CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

ORCA – Online Research @ Cardiff

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository:https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/184743/

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

Nairn, Angelique, Annabell, Taylor, Matthews, Justin and Bhargava, Deepti 2024. To perform or not to perform: Exploring the impact of COVID-19 on Aotearoa New Zealand's performing arts sector. Journal of Creative Behavior 58 (4) , pp. 722-738. 10.1002/jocb.1514

Publishers page: https://doi.org/10.1002/jocb.1514

Please note:
Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies. See http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.

To Perform or Not to Perform: Exploring the Impact of COVID-19 on Aotearoa New Zealand's Performing Arts Sector

Angelique Nairn, Taylor Annabell, Justin Matthews and Deepti Bhargava

ABSTRACT

This article explores narratives of how COVID-19 impacted the performing arts sector, by drawing on interviews with creative workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. Despite the late exposure to COVID-19 and the adoption of an elimination approach that afforded opportunities for performing arts to continue to varying extents between 2019 and 2022, cultural workers in Aotearoa New Zealand, as with their overseas counterparts, experienced significant and consequential disruption to their working conditions and lives. Taking into account the specificity of Aotearoa New Zealand's performing arts sector and the government's COVID-19 response, the article contributes to the empirical examination of COVID-19 experiences by teasing out narratives of impact from cultural workers. The thematic analysis demonstrates how participants presented (1) COVID-19 as responsible for financial, emotional, and psychological costs, (2) framed opportunities arising from disrupted working conditions and wage subsidy as "silver linings," (3) were reliant on digital technologies, and (4) constructed the return to "normal" as marked by the COVID-19 "aftermath." The article argues that uniting these perceptions and articulations of impact is the ongoing (re)evaluations of risks and benefits by cultural workers of working conditions that predate COVID-19.

Keywords: COVID-19, costs, technology, job losses, creativity, survival.

On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that SARS-CoV-2, also referred to as coronavirus and later COVID-19, had become a global health emergency (Timeline: How the new coronavirus spread, 2020). Spread from human to human in the respiratory droplets released when coughing and sneezing, COVID-19 presents as fever, dry cough, dizziness, weakness, diarrhea, and vomiting, and in some cases, can lead to respiratory complications and mortality (Yuki, Fujogi, & Koutsogiannaki, 2020). In response to the rapid spread of the disease globally, governments including Aotearoa[1] New Zealand implemented measures such as lockdowns and social distancing to limit the number of people contracting the virus. Unsurprisingly, the performing arts sector was significantly impacted by these restrictions. As Serow (2021, p. 92) proposed, it was the "first sector to experience the full force of social distancing and shutdown measures and it will be the last to recover."

Emerging research on COVID-19 examines how the global pandemic and associated government restrictions impacted the performing arts. While the experiences of cultural workers are being captured, much of this existing research is based on participants situated in Europe followed by the USA, Australia, and parts of Asia (Brooks & Patel, 2022; Comunian & England, 2020; Elstad, Jansson, & Doving, 2021; Flore, Hendry, & Gaylor, 2023; Haapakorpi, Leinonen, & Otonkotpi-Lehtoranta, 2022; Pulignano, Domecka, Muszynski, Vermeerbergen, & Riemann, 2021; Rodriguez-Camacho, Rey-Biel, Young, & Sanchez, 2021; Spiro et al., 2021) and often limited to

[1] The indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

insights about how the pandemic was experienced during earlier stages, before the implementation of recovery responses.

Unlike other countries, Aotearoa New Zealand's experience of the COVID-19 pandemic was unique due to the hard and fast elimination strategy (see Lynch, 2021 for an explanation of the elimination strategy)

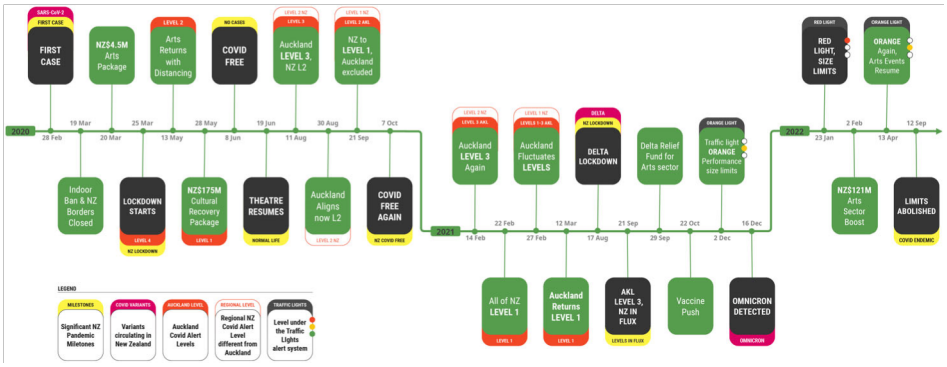

FIGURE 1. COVID-19 in Aotearoa New Zealand (Information for this table was collated from Theater Scenes (n.d.); For information on the alert levels in Aotearoa New Zealand see History of the COVID-19 Alert System (n.d.) and for information of the Traffic Light Framework see (History of the COVID-19 Protection Framework)).

adopted by the government (see Figure 1 below and the Appendix for the timeline of COVID-19 in Aotearoa New Zealand). Faster control of COVID-19, compared to other countries, meant that performing arts could continue to varying extents and in varying forms. For example, from September 2020 to February 2021, the country operated with some freedoms. Since the national border remained closed, emphasis was placed on local arts offerings and people were able to attend the theater, bars, and other venues where performances were regularly taking place. However, with the arrival of the Delta and Omicron variants to Aotearoa New Zealand, the country was forced back into a national lockdown and again, the performing arts sector was closed and shows canceled (Brooks, 2021).

This article advances research by bringing in the perspectives and experiences of Aotearoa New Zealand cultural workers, which were absent from scholarship except for Cosgrave's (2021) qualitative narrative inquiry of three freelance contemporary dancers from Aotearoa New Zealand. We draw on interviews with 33 cultural workers, carried out in 2022, to examine how they were impacted by COVID-19. We offer an account of perceptions and experiences within the local setting of Aotearoa New Zealand and against the broader global context through four themes: attribution of financial, psychological, and physical losses to COVID-19, framing of positive experiences and opportunities experienced during COVID-19 as "silver linings," the shift to "techno-arts," and construction of the COVID-19 "aftermath." Through these themes, we explore how the disruption to working conditions presented an opportunity for participants to reflect on their relationship to the performing arts sector, (re)evaluating the risks and benefits of being creative workers.

