

Sound Off

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My name is Roy, I work as a live sound engineer – the man behind the mixing desk at concerts and gigs whose job is to make the performance sound good. All of this work is reliant on an audience being present. When the lockdown happened all shows stopped, and with them all of my work; adapting to the situation whilst still doing the same job is basically not possible.

In many ways what I do is a bit different from most jobs in that it is closely interleaved with what the musicians do. For many musicians, especially those who do what they do out of a love of their art, not being able to play together is like losing a limb. Maybe there is a bit more creativity happening as people try to find ways to record together over the Internet but, for many people, that creativity is a face-to-face interaction which does not work on a screen.

One other thing that contributes to the problems faced by lesser known acts is that the music business went through a major upheaval in the digital age. Without a physical product (CD / vinyl etc.) there is no control over the distribution of music. You can share a song via MP3 in an email and the artist gets nothing. Streaming services, especially Spotify, pay little back to the artists so many small acts survived by doing live shows and that is precisely the thing that lockdown has finished.



Encounters are rare these days although I did drive out to a venue to sit in the garden with the owner and the lighting technician I work with to discuss the future. For the venue owner Covid-19 has also been devastating although he is able to access some Government resources to retain some of his staff. In the case of the lighting designer and myself our work is supplied as self-employed contractors on a show by show basis so the Government help did not allow him to pay us. To keep me occupied, I have had to fall back on DIY – I rebuilt our front door and discovered skills I did not think I had.

Shows do not happen out of the blue. Bands have to plan tours, book hotels, make sure that all the people involved are available, rehearse and generally engage in a big logistical exercise. Cancelling all the shows up to Christmas is a major blow for the bands, the technicians and the venues. The same is true for theatre and anything that involves performance.