

Share the Arts, Share the Planet: Toward a “Regional Residency” Model for Sustainable Touring in the Post-Pandemic

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Abstract: The “one night, one city” model of touring has a significant environmental footprint. Envisioning new models for sustainable touring after the COVID-19 pandemic will require an extended conversation between artists, agents and managers, concert and festival promoters, community educators and organizers, universities and colleges, and funding bodies. Prior to the pandemic, the Sustainable Touring Arts Coalition (STAC) sought to green the North American folk and traditional music circuit by serving as a clearinghouse for best practices for sustainable touring. This article describes STAC initiatives pre-pandemic and amplifies the voices of artists, agents, and promoters envisioning new models for sustainable touring, notably “regional residencies.” The regional residency model is framed in terms of three intersecting forms of sustainability: environmental sustainability; human sustainability, or healthier working conditions for artists; and community sustainability, or stronger local networks of artists, promoters, and audiences. Ultimately, this article calls for the formation of an epistemic community to envision new models for sustainable touring in the post-pandemic.

Résumé : La vie d'artiste requiert souvent des tournées de type « une nuit, une ville », ce qui laisse une importante empreinte environnementale. Repenser le mode des tournées post-pandémique de façon durable exigera de faire participer au débat autant les artistes, que les agents et les gérants de tournées que les promoteurs de concerts et de festivals, que les éducateurs et les organisateurs communautaires, des universités et des collèges, et les organismes financiers des différents palliers de gouvernements. Avant la pandémie, la Sustainable Touring Arts Coalition (STAC), cherchait à rendre plus écologique le circuit de la musique folk et traditionnelle nord-américaine en rassemblant les informations sur les meilleurs pratiques de tournées en ce qui a trait au développement durable. Cet

article décrit des initiatives de la STAC antérieures à la pandémie, et place au premier plan la voix des artistes, des agents et des promoteurs qui envisagent de nouveaux modèles durables pour les tournées, notamment celui des « résidences régionales ». Le modèle des résidences régionales est conçu en fonction de trois formes de durabilité qui s'entrecroisent : la durabilité environnementale ; la durabilité humaine, ou les conditions de travail plus saines pour les artistes ; et la durabilité communautaire, ou renforcement des réseaux locaux d'artistes, de promoteurs et de publics. Finalement cet article en appelle à la formation d'une communauté épistémique pour envisager de nouveaux modèles de tournées basées sur le développement durable après la pandémie.

Pivot, reinvent, reorient. At the time of writing, in November 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic has decimated the cultural industries. Yet it has also created space for conversations among cultural workers on how to not merely rebuild but to do so in new ways. In this article, I describe pre-pandemic initiatives by the Sustainable Touring Arts Coalition to green segments of the touring music industry, notably the North American folk and traditional music circuits, and argue for the formation of an “epistemic community” to envision new models for sustainable touring in the post-pandemic. I amplify the voices of artists, agents, and promoters already engaged in these conversations and describe one such model, of “regional residencies” — a term I borrow from Montréal-based agent and manager Barbara Scales (interview, December 4, 2020). I frame the regional residency model in terms of three intersecting forms of sustainability: environmental sustainability; human sustainability, or healthier working conditions for artists; and community sustainability, or stronger local networks of artists, promoters, and audiences.

The term “sustainability” often serves as shorthand for “sustainable development,” or the measured consumption of natural resources. In practice, this typically translates to a combination of consuming less and consuming differently, for instance, by replacing single-use items with reusables and fossil fuels with renewable energy sources, in order to “meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future” (Brundtland 1987: n.p.). A growing body of scholarship looks at this type of sustainability in the music industry, primarily focusing on the environmental impact of top-tier touring rock bands and large festivals (for instance, Mair and Laing 2012; Cummings 2014).¹ While some high-profile musicians have chosen in recent years to leave the road until more sustainable modes of touring can be found (BBC News Services 2019), this is not an option for most performing

musicians, especially given the sharp downturn in record sales in recent years due to streaming. I have written elsewhere about the challenges presented by the turn toward livestreaming during the pandemic (Risk 2021). In this article, I work from the assumption that many musicians will need, and likely want, to travel to perform post-pandemic, and ask how to make that travel more sustainable for the environment, for the performers, and for the communities with which they engage musically, socially, and economically.

In a 2011 colloquy on ecomusicology in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Aaron S. Allen asked, “Is the environmental crisis relevant to music — and more importantly, is musicology relevant to solving it?” (2011a: 392). He answered his question implicitly in his contribution to the colloquy, pointing out that “all scholarship is inherently activist,” not only for the issues that it chooses to address but also for those it chooses to ignore (2011b: 417). The pandemic calls for a renewed commitment to activism on the part of ethnomusicologists and musicologists in that large numbers of musicians — the people on whose labour our disciplines have been built — have temporarily lost their livelihoods as a result of the health crisis. How long that loss will endure is currently unknown; what seems increasingly evident is that the musical world that we enter after the pandemic will not be the one we left in March 2020. How might we as scholars use our academic capital to support musicians, promoters, agents, and other industry personnel in imagining a post-pandemic future that is more sustainable on multiple levels?²