Not only does our research document the Aotearoa New Zealand's experience of COVID-19 but it allows cultural workers to voice their views on their working conditions, particularly in a country with a relatively small population and short history. While then-Prime Minister The Right Honorable Dame Jacinda Ardern's Labour government was "lauded for its positive action… in announcing a NZ$175 million rescue package for arts and culture" and commended for being "more quickly attuned to the immediate demands of professional arts and culture" (Banks & O'Connor, 2021, p. 6), this is one of the first pieces of research that evaluates whether such

interventions responded to the needs of performing arts workers. Given some international governments took alternative approaches and were condemned, our research offers a different perspective on the COVID-19 experience of cultural workers (Banks & O'Connor, 2021).

PERFORMING ARTS, CULTURAL WORK, AND THE PANDEMIC

Comunian and England (2020, p. 122) propose that the COVID-19 crisis "exacerbates the precarious structural conditions" of the creative and cultural industries in the United Kingdom, making visible the nature of work and working conditions that predate the pandemic. Due to the nature of the industry and types of employment, workers are reliant on finding project-based work to make ends meet (Brooks & Patel, 2022; Elstad et al., 2021; Hesmonhalgh & Baker, 2010; Lindgreen & Packendorff, 2007; Nairn & Gumbley, 2018) and are often relentlessly job-seeking or working across multiple projects to curb financial pressures (Hesmonhalgh & Baker, 2010). In extreme circumstances, these working conditions foster an addiction to work (Rowlands & Handy, 2012) and self-exploitation (Haapakorpi et al., 2022; Spiro et al., 2021). Except for large performing arts organizations such as the Royal New Zealand Ballet or New Zealand Symphony Orchestra that have permanent full-time staff, most cultural workers in New Zealand are freelancers (Skills Active Workforce Scan, 2020).

By cultural workers, we refer to those working and volunteering in the performing arts, encompassing creative and administrative roles. Thus, cultural workers can be singers, musicians, actors, dancers, stage managers, production assistants, technicians, and marketers. Each holds a valuable role in the development and execution of performances. Despite navigating fragile and complicated working conditions of the arts and having to network regularly to acquire work, cultural workers find opportunities to express their creativity or the relative freedom that comes from project-based work worthwhile (Andriopoulos & Gotsi, 2001; Brooks & Daniluk, 1998).

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions impacted the performing arts sector, with lost income, ticket refunds, contingency planning, and pivoting online having implications for people whose livelihoods are tied to live performances. For example, in India, those reliant on live performances to survive "were forced to switch their jobs during the scarcity of employment" (Shah & Banker, 2020, p. 29), while in Australia, full sector closure meant financial and logistical problems led to canceled shows (Serow, 2021). Brooks and Patel's (2022) review of 21 empirical studies identifies challenges facing performing artists across countries (predominantly Western countries) during COVID-19. Participants encountered loss of work, reduced income, anxiety and concerns for their future, absence of social connections, and exacerbation of inequalities (Brooks & Patel, 2022). This review along with other research that captures the experiences of creative workers collectively puts forward the perspective that COVID-19 exposes and intensifies the fragility and precarity of working conditions in the performing arts (Comunian & England, 2020; Cosgrave, 2021; Flore et al., 2023; Haapakorpi et al., 2022; Pulignano et al., 2021).

The positive impact of COVID-19 on cultural workers was limited to personal opportunities to spend time with family and professional opportunities to pursue new creative avenues (Brooks & Patel, 2022). Rodriguez-Camacho et al. (2021) surveyed artists in Columbia and Spain and found that cultural workers had more time to spend on creative practice and developing skills during lockdown conditions. Since being creative is perceived to be part of a cultural worker's identity, some used digital technologies to express their creativity (Brooks & Patel, 2022; Jacobs, Finneran, & D'Acosta, 2022; Shah & Banker, 2020). However, that was only possible if people were not feeling emotionally overwhelmed by the loss of work and/or uncertain about their prospects (Flore et al., 2023). That said, many found that online opportunities were no substitute for face-to-face (Spiro et al., 2021).

How Aotearoa New Zealand cultural workers experienced life under these COVID-19 measures is yet to be empirically examined across the scholarship about the performing arts sector. However, the need to understand the experiences and perspectives of cultural workers in Aotearoa New Zealand is suggested by Cosgrave's (2021) analysis of three freelance contemporary dancers. Cosgrave (2021, p. 78) proposes that the unique position of Aotearoa New Zealand during COVID-19 allowed dancers "to enter in and out of society again, with room to reflect and adjust their creative practice accordingly." Her identification of feelings of alienation and experiences of adaptability among dancers also speaks to the uniqueness of the Aotearoa New Zealand's experience of COVID-19 such as fluctuating lockdowns as well as the nation's wider social, political, and economic context.

Building on this direction of enquiry and the call by Flore et al. (2023, p. 211) for research to examine "the lived experiences of new or transformed social and artistic worlds that the pandemic actively generates," the purpose of this article is to offer insights into how cultural workers articulated and reflected on their lived experiences given the unique situation the COVID-19 pandemic posed for Aotearoa New Zealand and its performing arts sector. As Figure 1 indicates, funding and government support measures, which sought to respond to the exceptional circumstances of COVID-19, were made available. The injection of an initial NZD $175 million funding into the arts sector[2] (Beehive.govt.nz, 2020) diverged somewhat from the typical arms-length approach to cultural policy adopted by the Aotearoa New Zealand government. Instead of "performing a control rather than a policy development function" (Volkerling, 1996, p. 203), where Manatu Taonga | Ministry for Culture and Heritage (MoH) monitors arts spending but relies on agencies like Creative New Zealand for funding allocation and the upkeep of the performing arts, they MoH collaborated with "funded agencies and sector stakeholders" to deliver "more than 25 initiatives designed to provide short-term relief and longer-term support for the sector" (Manatu Taonga | Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2023, paras. 3–4). Therefore, understanding how cultural workers experienced such interventions is vital in making sense of cultural policy impact. More broadly, our research contributes to the limited literature addressing experiences of Aotearoa New Zealand's performing arts sector in the midst and wake of COVID-19.

METHODS

The findings discussed in this article emerged from a broader research project addressing the nature of work and lived experiences of cultural workers in Aotearoa New Zealand's performing arts[3] sector. We draw on semi-structured interviews conducted with 33 participants (see Table 1 below for participant information)[4] to explore how cultural workers in Aotearoa New Zealand constructed the impact of COVID19. We were able to gain insights into the social realities and build an understanding of the COVID-19 experience of our participants because semi-structured interviews tend to be conversational, occur between a participant and researcher, and incorporate both open and closed-ended questions (Adams, 2015). These types of interviews are relatively structured but allow for probing on topics by the researcher and are a worthwhile means

[2] This was injected into the entire arts sector which included the performing arts, visual arts, screen, and music industries (to name a few).

