'Like a big part [of myself] would be missing. It took us lots of training to reach a certain level of what we could call "stage control." It is a primary requirement for our kind of music. Constant live activity is crucial to maintain and improve that level. Therefore I'd rather think about how good it's gonna feel when we'll be onstage again. I guess we'll feel more grateful, and will enjoy every second of it even more.'

The COVID-19 situation was unlike anything that any touring musicians had experienced before, which also meant that affective responses could be novel and it was unclear how musicians would cope. Chris Pervelis drew some similarities to the American tragedy that took place on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, when the World Trade Center was attacked by a radical terrorist group. As a resident of New York City, this was an especially salient comparison for him:

'9/11 caused quite a few issues for us and forced us to cancel quite a few shows because our drummer was working the attack site with the fire department. That's the closest comparison I can think of, and even that didn't compare in scale to the logistical problem the virus has created.'

In addition to the immediate emotional ramifications, I also inquired about the anticipated long-term impact of the COVID-19 situation on band members and bands. Chris had been playing in Internal Bleeding for nearly thirty years, so being unaware of when he can play live again was especially worrisome for him, as he wanted to keep playing the physically demanding form of music that he specializes in for as long as he can:

'Honestly, for me, it's a race against time. I am not getting any younger, and touring the past few years has become physically demanding on me. Sadly, I don't know how much more touring time I have left and the longer this keeps going, the more time I am going to lose.'

Bands struggled with the uncertainty of when they could resume playing live. Some bands, such as Hideos Divinity, had tours rescheduled for mere months after their initial cancellation. Others, such as Defeated Sanity, continued to book shows for later in the summer. In both situations, the band members I interviewed knew of the possibility of further cancellations and postponements. Enrico explained:

'When you face an exceptional situation like this, there's one thing for sure - no one knows exactly what will happen, and when. It's impossible to make plans, only projections provided by more or less trustworthy data. We may believe things will get better in the next months, but no one knows for sure. This is due to the different actions that are taken by, say, countries in Europe. We're a tiny yet densely populated territory with different governments and regulations: some countries went for lockdown; some others not. Some countries decided to close schools, stadiums and theaters; others are pretending that all is good and this "vigorous flu" will just go away.'

Lille explained how, despite that Defeated Sanity had continued to book new shows for the immediate future, including a festival appearance at that year's Chicago Domination in August, that he had doubts about those shows happening:

'Honestly I think it's not happening. Everybody will need more time to recover. But fuck, it would be amazing if it could happen - the first tour back! Everybody rejoicing with brutal vigor!'

Among the questions I asked interviewees were about how they were managing any negative feelings that they were experiencing as a result of being unable to play live. Tucker explained the role of humor in keeping the spirits of his band high despite continual anger and frustration:



'I'd like to think that in spite of being angry over the sheer inconvenience of it all, that my bandmates and I have kept a good sense of humor about things. Humor is typically our coping mechanism for when things are frustrating or scary, and there was definitely no shortage of it during our, for lack of a better term, frustrating experience.'

Another way that bands coped was to remain productivity by changing their function from touring to writing and recording new material. Phil Tougas acknowledged that the outbreak would cause his bands to change functions:

'It means that all my touring bands - Chthe'ilist, Funebrarum, First Fragment, will be studio bands for the time being. My other mains bands - Eternity's End, Atramentus, Cosmic Atrophy, DDT, etc, haven't been doing shows anyway so it changes nothing in this regard. Bands I was supposed to tour with as a session musician will simply postpone their tours if they need to... I've also already come to terms with the fact that doing shows in 2020 will simply not be possible, and the same could be expected for a good portion of 2021 but it is too early to say.'

Phil added that the output of bands would likely be influenced by the widespread and intense nature of the pandemic:

'I am concerned that my friends, family and band members could die or suffer permanent impacts from the coronavirus. I am concerned about how it will affect millions and destroy the lives of the most vulnerable folk out there. This disease doesn't just affect the old. It can potentially harm and kill anyone regardless of who you are. What is happening right now will change our lives forever, and of course this will greatly impact the music I am doing, positively or negatively.'

### **Community support & unification in times of need**

March and April of 2020 were clearly a turbulent time for career musicians, but it was possible to observe a number of charitable attempts to alleviate their stressors. For example, Dropout Media, which is a company that specializes in independent and do-it-yourself marketing services for heavy metal and hard rock bands, offered a list of free services available to bands to help them stay active, including free mastering of an album for any band affected by COVID-19 and free artwork available to bands for merchandise. This list was prefaced by the following message that was posted on their website (dropoutmedia.net) on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020:

'Hey – so we are in the middle of a crazy time. I just wanted to take the time to compile here a list of free services you can take advantage of as we try to come together and all help each other as we face the craziest event in our lifetimes.'

Tucker Thomasson of Throne of Iron was helped by the metal community when his band faced the possibility of monumental financial losses, and once he returned safely home from an anxiety-inducing European trip, he took personal responsibility to return this good will to offers. He offered to help other

bands be as cost-effective as possible. On March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020, he posted the following on the official Throne of Iron Facebook page:

'Bands having to quarantine or deal with lost shows - this sucks for everyone. If you've taken a hit because of all of this, I will teach you how to set up on-demand merch to sell that won't require you to buy inventory up front.'

