

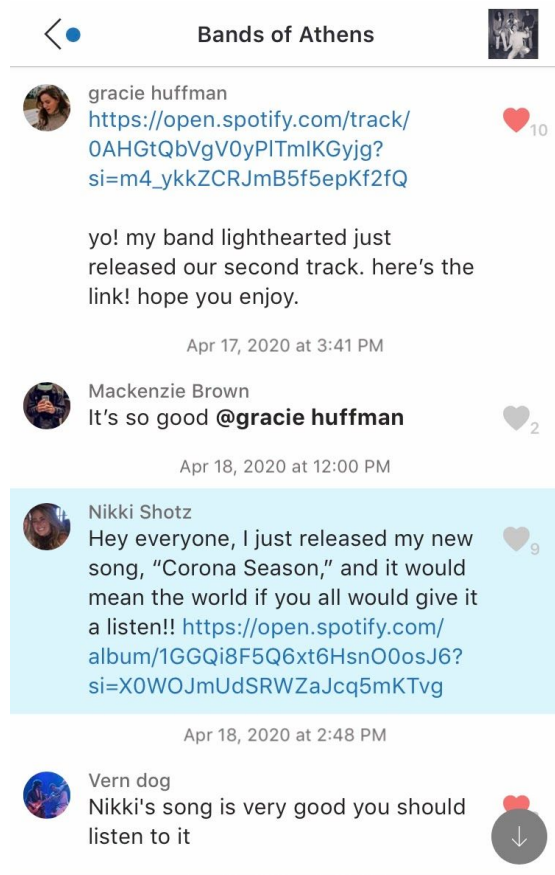
# COVID-19, The Music Industry's Low Notes

Nikki Shotz

The music industry — people either joke about how musicians are broke, or they envy how luxurious their lives are. When most people think about the music industry, they think about concerts and new songs, disregarding all of the work that goes on behind the scenes. People have to come together to write those songs, help record and edit them, publicise them, book concerts, sell tickets, work the merch tables at the concerts, work the lighting booth, work the sound booth and so much more.

Even though artists have more time to be creative, the music industry is suffering now more than ever because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Local artists in Athens, Ga. have put together a group text of musical artists and people in the music business program so they can support each other, find opening acts for their shows and collaborate. Over these past few weeks, the chat has been swarmed with artists sharing their new music, as they have more time to create music and put all of their effort into it.



Screenshot of artists promoting their music in the Bands of Athens GroupMe on April 18

Some artists are using this pandemic as leverage. Artists, such as Alex Benjamin, Luke Combs and 21 Pilots have released songs based on the COVID-19 pandemic, making people feel like they are not alone in this fight. Other artists are releasing new songs, donating a portion of their proceeds to science and healthcare in hopes that they can contribute to halting the spread of COVID-19.



One band that recently released new music is Rae and the Ragdolls. When asked how quarantine has affected their release, lead singer, Natasha Wermers, notes that “the number in our streams have slightly gone up, but we did just release a song.”

Her lead guitarist, William Bennett, comments, “We originally planned to get a semi-professional shoot for the new song, but instead, decided to make a social distancing video.” While still able to release music, artists are not able to promote their music as much as they would like to. Even something as small as a different quality music video changes how much publicity that artist receives.

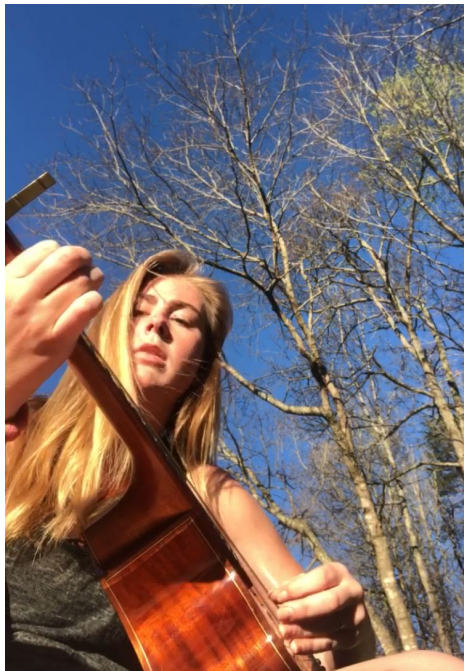
Rae and the Ragdolls cover art from Spotify (@raeandtheragdolls)

At first thought, most people would think that having more free time would mean being able to write more music. Jimmy Riemer, the lead singer of the Athens, Ga. band, Kobabnova, remarks “It’s kind of tough when we don’t have everybody in one spot because whenever we write, we like to have everyone’s input. We usually keep playing it through until we have a viable song.”

The best songs come from collaboration; however, artists are not able to come together and collaborate on new music because it would be a health and safety risk. “It’s impossible to get the band to play a whole song at once and that’s usually when everybody gets excited about it and that’s when we’ll actually start pushing it further down the pipeline, practicing it more and getting it stage ready,” Riemer continues.

“You’re getting rid of such a fun part of writing music,” adds Wermers. Even if artists quarantine together and create new music, it is still difficult for them to record that music professionally, since most studios are closed.