In an influential article on music and sustainability, Jeff Todd Titon argued that the conservation ecology principles of diversity, limited growth, connectedness, and stewardship should shape cultural policy with regards to music (2009). Though he is primarily concerned with the protection and preservation of musical traditions, such as those that might receive Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) status from UNESCO,³ Titon’s advocacy for a highly participatory approach that brings together key players with the goal of developing “flexible policies that enable a sustainable future” may also be applied to the development of a new ecology of touring in the present moment (121). Similarly, Klisala Harrison has argued that the polyvalence of applied ethnomusicology as a discipline is most easily parsed via “epistemic communities,” which she has defined as networks of people “with expertise and ability in a particular domain and an authoritative or working claim to knowledge within that domain or issue-area” (2012: 521). Participants in an epistemic community may be both academic and non-academic; what they have in common are shared “normative and principled beliefs,” which provide a rationale for their proposed actions; shared “causal beliefs,” which are based on an analysis of current — potentially problematic — practices and which

inform possible courses of action; shared “notions of analysis for the action”; and “a common enterprise,” which Harrison has described as “a set of common practices associated with the problem or problems to which their competence is directed, presumably out of the conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence” (2012: 521-22; following Haas 1992). Following Titon (2009) and Harrison (2012), this article advocates for a collaborative rethinking of touring within the musical economy, with a focus on Canadian and, more generally, North American contexts. Key players in this conversation — the members of an intentional epistemic community, as it were — would include performers, agents and managers, promoters, festival directors, venue owners, record labels, funding bodies, community music representatives, and other stakeholders.

I first locate myself as a touring musician and co-founder of the Sustainable Touring Arts Coalition (STAC), interweaving that more personal journey with a survey of recent literature on the environmental impact of touring. I then introduce eight voices from different sectors of the musical economy: my STAC co-founder, fiddler Liz Knowles, currently based in Maine; fiddler and guitarist Olivier Demers, who tours with Québécois supergroup *Le Vent du Nord*; Nashville-based fiddler Brittany Haas; Michigan-based percussive dancer Nic Gareiss; cellist Isabelle Bozzini and violinist Clemens Merkel, both of the Montréal-based Bozzini Quartet; booking agent and artist manager Barbara Scales, of Latitude 45 Arts Promotion in Montréal; and Winnipeg-based musician Leonard Podolak, Executive Director of the non-profit *Home Routes/Chemin Chez Nous*, which connects artists to house concerts and small venues in communities across Canada. Other voices also thread through this article. These voices are not intended as a representative sampling of the industry but rather as a preliminary step toward a larger conversation.

The Sustainable Touring Arts Coalition

I have worked as a freelance fiddler since the mid 1990s, performing at concerts and festivals, recording and producing albums, and teaching at summer music camps and weekend workshops. Until taking a position as a full-time academic, I would routinely fly tens of thousands of miles per year, sometimes criss-crossing the North American continent two or three times in a single month. My travels were mild in comparison to some, however. Olivier Demers once posted an image of fifty-odd boarding passes on Facebook, accompanied by the following caption, “Faire le ménage dans ses papiers d’impôts, c’est aussi réaliser le nombre d’avion[s] qui tu as pris dans l’année!!!”

Outch!!!” (“Tidying up paperwork for taxes also means realizing the number of flights that you took during the year!!! Ouch!!!”).⁴ Notably, Le Vent du Nord partnered with the solidarity cooperative *Arbre-Évolution* the following year to offset touring-related emissions through community-based reforestation (*reboisement social*) projects (La Compagnie du Nord 2019; *Arbre-Evolution.org* 2020).

My work as a fiddler has been primarily on the North American folk and traditional music touring circuit, with occasional jogs to Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. This circuit includes music festivals ranging from small-scale one-day events to major happenings, such as Cape Breton Island’s Celtic Colours Festival; concerts at small to mid-sized independent venues and larger performing arts centres (whose programs may include a set number of spots for folk/trad/world acts), plus a growing number of house concerts; and, for those inclined to teach, week-long summer camps and the occasional one-off workshop (see Risk 2013: 437). This is a world of freelancers, though segments of the industry come together at events such as the Folk Alliance International Conference. Some bands function as small businesses, employing musicians and sometimes a sound person and/or road manager, and working with a professional booking agency, a publicist, and/or a record label. Other musicians work independently, booking their own gigs, releasing their own albums, and writing their own press releases. While this article is not focused specifically on the folk and traditional music circuit, I recognize that my experiences as a touring musician have shaped in part my choice of interviewees and examples.

In 2019 I co-founded, with fellow fiddler Liz Knowles, the Sustainable Touring Arts Coalition, a grassroots climate-focused initiative for and by touring musicians (Risk and Knowles 2020a). Like many of our fellow musicians on the traditional and folk music circuits, we were increasingly concerned by the outsized environmental footprint of our work, frustrated by the lack of clear information as to how to decrease that footprint while maintaining our livelihoods, and disheartened by the discrepancy between our deep-seated belief that sharing art was a positive force in the world and the inescapable fact that doing so was detrimental to the environment. We also recognized that simply not touring was not an option for most musicians in our shared musical economy.