Many bands were taking huge losses due to merchandise being printed prior to tours that were inevitably cancelled. Many bands tried to recoup their losses by selling merchandise, however, unsold merchandise would still ultimately be an additional cost that would be an additional grievance for a band to deal with. What Tucker was offering was an introduction to services that print band merchandise on a case-by-case scenario based on fan orders, meaning that the merchandise, such as t-shirts, wouldn't have to be printed in bulk in advance. This can be a lower-risk technique of selling merchandise for bands that no longer had the disposable income to print merchandise in bulk. Tucker was not the only musician to give back after receiving relief from fans. For example, following Devin Townsend's request for funds to recoup his losses, he held a series of live-streamed performances from his home that raised more than \$100,000 towards COVID-19 relief (Bienstock, 2020).

Bandcamp, the corporate entity that was one of the most popular ways to sell digital music, announced that they would waive their sales fees on Friday, March 20<sup>th</sup> to show solidarity with struggling musicians (Hatfield, 2020). A statement from their CEO Ethan Diamond read:

'The Covid-19 pandemic is in full force, and artists have been hit especially hard as tours and shows are being canceled for the foreseeable future. With such a major revenue stream drying up almost entirely, finding ways to continue supporting artists in the coming months is now an urgent priority for anyone who cares about music and the artists who create it. The good news is that we're already seeing many fans going above and beyond to support artists across Bandcamp. To raise even more awareness around the pandemic's impact on musicians everywhere, we're waiving our revenue share on sales this Friday, March 20 (from midnight to midnight Pacific Time), and rallying the Bandcamp community to put much needed money directly into artists' pockets. For many artists, a single day of boosted sales can mean the difference between being able to pay rent or not. Still, we consider this just a starting point. Musicians will continue to feel the effects of lost touring income for many months to come... it may sound simple, but the best way to help artists is with your direct financial support, and we hope you'll join us on Friday and through the coming months as we work to support artists in this challenging time.'

Bandcamp held a number of other fee-less days during the pandemic to further assist bands. Bands also attempted to help music fans through this endeavour, as many fans were stressed as a result of the lack of concerts that they could attend. Some bands attempted to quell the discomfort of fans that suddenly found themselves starved for live music by streaming a live performance for free. For example, Metsatöll, a folk metal band out of Estonia, streamed a live performance through Youtube and Facebook on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020. On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, stoner doom metal band Void King streamed a live performance

through their official Facebook page. Following these events, an increasing number of bands worldwide streamed live performances for fans that were starved for live music performances. The Norwegian black metal band Enslaved streamed a live performance alongside several other bands through Verftet, an online music festival. The promoters of Verftet Online Music Festival, Bergen's largest virtual concert festival, described the purpose of the festival on their Facebook event page as such:

'We want to turn despair and frustration into innovation and positivity, and invite everyone to a digital festival experience out of the ordinary – in the comfort of your own living room.'

Some bands, such as Disillusion from Germany, streamed a performance for free but offered tickets to fans that donated money to watch the stream, so that they would still have a memento from the concert that would more closely emulate a typical concert experience. Some record labels have also tried to alleviate the stresses being felt by music fans that suddenly found themselves unemployed, without the ability to support the musicians they love, or unable to attend concerts. For example, New Standard Elite (based in the United States) and Transcending Obscurity Records (based in India) are two metal labels that temporarily put all of their Bandcamp digital releases up online for free download.

Although what I've mentioned are examples of how members of the metal community helped one another, I also asked my interviewees how fans could best support struggling musicians during the COVID-19 situation. Chris from Internal Bleeding explained:

'I think the best thing fans can do is to buy merchandise from their favorite bands. If they cannot do that, then help the bands out by sharing their music. People are going to be sequestered in their homes for a while, so sharing music is a great way to support bands!'

It should also be noted that many of the bands and venues that set up Kickstarter and Gofundme pages met their fundraising goals due to the unwavering support of music fans. For example, the popular Brooklyn metal venue Saint Vitus asked for \$15,000, but ended up receiving over \$125,000 due to how important that venue was for New York's dedicated metal fans and the bands that played there, although success stories like this were not common for many of the businesses that were crippled by the pandemic (Shaffer, 2020).

### **Broader perspective and humility about COVID-19**

Although this article focuses on the negative influence of the novel coronavirus on the different aspects of the music industry, that isn't to say that touring musicians weren't aware that the virus was having a devastating impact on many people outside of their industry. In other words, musicians were not egocentric about how COVID-19 impacted themselves versus the world around them. All of the individuals I interviewed had a strong sense of humility about the real dangers of the virus and the people that were at risk. The musicians I interviewed were dismayed at the cancellation of their tours, but they also acknowledged the importance of these cancellations for the well-being of others, including their own fans, and they acknowledged how insignificant their concerts were compared to some of the larger economic problems and tragic circumstances that were occurring. The interviewees shared their

thoughts about the virus, both in the context of their concerts and within the 'bigger picture'. Chris of Internal Bleeding spoke about the responsibilities that people then faced:

'I think people need to take this virus seriously. There's a lot of conspiracy mongering out there and I think we should just err on the side of caution. It may have a negative effect on young people, but this is deadly for older and compromised people and we need to make sure the vulnerable are safe... My biggest concern isn't necessarily for me - I'm pretty healthy and not too old; it's for my 86-year-old mother. I take care of her quite a bit, so I have no choice but to keep away from crowds and shows for a while. I was supposed to go to a show last Friday night [March 12] and I forced myself to stay home. I wasn't happy about it, but the thought of me being responsible for my mother's death is something I couldn't bear.'

