

The Clock in the Living Room **Re-Imagining Social Connection through Intergenerational** **Listening in the COVID-19 Crisis**

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Résumé de l'article

This article explores the practice of intergenerational listening and its implications for re-imagining social connection in the COVID-19 crisis. Using an approach based in conversation and exchange facilitated through video-conferencing platforms, the authors critically reflect on the possibilities for developing a new sense of social connection by listening to the everyday sounds (Tuuri and Peltola 2019) of particular spaces. More specifically, the principal aim is to investigate the impact of re-imagining the daily sounds of spaces under locked-down as sources of intimacy, accompaniment, and creativity. These sounds include the 'buzz' of a cherished clock, the creak of a screened in porch, or records regularly listened to in a family living room. Supported by literature on 'listening at a distance' (Finer 2018) and the 'sonic imagination' (Street 2019), we ask: how can intergenerational, socially-distanced listeners engage with sound and space to improvise new forms of social connectivity? Asking these questions, we argue, can inform research and action into the roles that intergenerational listening and improvisation can play in the representation and the valuing an ageing population (Lanphier 2019) in an emerging post-pandemic musical landscape.

The Clock in the Living Room: Re-imagining Social Connection through Intergenerational Listening in the COVID-19 Crisis

Lauren Michelle Levesque and J.F.R. Levesque

On February 18, 2020, at 10:13 a.m., I took a picture of the clock that hangs on the wall in my parents' living room. The clock has presided over family activities in my parents' home for over forty years. It has been a cornerstone of our family sound-space, a constant buzz in the chorus of everyday life. The photo was taken a few weeks before the COVID-19 lockdown was initiated across the province of Ontario. Reflecting on the picture later, as regions in the province begin to emerge from lockdown, I consider the final pre-pandemic visit with my parents in the intimate sound-space of our family home. I was not spending time with them but taking a rather mundane picture and recording the buzz of the living room clock. (Lauren, COVID Reflection)



Author's Personal Photo, February 18, 2020

Introduction: The Instability of Crisis

The pandemic has been deeply unsettling.

Unsettling: as in “upset,

disturb, discompose,

throw off balance, confuse,

perturb,

discomfit, disconcert, trouble,

bother, agitate,

ruffle,

shake” (“Unsettling”).

Pondering his experience of aging and time, Ronald J. Pelias writes: “Time is, to call upon the cliché that rings true to me more now than ever before, all we have” (xiii). In his early seventies, Pelias contemplates the impact of the current contexts of “crisis” framing his experience of aging:

Perhaps because I’m aging at a time of such political and environmental chaos, I struggle to keep myself in order. When I was younger, though, I never imagined my senior years would be such an emotional hot tub. I always thought I would be much less of a human mess. (100)

With regard to the word “crisis,” Mary Zournazi states: “Crisis as the word is now applied has left no space for discernment, and is regarded as catastrophe and disaster that tends to incite a reaction that is often unreflexive, rather than a response that is a more careful consideration of the condition of crisis” (59). Although I, Lauren, am in my early forties, the pandemic has exacerbated my sense of being an “emotional hot tub” and/or “human mess.” More specifically, as the pandemic has turned from weeks into months into years of self-isolation, lockdowns, and re-openings, time and the connections it fosters have begun to feel unstable, fragile, vulnerable.

A significant aspect of these feelings of instability, fragility, and vulnerability is the experience of profoundly missing the sound of my mother’s laughter and of my father’s voice. This experience has exacerbated the sensation of being shaken, thrown off balance by their physical and sonic absence. In his work *The Memory of Sound*, Seán Street speaks to the power of sound to pull at emotion and memory: “Sound, be it (frequently) music and song, the spoken word or the raw audio of the world around us provides direct entry to a lost or forgotten experience, and can be almost devastatingly potent because of this” (10). With Street’s quote in mind, I have found myself grappling with the question: How do we search for grounding in a context wherein everything feels unstable? In an effort to create a space in which to discern some of the current conditions of crisis in my own life and that of my family, I invited my father, Reg, also in his seventies, into conversation. This article explores insights and questions that emerged from our discussion, including the idea of intergenerational listening as an intimate, intersubjective, and improvisatory practice.