Recent conversations around environmental sustainability in the music industry have largely focused on eco-friendly actions by high-profile popular music acts (Pedelty 2012; Rolling Stone 2020), environmental messaging via song (Publicover et al. 2018; Pedelty 2012, 2016), and, perhaps most relevant to this article, greening efforts at festivals. The latter do not typically engage with the touring paradigm, however. For instance, an early source for best

practices, Meegan Jones's *Sustainable Event Management: A Practical Guide*, provides hundreds of practical steps to decrease the environmental footprint of festivals and other large events but has little to say regarding touring musicians, except that "Performers are probably the most difficult to manage in terms of sustainable transport. Appeal to their conscience and ask them to consider how they get to your event" (2010: 149). In a study developed in collaboration with Julie's Bicycle, a non-profit founded by UK music industry leaders to "take action on climate change" (Julie's Bicycle 2020), Bottrill, Liverman, and Boykoff report on a project to measure greenhouse gas emissions in that industry. Of the approximately 540,000 metric tons (tn) CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalents) linked annually to the UK music industry, nearly 75 percent are due to live performance and 43 percent to audience travel alone. Notably, while this study includes internal UK tours, it does not include international touring by UK artists or tours to the UK by international performers (Bottrill, Liverman, and Boykoff 2010: 5). A 2015 environmental impact report for UK festivals by Powerful Thinking, a "think-do tank" by and for festival organizers and supported by Julie's Bicycle, notes that "non-audience travel is a significant blind spot in industry data." Self-reported data from the 2015 Shambala Festival, for instance, puts artist travel at 18 percent of total emissions from that event (Johnson 2015: 27).

A recent article by Brennan et al. on the ways in which Scottish music festivals do, and do not, address issues of environmental sustainability is notable for foregrounding the artist experience with regard to touring. As the authors have noted, "Whereas festival organisers see the festival as the culmination of a year's work centred around one event, and where audiences see the festival as a one-off leisure activity at which they spend a short period of concentrated time, artists look at festivals as merely one stop on a larger touring itinerary and linger on site for less time" (2019: 266–67). They asked five Scottish musicians to "track their movements to and from all live performances" from April to September 2015. They discovered that, collectively, these musicians generated nearly 20 tn of CO₂ emissions (118,000 passenger miles) in that period (267). Much of the travel was "repetitive and inefficient," as evidenced by several spiderweb-like maps of the artists' itineraries (267–69). As the authors have noted,

For smaller artists (and particularly self-managed or agentless independent artists) the web of appearances within which festival performances sit is often fragmented and/or hand-to-mouth and therefore far-sighted planning is difficult ... The need to react to demand from specific audiences means that inefficiencies

in routing are commonplace and there is no way to rationalise itineraries. Smaller artists often don't have the level of influence that would be required to move venues or agents into providing more costly environmentally friendly touring options. (2019: 267)

Brennan et al. note that their maps showing extensive travel led artists to “express guilt about the environmental impact of their behaviour.” However, maps showing less travel generated “feelings of failure as more travel was perceived to represent greater audience reach, income and social capital” (2019: 267). That increased artist travel currently carries with it increased prestige is one of the primary challenges to rethinking touring post-pandemic. Envisioning a new, sustainable paradigm for touring requires assigning greater value to local artists, local touring, and, for travelling artists, sustained engagement with communities.

In launching STAC, Liz Knowles and I had been inspired by the work of sustainable agriculture consultant — and fiddler — Laura Lengnick, whom we had met while out on the road: the three of us were on staff together at the Swannanoa Gathering Fiddle Week in July 2017, and had been assigned to play the Thursday night dance. Between tune sets and then after the last waltz, Lengnick told us about her day job helping cities plan for food resiliency in the face of climate change. What I remember most about that conversation was her optimism and practicality. Change will happen at the local level, she told us: cities, towns, farmers, farms. In her book *Resilient Agriculture: Cultivating Food Systems for a Changing Climate*, Lengnick shares best practices for “managing for resilience to climate effects” from 25 independent farmers and ranchers across the United States, including approaches to water conservation, soil management, and crop diversity, among others, all tailored to specific locales and types of agricultural products (2015: 25). While I am wary of drawing overly facile comparisons between music and farming, Lengnick's work does provide a model for engaging a decentralized system of independent producers, each with local concerns, in conversations around sustainability.

The Canadian music economy is “largely driven by the independent music industry” (Canadian Independent Music Association [CIMA] 2019). A statistical profile of artists in Canada in 2016 notes that 60 percent of musicians and singers are self-employed, versus 12 percent for all workers (Hill 2019: 13; the same report places the median individual income for Canadian musicians and singers at \$17,900 versus \$43,500 for all Canadian workers). An earlier study, based on a 2006–2007 poll of 700 Canadian musicians, songwriters, and vocalists (primarily members of the American Federation of Musicians and weighted toward players in the classical and jazz genres), reports that nearly

70 percent of respondents described their music business arrangement as “sole proprietor” or “freelancer” (Hyatt 2008: 5). In response to the question “[W]ho, including yourself, is mainly responsible for conducting your business affairs, including your engagements or bookings etc.?” over 92 percent replied “myself” (7). Touring and live shows provided by far their largest source of income, at 48.5 percent of total revenues, and those that toured (approx. 23 percent of respondents) were away from home 18.5 weeks per year on average (11, 17).⁵

It was this segment of the music economy that we sought to reach with STAC — the freelancers, the independents, the small players — and to which the present article is primarily addressed. This is not to downplay the importance of organizations such as the US-based nonprofit REVERB, which has worked with artists like the Dave Matthews Band, Pink, and Maroon 5 on “backstage greening” and fan engagement via “Action Villages” at shows (REVERB 2020a).⁶ However, for the freelancers who form the vast majority of the music economy, working toward sustainable touring is likely to be as DIY as every other aspect of their career.

