



REMOTE CONTROL

Covid-19 might have turned the world on its head in 2020, but hi-tech advances have helped mitigate the damage. In this **special report**, covering everything from **remote working** to **livestreaming**, we unite a handful of forward-thinking execs to analyse how **technology** is changing the music business for the better...

— BY JAMES HANLEY —

Perish the thought, but what if the coronavirus pandemic had occurred 20 years earlier? For “Covid-99”, there’d have been no streaming services at our fingertips; no Netflix box sets to binge upon; no FaceTime to catch up with loved ones; no Zoom conferences to facilitate working from home...

Yes, as miserable as 2020 has been for vast swathes of the music industry, it would have been even *worse* if not for the wonders of modern technology.

“Coronavirus has without doubt accelerated the shift towards a more digital world and we were perfectly placed to capitalise on that shift in the interest of our members,” PRS For Music CEO Andrea C Martin tells *Music Week*. “We were able to

seamlessly transition to remote working. The morning following the first lockdown announcement, all of our teams were up and running remotely without any disruption to our core services.

“Technology that we had previously invested in allowed us to continue working in a collaborative way, wherever we were, as it was already second nature.”

Representing the rights of more than 150,000 songwriters, composers and music publishers worldwide, PRS collected a record £810.8 million in 2019 – up 8.7% year-on-year. Its August AGM meanwhile, which was held virtually, achieved the highest participation in its history, with engagement exceeding 1,000 members.

“From the outset of the pandemic, we bolstered data processing to pay out royalties as quickly as possible,”



PHOTO: Louise Haywood-Schiefer

“Coronavirus has accelerated the shift towards a more digital world”

**ANDREA C
MARTIN**
PRS FOR MUSIC

explains Martin. “We prioritised live performance royalty processing, leading to a substantial increase in live monies distributed in April, totalling £18.3m. July’s distribution included the largest ever distribution for YouTube User Generated Content, aided by increasing processing of online revenue data to minimise time from stream to payment.

“Over the last 12 months, we’ve also worked hard with [pan-European licensing body] ICE to further improve processes, leading to royalties flowing more quickly through to our members. This resulted in a 148% increase in multi-territory online royalties for our October distribution, compared to the same distribution in 2019.”

She adds: “The way we consume music continues to change and we have made considerable investments over the last decade to guarantee we’re well placed to capture future growth. We are doing everything we can to maximise return and minimise risk to future distributions for all of our members throughout the pandemic.”

Fellow UK music collecting society PPL also raised the bar with its 2019 figures – collecting £271.8m for performers and recording rights-holders – a 10% increase on the previous year.

PPL CEO Peter Leatham believes investments made by the company in technology and analytics capabilities make it a unique proposition as a collective management organisation.

“The recorded music industry is driven by data,” he says. “We invest in cutting-edge technology to collect our licence fee income, efficiently manage the data about our members’ recordings and rights, and process the reporting of our licensees’ use of music, helping us to maximise the distribution of revenues to performers and recording rights-holders.

“PPL’s repertoire database is the centrepiece of our technology. It is one of the most comprehensive in the world, holding the metadata describing over 17 million sound recordings, and forms the basis of the licences we grant.”

Leatham has even found a few positives in the new normal.

“Whilst human interaction can not and should not be replaced by digital means, it has been interesting to see the efficiencies and benefits that working virtually can bring,” he reflects. “By embracing technology for virtual meetings, member events and outreach, and employee engagement, we have increased our collaboration further, making us more connected than ever before – especially to our global partners around the world.”

Dominic Bolger, head of IT at accountancy firm CC Young, reports similar results. “In a strange way, the pandemic has really increased adoption of technology and seen efficiency increase in areas that may not have even been in consideration for a project,” he says. “Our real technical innovation has come in the way that we are now storing and manipulating data. From a standing start only a few months ago, we are



Q&A: Quincy Jones has invested in AI firm Musimap



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PPL

using a combination of our own SQL Data development and the use of some third party tools. We can now throw millions of lines of data for analysis into our systems and produce reports for clients in a fraction of the time we used to do manually.

“While this is not directly related to the pandemic, I feel the rate of change, and adoption to change in working practice has increased dramatically – all from the comfort of our own home. As an industry that has always been about face-to-face, or a physical presence such as a live gig, I think that behaviour has changed towards both the use and acceptance of technology. The rate of change within our own business has been phenomenal.”