[3] There are myriad understandings of what constitutes the performing arts. For McCarthy, Brooks, Lowell, and Zakaras (2001), the performing arts could include high and popular arts in the domains of opera, dance, music, theater, and the like, but equally work in film, television and radio can be considered performance art. Davies (2009) speaks of performing arts as an artistic expression that forges an interaction between performer and audience, and which permits appreciation and evaluation of the creative work. Traditionalists view performing arts as that which is performed live and gains its authenticity from not being perfectly replicated (Auslander, 2022). The latter suggestion ignores the fact that live performance can be mediatised especially with the digitisation of, for example, live dance, theater, and symphony performances, and the production of films based on plays, and recordings of live music (Auslander, 2022). We follow the classification of Creative New Zealand (n.d.-a), the primary funding body for the Aotearoa New Zealand performing arts, in which theater, dance, opera, and music constitute the sector.

[4] The names of participants have been changed to ensure anonymity, and gender-neutral names have been used to protect the identities of participants. Therefore, we use 'their' for all participants regardless of gender pronouns.

of learning "about people's beliefs, perspectives and meaning making" (Roulston & Choi, 2018, p. 243).

Participants were recruited through our networks and social media accounts. The interviews took place between July and November 2022 in online and offline settings and ranged in length from 30 to 90 min. The research received ethical approval from the project lead's university.

The semi-structured interviews were transcribed by one of the authors and a research assistant and the data were then analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step model of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an effective research method that identifies, analyzes, and reports themes or patterns present within a dataset, and which can generate further understanding of a phenomenon for a researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is particularly useful for determining "the relationships between concepts" and identifying whether they are "replicated" within the data (Alhojailan, 2012, p. 40).

Using both inductive and deductive approaches, we began by familiarizing ourselves with the data (step 1). That entailed listening to the interviews and reading the transcripts, uncovering preliminary codes, and comparing such codes for whether they accurately captured concepts emerging in the data. We each then generated codes that we attached descriptive labels to (step 2). These descriptive labels were used to develop themes and subthemes and were dependent on the researchers construing a relationship between the codes they had devised (step 3). We then brought our themes together and began comparing them to define which themes fit with our understanding of the data. Such a process required questioning the quality and reliability of certain themes (step 4). Once we had settled on our themes, we named them and proceeded to revisit the data to capture extracts that would be incorporated in the final write-up of the research (step 5). This article is the final step of the Braun and Clarke (2006) process which relies on researchers sharing their findings. Our thematic analysis process led to the revealing of four themes: The costs of COVID-19, the silver linings, the techno-arts, and the aftermath.

TABLE 1.Participant Information

Participant	Performing arts area	Length of time (years) involved in the industry (including amateur & professional involvement)
Brooklyn	Theater[a]	10
Bobby	Backstage[b]	10
Taylor	Arts Admin[c]	20
Sidney	Arts Admin	15
Pat	Arts Admin	25
Morgan	Dance[d]	16
Hunter	Comedy	30
Kai	Dance	29
Ezra	Theater	11
Elliot	Music[e]	12
Jordan	Backstage	32
Logan	Comedy	24
Rory	Backstage	30
Frankie	Arts Admin	26
Riley	Dance	40
Cody	Theater	25
Charlie	Theater	22
Harlow	Arts Admin	6

Reese	Theater	11
Dylan	Comedy	31
Blair	Dance	13
Bailey	Theater	17
Blake	Comedy	40
Noah	Theater	5
Gabriel	Theater	13
Lee	Backstage	43
Casey	Music	21
Jesse	Dance	10
Tracy	Comedy	15
Lindsay	Arts Admin	9
Quinn	Backstage	13
Nicky	Music	15
Drew	Music	30

a b

Theater includes disciplines such as circus and opera. Backstage includes anyone working as a lighting or sound technician, production assistant, stagehand or set designer. [c]Arts admin includes producers, marketers, box office and venue managers. [d]Dance includes all disciplines from ballet to contemporary. [e]Music includes those in bands, solo artists, and choir singers.

NARRATIVES OF COVID-19 IMPACT

COSTS OF COVID-19

The first of our themes captures the financial, psychological, and physical consequences of the pandemic on the performing arts generally, and cultural workers' personal situations specifically.

COVID-19 was experienced and positioned by participants as disruptive to their work, working conditions and, by extension, their sense of identity and lives. Although this disruption was due to the moves into national lockdowns and ever-evolving constellations of restrictions, agency was primarily attributed to COVID-19 rather than government measures. The socio-temporal reconfiguration of life under these conditions reduced participants' capacity and ability to work. For example, Blake despondently recalled how they "lost two-thirds of [my] income" and how they became increasingly concerned as the national lockdown continued beyond what was initially anticipated. COVID-19 was, thus, not only an experience in time but a disruption to time. Participants faced uncertainty during lockdowns over how long they would be confined to the house and unable to perform. As Charlie put it, "in the beginning, it seemed short term and we weren't so worried, but as things progressed, things would get worse." While scholars have addressed the way that COVID-19 exposed and intensified trappings of performing arts characterized by project-based and inconsistent periods of intense work, followed by the work tapering off (Comunian & England, 2020; Elstad et al., 2021), our participants did not explicitly draw these connections or situate their experience within the pre-pandemic "normal" except when reflecting on the value of the wage subsidy (discussed in section 4.2). Instead, for cultural workers in Aotearoa New Zealand, the pandemic was presented as a new situation that left them feeling anxious and money-conscious in ways not experienced before.

Participants shared feelings of depression and anxiety within their descriptions of how COVID-19 impacted their work. This resonates with orchestral musicians in the United Kingdom (Cohen

& Ginsborg, 2021) and creative arts workers in Australia (Flore et al., 2023) who reported suffering from emotional and cognitive depletions that produced feelings of hopelessness and mental disturbances. Such intensified and increased feelings of anxiety were consequential for the creative process. Elliot asserted the COVID-19 pandemic brought their "creativity to a halt" because they had to prioritize other parts of their life, while Logan felt they just "didn't have the creative juices flowing." As an administrator, Pat found that the people around them "didn't create, cultivate or follow through on a lot of artistic things." Along with these negative effects, Tracy reflected that "people were openly talking about their own mental health struggles." There is a construction of a shared experience not only of struggle but also openly discussing such feelings in ways that may not have taken place before the pandemic. In other words, the disruption of COVID-19 shifted conversations among cultural workers to include issues of mental health, which is not entirely unexpected given Trnka et al. (2021) acknowledged that the government anticipated that mental and physical well-being would be a primary concern of people confined to their residences during COVID-19.