Chris further explained his concern for music fans because large groups, like those found at metal concerts, could enable the widespread transmission of the virus:

'I am absolutely concerned and I think it's wise not to have any shows. I think bands that are currently touring during this pandemic should think of going home and laying low for a while. We really need to be careful about cutting down the transmission rate so we don't swamp hospitals, etc.'

Phil Tougas communicated the importance of not holding live shows until the pandemic had passed:

'This crisis is to be taken very seriously. Lives are on the line here. Even if gatherings had not been prohibited, going through with this tour would've meant endangering the concert attendees, the fans, the venue staff, the promoters and ourselves. Staying safe and home is much, much more important and postponing the tour was the only solution. My disappointment was only temporary as there's much more at stake here than our musical careers, not to downplay the hard work the promoters have done themselves and what they're going through... what I've lost is nothing compared to what people are going through right now. People have lost loved ones, friends, their jobs, their businesses and are dying by the thousands every day. I'm extremely privileged and I'm not saying this to brag, I'm saying this because I've got absolutely nothing to complain about and I should not be complaining. I can't imagine myself complaining about a money issue in a time like this when people are having it way worse... the well-being of everyone involved (attendees, fans, technicians, promoters, staff, musicians) comes first. Not a single show will be played until this pandemic has been dealt with, for the safety of everyone. It would be really selfish otherwise. I don't care if I die of boredom. I'll just continue writing and recording music tirelessly in the meantime. Of course, it's unfortunate not being able to play my own music on the road and to postpone session work, and of course I'll be extremely "rusty" when I get back on stage. But I'll survive.'

Enrico of Hideous Divinity was genuinely irritated by how some bands were approaching the pandemic, as he felt that some were not taking it seriously. Although he wasn't as worried about his own well-being, he was worried about how concert crowds could facilitate the spread of the virus as a result of negligence and ignorance:

'The only thing that would make me anxious is the idea of crowds getting infected, not me. Very recently, a quite famous band released the most idiotic post I had read. They announced that they will keep on playing live, as they've endured I don't know how many heart attacks - by the way, who gives a fuck about that - and basically "you cannot cancel a gig for a virus". You gigantic moron [speaking to the aforementioned band] - it's not only about you; it's about the hundreds moshing in steaming pots of sweat that after the concert will spread the virus everywhere. It doesn't take a genius to understand it -or maybe it does, apparently. Another band decided to play a scheduled gig in the US as "they saw no sickness around". What are you, a human laboratory test for SARS?'

Enrico also had concerns about the inconsistency between countries for handling the spread of COVID-19, and communicated his concerns about when the largest gatherings of metal fans occur:

'If we look at the calendar of our next shows, now that the April/May tour has been cancelled, it will soon be time for summertime festivals. Which basically means large gatherings all around Europe, in countries that are adopting different measures to contain the virus and therefore will have different outcomes. I honestly don't know what is going to happen. The next month will be crucial. We will see the effect of the Italian lockdown together with results in other countries.'

The seriousness of the global situation was especially clear for Enrico, as a resident of Italy:

'I'd also consider financial consequences on a larger scale, looking at my country. See, that's the true part that scares me. An entire country that shuts down means a daily loss of billions. I live in a city, Rome, that relies almost entirely on tourism related activities and services. We've been in total lockdown for almost two weeks. The city is now a ghost town and will probably be for the upcoming weeks, maybe months. Restaurants, hotels, pubs, but also tour guides and touristic freelancers are facing bankruptcy. Northern Italian companies are also on the verge of failure. Let's hope the European Union and BCE will show some common sense. If Italy goes down, we drag everybody else down with us.'

Tom of Cardiac Arrest explained how bands needed to be realistic about their expectations and plans for the immediate future, but he made suggestions about how bands can still be productive while maintaining a positive outlook about the outcome of COVID-19:

'Bands should not make any long term plans right now. Honestly, none of us or anyone I know has ever been through what we are currently going through. Everything is

changing from day to day. Maybe this is time to hunker down and write [music]. Record. Blow out your merch, I dunno. We can all be optimistic and say everything will be okay in two weeks, but realistically, that is not the case. We are in uncharted waters right now. And that sucks, but it is what it is. There are far more important things to worry about right now than shows... I would hope that this crisis would bring people together more. People need to put politics aside and look at the big picture. As I said earlier, none of us have ever been through something like this before. It is time to work together and put all the petty bullshit aside. Just be a good person. I think back to 9/11 - that unified everyone. Perhaps this crisis should do the same?'