Liz Knowles and I co-founded STAC with the goal of launching a conversation among not only touring musicians but also agents, promoters, festival directors, managers, etc. We decided to steer clear of the unfortunate politicization of climate change in the North American context and focus on practical solutions to issues, such as backstage water bottles, green room snack plates, and tour routing. Our goal was a clearinghouse for best practices for the independent music sector. We mapped out three areas of focus — travel, plastic, food — and launched a website, www.sustainabletouringarts.org (Sustainable Touring Arts Coalition 2021). Knowles wrote posts on sustainably navigating airports and hotel rooms and catalogued her own environmental footprint flying to London for a one-off gig. I wrote posts comparing carbon emissions for flying versus driving (conclusion: flying generates approximately as much CO₂ per person as driving the same distance solo) and posted a template that musicians could use when asking promoters to include offsets as a reimbursable expense. We interviewed and offered guest blog posts to musicians and promoters who were already “walking the walk,” for instance by touring plastic-free or even touring locally by bicycle. We promoted each new STAC page with the same enthusiasm that we would have given to promoting an upcoming gig.

STAC launched as a small player in a growing field of like-minded initiatives, such as Julie’s Bicycle, REVERB, and Green Music Australia (Green Music Australia: 2021). Events such as the Woodford Folk Festival in Australia, which has a “500 Year Plan,” and the Hillside Festival in Ontario, which became carbon neutral in 2019, have been leading the conversation for years (Woodfordia Incorporated 2020; Hillside 2020). Recently, a number of bands

and agencies have taken steps to reduce their environmental impact: in Quebec, the booking agency Résonances instated a carbon-neutral policy in 2018 and, as noted above, the band Le Vent du Nord offsets all touring-related emissions via community-based reforestation (Résonances 2020; La Compagnie du Nord 2019). Since launching STAC, we've learned of bands that cook all of their own food on the road and musicians that carry their compost from gig to gig until they reach a location with composting. Perhaps one of the more high-profile examples is the electronic music duo Filastine & Nova, who have committed to “slow touring” on a refurbished sailing ship (Filastine & Nova 2020).

At STAC, we hoped to bring these conversations into the mainstream of our own musical world. We began with the low-hanging fruit, focusing on the day-to-day decisions of performers, presenters, and others in the industry: which type of water bottles should be onstage, what food should be backstage, what mode of transportation was most efficient. We were interested in the economies of scale and imagined these small gestures as the touring musician's equivalent of replacing incandescent lightbulbs with LEDs. And then the touring music industry disappeared overnight. With the global COVID pandemic, plastic water bottles onstage, disposable utensils backstage, and excessive airplane flights were all moot points. As Knowles posted on our Facebook page, “What has destroyed our community in terms of making a living has also, in the same breath, accomplished our mission to reduce our carbon footprint! No one could have ever imagined this irony” (STAC Sustainable Touring Arts Coalition 2020).

Forming an Intentional Epistemic Community Around Sustainable Touring

STAC is on hiatus. It has been since March 2020. We know that eventually, in some form or another, musicians and bands will be back out on the road. But for the moment, now that the low-hanging fruit has vanished, we are faced with the core of the problem: the current touring model is unsustainable from an environmental standpoint and, often, from a health standpoint for the musicians who partake in it.

In a study of the “parameters of environmental advocacy” in the careers of 14 Canadian musicians featured on a compilation CD of “environmental anthems,” Publicover et al. note that these musicians “universally regret the impact of the extensive traveling that most of them must do to make a living, particularly flying. ... They see it as a business liability that erodes their ability

to live up to their ideals” (2019: 168, 172, 177). Singer-songwriter David Myles, for instance, describes the ethical quandary of being a touring musician:

Being a musician is brutal for the environment. ... I fly all the time, and I think about that every time I fly. ... I can do what I can do in my own life, and certainly try to be as positive as possible in all my music. ... but it doesn't matter when you add flying to it every couple of weeks. ... So it's a tough place to be a guy who's going to sit up and talk about that stuff (quoted in Publicover et al. 2019: 177).