COVID-19: Making Sense of Crisis Conditions

Given the crisis conditions of COVID-19—which included quarantine, social distancing, risk to one’s health and that of others—scholars such as Aliko Nicolaidis and Ahreum Lim have characterized their pandemic experiences as “ruptures” leading to a reconsideration of action and responsibility. In their dialogue on reflective practice, civil society, and building inclusive spaces in a time of pandemic, Nicolaidis and Lim note: “We feel our own interior sense-making as part of a mind-heart-body inquiry into what is *right action* in this moment, and the next, and the next, without censoring the creativity of our responses” (855, emphasis in original). With these ideas of absence, rupture, creativity, and action in mind, how can intergenerational listening provide space for discernment, possibility, and new ways to think about time, aging, and musical connection during the COVID-19 crisis? What insights can be gleaned from understanding intergenerational listening as an intimate, intersubjective, improvisatory practice?¹

The present article is an initial foray into these questions. It is a container for grappling with the “devastating potency” of the sonic and physical absence of family during the COVID-19

pandemic. The notion that intergenerational listening can act as an improvisatory practice is rooted, as scholar and improviser Catherine Ryan argues, in conceptualizations of the family itself as an “improvisational ensemble” (38–54). For example, in her chapter “Improvising Care,” Ryan explores this understanding of family through her relationship with her young daughter. She explains that improvisation can “nurture relationality by continuously supporting the interdependent flow of connections and power between [her and her daughter]” (39). Drawing on the recent work of Daniel Fischlin, Eric Porter, and Vijay Iyer, Ryan cautions that the word “improvisation” cannot be an empty signifier, standing in for all that is considered good, meaningful, and/or “ungraspable” about life (47). The word, she suggests, needs to say something beyond that, which for Ryan includes “the links between improvisation and life sustaining care” (47).

Ryan’s understanding of family and improvisation provide a starting point for us—Lauren and Reg—to explore intergenerational listening as an improvised practice. As it does for Ryan, improvisation means something specific for us in the context of this article. Its meaning is shaped not only by our own family relationship but also by our experiences of living through the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Composer and improviser, Pauline Oliveros, captures some of the meaning we are engaging with here and in later sections of this article in a Deep Listening meditation included in the volume *The Improvisation Studies Reader: Spontaneous Acts* (“Deep Listening Meditations”). She writes:

Listening all day to your footsteps. Where does the sound come from?

. . . Imaginary improvisation: You are holding the possibility of making the first sound.
(53)

Stated differently, this is improvisation understood as “a key feature of interpersonal communication and social practice” and as “vital life-force”; one that, as Ajay Heble and Rebecca Caines note, “has much to teach us about listening—*really listening*—to what’s going on around us” (“Prologue” 2–3, emphasis in original).

As a whole, the article is divided into four sections. In the first, we contextualize our collaboration and discuss further understandings of improvisation that underpin our work. The second section delves into the practice of intergenerational listening and connects this listening to imagination and sound, particularly as these relate to renewing thinking on the marginalization, underrepresentation, and undervaluing of aging in North American society (Lanphier). This section is followed by an examination of “home” as a springboard for creative action. Here, we outline some of the insights that we gleaned from recognizing the improvisatory practices that shape our own daily lives at “home” (Duffy and Waitt). In the concluding section, some performative pathways are suggested for engaging with improvisation, listening, and musical connectivities post-pandemic. Examples of our collaborative and creative responses to COVID-19 are interspersed throughout the article in the form of images, reflective journal entries (e.g., Reflections), snippets of email exchanges, and poetry. We end the article in this spirit, with a poetic CODA.

Section 1: Pulling at Sound, Music, Space, and Subjectivities—Listening Well?

Pulling at the word “academic”—purposefully experimenting

I have had to pull to allow insights to emerge.

More difficult, emotions amplified by listening.

I end up questioning my own understanding of this deeply embodied and spatial practice. Can we really render an experience of radical openness into academic writing?

How do you put into words moments lived in one relationship?

The rhythm of your father's voice, the sound of his memories, the stories of the ways music has shaped his life.

The chorus of swishing leaves on the maple tree just outside the boundaries of the screen.

The internal sound of the question: How well have I been listening? Maybe I haven't been listening well at all.