### **The impact on bookers, promoters, managers, labels, and venues**

The impact of COVID-19 on the music industry far extended beyond touring musicians, including to the managers, booking agencies, and promoters that bands were dependent on for playing live. Booking a tour can be an arduous task, so bands often seek assistance through a manager or through a booking agency that can work out the logistics for them. Then, each show will generally have a single promoter, which is the individual that hosts the show in a particular city and has an agreement or contract with the band (or their manager/booking agency) in regards to their payments, any backline needed, etc. The promoter is responsible for advertising the show locally because that individual is dependent on attendance to make the income needed to pay the band and hopefully profit off of the concert. The musicians that I interviewed also shared with me their thoughts on how the situation would impact the promoters of their cancelled tours. Tom from Cardiac Arrest explained:

'It is going to hurt the legitimate promoters immensely. These are the ones that put their asses on the line to have a good show. They pay for flights/travel, feed and water the bands, get them accommodations, and whatever else.'

Tucker of Throne of Iron provided a similar response:

'The financial ramifications on the promoters and bookers of events like this as well as tours is immense. I can't begin to fathom how much money is being lost right now, between booking guarantees for bands and flights and lodging and food. It's simply staggering.'

Phil Tougas provided some thoughts on how the virus could also impact record labels:

'It would also not surprise me that the pandemic would put certain labels out of commission and/or delay the release of numerous releases including my own. Atramentus and Funerarium [other bands that Phil is a member of] are set to release albums this summer through 20 Buck Spin & Pulverised Records respectively and I know that these labels work with factories in other countries that are hit hard by the virus. Time will tell.'

To get further perspective, I spoke with some booking agencies and promoters of varying sizes that experienced show cancellations because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, I also interviewed one

individual that manages many bands, and also works at a heavy metal record label who provided an outlook on how COVID-19 had influenced his work and the work of the record label he worked for. Below is a description of each interviewee and their relevant occupation:

- **Bastian Doblekar of Master of Metal**  
Master of Metal is a booking agency originally based in Slovenia (now residing in Spain) that exclusively books metal bands. Master of Metal was also responsible for the Metalcamp musical festival that ran in Slovenia from 2004-2012 that catered annually to 12,000 metal fans.
- **Mikael Parks of WorldForge Booking & Touring**  
WorldForge is a U.S.-based booking agency that specializes in death, thrash, and black metal.
- **Randy Kastner of RK Metal Promotions**  
RK Metal Promotions is a booking agency that operates out of and caters to Wisconsin that specializes in booking metal shows & festivals that avoid the pay-to-play model.
- **Tito Vespasiani of Everlasting Spew Records**  
Tito works as a band manager for multiple bands and as a manager at Everlasting Spew Records that takes on additional roles as an A&R booking agent and a web promoter.

Before getting into the details of how COVID-19 has impacted these individuals, I'll first provide some description of what their jobs entail. Mikael described the logistics and process of booking a band for a tour through his agency:

'When I'm approached by a band the first thing I want to know is what they're trying to do - how many days they're trying to be on the road [touring] and their availability. Once that is figured out then we [WorldForge Booking & Touring] can determine what direction they want to go based off their location and then I open up a map to come up with multiple routes for them to choose from. I factor in mileage between shows to try my best to keep drive times short. Gas isn't cheap and many of us underground bands [as Mikael also plays in the band Deathcrown] are not getting great guarantees [how much a promoter promises to pay a band], if one at all. Sometimes it's a door deal or bar sales percentage. Especially for bands that are just getting out there. When a route is chosen then I start the booking process, which needs to start at least 4 months prior. I pretty much reach out to all of my people that I have worked with in the past for other tours. However, in the event they cannot help me with the date they generally refer me to someone else. Then from there it can be an ongoing thing until it is confirmed. Sometimes locations have to be moved for a date or dates have to be moved for a location. Sometimes a good majority of a tour can come together smoothly, but that's very rare. Even more so in the last two years. The touring circuits are very saturated and it makes it very hard for the smaller bands and strictly DIY bands to get booked.'

He further explained that the significant losses during this ordeal aren't limited to money, but also time lost or wasted, since his work requires much time invested before any profit can be made:

'Well, I spent hours upon hours since October to book a 16-day tour for a band. It was a lot of stress to navigate around all of the bigger tours to get this tour booked for them [because large tours can lessen attendance of smaller tours]. I didn't lose financially nor did I gain. However, time spent, to me, is more valuable than money. A lot of messages and emails went out. Many didn't respond. Many were read with no response. Some cities didn't work out and the locations had to be moved whilst trying to keep drive times reasonable. Dates were confirmed only to have some fall through and once again get confirmed elsewhere. In some places local support was just unavailable and then once again a date had to get moved. Negotiations, creating flyers, getting bands, staying on top of things with the promoters, etc. It was like this up until almost two weeks out from the tour in which the last 3 dates finally panned out. Then not even a week later it was all cancelled. It sucks, but I'd rather cancel than ever jeopardize someone's health and safety.'

I asked Mikael about what booking shows meant to him so I could understand what the loss of that ability meant, and in answering, he also described the importance of connectedness with the metal community in each city that he books shows in, since it's important to cater to the musical tastes of each area:

'It means a lot. Like anyone, I want every show I'm involved with to be the best show it could possibly be. For the bands and the people attending... I try to stay in the know when it comes to the scene or climate of metal in many cities, states, and regions. It's important creating a line up and appealing to the people that are essentially the scene. Overall, I just like seeing people have a good time.'

