

**A holistic look into the live music industry  
and how COVID 19 has affected it**



**RESEARCH INVESTIGATION  
Written by Callum Davies**



# CONTENTS

**Page 3-6** - Introduction

**Page 7** - Methodologies

**Page 8** - Aims and Objectives

**Page 9-10** - Interview with Dougie Cousins

**Page 11 - 12** - Interview with Jason Blackburn

**Page 13-14** - Interview with Adam Clarke

**Page 15 - 16** - Music in a post COVID world

**Page 17-18** - Music consumption during COVID 19

**Page 19** - Assumptions

**Page 20** - Survey Discussion

**Page 21** - Summary

**Page 22** - Finalised Question

**Page 23 -25** - References

**Page 26 - 27** - Appendix

# INTRODUCTION

## The Industry

The live music industry currently occupies a market value of £1.1 billion within the UK, Live music industry in the United Kingdom (UK) – Statistics & Facts (2020)

Research implies that this arena will reach a global market value of £31 billion in the next 4 years (2025) and it is estimated that £24 billion of that would be made up from ticket sales as cited on the Music Business Association page – Sanchez, T. (2018). It is evident that ticket sales and the associations of live music occupy the vast majority of this market value.

After looking into jobs within the frontline of the industry they can be split into two categories. First we have more localised artists who tend to have no management, very little merchandise and fan base and next to nothing when it comes to Spotify streams. Secondly we have the more established artists, these are artists that have a more developed fan base, have management and a record label and tend to have over 10,000 monthly listeners on Spotify.

The industry consists of independent artists as well as those that are managed by agencies and record labels. Those artists perform at venues, which draw money to the economy, people go to Vegas, people go to festivals, business operates there as well as allowing various jobs for people who have a passion for music in the process. The industry is so big it allows avenues for so many people to play part in this industry such as band promoters, booking agents, road crew and local venues.

The main differences between the two of these artists is that the more local artists rely on events such as tours as this is their main source of income in comparison to the more established ones who don't need to tour much to gain an income. Another difference between these is the capacity of venues they play. Local artists can play a small pub show and not sell it out whilst the more established artist can sell out a 1,000 capacity show.

## The Virus

Coronavirus seems to decimate everything in its path to the point now where we long to find enjoyment in the little things, stuff we normally wouldn't before the pandemic started. Coronavirus (COVID 19) is a respiratory virus that primarily spreads through droplets of saliva whenever someone who has the disease sneezes or coughs. Some of the symptoms of Covid are high temperature, a new continuous cough and a loss to your sense of smell and taste.

As of March 2020, the UK was put into its first lockdown which set ways for numerous other ones to be set later on in the year. With this lockdown we were given a set of rules two of which was the two-meter apart rule and only essential travel was allowed nothing else and many people having to work from home whilst schools and universities having to be cancelled. The two-meter rule brought a whole new look into everyday life, this meant places such as shops etc were normally fitted with a one-way system to avoid contact and would limit the amount of customers in a store at one time. Later lockdowns throughout the year also made masks mandatory to be worn in shops.

## The Collision

The live music industry has been decimated over the last year due to the pandemic Kambasha (2020), yet this sector is more important as one may think at first glance. First off there's jobs such as band promoters, booking agents, road crew and local venues who have all been put at risk in a matter of months. Venues who are normally busting at the seams with fans when hosting a gig were suddenly hung out to dry with sadly no glimpse of hope in what we can only call a very dull horizon.

Artists feared when they would be able to perform live again or an even scarier thought of if they ever would again, this again refers to smaller more independent local artists who need this source of income to survive and have sadly had to put the dream of being in a band at rest. These are only a few examples of how important the live music industry is and how pivotal it is in playing its part in many people's lives both physically and mentally.

Photo by  
**ROD LONG**





# "COVID HAS DECIMATED THE LIVE MUSIC INDUSTRY AND ITS UNSUNG HEROES"

**MICHELLE KAMBASHA**

Many people use music as a pathway to help with our mental wellbeing and use live events as a way to become more connected with the artists themselves. Even the feeling of being in a room filled with others who share the same love as you can do wonders for the mental state. This alone shows how important the live music scene is for the mental wellbeing of artists as well as the fans.

The purpose of this insight report is to gain a greater understanding of the live music industry as well as to look into the music industry pyramid and how more established artists are coping compared to more grassroots artists. How local venues are hanging on and what challenges there are to help bring attention to them as well as focusing on the importance in mental health and live music.