(Lauren, COVID Reflection)

As noted in the introduction, this article emerged in response to the unexpected constriction of physical space and the sudden absence of particular sounds and connections—familial and musical—that resulted from a COVID-19 lockdown. It brings together two perspectives: a daughter and arts-based researcher and her father, a retired judge. It leverages Gillian Siddall and Ellen Waterman's conceptualization of improvisation as "a complex site of negotiation" (9), one which is deeply embodied, and which has implications for how improvisers experience their sense of self or their "subjectivities" (8). For Siddall and Waterman, subjectivities are themselves "a complex negotiation of lived embodied experience and social forces that work to regulate behavior and therefore shape that experience" (3). They go on to explain that, with regard to the shaping of subjectivities, improvisation can not only be understood as a complex site of negotiation but also as a "form of recollection and repetition" (3), a means of weaving together past narratives and repertoires of sounds and gestures into the present moment (3–9).

These understandings speak to the possibilities of improvising with past narratives as well as sonic and gestural repertoires that make up a particular relationship, in this case that of a father and daughter. To create a new or different sense of connection in the context of COVID-19, we initiated a series of conversations that took place between May and July 2020 during a lockdown in Phase 3 of Ontario's COVID-19 measures. As a "complex site of negotiation," improvisation acted as a lens to frame these conversations and to manage individual ruminations, whether these consisted of writing poetry, a quick phone chat to share an emerging insight, or momentarily listening to the sounds that drifted through an apartment window or reverberated during a morning walk.

For both of us, the use of video-conferencing platforms was relatively new and required an openness to adapt, such as figuring out accounts; coordinating schedules; negotiating weak internet connections; and, at times, uncooperative laptops. While we sought to give our virtual exchanges some initial structure—meeting once a week, for instance—the goal was to allow our time to flow as needed. Writing about an improvised performance with Barre Phillips in a piece titled "Improvising Composition: How to Listen in the Time Between," Oliveros describes "flow" in that context as a kind of consensus: "Consensus arrived with our bodily interactions with our instruments. This consensus is the confluence of openness to histories, embodied musical knowledge, bodily action resulting in sound, musical give and take, and agreement to continue the flow or stop and start again" (84). While complicated by physical distancing and mediated

through technology, we engaged in instances of flow to “pull,” as Street emphasizes, at our experiences of sound, music, space, and subjectivity: opening to individual and collective stories, embodying musical and sonic knowledge through listening and conversation, and starting and stopping our exchanges, with some lasting five minutes and others two hours.

As we progressed through the project, our exchanges began to feel like a “composition,” one that mapped a particular relationship responding to a particular set of unexpected life conditions in a particular time and space. By composition, we mean what Marcel Cobussen described in his article “Sonic Cards: Improvising (with) Sounds,” when reflecting on the experience of listening to sounds while drinking coffee at a bar in the city of Belgrade: “Closing my eyes for a moment, all these sounds together become the music, an improvised soundscape composition, just for me” (270). Thus, through the flow of our improvised practices, we wove together familiar sounds and gestures along with narratives of the past into the present moment of specific home-spaces during the COVID-19 crisis. As for the actual weaving of our composition, I, Lauren, recorded sounds, snapped photos on my cellphone, and kept a reflective journal. Outside of our Zoom exchanges, Reg read, shared ideas via email and phone, and contributed to the conceptualization and mapping of the current article.

It is important to note that, in leveraging the understandings of improvisation discussed above, we do not consider the practice to be a universal remedy for the myriad economic, ecological, social, and political challenges that individuals and communities face at this time (Tomlinson and Lipstiz). Given that I study the dynamics of music as a space for building peace (Levesque and Ferguson), this is a critical insight that provides a check against overly optimistic views of what creative practices such as improvisation and music can contribute to constructive social change (Levesque). The recognition of the limits and multiple applications of these practices in different contexts (Fischlin and Porter) is, therefore, a horizon that has influenced the ideas and questions shared herein. Given this recognition, in the following section we explore in greater depth our understanding of intergenerational listening as an improvised approach in COVID times.