Similarly, he told me how he feels when his shows have to be cancelled:

'I'm bummed out. All of my promoter buds, venues, and musician friends are as well. But, I am sure I can speak for most of them when I say that we'd rather cancel/postpone than see anyone suffer because of any irresponsibility during something like this. It's something we are all taking it seriously with hopes that everyone comes out on the other side healthy... I'm prepared to do what is necessary to keep people safe. If it means a month, year, or longer. Humans have always found a way to adapt for better or worse. Many are already [adapting] by live-streaming performances which is pretty cool. Unfortunately, a prolonged amount of time could really hurt a great deal of others that rely on the industry for income. Hoping things turn around sooner than later... What we have learned about this virus is that it doesn't discriminate and the symptoms can vary. I don't think some people would be responsible enough to stay home if exhibiting mild symptoms as we are seeing in general already. I'm thankful no shows are going on during this crisis.'

The impact on Randy Kastner might have been the least of the three bookers, as his shows focused exclusively on the state of Wisconsin. He started off booking shows there to play a role in strengthening



the local scene, but more recently he continued to book shows because he genuinely enjoyed doing so. Even for him, the COVID-19 situation caused a multitude of show cancellations, including for a festival that was something he'd hosted for more than a decade without interruption:

'[Shows featuring the bands] Swallow the Sun, Ghoul, Trouble, on top of my newly formed Blades of Steel metal festival which was born out of the ashes of the NYDM Spring Bash that ran for 10 years [were all cancelled]'

Of the three bookers I interviewed, Bastian was likely hit the hardest by these cancellations, as Master of Metal, an agency he co-owns with his wife, was his only source of income, and the only occupation he ever had. The other promoters I had interviewed had other sources of income, so they weren't as dependent on concerts and tours to survive. In addition to the large-scale festival, Metalcamp, Bastian also booked many shows. He started off booking approximately thirty club-sized shows per year in the 1990s, but those numbers had grown since then. He also served as a consultant for many metal bands. In addition, he ran a music distribution through Master of Metal that was an official distributor of titles for many large metal labels, including Nuclear Blast and Roadrunner Records. He described the scope of the impact of COVID-19 on his current booked roster (at the time of the interview), which had caused him to have to cancel multiple tours in multiple countries, and one of the musicians he was representing even contracted COVID-19:

'We are Master of metal, a small underground management and booking agency with a small selection of bands from different genres. Crisix are a thrash metal from Barcelona. With them we do about 70 shows per year. This year's goal was to do over 80 shows. So far we lost all March shows. But all this [booking problems related to COVID-19] started for us much earlier. We were just not taking it seriously enough and never thought it would affect Europe the same way it did in China. We started booking Crisix' Asian tour in November 2019 for May 2020. Just after the Destruction tour [the headlining band on the tour], we booked Crisix an Asian tour with 4-5 shows in Japan, a show in Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, and 3 shows in China. The promoter from Japan informed us in January that we should cancel China. A week or two after, they told us we should postpone the tour as the virus issue over there will most probably last at least till April. We had just returned home from 20-day Spanish tour and then it [the COVID-19 outbreak] started here. We cancelled a headlining, sold-out show on the boat Metal City Sursee on Lake Luzern in Switzerland and No Playback and MISE festivals in Germany. Yesterday we postponed an 18-day tour with Destruction and Suicidal Angels that was supposed to happen in April/May and we also postponed a few Spanish shows. We also work with BTWD [Brothers Till We Die] a beatdown/hardcore band from Madrid. We cancelled a 6-day French tour in April including a very cool festival called Day of Hardcore. We were just about to confirm two tours for them but then lost another 18 shows or so. We are hoping they will be able to keep shows with Desolated in July. Another band we work with is Vita Imana, known in Spanish speaking markets only. They do very well and we just lost probably the biggest event in Spain and had to cancel all April and May shows. Worse yet, Vita Imana's percussionist Miriaim was hospitalized,

[she tested] positive with coronavirus and pneumonia in her right lung. Thankfully she was released from the hospital. Our other bands were luckily in the studio recording new albums.'

Bastian explained to me that it was unclear when he would be able to make income again, since he only gets paid when bands get paid. He explained to me some of the conditions that the bands he worked with were living under:

'Crisix comes from the Spanish city of Igualada, which is like a 30 minute drive from Barcelona. Igualada entered quarantine on the 13th of March as it was recognised as the epicentre in Catalunya, and since then the guys [in the band] cannot leave the city. All the area, public transport, and roads are closed under state police control. We were told that the city will be in quarantine for a minimum of 14 days.'

Bastian did tell me that he was somewhat accustomed to mass cancellations of his booked shows, as in the past he had to do so due to European politics:

'You know, originally I come from very difficult territory -Eastern Europe. I was promoting shows when we had to deal with Yugoslavian borders and I can tell you I had a list of cancelled shows because of the borders and shit. I did a Kreator/Destruction tour where we had to cross like 5 borders and successfully did all the shows. It was just after the Balkan War. I had cancelled Cannibal Corpse, Marduk, and Immortal shows because of the border, so I am kinda used to it from old times. It's weird because I didn't have a cancelled show for like 10 years now. But for our bands it was very hard.'