With touring on ice since the coronavirus crisis went global in the spring, livestreaming has emerged as a viable new revenue stream for artists. UK-based livestream business Driift revealed sales totalled more than 150,000 tickets for performances by Niall Horan and Kylie Minogue, while 5B Artist & Media-led rock gigs by Trivium and Behemoth both generated six-figure returns. Elsewhere, Billie Eilish’s Where Do We Go? livestream – brought to life by Maestro, Moment Factory and Lili Studio – embraced VR, XR and AR tech to rave reviews.

“Livestreaming concerts have proven to be a huge success

and a rare positive this year for artists,” observes Patrick Zucchetta, MD of Emotional Artificial Intelligence start-up Musimap. “Music fans have embraced this opportunity to support their favourite artists and enjoy unique and intimate performances from the comforts of their own home. The other huge advantage of this is that any artist can do this no matter the size of their fanbase or their income. Rather than having to spend money on hiring venues and all the organisation which comes with touring, artists can now hop on Facebook, Instagram or TikTok and go live and earn money while doing it through e-ticket sales and tipping. That’s been very encouraging to see.

“There are some uncertainties as to whether they will continue on a grand scale post-Covid, but I certainly see this as being a strong possibility. When operas first started being broadcasted live in cinemas across the globe this was met with much scepticism and yet in recent years they have been hugely impactful in attracting a wider audience at a fraction of the cost.”

Using technology that automatically generates emotional and contextual metadata, 1:1 personality profiles and emotional states of mind based on music consumption, Musimap is purported to have developed “the largest AI-powered emotion sensitive music database to date”. Clients include Universal Music Group, Vevo, BMG Production Music and MotionElements, and the start-up recently welcomed the legendary Quincy Jones to its ranks as an investor.

“Artificial Intelligence promises to revolutionise and further our personal connections to music in ways which we could never imagine,” asserts Zucchetta. “At Musimap we see ourselves being right at the heart of this intersection between AI and music. One of our products, MusiMe, builds emotional profiles for listeners, detailing mood, feelings and values based on their listening history to generate realtime psycho-emotional profiles. Through this, we have been able to develop advertising and product recommendation engines.”

Described as “the world’s first audio social network”, Bristol-based music app Cosound (Community Of Sound) launched this summer with the objective of disrupting the independent music space.

“Our mission is to build technology solutions that solve problems experienced by independent musicians, freelancers and businesses,” explains founder Ben Rees. “We work incredibly closely with our community to determine where their pain points are and develop tech solutions to help meet those needs; for example our peer-to-peer marketplace is designed to streamline gig economy within the industry and provide our users with new revenue streams at a time where performance opportunities aren’t available.

“Lockdowns have definitely amplified the need for a platform like Cosound. Things like remote collaboration, connectivity and additional income streams are now more important for musicians than ever. To meet these needs, we made the decision early on to double the size of our software team, bringing new features to market faster. It was certainly a gamble, but one which we’re proud to say has paid off.”

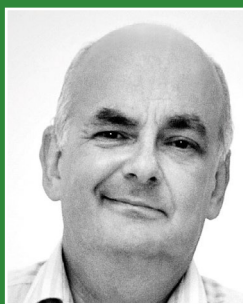
Rees suggests the music industry has become less resistant to new technologies than had historically been the case. “Whilst the



The IT crowd:
(From top) CC Young’s
Dominic Bolger and
Cosound founder Ben Rees



Boy in da corner: Dizzee Rascal starred as part of the PRS Presents Black History Month virtual show



*“Livestream
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**PATRICK
ZUCCHETTA**
MUSIMAP

pandemic has certainly hit us hard, and potentially caused some long lasting damage for certain sectors, I’ve been encouraged by some of the ways in which technology is being used to deliver new experiences to fans,” he says.

“I’m seeing some really exciting developments with virtual entertainment experiences, with artists being transformed into digital avatars and creating interactive live performances. TikTok hosted The Weekend Experience, an interactive XR broadcast which reached around 300,000 concurrent viewers at its peak.

“Events like these are indicative of the direction that the industry will move in over the next decade. A lot of this technology would have once been considered a bit of a gimmick, but the pandemic has pushed us to accept these technologies as a really viable option for the future of live music. Just this month two of pop’s biggest names – Dua Lipa and Kylie have hosted PPV concerts, and even the MTV EMAs took a more virtual and futuristic presentation style – something that I feel viewers, fans and the industry are becoming much more familiar with.”

Wrapping up, Rees declares himself impressed at how well the business has adapted to the dramatic change in circumstances.

“Like in many industries, the pandemic has pushed us to innovate quickly and explore how we use technology to engage with fans and create live music events,” he finishes. “As a creative industry, we have come together and collectively created innovative ways to keep going – something that we should all be proud of.”