Like Trnka et al. (2021), we observed that the COVID-19 experiences of the cultural workers varied based on their personal circumstances. Freelancers with limited secondary employment (33%) seemed to experience a higher rate of stress, anxiety, and depression compared to those who held permanent jobs (21%), secondary employment (37%), or were otherwise financially supported by their partners, families, and/or friends (9%). For example, Rory's work came "to a grinding halt because of COVID" and they had to begin "driving trucks and working my way back into the NZ industry," an experience that took a "mental and physical toll" because they had been in the industry for 30 years and now had to pivot to an unexpected and less fulfilling job to make ends meet. Contrastingly, describing their work as a permanent member of a theater company, Harlow pointed out that there was a "big difference being an employee versus a contractor…There's been a lot of work for me and my team when there might not necessarily be for the production company." Additionally, those who had newly entered the performing arts industry, for example, had less than 10 years of experience (18%) in their roles, appeared to cope better with the ambiguity and anxiety that accompanied the lockdowns and loss of work. As Sidney put it "I went into it [performing arts industry] knowing that I need to have a Plan B…My Plan B simply accelerated a lot faster than I had intended." In other words, whether because they were also younger (average age 25), or simply less established, these people were often more resilient and pragmatic about their circumstances and the unreliability of the performing arts. Therefore, in some cases, the unfavorable mental health experiences of our participants were a product of differences in roles and expectations connected to the industry.

Interestingly, there did not appear to be any differences in the experiences of performing artists when factoring in demographics such as gender. The participants referred to the mental tolls the pandemic was having on their professional sense of self or creative identity and spoke less about the implications of the pandemic to their personal identity or personal relationships. On the occasions when the home dynamics experienced were referred to by participants, the men, women, and non-binary interviewees referred to how their partners or wider extended family were sharing the load when it came to domestic activities such as child-rearing and homeschooling. In fact, Tracy admitted that the pandemic meant that they could have a more hands-on role "helping the kids," which their partner appreciated because it was usually "not possible when touring," while Hunter (different gender from Tracy) admitted that taking care of their children was a priority during the pandemic and that they enlisted the help of their parents when they needed to work on their writing. Such a finding diverges from the experiences documented by Trnka et al. (2021) where clear gender differences were found among participants during the pandemic, with women expected to carry more of the domestic load.

Even after the performing arts reopened and shows were possible again, participants referred to the emotional toll of the pandemic as enduring within their narratives of work. Harlow (arts admin) proposed that artists were experiencing "COVID fatigue" and were "exhausted from having spent the last 2.5 years cancelling, rejigging and pivoting" to the point that "they haven't had the time to think ahead to the future in the way that they may have usually." Similarly, Drew felt that they were riddled with nerves preparing for shows and it became "emotionally hard to prepare for something that you don't know if it's going to happen." It appears that the restrictions applied to manage COVID-19 were experienced as unknown, unpredictable, and unstable, which impacted motivation and made it difficult to channel creative drive over time.

While Cohen and Ginsborg (2021) and Rodriguez-Camacho et al. (2021) found that orchestral musicians in the UK and artists in Colombia and Spain, respectively, experienced a loss of motivation, for our participants, this was not restricted to lockdowns. In part, this may be due to Aotearoa New Zealand's COVID-19 response. At the time of the interviews (July–November 2022), shows were still being canceled if casts or crews presented with COVID-19 and this looming threat along with the experience of cancellation left people like Drew reeling from the "cancellation blows." It fostered a climate in which managing uncertainty folded into the emotional labor of being a creative worker.

In some situations, performers felt unprepared for returning to shows because their bodies were no longer fit for purpose due to loss of stamina during pandemic restrictions. Discussing the physicality of their work Noah stated that "if you take a few weeks off, it can make it difficult for you to get back up to speed, both in terms of physicality and remembering the choreography. The strength is easy to lose." Therefore, while performers were feeling overwhelmed by the uncertainty heralded by the pandemic, their situations were further compounded by a loss of fitness. It marks another instance in which the disruption to the performing arts sector due to COVID-19 plays out at the level of the individual and is consequential to their ability to engage in work. Having not earned an income for some time, performers were unable to ease back into performances. Instead, the need to overcome mental and physical challenges quickly created its own new sense of pressure, which they were called upon to manage individually.

SILVER LININGS

Despite all of our participants expressing that they felt jaded, frustrated, depressed, or anxious by the experience of lockdown, some identified positive experiences in their reflections on the first lockdown. We position feelings of gratitude for the opportunity to rest, relax, and reflect after working non-stop for years at a time as "silver linings" of COVID-19. Some participants were pleased to be removed (temporarily) from the trappings of continuously networking, juggling projects, and channeling their creativity on demand. In fact, a select group of our participants found that not having to move from project to project meant that they could more readily develop and finish creative projects that they had no time to invest in earlier.

For example, Brooklyn spent time writing "my own play, which hopefully I can produce next year," while Charlie was able to finally go to directing school which they had been putting off because of all their other creative commitments. Sidney captured the feelings of many when they stated, "It's given us the opportunity to think because we have just been doing it [work] non-stop for the last six years." In keeping with their international counterparts (see Haapakorpi et al., 2022; Rodriguez-Camacho et al., 2021; Spiro et al., 2021), time was spent on developing artistic skills and activities related to their creative practice.

While cultural workers in Rodriguez-Camacho et al. (2021) study spent time developing business and entrepreneurial skills along with their artistic skills, our participants focused primarily on their creative practice and development of creative outputs. This is perhaps due to

the connections established between their identity and the value of their creativity and work. As Charlie explained, "it gave me space to realise that arts is something essential for me to feel like life is worth living," while Taylor found that they could develop work "which is going back to my roots." Paradoxically, during a time marked by restrictions to working, socializing, and interacting, some cultural workers experienced a sense of freedom and agency due to being unbound to the constraints of "normal" working conditions. The experience of disruption was positioned as providing "space" to reflect and reassess how they felt about working in the performing arts.

The experience of lockdown as a respite from the relentlessness of working conditions was for some participants due to the support offered by Aotearoa New Zealand's government. From March 2020, freelancers and self-employed workers had access to the Wage Subsidy Scheme and support for cultural workers was also provided through the Cultural Recovery Package announced in May 2020. According to Banks and O'Connor (2021), the New Zealand government was "quickly attuned to the immediate demands of professional arts and culture" compared to the actions taken by European governments. Many participants discussed how they would not have survived the financial consequences of the pandemic without such state support and drew attention to how it gave them a taste of a Universal Base Income (UBI). This was not only a major relief during the crisis but also perceived as something that could perhaps be implemented long term.