It wasn't until early April that the entry and exit restrictions in Igualada were lifted, with the rationale behind it being that the entirety of Spain was then under quarantine, so there was no need for between-city restrictions as the rates of COVID-19 were then similar for other areas of Catalonia (Spain endorses Catalonia's proposal to lift quarantine perimeter around Igualada area, 2020). Bastian was clear that despite the stress that comes with concert cancellations that his agency and the bands that work with him do keep the safety of fans in mind. As he explained, some shows in some countries could continue, but he made the decision to cancel those shows even if they were not under government restrictions:

'The guys [in Crisix] didn't want to take any risks. Fans are their first concern. They are young sportsmen, but our customers can be old metalheads and it was just not moral to potentially bring a possible virus among our fans. Solidarity in this case was most important. But it's never easy to cancel shows.'

Bastian of Master of Metal elaborated on how much the COVID-19 situation could impact individual promoters (such as Randy Kastner) that put on shows:

'It sucks completely. Imagine. You book bands, pay fee, flights, hotels, venue rent, and promo. The promoter's job is not easy. Many people see promoters work as some necessary evil, but many don't realise what kind of risks promoters take every day with

investments and how many jobs the promoter provides from security, technicians, crew. My wife Ana speaks daily with a German promoter who lost about 25,000 euro because of a cancelled festival. He had everything paid in advance.'

He further explained the laborious work in trying to book a unique show, such as a show on a boat or a cruise ship:

'It took him [the promoter of the Swiss concert on a boat] 3 years to get permission from the government to do the very unique event. Crisix would be the first band to play on the famous Swiss Lake Luzern. The show was sold out. This is local promoters, but what about bigger agencies that cancelled and postponed hundreds of tours and shows? I know [booking agencies] MAD and Doomstar among others are postponing 10 tours, like 120 shows each.'

I asked Tito Vespasiani about how the pandemic had impacted him in his line of work as a band manager and as someone that works at a record label in one of the epicentres of the virus. First, I asked Tito to clarify what his jobs entail:

'A manager is in charge of constantly advising a band and leading it through its journey in the music business. This could include a variety of aspects - large scale decisions and actions - looking for a booking agency and negotiating terms, label shopping for example - or even simply coming up with effective ideas to push the band and keep it active and motivated. It could be merch sales and all sort of initiatives. I don't see the manager as something that invisibly controls the band but rather someone who strongly believes in the band and that works as an enhancer of the band's original purpose. The booking agent has the role of looking for shows - talking to either local promoters or tour agencies and negotiating those with them. "The man in the middle" in a few words. When it comes to web promotion I've got my own take on the matter. I don't do classic-approach PR, sending emails for interviews/reviews/magazine coverage in general, although I do shop for premieres for my bands and for my label Everlasting Spew as well. I've built - it took years and it's always expanding - a network of contacts through real and genuine interaction with fans, those who actually listen and buy music and I make sure most of them will at least listen to the bands I care for.'

Tito was especially dedicated to his craft, as he had managed the Italian metal band Hideous Divinity for thirteen years (and counting). They were his favorite up-and-coming band from the area he lived in, so his initial focus was to spread familiarity about a band that he was passionate about and that he felt deserved wider recognition. From there his dedication to metal only grew over the years through increasing engagement, especially in a formal and business sense, with the global metal community. Tito told me about how the pandemic affected the bands that he managed, in terms of their productivity and output, and how he was supportive as they dealt with feelings of isolation:

'[Bands were affected] In multiple ways. Besides the most obvious - the lack of shows - there are a few smaller things. Musicians are human beings and they are affected by

isolation or fear as well and this is reflected upon the band's activities. Some get very productive... the rest of the world/bandmates make them feel like they have to [be productive during quarantine and while live concerts can't happen], they have to write music or the isolation time is wasted. Web sales also slowed down a bit and so did streams... but the live aspect is the biggest one for sure. Hideous Divinity got their European tour with Terrorizer cancelled, Gaerea [a band on Everlasting Spew] got a tour cancelled as well, plus plenty of festival cancellations for both these bands and more. I regularly keep contact with the guys in all my bands and at least make them feel I am keeping myself active in multiple ways, whether it's rescheduling shows or aggregate people, boost streams, anything. My bands know they are not alone.'

I also asked Tito about the impact he saw on the independent record label he works for. He noted that sales took a hit following the global quarantines in March, but by May sales had begun to recover:

'Impact has been pretty hard and I know sales slowed down at first due to fear and lack of money both for us and other labels, but I also noticed fans started buying again cause they need their tunes and many want to actively support [as the awareness that record labels were struggling spread]. The first days had been nightmarish for us but we've been able to make people feel involved. I chatted with a lot of customers and launched plenty of funny initiatives [to encourage sales] like "buy 2 CDs and get a 3rd for free", mystery boxes, name your price downloads [i.e., free music downloads through Bandcamp]. The metal community is very active, supportive and responsive - if you throw in the towel don't expect a reaction, but if you're able to communicate [that you need support, then] they'll be there. I feel very lucky and grateful. This is mostly our experience though [at Everlasting Spew Records], I'm sure plenty of labels faced setbacks with orders or artists unable to finalize recordings, messing up schedules, and so on, but there are ways to get the best with what we got. You don't fight an unavoidable situation, you adapt and accept the things you can't change.'