Section II: Intergenerational Listening as an Improvised Approach

The wisdom of the years has brought me to this point. After years of dealing with balancing the rights of the individual with the security of the collective in courtroom legal debates, I came upon Joseph Campbell's The Power of Myth on Netflix on a particularly nothing retirement day. Time had erased the memory of its original viewing. I came to understand viscerally, probably for the first time, that the myths by which societies conduct themselves were inventions of the human mind. More importantly, we had long surpassed their purpose. More critically, we had not invented relevant myths to deal with the mess we find ourselves in today (e.g., climate change, partisan politics, consumerism). I found liberation in the idea that established myths and structures could be reinvented. What is needed now is action to overcome the stagnant thoughtless compliance to these myths and structures. (Reg, personal communication, June 8, 2020)

In her chapter “Aging and Aesthetic Responsibility,” Elizabeth Lanphier suggests that aged bodies and scenes of aging are often overlooked or kept hidden in North American visual landscapes (99–124). She writes: “The lack of a variety of aged bodies and experiences in art and film reflects and reproduces the marginalization and lack of valuing older people and lives within society” (107). The acknowledgement that older people and their lives are often marginalized, underrepresented, and undervalued in society remains a difficult focus and key challenge of the COVID-19 crisis (Pedersen et al.). Lanphier’s statements, however, underscore

that this reality is not new. The 2019 volume titled *Aging in an Aging Society*, of which Lanphier's chapter is a part, demonstrates the need to renew thinking on such marginalizing, underrepresenting, and undervaluing. The editors of the volume, Iva Apostolova and Monique Lanoix, urge readers toward this renewal, stating:

Although we fully realize the impossibility of the task of presenting a comprehensive analysis of the topic [of aging], we hope that the chapters featured in this volume offer an alternative interpretation, and will stir the readers' imagination in the direction of questioning the current discourses on aging. (2)

For her part, Lanphier proposes that artists can contribute to an "aesthetic responsibility," or the generation of alternative modes of reflection and action that can bring older people and their lives into view (102–3).

I am a captain surrounded by ghosts.

I hear every word they whisper:

Navigate, Negotiate, MANAGE THIS WELL.

There is a path to be followed:

All I see is the rope leading up.

And the drowning that will be deep.

(Lauren, June 15, 2020).

Echoing Lanphier's proposition in interesting ways, the arts became loci of alternative ideas and actions from the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdowns. For example, the title of an article posted on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) website on March 16, 2020, asks: "What is the role of art in helping us better understand coronavirus?" (Collins). Also ubiquitous at this time was the phenomenon of spontaneous outdoor performances on peoples' balconies (Ditmars). Although COVID-19 lockdowns presented us—individuals and communities across Ontario and Canada—with the unexpected constriction of physical space and the sudden absence of familiar connections, social media and online news outlets showcased the arts as a means to resist these conditions of crisis. In light of these demonstrations of artistic resistance, our own conversations turned to the questions: How can music and improvisation contribute to a sense of responsibility toward others at this particular time? How can intergenerational, socially-distanced listeners engage with sound and space to improvise new forms of social connectivity?

For the purposes of this article, we define intergenerational listening as the act of two individuals from different generations intentionally listening to each other. While more complex understandings of this particular listening practice surely exist, we have chosen to ground our approach in the work of scholars, such as Street in *The Sound Inside the Silence*, who explicitly associate listening with sound and imagination. Taking up this idea, Ella Finer remarks, for example: "Experiences of listening will never be as neat as a composed paragraph of sequential sensations. The sonic world makes its own punctuation and [is] rarely bound by rules" (135). Speaking of the impact of distance on such experiences, she offers: "The performance of sound is apprehended in its wake at varying proximities, from the very close to the far distant, to the furthest limits of imagination" (137). These comments underscore the ways in which proximity

and distance shape the experience of listening as well as how this experience can be an unpredictable yet fundamental dimension of everyday life.

We also draw on the notion of linking the practices of improvisation and accompaniment, as articulated by Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz in their book, *Insubordinate Spaces* (23–44). They describe accompaniment as “a commitment based on a cultivated capacity for making connections with others, identifying with them, and helping them” (23). Of particular import to our understanding of intergenerational listening, Tomlinson and Lipsitz stress that accompaniment is not something that can be learned in the abstract (30). It is a commitment manifested through action, risk, encounter, and failure. Given that we have not previously worked on a creative project together, Tomlinson’s and Lipsitz’s application of accompaniment suggests we can frame our own intimate, intersubjective listening practice as a commitment to accompany each other through potential experiences of action, risk, encounter, and failure.