In my own conversations with artists, many have expressed a desire to return to the road — but not on the same terms as prior to the pandemic. Liz Knowles told me that COVID has made her realize that she no longer wants so many weekend run-outs — what she described as “go out, come back, go out, come back” — and is exploring the idea of fewer, longer, and more regionally focused tours (interview, October 9, 2020). Brittany Haas does appreciate weekend run-outs because they allow her to balance music with other areas of her life but expressed concern about the environmental impact of so many flights, and noted that financial considerations can lead to wasteful tour routing; “you have to go with where the money is,” she said (interview, April 16, 2021). Nic Gareiss spoke of the physical toll of touring, noting that although he is a dancer, he comes home from tours not with sore legs but sore shoulders from carrying gear and merchandise through airports. Still, product sales at gigs are necessary as “another income that helps to support the touring, which is so precarious,” he said (interview, October 15, 2020). Booking agent and artist manager Barbara Scales said that some of the artists on her roster no longer want to tour, for both environmental and health reasons:

I have artists who have brought to my attention that they do not wish to do the kind of touring which is: getting on a plane, getting off a plane, setting up, playing, getting on a plane, getting off a plane, setting up, playing. They just don't want to do it anymore. They think it's wrong, in terms of the environment, but they also feel that it's a lot of wear and tear, and it's very hard. (interview, December 4, 2020)

Olivier Demers does hope to return to a touring routine similar to before the pandemic, but with substantially more governmental support for offsetting negative environmental impacts, including financial incentives for promoters

to hire performers who have lowered their carbon footprint and incentives for artists to do so (interview, December 14, 2020). Isabelle Bozzini and Clemens Merkel would similarly like to see carbon offsets included in federal and provincial touring grants. They also noted that while the funding they have received from the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) allows for flexibility in travel itineraries, thus increasing opportunities for local engagement (a high priority for the quartet), the same is not true of their provincial funding body, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ), which prioritizes a “city-to-city” model (interview, April 13, 2021). In short, there is no single vision for post-pandemic touring. But even from this limited set of conversations, key themes emerge: recognition of, and compensation for, the environmental impact of touring; increased attention to performer wellbeing; and more flexible touring models, especially those that allow for engagement with local communities.

COVID-19 has been devastating on multiple levels, but it has also created space for conversations about the world in which we would like to live post-pandemic. Writing in *The Lancet* on one of the unexpected outcomes of the pandemic, the worldwide reduction in air pollution, Landrigan, Bernstein, and Binagwaho have argued that the current moment presents a unique “opportunity for radical change,” whereby societies might “catalyse revolutionary improvements in air quality” (2020: e447, e448). The same could be said for the performing arts. Nic Gareiss sees the present moment as a time to “reimagine what touring can be without some of the destructive practices that we’ve inherited” (interview, October 15, 2020). Indeed, when I asked âpihtawikosisâniskwêw artist Moe Clark about simply “restarting” the performing arts sector post-pandemic, she replied: “Definitely not. Please no. It needs to be different. It needs to change” (Clark 2021). What is needed, I argue, is the formation of an intentional epistemic community: a “[network] of knowledge-based experts” for touring music (Haas 1992: 2). In this section, and as a contribution to the launch of that network, I amplify the voices of artists, agents, and promoters envisioning a “regional residencies” model and calling for increased governmental support for sustainable touring initiatives.

While regional residences are only one of many models for touring post-pandemic, they offer multiple benefits: lowered environmental impact, increased community engagement, and, potentially, increased wellness for performers. The basic tenets are as follows: artists travel to a given community for an extended period of time, anywhere from a week to a month, and engage intensively and creatively with the community. Regional residencies could benefit from an anchor institution but would be marked by a high level of collaboration — Leonard Podolak called it “pass[ing] the puck” (interview, November 23, 2020)

— between multiple local players, such as venues, festivals, non-profits, schools, and community and cultural centres. Performance opportunities could include not only concerts but also school shows, senior residences, libraries, and perhaps seasonally appropriate outdoor events. These could be paired with masterclasses or community workshops. The model is locale-specific and can be quite fluid; the following five paragraphs offer examples of what such a residency might look like on the ground, in both high-density urban areas and in more rural communities, and for several musical genres.

Liz Knowles described her vision for a post-pandemic residency to me as follows: “Say I went to Chicago, and I knew that I could arrange to live in [a] house instead of a hotel. ... So I’m there for a month. I could then book concerts, I can book teaching, I can even do online things. ... I can do masterclasses, I could do a book talk about the book that I’m hoping to release on teaching. ... I could engage with a theater and talk about doing a project that involves writing music. ... This makes so much more sense to me mentally, physically, environmentally, and maybe financially, too. ... [And I could expand] that month-long residency to also include retirement homes, hospitals, schools, preschools” (interview, October 9, 2020).

Olivier Demers described a series of regional residencies that Le Vent du Nord did in the US Midwest through the Arts Midwest World Fest program (Arts Midwest 2020). Over the course of two years, they visited small towns in nine Midwestern states, spending one week in each town, for a total of 18 weeks. From Monday through Friday, they would perform in school gymnasiums, senior centres, public libraries, and the local college, and participate in “meet-and-greet” evening events. Saturday evening was a public concert and on Sunday they would travel to the next town. Demers recalled these residencies as “vraiment merveilleux” (“really wonderful”) but also noted that this type of touring is not for everyone; not every band is comfortable performing school shows, for instance, or wants to (interview, December 14, 2020).⁷ He sees regional residencies as supplementing rather than replacing current touring models.