Government support provided evidence of well-being and protective measures, such as a UBI, as a means of economically sustaining the arts, which Morgan had been advocating for before the pandemic. Morgan stated that the COVID-19 experience emphasized that change was needed to protect cultural workers and make the performing arts sector a safer employment choice. Morgan lamented that they "probably work 60 hours a week but only get paid for 10," highlighting the high proportion of unpaid labor required to maintain their dance career. COVID-19 was also positioned as a catalyst in the calls to change cultural policy and business models in the United Kingdom. However, the UK government's response during COVID-19 was seen to benefit organizations rather than individuals and workers on higher incomes (Eikhof, 2020). Similarly, based on their empirical research on visual arts workers, Doustaly and Roy (2022) found that many were unable to access financial recovery schemes and fell through the cracks. Although we do not seek to overstate the success of Aotearoa New Zealand's government response, the experience of our participants potentially adds to the case studies on how UBI mechanisms are realized in local contexts.

Silver linings were also seen in how New Zealand-based performing arts workers were given greater opportunities due to border closures and lockdown restrictions easing between September 2020 and February 2021. As Casey reflected, "New Zealand was focused entirely internally on Kiwi acts," which meant upand-comers were able to enter the industry, find work, gain experience, and strengthen their positions. For example, Charlie felt that being able to perform in Aotearoa New Zealand, "presented us with some incredible opportunities" and helped to re-establish a strong performing arts community. These experiences construct the climate before the pandemic as one in which cultural workers were often competing for recognition and audiences against overseas acts to the extent that the focus on the local was experienced as novel. Such a position is exemplified by Aotearoa New Zealand's adoption of a neoliberal and deregulated approach to work, including the arts, where it is easier to support overseas creative work in the country than to fund local offerings. This has often forced cultural workers to compete with overseas "content providers" (Horrocks, 2016, p. 140), whose creative products are brought to Aotearoa New Zealand and often reflect the cultures of their countries of origin. This competition is increasingly problematic for gaining recognition and economic benefits due to the country's small size and the difficulty for cultural workers to generate a critical mass for artistic

expression. Furthermore, New Zealanders tend to hold an attitude of cultural cringe toward local content (Horrocks, 2016; Pickles, 2011), viewing international offerings as superior, which makes it challenging for performing artists to attract audiences when overseas imports are also on offer. The positive responses to the inability of international cultural workers to access the New Zealand market due to COVID-19 border restrictions illustrate how the experience of disruption illuminates the "normal" pressures facing Aotearoa New Zealand cultural workers. Admittedly, because the majority of our interviewees appeared to be white New Zealanders, it is difficult to know whether the experiences of minority groups in the performing arts would have felt the same about the focus on kiwi acts.

THE TECHNO-ARTS

Another theme that emerged from our interviews addresses the role of digital technology and the development of what we refer to as the "techno-arts." Many cultural workers who found themselves confined to their houses under COVID-19 restrictions, turned to digital technology to express themselves artistically and discuss productions. For example, Blair referred to how the dance production they were working on was "moved to a digital production so it got filmed and premiered online," while Logan spoke about how "a lot of comedians started podcasts or variation of live streaming as a creative outlet." These and other examples from the interviews showed that cultural workers were looking for ways to stay relevant, express their creativity, and remain in contact with audiences and collaborators.

Keeping in contact with collaborators through digital technologies was seen as especially important for the interviewees because creative work is often a product of teamwork and creativity emerges out of the collision and contradictions with one's peers (Bilton, 2007). For Gabriel, Zoom meetings to rehearse became essential. Likewise, Cody felt that "being able to communicate in COVID through laptops and Zoom" was important "because communication in this industry is key." The adaptation to online platforms had also emerged as a central theme in Brooks and Patel's (2022) review of empirical research on COVID-19. Our research adds to Brooks and Patel's (2022) assertions and helps to further understand how digital technologies were positioned as a solution for overcoming the issue of social distancing and the extent to which online settings were adopted in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The experience of "techno-arts" also brought issues for participants, challenging the narrative of seamless transition and adaptation. Blair, a dancer, found that trying to synchronize performances online was difficult when the music lagged and technology cut out. Their thoughts are akin to the dancers of Warnecke (2020, p. 146) study who felt that "The 'just put it on Zoom' approach ignores every impulse of a performing artist; dance simply can't be replicated on a screen and expected to be the same." Equally, those who were trying to teach performing arts found online technology a "nightmare" because some techniques required physical interaction, which was not possible in an online environment. The experience Reese referred to here was not uncommon. Others found that teaching young people was difficult because they lost focus when communicating through digital technologies.

Furthermore, some of the participants were not keen to pivot online. Logan shared that they "couldn't bring myself to do [online creative work]. I thought it was soulless." For Logan and some of the other participants, the online environment did not seem to capture the same atmosphere and vibe as face-to-face performances. For example, Lindsay remarked that they found comedians really struggled because they were unsure how their jokes were being received. With the industry pushing to digitize performing arts activities such as opera, music, theater, dance, and the like, the participants' views suggest that at least for some, there was apprehension about technological influence, particularly when it came to live performances (Dixon, 2015; Webb,

2021). It also suggests that some forms of artistic expression lent themselves to being aided by technology, but for others, it was a poor substitute.

Although the push to mediatization and particularly the digitization of the arts has been happening for some time, our interviews revealed that the pandemic accelerated the use of technology for some people. There has generally been an apprehension around the use of technology in what is considered live arts (Auslander, 2022; Hunter, 2019), with the general consensus being that streaming or filming content dilutes atmosphere or subverts authenticity (Dixon, 2015; Hunter, 2019; Schulze, 2017). These ideological positions were held by some of the participants who were initially reluctant to express their creativity online, but others' desire to create and collaborate saw them readily integrate technology.

Despite perceptions of creativity being the purview of the individual (Bilton, 2007), the reality is that creativity is a product of team dynamics and therefore, technology offered a new means for sharing ideas, keeping in contact with people, and expressing creative work. Given the reliance on technology during the pandemic, future research would do well to explore whether people continued to use Zoom, social media, and the like as part of their preparations and delivery of performing arts, especially as Hylland (2022) contends arts practitioners were often expecting the digitalization of their creative work to be temporary.