## METHODOLOGIES

It's evident that the live music industry would be hit hard going into this insight report as the industry is already reliant on groups of people and being in a pandemic this was bound to affect it greatly. For the methods of research that would benefit me most as the topic is very user generated ethnography would be one of the best to use however being a pandemic has limited me in the process as we can't be in groups. The other two methods are surveys and interviews as these allowed me to gain insight into people's lives who are directly affected by the problem

Photo by  
**SAMUEL REGAN**

# AIMS & OBJECTIVES

## AIM 1 - **TOO DISCOVER HOW MANAGERS AND STAKEHOLDERS ARE AFFECTED BY THE PANDEMIC**

- A great viewpoint as to how stakeholders etc are affected with no tours etc as well as not having a job due to pandemic

## AIM 2 - **LOCAL ARTISTS COMPARED TO ESTABLISHED ARTISTS**

- This will allow me to gain a much greater understanding of how various artists are coping without this source of income.
- How artists who make money from Spotify compared to artists that don't

## AIM 3 - **MUSIC IN A POST COVID WORLD**

- See how people would react to music gigs/ venues opening after COVID and if they would feel comfortable, would they attend gigs straight away or leave it a while
- Look into when smaller artists would be able to perform again



Photo by  
**ALEX HELENE**

# DOUGIE COUSINS

## Lead singer in Bearings

As bearings have been a band I've been a fan of for a while I was excited to get the chance to talk to him about how he and his band have been affected. As Bearings are more established within the music industry compared to Thick Skin for example was curious as to how covid has affected this lifestyle in which music is such a pivotal item in his day to day life, Dougie had this to say about the matter,

### **As live music plays part in your everyday life how would you say covid has affected this lifestyle?**

"It's a mixed bag, if we were sitting at home working on a record it would be different but we had to put a record out in the pandemic, the second record is so important for up and coming bands" Releasing an album during a pandemic is something I didn't even think about as normally when bands release an album they tend to go on tour to help promote it so this was an interesting topic to cover.

Dogie continued "It's nice to have time off and not be away from home constantly, it's really helped with my mental health as I've formed some good routines and have the opportunity to exercise a fair bit. As much as it sucks to be stuck in a time that's important to my career many have lost family and friends and that is more important than any show, record or tour"

Again we're seeing instances where artists are turning the pandemic and the lack of shows into a positive and using the time to focus on their mental wellbeing. This interview also gave an insight of how important it was for the artist to release an album during the pandemic something that most bands won't do and would hold back until they can tour so they can promote the album to its full potential

### **Since the cancellation has prevented more localised bands from 'making it' in the industry and sadly disbanded, was this ever a concern for Bearings?**

"I can't really speak too much for localised bands. I'm not too sure we fit into that category. We have a booking agent and a label who are all very good so it's not really too much of a worry"

This is interesting as it shows that more established artists don't have to worry about tours as much as localised artists

Dogie continued "We had tours that really would have helped us turn this and perhaps we missed out, maybe it would have made little difference"

"As much as it sucks to be stuck in a time that's important to my career many have lost family and friends and that is more important than any show, record or tour"





Photo by  
**APERTUNES**

# JASON BLACKBURN

**Guitarist in Death Blooms former vocalist in Thick Skin**

"The longer it went on the less hope certain members had and sadly we ended up disbanding"

**With you being in the live music industry especially as a more localised band, how would you say this has affected you?**

"To be honest at the start of the pandemic wasn't all that bad (which obviously wasn't great) it gave me a bulk of time to dedicate solely to writing new music. Moving past the 6 month mark it started to get tough, with no clear end in sight it was hard to stay motivated to work on new material. It's definitely been a year of adapting and a real test on patience and perseverance"

Straight from this answer i got that Jason took a negative and turned it into a positive and used the time in isolation to help work on new material and also giving him the to solely dedicate time to new music

**How are Thick Skin managing without shows at the moment?**

Sadly, we decided to disband as our drummer had a kid and with the whole pandemic we

decided to call it quits, however i am now back on guitar in Death Blooms"

This was sad to hear as from my perspective Thick Skin were good and had a bright future ahead of them and it's sad to see one of the causes of the disbandment is due to the pandemic.