In this regard, Street’s conceptualization of sound as a “poignant link,” expressed in his chapter “Audio Inside the Mind: The Poetics of Sound,” is significant (407). He explains: “Because sound is always present as it happens, always fading as it passes, it is a poignant link between ourselves as we are and ourselves as we once were, as well as a metaphor for our own transience” (407–8). In a setting of COVID-19 lockdown, sound became a poignant link that connected us as authors, as improvisers, and as father and daughter. Here, imagination was key due to the requirements of social distancing and the fact that technology was our only interface. Connecting these ideas to the act of listening, Cobussen argues that: “listening somehow cannot occur without imagination” (“Listening” 126). It is, in his estimation, a “necessary quality when listening” (116), most meaningfully in its capacity to “fill in certain gaps” (126). As we discuss in the following section, the space that we ended up listening to and imagining the most during the COVID-19 crisis was home.

Section III: Listening to and Improvising “Home”

The home has become the focal point of the pandemic. As much as the public domain was influenced by the sound of the exchange of information and ideas, the home has become the centre where sound provides the platform of comfort upon which creativity is deployed to deal with whatever is required. (Reg, personal communication, June 8, 2020)

*I was reading Street’s *The Sound Inside the Silence* and couldn’t stop thinking about how to describe “intimacy” in relation to sound, imagination, and home. I suddenly had a vivid mental image of one of my older sisters sitting on the floor of our childhood bedroom. She was in her pajamas and was holding a small tape recorder. The cassette playing was one my mother recorded of herself before my parents left for a short trip. My older sister was crying, listening to my mother singing lullabies. I closed the book and picked up the phone to ask my sister: “Do you remember this?” (Lauren, COVID Reflection)*

For many of us, the experience of COVID-19 has shifted our relationship with “home.” As an academic, I, Lauren, experienced the swift pivot to online learning in March 2020 that has continued throughout the writing of this article.² In these circumstances, “home” has become a blur between work and my personal life, at different times of the day or week acting as an office, a classroom, a library, a movie theatre, and as a singing studio every Wednesday at 9:30 a.m.

While this blurring may be a new experience for some of us, scholarly examinations of home underscore that, as an object of study and as a human experience, “home” is both complex and paradoxical (Bahun and Petrić 1–13). It is at once rooted in the dynamics of individual lives and profoundly implicated in the formation of community, politics, and social policy. Acknowledging this relationship, Sanja Bahun and Bojana Petrić observe: “Home thus straddles a paradoxical territory. It forms who we are, as individuals and collectives, but it also ferments political action and reaction, and has generated, from the very beginnings of organized societies, public policymaking” (1). This understanding of home as a focal point of individual meaning-making and a basis for collective action is core to Bahun and Petrić’s edited volume, *Thinking Home: Interdisciplinary Dialogues*. It is also echoed in a collection of “Home’s Accounts” (*Stories of Home* xv) put together by Devika Chawla and Stacy Holman Jones. They write:

Home is quite possibly one of the most definable and undefinable ideas that litter the landscape of our contemporary cultural lives. Beyond being experienced as a place, a space, and a structure, home is also memory, feeling, and affect. Home can be an idea and a hope, thereby becoming both anticipation and promise. (xi)

Ideas and experiences of “home,” however, were variously impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as Janine Certo and Alecia Beymer observe in their article, “Home as Poem.” They argue that the pandemic not only led to quarantine and self-isolation at home for many but also to barriers in the way of reaching home due to travel restrictions (243). The article goes on to explain that, in these circumstances, poetry became a medium through which they “stayed connected and engaged” during their own periods of self-isolation (243). Similar to some of the improvised practices used in our own exchanges, Certo and Beymer suggest that an exploration of what constitutes home can include “jot[ting] down images, sounds and silences, tastes and smells” (248). Such jotting down, done “without censorship or judgement” (248), can provide a creative foundation for the composition of poems about memories of a loved one, a childhood neighborhood, or particular rooms in a family home (249–50). Pertinent to our own exchanges during the COVID-19 lockdown is the realization that a sense of comfort and/or wellbeing generated by the sounds and spaces of home could act as a springboard for creative action.