Isabelle Bozzini and Clemens Merkel noted that, in the classical music world, it is already commonplace to add master classes and workshops to a concert tour, but their quartet has chosen to work toward more in-depth forms of community engagement. They try to connect with local musicians when they travel, for instance by including repertoire with “open instrumentation,” and also have repertoire intended for collaborations with local amateur groups (interview, April 16, 2021). Their annual “Composer’s Kitchens,” while not strictly regional residencies in the terms outlined above, begin with several days of intensive collaboration with a handful of composers in Montréal and then,

several months later, a week (approximately) at an international contemporary music festival (Quatuor Bozzini 2021). Being on site for the full festival, rather than “zap[ing] in and out,” allows them to “develop a sense of the place,” Bozzini said, and build relationships with the local community (interview, April 16, 2021). More generally, the quartet described the “Composer’s Kitchens” as foundational to the sustainability of their creative careers, as many of these professional relationships with budding composers continue to bear fruit in later years.

Leonard Podolak told me about a Home Routes project that had been in the works pre-pandemic, in collaboration with the TransCanada Yellowhead Highway Association, which connects municipalities along the Yellowhead Highway (Winnipeg, MB to Graham Island, BC). “We were just in the process of planning a tour ... [of an] ensemble that would meet up with local musicians and artists in each of the towns [along the Yellowhead]. Together, they would coordinate a schedule of workshops in schools and workshops for seniors and do this two-day residency in the town” (interview, November 23, 2020). The project was to culminate with a concert in which the touring ensemble was joined by musicians from each of the Yellowhead towns. Home Routes also runs the Winnipeg Crankie Festival and Podolak believes that festivals can be central to developing the local collaborative structures that support a residency model. “The goal [of a festival] is to rally the community and involve the community so that it [doesn’t] matter who you hire on the stage, the festival will be a success,” he said. “We are not just a business ... Take those people that make up that festival and engage them on a more year-round, broader level, with mentorships” (interview, November 23, 2020).

Barbara Scales described to me a recent tour by one of her artists, *collectif9*, to Mexico. The ensemble had been invited for the Festival de Música de Morelia but also performed a school show and a second, smaller concert, and the individual musicians taught several masterclasses. “The idea was to move them around and to reach out. It aided the festival in the sense that the breadth of the community was implicated in the presence of the group arriving from Canada” (interview, December 4, 2020). Scales also imagined regional residencies that require a more sustained creative engagement with a community, where artists might create “working groups to create the art. You do songwriting sessions, you create a community choir, you have a band. ... You take the time, you come in with professional skills, you come in with recording equipment, and you create something. It takes a week or a month. You [could] tell a local story [or] create a narrative out of local mythologies” (interview, December 4, 2020). While the outputs of regional residencies may be similar to traditional artist-in-residence programs, the latter typically depend on a single

institutional sponsor whereas the former ideally rely on collaboration between multiple community actors.⁸

Realizing this regional residency model in the Canadian context would require launching an extended conversation between musicians, venue owners, festival directors, educators, community organizers, and larger institutions, such as universities or colleges, that might provide anchor gigs in their communities. Federal, provincial, and local funding bodies should also be at the table. Barbara Scales would like to see these agencies design “cooperative, collaborative [funding] models for regional residencies” and offer grants to encourage the formation of presenter “networks” (interview, December 4, 2020).⁹ She noted that regional touring organizations focusing on rural communities, such as Home Routes or, on the classical side, Prairie Debut and Debut Atlantic, would be important contributors to the conversation as well. In short, this is not a burden that should fall exclusively on artists. As Brittany Haas notes, it may be possible for performers to “cobble ... together” a regional residency-style tour but for a musician from outside a given locale, it is “harder to ... know about where to go and where to play.” She would like to see “more of an obvious network” for artists to tap into (interview, April 16, 2021).

Isabelle Bozzini and Clemens Merkel would also like to see more support for regional networks of presenters in Quebec and Canada, and more funding for artist fees (which, they note, are heavily subsidized in Europe). They felt that, at present, “there’s really no space” for promoters outside major urban centres in Canada to “[take] risks” and diversify their musical programming (interview, April 13, 2021). The new funding model introduced by the CCA in 2017 has enabled more flexible travel itineraries for the quartet, however, which in turn allows for increased engagement with local communities (see Canada Council for the Arts 2016).¹⁰

Olivier Demers pointed to the limited reach of individual actions by artists, agents, or promoters, and has argued for increased governmental regulation and support at both the provincial and federal levels. Funding for touring from the CCA and the Société de développement des entreprises culturelles (SODEC), for instance, typically covers a portion of air travel, ground travel, lodging, and a per diem. Demers has argued that these grants should also require artists to calculate their emissions:

C’est quoi vos billets [d’avion], c’est quoi votre kilométrage, avec quel type de véhicule? Donc ... vos émissions pour la tournée que nous subventionnons. ... Cette subvention-là devrait automatiquement venir avec une partie qui s’en va dans un fonds de reboisement gouvernementale ... [ou] une espèce de fonds

vert que pour les déplacements. (What [airplane] tickets do you have, how many kilometres have you driven and with what kind of vehicle? That is ... your emissions for the tour that is being funded. ... That grant should automatically come with a portion that goes to a government reforestation fund ... [or] some kind of green fund uniquely for travel.) (interview, December 14, 2020)

Such requirements should be paired with incentives, stated Demers, such as tax credits for promoters or artists who commit to a low carbon footprint (interview, December 14, 2020).