Although most musicians have not been able to come together to collaborate on new music and record it, individually, musicians have had more time to expand their repertoire for their live performances in the future. Connor Di Vita, the keyboard player of Athens, Ga. band, Claustrophilic, mentions that he has “worked on a couple of songs that are covers that might be possible” to perform with the band, his favorite being Blinded By the Light by the Weeknd. Di Vita comments “there’s a lot more time to just play my instrument.”



Since musicians are always writing new music, recording new songs, and performing, it is difficult to learn and perfect new covers with such limited time. This pandemic has allowed artists to perfect those songs that they have been working on and wanting to learn.

A major part of musical artists' finances are attributed to live performances. Although people have more time to listen to music in quarantine, smaller artists are not able to promote their music as much and get their names out there.

Photograph of an artist practicing music during quarantine on April 20

Riemer describes his most recent experience with how the pandemic has affected not only their publicity, but their budget: “We were scheduled to play a show a week ago for a fraternity up in Wofford where they paid in a non traditional sense in which they paid half in advance so we could book our hotel, so we had to return all of that even though we had already budgeted for that to go into some recording that we wanted to do.” Just one cancelled show has the ability to postpone an entire album release.

Because of the COVID-19 outbreak, pretty much all concerts from mid-march until August, as of now, have either been cancelled or rescheduled. Bradley Reeves, Junior Talent Buyer of the 40 Watt Club in Athens, Ga. comments “it was around the beginning of March when I realized this

was going to be really really bad. That's when I started cancelling some shows . . . I hate it for the artists that have been looking forward to these shows — lots of them need the money and have been planning on getting it from these shows.”

When one show cancels, it is a trickle down effect. It messes up the budget for the artists, leaving them less money to record more music, leaving recording studios with less business.



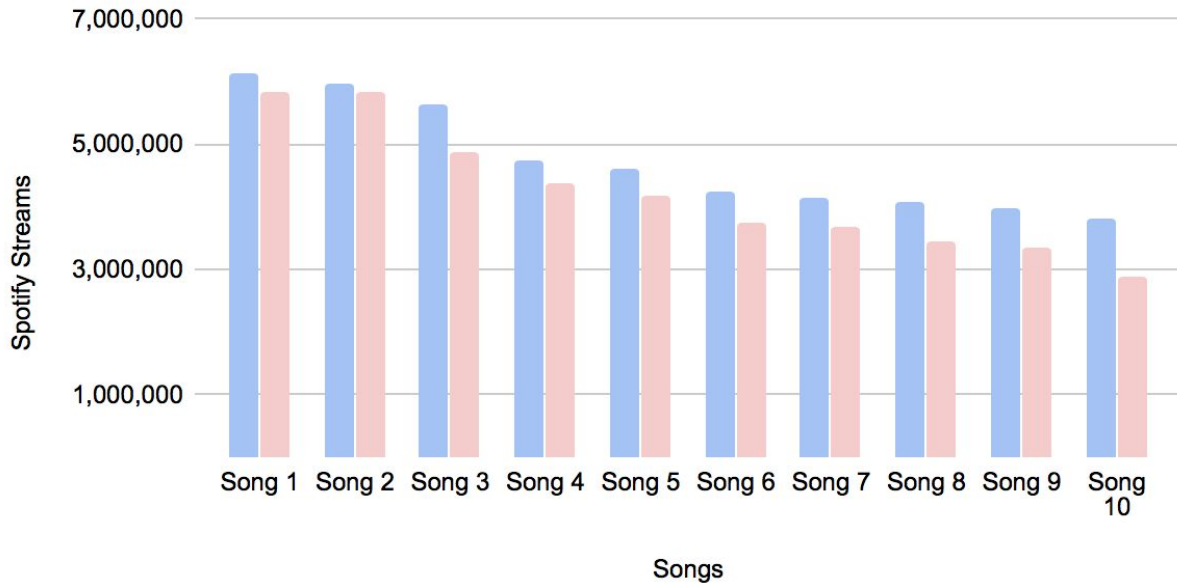
The people that had to work the show lose money, as well. When every show is cancelled for the unforeseeable future, everyone is left like a deer in the headlights. Fans are let down and have to resort to streaming music on Spotify, iTunes and other music platforms.

Nikki Shotz in front of The Georgia Theatre with “We love you Athens. Wash your hands, be back soon” sign on March 16

Music is played over restaurants, through coffee shops, in dining halls, at parties, in bowling alleys, and so many more public places. Since the pandemic spurred across the world, music streams have significantly lessened globally. According to Spotify charts, the number one song on Spotify February 20 was streamed over 6.1 million times while on April 24, the number one song was streamed 5.8 million times.



## Spotify Streams Reflecting COVID-19



Blue = February 20, 2020 | Pink = April 24, 2020

A graph created from Spotify Charts' streams over the past three months (Nikki Shotz)

As public places are shut down, music is not streaming nearly as much as it did before the pandemic. Songs are not getting as much public exposure; concerts are not motivating people to listen to more music. This decrease in the number of streams can also be due to group listening with families at home.

Some artists have noticed a spur in streams over the past few months, but overall, the music industry as a whole is taking a blow. This industry requires lots of planning in advance as each branch builds upon the other, so everyone's plans are becoming more and more jumbled as this pandemic prolongs.

For the past few weeks, people all over the music industry have been trying to find new ways to continue to grow their publicity without live shows and face-to-face interaction; however, the music industry runs through deep connections. Artists may be able to work on more music individually, but they are all itching to come together again and flourish in full capacity.