**Was disbandment always a lingering thought in the back of the mind ever since the cancellation of live shows?**

"Honestly not really, I actually wrote an album for Thick Skin right at the start of the pandemic but then the longer it went on the less hope certain members had and sadly we ended up disbanding"

This alone shows how much of an effect the pandemic has had on smaller localised bands.



# ADAM CLARKE

**Guitarist in Rarity and manager at Tandemmgmt.co**

"If a band didn't have plan to tour in that spring of 2020, they're probably going to have to wait a season or two until they can get the chance"

**With you being in an established band as well as managing them how would you say the pandemic has affected you?**

"What we're doing now is building content that can be used for videos, graphics and contents. One of the things we've started doing is streams on twitch making revenue on that and I feel that this could be something we see a lot more of when the pandemic is over"

This was an interesting take as some bands may take the approach of crelaxing during the pandemic and just waiting for a future tour, this may be because they are more established within the industry and can rely on Spotify plays and merchandise sales whilst bands like rarity are taking twitch to gain that little bit more of an income whilst also having the benefit of engaging more with fans on a one-to-one basis something that we may not see with more bigger bands in the industry. Another touchpoint in which we talked about was a subscription-based model and how the pandemic has allowed them to pursue this avenue.

On the other hand, the smaller local artists it's a lot harder as without the opportunity to perform they struggle to push content etc like the larger bands as they won't have that much of a fanbase.

**From a mangement viewpoint how has this affected your livelihood when it comes to booking shows and how does the future look from your standpoint?**

"I'm expecting to see a lot more of micro agencies and that are doing it part time"

In Adams' case most if his revenue comes from tour dates as when they make money, he makes money as it's all commissioned based and will have to then work a separate job on the side to make ends meet until the artist can tour again.

**What was releasing an album like during a pandemic?**

Usually, the way to do it is you put the record out alongside a tour because that's when you're going to grow the most and making that decision to put out a record was not easy but ultimately everyone at the label and the band is happy, we followed through with it. I feel that if we were to hold onto it there wouldn't be as much excitement around the band as it is now"

Touching on more local bands, Adam touched on the fact that its going to be very difficult for the more smaller localised bands to book tours when this is all over due to the high demand of the tours that were scrapped just before the pandemic, he said "If a band didn't have plan to tour in that spring (2020) they're probably going to have to wait a season or 2 until they can get the chance"

Photo by  
**BRANDON DACOSTA**







Photo by  
**DANNY HOWE**

# MUSIC IN A POST COVID WORLD

Music streaming music accounted for 80% of overall music consumption in the UK in the last year stated this high rise could be the result of the decimation of the live industry due to the lockdown rules set in place. Another factor which could affect artists both big and small is the need to have a visa to tour in a now post brexit word. The UK government has come under heavy criticism in recent weeks as no negotiations between them and various EU countries have taken place regarding touring despite the industry being in dire need.

With all the new expenses and added paperwork regarded for a visa, many new to mid level artists will find it impossible. Currently there's a petition set by 'The Musicians Union' currently sitting at 117,664 signatures (2020), the petition - Let Touring Musicians Travel: Support Musicians Working in the EU Post-Brexit (2020) calls for a passport that will allow acts and crew to travel freely between EU member states, ridding them of new required permits.

Isle Of White festival boss Giddings, J as cited by NME "It's OK when you're a big-time act and you can afford to swallow costs, but if you're the average or emerging artist then you're hand-to-mouth", he then continued to say "If it's going to cost more money to tour there or you're going to have to take extra days off, then it's not going to be financially possible." - Giddings, J cited by NME.

It's going to be incredibly hard for smaller upcoming artists to tour in the future either for the fact that it may be financially impossible for them or for the simple fact that they would have to wait various seasons until they can tour again due to venues being in high demand for the more established artist who would more likely want to tour as soon as possible

"ITS **OK** WHEN **YOU'RE A BIG-TIME** ACT **AND** YOU **CAN** AFFORD **TO SWALLOW COSTS** BUT **IF** YOU'RE **THE AVERAGE OR EMERGING ARTIST** THEN **YOUR** HAND **TO** MOUTH"

- JOHN GIDDINGS -



# MUSIC CONSUMPTION DURING COVID 19

During COVID, music has been the answer for many and would think that there would be an increase in the streaming side of it, however initial research shows that streams have actually fallen in comparison to pre Covid 19. An example of this is the 6th of April 2020 the US top combined streams of the 'Top 200' has slipped for the third consecutive week which then ultimately hit the lowest point of the year - The entertainment and media industry (2020). Spotify confirmed that there was a sudden decline in areas hit hardest by COVID these areas including Spain and Italy this could simply be the fact that music consumption normally co exists with various of other activities such as going to the gym and commuting to work all of which have been lost with the pandemic.