For Scales, the first step in shifting toward regional residencies and away from what she has called the “one-night stand” model of touring is to rejig exclusivity clauses, the contractual stipulation that an artist may not perform within a certain distance of a venue for a specified period of time. While exclusivity clauses “[create] the phenomenon of a special occasion,” they also “[turn] the artist into basically a prisoner of that contract” and “merely a spectacle.” This “disables the possibility of the artist reaching deeper into the community [and] disables the interest of local media” (interview, December 4, 2020). Rather than restrict additional local performance opportunities, she suggested, venues could simply ask artists to perform different material at each of several concerts, thus encouraging both community engagement and creative output. Olivier Demers has agreed in principle but noted that exclusivity clauses can help sustain small to mid-sized local venues.

Ultimately, rethinking touring requires rethinking how value and meaning are attributed to performers and performances. I end this section with an extended quote from Nic Gareiss, in which he points to the connections between exclusivity clauses, the exoticization of the touring artist, and the impact of touring on performer health:

I understand the marketing strategies that have been employed in exoticism. In fact, I’ve also benefited from them as a performer ... [But] the “one night only” idea is based upon an economy of scarcity where you have to grab your commodity, because it might leave, and get in on this deal really fast. And I think all that really rests on this tacit idea of capitalist accumulation, because you want this rare, special thing, and we know that that can have really, really dire impact[s] on the natural world ... [Exoticization] can happen in all kinds of geographic spaces, too, where the [artists] who are coming are going to bring you something magical, something ... that’s different than what you are used to. And that’s going

to somehow sate you or tickle you or titillate your audiences in some way. And I think people buy into that magic because of the exoticism, and I think that can have really negative effects ... It can create this strange hero worship sometimes around artists. In the case of dancers, it can create the idea [that] dancers are “athletes of God” ... I can’t think of any notion that distresses me more in terms of the pressure that that puts on labouring bodies. (interview, October 15, 2020)

How Do We Feed Ourselves in This Place Without Harm?

In my last semester as an undergraduate, I mentioned to an older bandmate with ample road experience that I was hoping to work as a touring musician when I graduated. “Do it now,” he said, “because once you’re older you’re not going to want to anymore.” Touring can be fantastic, in all senses of the word. To be out on the road with fellow musicians is perhaps one of the most freeing experiences I know. It is a road trip that never ends, with housing and food (hopefully) provided, clapping audiences every night, and even some cash at the end. Touring accords status within musical circles, a sort of “road capital” that increases in proportion to kilometres travelled, days away, and far-flung festivals played. From an environmental standpoint, and taking into consideration the impact on performers’ bodies, however, touring can be the other kind of fantastic: not “extraordinarily brilliant” but “ludicrously far-fetched,” as *Vocabulary.com* puts it (2020).

While musicians have always travelled, how they have done so has been concomitant with available technologies of movement, from ship to train to plane. The touring music industry, as we currently live it, is a product of the internal combustion engine. We romanticize our touring musicians — from La Bolduc travelling across Quebec to the Benny Goodman band driving cross-country to the Palomar Ballroom to the Beatles flying into Kennedy Airport — in a way that we do not, typically, celebrate our local musicians. With climate change, we may need to reverse that equation.

This article takes a first step toward recognizing the interconnectivity of various forms of sustainability in professional music-making: 1) environmental sustainability, or greening the industry; 2) human sustainability, namely supporting artists’ mental and physical health; 3) financial sustainability for both artists and venues; 4) community sustainability, including enriching communities through engagement with artists; and 5) creative sustainability for all, for example giving artists the resources to deepen their work, and venues

and communities the resources to deepen their engagement with the arts. As the voices of musicians, promoters, and agents in this article show, we need to begin to imagine new forms of sustainable touring post-pandemic.

Many questions remain to be answered. Should funding for new models of sustainable touring, such as regional residencies, come from the municipal, provincial, or federal level — or all three? What is the role of the musicians' union and other music industry associations in supporting alternative touring models? What role might institutions, such as universities, play in supporting local presenter networks? How might universities support touring artists not only by providing anchor gigs but also by connecting them to other local performance and teaching opportunities (and might this benefit universities seeking a stronger connection with their surrounding communities)? This article does not propose solutions to all of these questions but rather suggests a grassroots approach: an extended conversation via an intentional epistemic community that brings together actors from many sectors of the milieu.¹¹