Affirming these ideas, Bahun and Petrić incorporate several projects by artists and/or community organizations exploring “home” in their aforementioned volume (Green 91–5; Golubovic and Dragin 143–51). To give one example: English artist Lily Hunter Green describes the development of her project, “Harvest,” a community-led installation based on the Jewish tradition of building a Sukkah, a temporary house or hut (91–2). Commissioned as part of a broader cultural diversity initiative in Essex, Green notes that, while she is not a member of the Jewish community, she envisioned Harvest as a way to engage with unfamiliar notions and practices of home. The spark for this engagement, she comments (92), is an argument put forward by Renos Papadopoulos in his chapter, “Home: Paradoxes, Complexities and Vital Dynamism.” Papadopoulos’ original quote is worth citing here in full. Contextualized by his work with refugees and asylum seekers, he writes: “It is precisely in the ability to recognize our homes in others’ lost and prospective homes and to treat the world as a home that the healthy relationship towards one’s own home resides” (66; see also Pons, “Performing Home”).

In sharing insights that bubbled to the surface during a COVID-19 lockdown, we acknowledge that the spaces and sounds of family and home cannot be considered unanimously safe, positive, or comforting (Weinberg and Nwosu 39–51). Alongside Papadopoulos’ remarks, however, and in line with Green’s application of his idea, we wish to highlight how the notion of home can inform broader discourses on diversity, community engagement, and belonging. Papadopoulos explains: “Home refers *both* to the actual physical shelter of a house embedded

within a certain locality as well as to the cultural construction of a space that belongs to the collective structures of meaning” (66, emphasis in original). In essence, home is a multi-dimensional space that can enable individuals as well as communities to situate themselves meaningfully in the world.³ Certo and Beymer conclude their COVID-19 poetic inquiry of home thus: “We imagine with the current pandemic more people, as they turn inward, as they stay home, will be exploring the connections to and histories of their families, as well as the ways all beings are interconnected on our planet home” (254).

Resonating with these ideas of family and interconnectedness, Michelle Duffy and Gordon Waitt argue that sound is a fundamental factor in the shaping of a home-space (“Home sounds” 466–81). Discussing interviews with members of a coastal Australian community, they comment: “Home can, therefore, be understood as a serendipitous collection of things, including bodies, buildings, technologies, plants and landforms” (469). The surf, for example, was a prominent sound in this “serendipitous collection,” one that helped members of the community to both feel and perform a sense of belonging to that particular place (473). From Duffy’s and Waitt’s analysis, we take this understanding of sound as deeply implicated in the feeling and performance of a home. Within the COVID-19 conditions of self-isolation and social distancing, the acts of listening, reflecting, and talking about sound made it a “poignant link,” to use Street’s phrase, that allowed us to meaningfully resituate ourselves in a context of crisis.

Particular sounds became the foci of our exchanges, including the buzz of the clock in the family living room, the creaks of the door to the screened-in porch, or the thump and bark of the dog rushing down the stairs to greet someone at the backdoor—all sounds mediated through time, space, and technology. Our conversations also revealed the sounds of a small plane pulling a glider, the breeze rustling the leaves, the rattling spinning washer and tumbling dryer. Contemplating these sounds, Reg commented: “All contribute to being aware of the moment. It’s part of the realization that living is the now” (personal communication).

Memory and music also featured in our conversations. Memories of the records that played during the preparation of meals—records that often drowned out the buzz of the family clock—turned to memories of the sounds of childhood: moments of solace as a parent hummed along in the car to Louis Armstrong or Edith Piaf or Charles Aznavour; the distinctive sound of a maternal grandmother’s singing voice; the clop of the milkman’s horse and the rumble of his cart up a village street. Everyday sounds of past “homes” echoed in the lockdown spaces of the present, heard through the speakers of an iPad and laptop: hints of the sounds that accompanied my father’s sense of time, connection, and his daily life. Speaking of the evocative capacity of everyday sounds, Street writes: “The song of a particular bird or the sound of water gently lapping on a shoreline at morning can have the same effect, and often strikes home with the most emotional power in the shadow of change or uncertainty” (*The Memory of Sound* 81).