# ASSUMPTIONS

Going into my survey I expect to see a lot of people answering yes to attending gigs however see an increase in people who tend not to see local bands compared to more established bands. This is the same for attending local venues but feel that after COVID a lot more people will jump at the opportunity to see local artists at local venues maybe even for the factor that they've gone so long without this sort of entertainment. I can also expect people to be very wary as to when they would attend gigs again in a post covid world with a lot of them, feeling that they would wait a while whilst i can see some people wanting to go as soon as possible as like previously mentioned they've been longing for this type of entertainment for a long time.



# SURVEY DISCUSSION

For my survey I wanted to gain insights revolving around music consumption, Local venues and local artists and how people feel towards these topics in hopes to get an further insight from perspectives that may not rely on these topics as livelihoods

For section 1 of my survey i wanted to find out if participants have used music as a way to cope with the pandemic with 90.5% saying yes whilst 9.5% of participants said no. Now knowing that people have used music to help i wanted to expand on this by asking why they turned to music to help. When looking at my answers a lot of them described music as being a good distraction as to what's happening in the world and that time alone is giving them an opportunity to relax and to help with their mental wellbeing, whilst a variety of participants answered that music has always played a special part in their lives and has made living in a pandemic that little bit more easier. One participants answered "Gave me time out of my day to switch off and chill out. To forget about what's happening in the world." Section 1 has given me an overall insight just how important music is to some people's lives and how much exactly it has helped them cope with the pandemic

In section 2 i wanted to find out if people used music in the pandemic to find artists they wouldn't normally tend to listen to. 52.4% said yes whilst 47.6% said no. For the participants who said yes i wanted to then find out why they wouldn't have listened to these artist without the pandemic, a wide variety of answers simply stated that they now had more time to find and discover new artist and genres with one participants saying that "Their music taste varied due to increase in people going online and sharing their alternative styles".

This shows me that even isolating in a pandemic people are finding ways in which to share what they're listening to with one another

For section 3 i wanted to ask about music gigs, more specifically if people used to go to gigs pre covid, Do they listen to any local artist and do they attend any local venues. 66.7% regularly attend gigs pre covid opposed to the 33.3% who said no, 57.1% said yes to listening to local artists whilst 42.9% said no and 76.2% seem to attend local venues compared to the 23.8% who don't. I wanted to elaborate more on why the participants seem to not attend gigs at local venues so when asked why participants said that either they simply are not keen on local artists within the area or simply the fact that the artist they do listen to tend to not host gigs near them.

After learning that one of the reasons people may not attend local gigs is the fact that they simply dislike local artists, I was keen on finding out if there is anything that would entice them into attending these types of shows in a post covid world. A recurring answer from various participants cited that more thorough hygiene checks in the future would entice them to attend, this is understandable due to the world COVID has shown us it's natural for people to be more wary in the future for when it comes to hygiene

Following on from the hygiene answer i wanted to see how long participants are willing to wait until they feel comfortable attending gigs again due to us being so used to social distancing. Most answers cited waiting a couple of months after everyone is vaccinated so it's guaranteed safety with some of them even saying that they won't feel safe until mid 2022 whilst others are more eager and would want to go back to gigs as soon as they possibly can, whilst the majority are willing to wait



# SUMMARY



In conclusion I feel like my assumptions were accurate especially when it comes to finding other people's views on attending gigs in a post COVID world and how various safety measures would make the new experience a lot more enjoyable. This insight report has opened my eyes into various problems the live music faces due to COVID and has given me many avenues in which I can pursue. Some glaring problems I found are that there's a worry that more local artists are finding it hard to find motivation to continue their band and there's a fear that this would further damage then music scene in the future as well as the added factor of people tending to not support local artists/venues pre COVID so if I am able to find a way in which I can get them to support local livelihoods such as these then that would be great.

I feel like the question I first asked has now differed and that my new question will help aid me in my aims for my final major project as well as managing to highlight the problems I uncovered within this insight report

**“How can design bring attention to help support the local music scene in a post COVID world?”**