One of the most common ways of dealing with concert cancellations was to postpone or reschedule them, but Tito explained to me how that solution can be problematic too, since two months into the pandemic it was still unclear how prolonged the situation would be, which could result in further costs and further reschedules. Worse yet, many of the major metal festivals had been delayed by one full year, which meant that up-and-coming bands would be unable to get onto these major annual festivals for at least two years. For bands that were seeing fast and increasing success, this delay in a major exposure opportunity could stop their meteoric climb at a pivotal time. In Tito's words:

'My main concern is, "what if we reschedule that show and maybe even face some [additional] costs and then lockdowns get prolonged?". Also I had a couple of bands thinking about not releasing new music which was ready [to be released] since while [music consumers were] in fear it would not get the proper attention. Some other bands couldn't finish their recordings and are afraid that when they take their recordings to go and shop for a label those labels will be swamped with applications. Some bands are

being heavily hyped now, but they won't be booked for most fests next year anyways because fests will just replicate this year's cancelled line up, so they should apply for 2022 in hopes that the hype stays alive, but in a year many more albums will come out. It's tricky... I'm afraid the hard work we've put in to build a connection to the public will kind of go wasted, same as the promotional efforts for the albums, if this thing [the pandemic] will keep going for too long. Bands might be able to return playing [live] when hype has faded or tunes feel "old" at that point.'

Tito shared his anxieties about how detrimental the pandemic could be to his label if the COVID-19 pandemic kept prolonging:

'As I mentioned before, schedule issues are a real thing already. Many bands were meant to record so there was a certain schedule that will now change unpredictably. I might end up having some empty months with no releases and then two-three packed months with a lot of costs to front all of them in a short span. No live shows also means less promotion and sold copies which also impacts a label. And the most obvious concern is the financial crisis as a whole. It's pretty bad already and if people lose their jobs they won't be able to buy music. Hell, not even me or Giorgio [owner of Everlasting Spew Records] will be able to finance the label. But honestly I'm more concerned for human beings having no income than how this could potentially impact my label, even with it being a crucial component of my life. Things need to be put to scale sometimes.'

And he explained how the lack of live concerts alone could be problematic, not only for bands, but for music fans:

'...live activities are crucial for the sense of enthrallment, relief, and aggregation they give us and we take them for granted at times. The entertainment business as a whole is at danger and most of the time it is neglected by people, governments, and so on... it's pushing artists to bring up new and different contents, although this is harder to apply to metal. I could see myself and other fans enjoying crowd-less live shows, acoustic jams, but would this work for a huge portion of extreme metal bands? Certainly not. Some dark atmospheric bands could play it like a drama - a theatrical piece, with cool props and while setting up a nice mood for it. But what underground band has such a budget? And how many metalheads would actually be interested in that? I know more than a few who'd point their finger at that and say "hey that's lame, that's not metal, that's not *true*".'

Even when concerts would return to being a possibility, Tito, much like many of the other individuals I interviewed, expected that there could be changes in concert behaviors following the pandemic:

'Will there be the same attendance? Will people be excited to go to live shows again or will some still fear being surrounded by people even when the waters will calm down? Will flights' prices [for bands to play intentional concerts and tours] increase substantially?'

Bastian of Master of Metal explained the seriousness of the situation for people working within the music industry:

'This morning I saw a Facebook post saying, "Stay at home, you can do your job from home." This can be true for a lot of occupations, but not for a concert promoter. Let's see how fast things will change. Right now the losses are huge - for smaller bands, bigger bands, the entire industry, managers, bookers, tour managers, etc. So, I hope everyone reacts fast and responsibly. Stay at home so we can all return to normal ASAP.'

## Looking to the future

Although the negative ramifications for many interviewees have been reported, that isn't to say that these individuals weren't optimistic about the future. Some interviewees tried to make note of possible positive incomes of this situation. These perspectives, they reported, helped them cope with the situation. Chris of Internal Bleeding explained:

'I am looking on the bright side of things and thinking that some interesting new music will come out of this experience. How can it not? It's a life-changing event.'

Bastian of Master of Metal was confident that metal fans would help bands get through this turbulent time:

'In our case, all of our bands sell merchandise very well. Also, in a case of a cancelled tour, they will sell it all online and at the next shows. Some people like buying shirts with a tour backprint they never attended... Now it's time that you prove what kind of fan you are. A fan that talks or a fan that buys original band merchandise and legal music and supports his favorite bands. But I also understand fans at some point when they will have to choose between a piece of bread or original band shirt. Many will still go for the t-shirt. This is why I like metal community. We should help each other and go through this shit together.'