AFTERMATH

In this final theme, we focus on how participants articulated their experiences of the easing of restrictions. At the time of the interviews, most of the country was operating "as normal" with social distancing and mask-wearing mandates abolished. Yet, it was clear that for those working in the performing arts, it was not "back to normal," but they were experiencing "the aftermath" in which COVID-19 continued to intrude and disrupt working conditions. This played out with the availability of work. On one hand, Dylan pointed out that "I've got a lot of friends and colleagues that are screaming out for them [jobs]," but on the other hand, as Quinn emphasized, those people wanting to get back on the stage are hindered by the fact that "we have a shortage of technicians." The divergence in the assessment of work is emblematic of the issues of supply and demand due to the disruption of COVID-19. The latter example alludes to cultural workers in crew roles who left the sector. As Rory explained, this presents challenges for those wanting to put on shows: "There will be a huge influx of shows coming in but we're not going to have the resources to support those shows. People have left the industry."

The influx of shows is perhaps a response to the growing amount of creative work completed during COVID-19. Many of our participants indicated that they had used the lockdowns to write new material (often one-person works) that they intended to showcase once COVID restrictions were reduced. For example, Hunter pointed out, "I did a lot of writing. You write a lot of COVID gear. There were a whole lot of common experiences that happened. You knew when your stuff was relatable. We all had that same lived experience and that made a difference for the audiences when we got out." In Reese's case, the work they developed purposely avoided the risks of people getting COVID and adversely impacting the show. As they put it, "We did [REDACTED] in April which is a one-person show that they don't need to prepare for. It's not improv but there's no preparation involved so we chose that intentionally because it's recast if you need to at the last minute or reprogram if you can't recast." In essence, our interviewees were keen to develop work that would resonate with the audiences but was not reliant on large casts as that could risk contracting and spreading COVID-19 and costing people time and money.

Of course, finding venues to showcase work was identified as increasingly difficult because everyone was competing for slots and as Morgan observed, this was made more problematic when "some arts spaces have had to close." For instance, Harlow signaled that the performing

arts organization they worked for had received "a number of submissions" in response to their call for theater plays, and that could perhaps be explained by the organization's decision to diverge from their usual show offerings. As they put it, "we encouraged people to pitch shows that might not be a standard or traditional arrangement so that they could have some advantage." The "advantage" here was the possibility of ensuring the organization had works to showcase that could permit some level of financial recompense in response to lost profit during the lockdowns. Similarly, Riley found that festivals that "normally wouldn't take anything that hadn't been already performed" had altered their stance and started accepting untried and brand-new creative works to accommodate the burgeoning demand by artists to showcase their work and to respond to the fact that COVID restrictions had made it difficult to showcase work prior to festival season. Harlow and Riley's creative organizations appeared to diverge from what others were doing with both Pat and Bailey claiming that their organizations were not interested in new material because they now had a backlog of shows to reschedule to fulfill pre-COVID-19 commitments, which perhaps contributed to the competition for venue spaces.

The expectation among many of those we interviewed was that Aotearoa New Zealand might be operating business as usual, but that this was certainly not the case for the performing arts sector. Their positions are reinforced by Wenley (2023), who contends that the cultural sector in Aotearoa New Zealand remains in crisis even 3 years on from the initial COVID outbreaks with theater organizations canceling their regular programming in response to shrinking audiences, waves of COVID, and practitioner burn-out. The loss of talent and spaces, coupled with COVID fatigue and funding crunches presented a difficulty for growing the performing arts again, even after Aotearoa New Zealand embraced relaxed restrictions.

Part of this reconfiguring of performing arts working conditions was navigating how to manage the potential spread of COVID-19 among workers and audiences. The expectation from the New Zealand Government that people with the virus remained home for 7 days was translated into a range of approaches and policies. Some performing arts organizations were still expecting their workers to limit contact with people outside of the shows because of the threat of COVID-19 impacting productions, while others were constantly evaluating COVID-19 policies to establish contingency plans for managing the spread of COVID19 in their teams. Among our participants, the issues and processes identified indicate how this placed cultural workers under additional pressure. Jordan outlined the challenges of cultural workers needing to be tested every show and navigating "people's understanding of what is social distancing, what you can and can't do, it's all confusing, especially the masks." In Reese's case, preparations for an upcoming show were hampered because "We're five weeks out from [show] and we haven't been able to get more than half the cast in the room at any one time. At least four cast members out of 20 are unwell with COVID." To avoid contracting COVID-19, Nicky would hire tour buses where musicians could sleep and live to keep bands separate from others as much as possible. Although these were the circumstances encountered in the backend of 2022, recent personal communication at the time of writing this article indicates that among bigger productions, cast and crew continue to face similar expectations and pressures to manage the risk of COVID-19 spreading despite the virus being endemic in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Another aspect of the COVID-19 "aftermath" is the slow return of audiences. Unlike performing arts workers who were keen to get back onto the stage, they observed that their audiences were not as eager to be back watching them. Blair stated that "there's still trepidation with wanting to be out in the world and being scared of the repercussions that can happen because of contact with people" a position echoed by Lee who felt that "our ticket sales are lower than normal" because audiences were reluctant to return to venues where large numbers of people tended to congregate. Harlow pointed out that you could not have a full theater when "you've had to halve

it" to accommodate social distancing restrictions. In fact, Frankie who works in marketing has noticed "Everyone is not selling tickets until the week of [a show] because people don't know if they can come" and that is "anxiety-inducing." These attitudes track with statistics released by Creative New Zealand (2021) that signal that attendance in the performing arts dropped to 68% in 2020 which is down 5% from the figures released in 2017. Similarly, a Ministry for Culture and Heritage (2021) found that 36% of those surveyed attributed their reluctance to return to performing arts shows to the continued societal presence of COVID-19. Field, Greenaway, and Wypych (2022) found that 27% of respondents continued to be worried about the influence of COVID-19 on creative work and had observed a decrease in "audience appetite" for creative offerings. According to the survey, 37% reported that interest in their creative work was "less than usual." Coupled with these statistics, our research lends support to Serow's (2021) expectation that COVID-19 would have a prolonged economic impact on the performing arts and suggests that people's hesitancy and in some cases, reluctance to return to cultural experiences is part of this dynamic.

Many of our participants also suggested that their experience with COVID-19 had led them to question whether they would need to consider another career path. They were unsure whether a degree of normality would return, suggesting that the concern expressed by musicians over the viability of live music during lockdown conditions (Musgrave, 2022) spilt over into post-pandemic conditions. COVID-19 has become a catalyst for a re-evaluation of their career in the performing arts, which we argue is evident in the way that the financial, emotional and psychological costs coexist with fewer silver linings and the need to transition to "techno-arts." Our findings align with the survey findings of Cosgrove (2021) who found that 17% of the 549 artists they surveyed had stopped their creative practice because of COVID-19. Furthermore, COVID-19 fostered circumstances in which other priorities needed to take precedence. As Hunter puts it, "my main priority was ensuring that my family was safe. It [life] was consumed by home-schooling and finding food."