Reimagining touring by prioritizing regional residencies will not ensure equity and inclusion in the industry but it could be a step in the right direction, by valuing community above stardom. It will not address all of the health challenges faced by musicians but it may lessen or mitigate some, by allowing travelling musicians to build a life in one location for a space of time. It will not eliminate the industry's carbon emissions but it could reduce them, by replacing “seven days, seven cities” with a week-long residency. It may also encourage communities to revalue their local artists — and every touring musician is local to somewhere — so that when they do this sort of work close to home, it is for the same pay as the visiting artist. Still, regional residencies are no panacea for the industry's ills and, of course, touring will still be limited to those who are able to leave home for weeks on end and who feel safe travelling to unknown locales. Lengthy residencies are likely more feasible for solo or duo performers than for bands, which require more in the way of lodging and meals. Regional residencies may be less viable in the summer months, when many musicians earn an important percentage of their income travelling from festival to festival, and when local communities may have more difficulty mobilizing the multiple actors necessary. This article has focused primarily on the North American folk and traditional music touring circuit; how regional residencies might work in other locations and on other musical circuits remains an open question. It is also important to remember that audience travel forms a high proportion of the industry's carbon emissions and sometimes moving a band from town to town for multiple smaller shows is more environmentally sound than requiring audiences to come to a central hub for a single large concert. This article does not seek to propose a one-size-fits-all solution but rather to open a conversation,

as per the STAC mission, on how we might make environmental sustainability “an integral part of day-to-day decision-making in our industry” (Risk and Knowles 2020b).

During the pandemic, artists have been asked to reinvent or reimagine their work via digital media. Post-pandemic, however, we will need to turn our attention to reinvesting in the arts as a site of human connection. The pandemic has taught us to fear the press of human bodies but also shown us just how much we miss it. Musicians, performing live, may well be the ones to teach us how to be together in crowded spaces again, and to experience our communities in the flesh. The challenge will be to find ways for musicians to do so that are not detrimental to the environment or their own well-being, and that fully support the communities to which they travel. As Laura Lengnick has asked, “How do we feed ourselves in this place without harm?” (2015: 333). As we rebuild, we will need to ask the same question about music. 🍄

Notes

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1. Mark Pedelty (2012: 26) has written that “conscientious musicians” seeking to use their public platform to advocate for environmental action often “act out our collective conundrums in public” due to the wasteful nature of touring.

2. By “academic capital,” I mean the resources to which academics have access by virtue of their position. This includes, but is not limited to, funding sources only available to those with a university affiliation, privileged access to policy makers, and the security of long-term salaried employment with benefits. To give one example of how academic capital might be put to use: I recently co-edited a triple special journal issue on improvisation, musical communities, and the pandemic, which included a number of commissioned “community voices” contributions from artists, agents, promoters, and others working as freelancers in the music industry. My co-editors and I secured funding from our institutions to offer fair compensation to these authors. We also used our co-written editorial to advocate for a rethinking of policies governing the allocation of resources to the creative commons (Fischlin, Risk, and Stewart 2021).

3. Titon problematizes top-down efforts at cultural heritage management, such as the UNESCO ICH designations. Though beyond the scope of the present article, it should be noted that such designations can also be bottom-up, as when local or regional organizations take the lead on seeking ICH status (for instance, Conseil québécois du patrimoine vivant 2015).

4. Facebook post shared with “friends,” Olivier Demers, April 20, 2018. This and all subsequent translations by the author.

5. Similarly, Bottrill, Liverman, and Boykoff (2010: 3) have noted that with regard to the UK music industry, “In both [music recording and publishing, and live music performance] there are a handful of large international companies (e.g., Universal Records and Live Nation) and a large number of smaller independent companies with 97 percent (about 18 000 companies) in the sector classified as micro or small to medium-sized enterprises.”

6. In early 2019, REVERB (2020b) partnered with the United Nations Environment Programme to “engage music fans to take action for the environment,” notably by reducing single-use plastic consumption.

7. Demers (interview, December 14, 2020) noted that *Le Vent du Nord* already prioritizes a regionally focused approach to touring where possible, such as in the United Kingdom: “Nous, on s’en va deux semaines au UK, en [total] on a douze shows, pis on revient. On fait juste le UK. Dans l’absolu, ce n’est pas de gros déplacements.” (“We go to the UK for two weeks, in total we have twelve shows, and then we come home. We do only the UK. In absolute terms, it’s not a lot of travelling.”)

8. Scales (interview, December 4, 2020) noted a growing phenomenon in the United Kingdom, “corridor touring,” where artists and agents begin with an anchor gig and then “just go down the stations along the train route.” She says, “You wouldn’t fly from London to Edinburgh; you would stop at fifteen cities along the way. [You might earn] less fee but you would have fifteen more engagements and probably more media attention as well.” While corridor touring is not the same as a regional residency, it offers a lower environmental footprint than flying or driving and could potentially allow for more connection to local communities, if daily travel times were kept to a minimum.

9. Some existing grant opportunities include language that could support a regional residency model. Evaluation criteria for the Canada Arts Presentation Fund (Government of Canada 2017; also see Government of Canada 2020), for instance, include “Impact on audiences, artists, and communities,” which, in turn, includes the “[c]apacity to retain, expand or diversify audiences and knowledge about community demographics” and the “[c]apacity to build partnerships that encourage the links between the arts and communities.”

10. Isabelle Bozzini and Clemens Merkel (interview, April 13, 2021) noted that the four-year federal funding that they currently hold—rather than short-term, project-based funding—has been crucial to sustaining their creative practice during the pandemic, especially because their budget for commissioning new works is now part of their operating grant.

11. Many thanks to the anonymous peer reviewer whose suggestions shaped some of the questions in this paragraph.

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