Many of the interviewees felt there would be a lasting impact on the music industry even after the COVID-19 crisis has ended, but that it was too soon to know what that impact would be. Mikael of WorldForge Booking & Touring communicated what he felt were widespread anxieties about what would come next:

'I think it may change things overall even after this passes - if it passes. I could be wrong. As of right now? Everyone is scrambling to adapt. There is so much uncertainty, though. It's pretty ominous. With anything, everything requires some kind of planning and logistics. Will we get back to playing shows? How many venues will survive this? Can anyone even afford to tour after this? When will it end? What if it doesn't end? There are a lot of questions and little answers. Hopefully, we will have more answers and more certainty soon.'

Wisconsin promoter Randy Kastner had a more cautious, balanced perspective, where he weighed optimistic outcomes against more problematic ones. He hoped that metal fans that have been unable to attend shows might attend shows in greater numbers in the period after the COVID-19 crisis ends:

‘We should be ok when it is over because I think the [metal] fanbase will appreciate things and life more and not take things for granted as much... Hopefully the fanbases appreciate the promoters, bands, and venues more than they did before, but I think that is a stretch because humanity is more about themselves nowadays.’

Randy also cautioned towards another scenario where too many bands being eager to return to touring could overwhelm the market, causing lower attendance across the board due to a wider dispersion of fans, and ultimately, financial losses for bands and promoters:

‘Once things return to a new normal everyone will be on tour making it even harder to break even... Every band will be on a mission to get back out there, but unfortunately, with too many shows and not enough fans, money turnouts will suffer for many shows. Too many shows is never a good thing.’

## **The big picture & moving forward**

COVID-19 is likely to have a lasting impact across many countries, cultures, and occupations. There is evidence that the widespread nature of the contagion and the resulting quarantines and shutdowns resulted in an ominous state of uncertainty for touring musicians, their respective booking agencies and promoters, and broader communities that were dependent on concert venues to stimulate local businesses. The closure of businesses including concert venues had occurred as a result of the bans on large gatherings in an attempt to curb the spread of contagion. It was unclear how many concert venues would survive these shutdowns, and musicians were aware of the situation. Similar circumstances appeared to be prevalent across the music industry regardless of country, as the global COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in similar quarantines and closings of non-essential businesses worldwide. Evidence from interviews with touring musicians, promoters, booking agencies, and record label employees combined with evidence from Gofundme and Kickstarter pages provided insight into the widespread difficulties that the music industry faced following the early months of the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic. Touring musicians that abruptly had their tours cancelled either in the middle of a tour or in immediately before the tours commenced faced significant financial losses due to non-refundable tour-costs, travel, and preprinted merchandise. The indefinite loss of performing live deprived musicians of a fundamental cathartic expectation that was normally supplied by their music occupations, with musicians experiencing the onset of depressive symptoms as they faced uncertainty about when they could perform live again. These difficulties extended to other areas of the music industry, as up to 90% of music venues faced permanent closure. The individuals involved in booking shows, including band managers, promoters, and booking agencies also saw losses immediately following the COVID-19 outbreak, and they maintained anxieties about when regular music consumption through concerts would resume. Although in March and early April of 2020, musicians were only beginning to feel the onset of the financial and emotional fallout following the initial spread of the pandemic and resulting

quarantines, what they were already experiencing was substantial. Some bands had lost thousands of dollars due to prematurely ended tours and an abundance of unsold merchandise, and travel expenses, and their booking agencies similarly had non-refundable expenses from those same tours, and both groups faced uncertainty about when they would be able to resume activities and maintain tour-based income. Although, based on everyone interviewed in this article, they were also able to maintain perspective about their occupations in the context of the pandemic on broader society, noting that lives were at risk, so live music could wait for the greater good. Despite this humility and prioritizing of interviewees to put others before themselves, there was still a great community outpouring within the metal community to help bands and fans through free services, free music, streamed live performances, and widespread donations through GoFundMe and Kickstarter pages. This behavior was likely the result of a metal cultural norm to assist community members in need, such as what is found in the dance known as moshing. Between job losses for the general public and anxieties about the virus spreading through the mail, the one independent record label employee surveyed experienced financial losses following the initial spread of the pandemic, but sales began to improve a couple of months after the initial March outbreak.

Although this article provides insight into the impact on musicians and their respective promoters, booking agencies, managers, and record labels in the immediate aftermath of the initial COVID-19 outbreak and quarantine, it should be noted that this article utilized a limited sample to draw these inferences, and specifically focused on metal musicians to maintain precision and consistency, so the extent to which generalities can be drawn from these interviews to the entirety of the music industry is not yet clear.

Lasting effects such as post-traumatic stress disorder have been documented in the aftermath of previous coronaviral pandemics. Moving forward, employees within the music industry are among those that should be given attention as they are among the business owners and employees that have been hit by COVID-19 severely, both emotionally and financially.

## Autobiographical Note

Kyle J. Messick is a social psychologist that specializes in metal music studies and religious studies. He is an advocate for open science practices and has had works published in multiple books, including by publishers Routledge and Brill. He is a leader in studying metal music and culture from a psychological perspective having investigated the relationship between lyrics and moral reasoning, metal and mental health, how violent imagery is processed by different types of metal fans, and the functions of sacred aspects of metal music culture, among others.

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