CONCLUSIONS

Internationally, the strategy to manage COVID-19 adopted by Aotearoa New Zealand's government has been celebrated with "success" indicated by the proportionally low numbers of deaths and relative freedom in the country during various stages between 2019 and 2022 (Barrett & Poot, 2023). Nonetheless, echoing the experiences of disruption, uncertainty, and precarity facing cultural workers overseas (Brooks & Patel, 2022; Elstad et al., 2021; Haapakorpi et al., 2022; Spiro et al., 2021), our participants in Aotearoa New Zealand's performing arts also experienced financial pressures, lost motivation, and struggled with mental health. We propose that the similarity in themes that emerge in the accounts and stories reinforces the profound impact that COVID-19 had on those in the performing arts and reinforces the structural issues facing cultural workers. We do, however, acknowledge that the experiences of Aotearoa New Zealand performing artists are unique, in that the lockdowns and closures that occurred here do not exactly align with what was happening overseas. To this end, the conclusions we draw are national in focus, but we have made attempts, where possible, to expand on how our findings could have international value.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that more protections need to be afforded to cultural workers to ensure that their creative potential is met and the working conditions become manageable. It indicates how the arm's length support and New Zealand government's desire for the arts to be self-sustaining are clearly not working to ensure the continued success of the performing arts (Craik, 2007; Nairn & Guinibert, 2020): and that is without factoring in that some groups will be grappling with a socio-economic disadvantage that would and does deter diversity

in the arts (Eikhof, 2020). Our research, much like others writing on the value of an artist's wage or universal base income, advocates that Aotearoa New Zealand's government needs to consider measures to limit the financial insecurity felt by cultural workers who are perceived, according to de Peuter, Oakley, and Trusolino (2022) as essential workers for developing and maintaining culture and contributing to a country's economy. Perhaps then, the exodus of skilled and qualified people from the performing arts could be mitigated, especially because this is not the first crisis to have seen talent lost because of financial insecurity. Similar observations were made in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008 where, as Beirne et al. (2017, p. 217) argue, "These artists and communities were surviving rather than prospering. They were passionately frustrated rather than assuredly transformative, resigned to exploiting gaps and opportunities, with a resilience that was often difficult to sustain, and which took them on an emotional rollercoaster." The suggestion then is that the performing arts, both in Aotearoa New Zealand and globally, maintain structural inequalities, and during a pandemic, these are worsened. Our research highlights the urgent need to address these issues across the globe, focusing on improving working conditions, ensuring equitable pay, and resolving administrative challenges that hinder performing artists and their potential for sustained success, especially during the time of an international emergency.

Additionally, given our finding that cultural workers used COVID-19 restrictions as a way to re-evaluate their occupational sector, we suggest that it might be worthwhile for them to continue with these reflections and perhaps come together as an industry to call for government support, policy changes, and transformation of any unsustainable occupational practices. For example, in South Korea, Japan, and China, COVID-19 acted as a critical juncture for the intensification of discussion and policy creation in the cultural sector (Lee, Chau, & Terui, 2022). While this may not have led to tangible changes, it still created momentum toward a stronger focus on cultural policy, which is just as beneficial for the "cultural sustainability of society" (p. 160).

Our research, though focused on the experiences of performing artists in Aotearoa, New Zealand, highlights critical insights with global implications for the performing arts sector. A key finding from our study is that many artists reported heightened mental health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing a broader issue within the arts: the pervasive myth of the "tortured artist" (Alacovska & K€arreman, 2023, p. 961). This stereotype suggests that suffering and mental distress are inherent to creativity, often normalizing depression, anxiety, and burnout among performers. However, this is not just a national problem; it is a global issue affecting artists worldwide. The arts are often celebrated for their potential to enhance mental health and well-being for audiences (Trnka et al., 2021), yet there is insufficient focus on the well-being of the artists themselves. As Alacovska and K€arreman (2023) contend, such social imaginaries need to be broken down to improve the identity work of performers. Thus, global initiatives that challenge the tortured artist stereotype and advocate for supportive, protective measures that prioritize the mental health of artists are crucial to cultivate healthier, more empowering environments within the industry, ensuring that those behind the art are as valued and safeguarded as the art they create.

Based on our thematic analysis of qualitative interviews, we conclude that our participants experienced COVID-19 through engaging in (re)evaluations of the risks and benefits of their working conditions and life as a cultural worker. Participants indicated that lockdown and restrictions had financial, emotional, and psychological costs. This led some participants to seek alternative forms of employment and reassess the longevity of a career in the performing arts, while others utilized the wage subsidy to survive disruptions, which in turn, presented an opportunity to reflect on the viability of UBI. The learnings from the pandemic heighten the scholarly arguments from around the world for the universal base income to be a requirement for

the performing arts industry (Doustaly & Roy, 2022), with the likes of the arm's length approach governments such as those found in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, to name a few, needing to heed this call to protect these cultural workers.

Furthermore, we posit that the government could also be more proactive rather than reactionary to help sustain the sector in the long term. This would mean that cultural workers would be better protected in case such emergencies were to arise again. During the pandemic, the MoH implemented or aided 25 initiatives designed to support the arts (including performing arts), from maintaining creative spaces to cultural installation events (Manatu Taonga | Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2023). This funding has since closed, and yet, according to Beehive.govt.nz (2023), employment in the wider arts sector grew by 4.2% and the sector's GDP contributions increased by 10.6% on previous years, suggesting that such initiatives need to remain a mainstay rather than an emergency response, especially given potential fluctuations in the economy. These initiatives were clearly successful and worth ongoing consideration. Similar to such funding considerations, we agree with Long et al.'s (2022) assertion that further public interest communication is needed to reiterate that public venues must cater for the ongoing safety of attendees and place emphasis on the health value of reconnecting safely as COVID-19 remains an ongoing issue. This will perhaps address people's caution in coming to public venues even post-COVID-19 and also entice them to engage in performing arts events for their own mental health. Finally, although efforts are made to encourage artists to develop local content (see, for instance, the Creative Communities Scheme- Creative New Zealand, n.d.-b), the cultural cringe and general preference for overseas content among New Zealanders could perhaps be offset by increasing subsidies to attract audiences to locally produced performing arts shows.

The experience of adaptation to digital technologies also involved an assessment of the extent to which technologically mediated interaction could facilitate their creative process, with the continued digitization of content post-COVID-19 worth considering to strengthen community ties, but also, to ensure a repository of content that can be shared online in the event of other such national emergencies. Performing artists in both Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally should take heed of the value of having past performances available for consumption via new technologies such as streaming, as it could mean staying relevant and maintaining a presence in future situations where live performance is not possible. Our research also reaffirms the scholarly position that live performance can be experienced online and would afford cultural workers another means of connecting with their audiences (Auslander, 2022).