The COVID-19 lockdown did feel as though we were both experiencing and performing a moment shadowed by change and uncertainty. In efforts to connect and navigate these conditions, laptops and cellphones became the medium through which we experienced, negotiated, and performed daily life. At least for me, Lauren, who has spent the COVID-19 lockdowns in a small urban apartment, the experience created a shift in how “performing home” (Andrews) can be an intimate, generative, and daily artistic practice. Thus, our exchanges emphasized how intergenerational listening, as well as conversation on what constitutes “home,” can create space to discern the conditions of crisis, the roles of sound, memory, and music in shaping the individual self and the relationships in a particular family unit.

Summarizing some of the broader implications of these ideas, Reg emphasized that what was taking place in the daily COVID-19 decision making processes on behalf of communities is well described in the prelude to *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Improvisation, Rights and the Ethics of Co-creation*, where Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz write:

In a world filled with paths we can or must take, improvisation compels us to think about the paths we can make. It requires an open attitude toward other people as well as a creative disposition toward art. Improvisation is a manner of speaking that requires listening, a collective conversation that turns great risks into splendid rewards. By definition, it invokes collective interchange that is potentially transformative. (xii–xiii)

Fischlin et al. go on to argue: “Improvisers need to counterpoise imagination with discipline, ego with empathy, and self-assertion with self-effacement” (xiii). Reflecting on these words, my father continued: “The world is not unidimensional. It is multifaceted. Faced with a problem that needs to be addressed with little time, given the accelerating viral spread, the interface of these improvisational factors came into play not only on a societal scale but also on a household level” (personal communication). What are some implications associated with these ideas? How does improvisation at the level of the household help us to mobilize our responsibilities toward others? In what ways can improvisation contribute to treating the wider world as a home? We turn to these questions in our concluding section.

Conclusion: Reimagining Musical Connectivities as Human Connectivities

COVID-19 has exposed the societal impulse to warehouse some of our most vulnerable, the elderly. How did we get here and what have we lost? (Reg, personal communication, July 28, 2020)

In *The Memory of Sound*, Street observes: “[w]e are all archivists; it is part of human instinct to collect the material evidence of existence, be it books, records and CDs, photographs or letters” (74). He argues throughout his book that cherished objects can shape our individual and collective lives, and that we are not only archivists but also “recording devices, absorbing and preserving our personal witness of the world through the senses” (155). As we have discussed in previous sections of this article, sound and music are some of the “material evidence of existence”—a clock, CDs listened to during family meals, a mother’s steps on the staircase—that we record in the individual and communal spaces of everyday life. They shape how we imagine, listen to, and perform our connections to others.

In the context of COVID-19 lockdowns, improvisation and listening emerged as daily, embodied, and intimate practices that could bring past narratives, memories, sounds, and gestures into the present moment: voices at a distance, past listening sessions in a family living room, the gallery view of faces on our computer screens. In a time of pandemic, our individual archives were on display in new and different ways. This included music that forms what Lauren Istvandity calls the “lifetime soundtrack”. Lifetime soundtracks, she affirms, are “dynamic and are refreshed over time with the addition of new musical memories and through the influence of life and sense of self” (2).

In these ways, an improvised approach to intergenerational listening and conversation suggested that our imagining and performing of “home” could be a refuge, a space of hope, and a focal point for discernment and making sense in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. The performances shaping our home-spaces also became an opportunity to consider pathways that can help to reimagine musical connectivities in the context of a global pandemic. They

underscored the need to explore one overarching insight in particular: reimagining musical connectivities calls for reimagining the meanings and performances of “home” that can support wider human connectivities, whether these are economic, ecological, social, and/or political. Echoing Certo and Beymer’s reflections on home as a source of interconnectedness, perhaps sound and music will continue to act as poignant links that can generate such reimaginings post-pandemic (Marcus et al. 11–28).

In one of our final conversations, we spoke of our hope that experiences of the pandemic—as complex, difficult, and varied as they are—might act as a collective springboard to imagine, listen, and connect differently. As part of our own COVID-19 contexts, the sounds, performances, and spaces of home have acted as a thread of hope, one to creatively compose our daily lives around. In the preface to *The Sound Inside the Silence*, Street writes: “We all carry our own sonic rainbow, and it is ours, because we made it out of the raw materials of listening” (xi). In many ways, the pandemic has left us with a range of questions, including: How can we use listening, and specifically intergenerational listening, to make the sonic rainbows of our entire communities heard?

Our answer: creatively engaging with “home” in all its complex, paradoxical, performative, definable, and undefinable manifestations. Below are some possible pathways with which to conduct these engagements, pathways that return to Tomlinson’s and Lipsitz’s notion of accompaniment discussed in section II of this article: “a commitment based on a cultivated capacity for making connections with others, identifying with them, and helping them” (23).

Performative Pathway 1: Listen well.

Listening well is a profoundly embodied, emplaced, and emotional experience (Rice; Waters). It is also a relational practice, one that can help us to recognize our own homes in the lost and prospective homes of others, as Papadopoulous suggests. In the context of COVID-19, Lanphier’s arguments emphasize that this recognition includes the homes, physical and imagined, of aging members of our communities.

Performative Pathway 2: “Home” as a Site of Daily Improvisation.

Understanding the home as a platform for discernment and making sense can generate creative possibilities and actions (Golubovic and Dragin 143–51). This understanding can be brought into dialogue with the notion, in the works of Street and Istvandy, that each individual is an archivist and has a “lifetime soundtrack” to be listened to. These ideas can be leveraged to create, amplify, and/or sustain complex and multifaceted meanings and performances of “home” along with the insight that improvisation is itself a daily activity and way to connect. As Sarah Pink and Kerstin Leder Mackley underscore, even our nightly routines of turning on and turning off lights in our household spaces can be characterized by improvised movement and making (171–87).

Performative Pathway 3: Imagine Responsibility as Rooted in the Interplay of Individual and Collective Action.

In the midst of COVID-19, this third pathway includes the knowledge that individual action does make a difference and has collective implications such as flattening the curve of the virus to support collective well-being. Music has helped individuals and communities express and build on this knowledge (“Soundtrack for the Soul”; Kingsley). While experiences of music contributing to collective change is not new, those experiences raise the questions: What will

our post-pandemic soundtracks consist of? What new musical and human connectivities will these soundtracks help us to imagine and enact together?

Perhaps the image of the living room clock can provide further insight into these final questions. The image is static, suspended at 10:13 a.m. on a particular day. The process of aging, however, as Pelias notes in his reflections and poetry, is dynamic, ever-changing. Time itself may be all we have but, unlike the static image, our experiences of it are never really the same.

Similar to the artistic resistance and spontaneous performances that emerged during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic, we discovered different ways of shaping and sounding our relationship through the recognition and engagement with improvisatory practices including listening, conversation, poetry and reflection. Embracing this opportunity underscored that, notwithstanding their complexities and paradoxes, the spaces of home can help to make visible sonic and musical connectivities that accompany the process of aging and other individual experiences of time.

These are likely not new or innovative ideas, but they stress the importance of considering the dynamic and ever-changing lives of the older members of our communities (Demecs and Miller). In this way, the questions posed about post-pandemic soundtracks intersect with a significant dimension of the field of critical improvisation studies itself: the imperative of sounding “other possible futures” (Fischlin, Heble and Lipsitz 49). How can soundtracks of home, for example, help individuals and communities, sound other possible futures where the process of aging is visible, valued, and creatively represented? As Street reminds us, our subjective and intersubjective worlds, including our homes, are vital to such soundings “because we are the listening devices through which time speaks” (*The Sound of a Room* 19, emphasis in original).

CODA: A Memory of a Room at Night

*“The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the sorry state of the warehoused elderly. The occasion is present for reimagining the reintegration of these stores of lived wisdom. For too long, we have ignored the benefit of their knowledge. Do we have the will to act?”
(Reg, personal correspondence, May 26, 2021)*

A hallway and muffled voices.

Lamplight, the edge of shadow.

A page crinkles. Turn once:

Set the book aside.

A distant glow and soft footsteps.

Racket of pillows and blankets.

On the left side, a face illuminated by time:

A window slightly cracked.

On the right side, a face with glasses perched:

A plastic cup and the sound of the daily news.

I click to silence the late-night chorus. Dim the lights.

Parents, asleep.

This: a memory of a room at night.

(Lauren, October 8, 2020)

Notes

¹ See also McCartney “How am I to Listen to You?” for a discussion of intimacy and improvisational listening.

² See Metcalfe, “Visualizing” and Persky, “Higher Education and the Ethic of Care.”

³ For further explorations on the complexity of home and belonging, see Yomtoob, “How is Home” and Neumark “Drawn to Beauty.”

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