Our research suggests that, while arts organizations have begun to adapt by offering online content and streaming productions to increase accessibility, there is a global need for more targeted training, guidance, and exploration into using technology effectively to connect performing artists with their audiences. This approach can significantly contribute to the sustainability and profitability of the performing arts. Universities worldwide should incorporate the impact of technology on the performing arts into their curricula, equipping future performers with the skills to create and market their work. This is especially crucial as many will become creative entrepreneurs, responsible for managing and growing their own brands. Additionally, emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and holographic concerts present new opportunities to expand live performance (Matthews & Nairn, 2023). Embracing and understanding the role of technology in the arts can help reduce stigmas around its use in live performance, allowing artists to capitalize on these innovations more effectively.

Finally, within the "aftermath" produced by COVID-19, an understanding of what constitutes "normal," and the expectations placed on workers within a "new normal" is threaded throughout their narratives. While we do not wish to make generalizations to all of those in the performing arts or wider creative industries of Aotearoa New Zealand, our research suggests the value of

exploring the impact through lived experiences and the need for future research on the long-term implications of COVID-19 for the performing arts. Additionally, our research was comprised of 13 men, 14 women, and 5 non-binary (gender fluid) participants, and while we did not ask for the ethnic orientation of any of our participants, 75% were whitepassing. Unlike Trnka et al. (2021), we did not find any evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic unduly disadvantaged women or ethnic minorities. To this end, further research should consider the role gender and ethnicity have in shaping the experiences of performing artists, especially during national emergencies such as a global pandemic.

Overall, our analysis highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic left scars and altered the participants' relationship with the performing arts. For some, it reminded them of how valuable it was to their identities to be working in the sector, but for others, the pandemic was a wake-up call about the need to have greater financial stability. At the very least, their perspectives made clear that there needs to be a heightened awareness of the fragility of the performing arts as they lack protection and security.

FUNDING

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or notfor-profit sectors.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have declared no conflict of interest.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research received ethics approval from AUTEC in March 2022 (reference no. 22/90) and informed consent was obtained from all study participants.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.
The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

REFERENCES

Adams, W.C. (2015). Conducting semi-structured interviews. In H.P. Hatry, K.E. Newcomer, & J.S. Wholey (Eds.), Handbook of practical program evaluation (pp. 492–505). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons.

Alacovska, A., & K€arreman, D. (2023). Tormented selves: The social imaginary of the tortured artist and the identity work of creative workers. Organization Studies, 44(6), 961–985; doi: 10.1177/01708406221089594.

Andriopoulos, C., & Gotsi, M. (2001). Living the corporate identity: Case studies from the creative industries. Corporate Reputation Review, 4(2), 144–154; doi: 10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540139.

Auslander, P. (2022). Liveness: Performance in a mediatized culture. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Banks, M., & O'Connor, J. (2021). 'A plague upon your howling': Art and culture in the viral emergency. Cultural Trends, 30(1), 3–18; doi: 10.1080/09548963.2020.1827931.

Barrett, P., & Poot, J. (2023). Islands, remoteness and effective policy making: Aotearoa New Zealand during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regional Science Policy & Practice, 15(3), 682–705.

Beehive.govt.nz. (2020). Support for arts and music sector recovery. Available from: https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/supportarts-and-music-sector-recovery [last accessed 23 August, 2024].

Beehive.govt.nz. (2023). Govt investment in arts delivers strong economic results. Available from: https://www.beehive.govt.nz/ release/govt-investment-arts-delivers-strong-economic-results [last accessed 23 August, 2024].

Beirne, M., Jennings, M., & Knight, S. (2017). Autonomy and resilience in cultural work: Looking beyond the 'creative industries'. International Journal for Cultural Research, 21(2), 204–221; doi: 10.1080/14797585.2016.1275311.

Bilton, C. (2007). Management and creativity: From creative industries to creative management. Malden, MA: Open University Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101; doi: 10. 1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Brooks, G.S., & Daniluk, J.C. (1998). Creative labors: The lives and careers of women artists. The Career Development Quarterly, 46, 216–261; doi: 10.1002/j.2161-0045.1998.tb00699.x.

Brooks, S. (2021). Not just a bump in the road: Performing artists on lockdown's cruel blows. The Spinoff. Available from: https:// thespinoff.co.nz/society/04-03-2021/not-just-a-bump-in-the-road-performing-artists-on-lockdowns-cruel-blows.

Brooks, S.K., & Patel, S.S. (2022). Challenges and opportunities experienced by performing artists during COVID-19 lockdown: Scoping review. Social Sciences & Humanities Open, 6(1), 100297; doi: 10.1016/j.ssaho.2022.100297.

Cohen, S., & Ginsborg, J. (2021). The experiences of mid-career and seasoned orchestral musicians in the UK during the first COVID-19 lockdown. Frontiers in Psychology, 12, 1–16; doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.645967.

Comunian, R., & England, L. (2020). Creative and cultural work without filters: Covid-19 and exposed precarity in the creative economy. Cultural Trends, 29(2), 112–128; doi: 10.1080/09548963.2020.1770577.

Cosgrave, E. (2021). Reconstructing dancer identities: Implications of a global pandemic for freelance contemporary dancers in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Dance Articulated Special Issue: (re)Imagining Dance in the age of Distance, 7, 66–82; doi: 10.5324/da. v7i1.4227.

Cosgrove, J. (2021). What we learned about independent artists this lockdown. The Spinoff. Available from: https://thespinoff.co.nz/ society/06-12-2021/what-we-learned-about-independent-artists-this-lockdown [last accessed July 19, 2024].

Craik, J. (2007). Re-visioning arts and cultural policy: Current impasses and future directions. Canberra: ANU Press.

Creative New Zealand. (2021). Latest research shows New Zealanders more positive than ever about vital role the arts play in our lives, despite COVID-19. Available from: https://creativenz.govt.nz/news-and-blog/2022/06/15/02/26/31/latest-research-shows-newzealanders-more-positive-than-ever-about-vital-role-the-arts-play-in-our-lives-despite-covid-19.

Creative New Zealand. (n.d.-a). New Zealand and the Arts: Attitudes, attendance and participation. Available from: https://www. creativenz.govt.nz/assets/ckeditor/attachments/2332/nzarts_auckland_final.pdf.

Creative New Zealand. (n.d.-b). Creative Communities Scheme (CCS). Available from: https://creativenz.govt.nz/funding-andsupport/all-opportunities/creative-communities-scheme [last accessed 23 August, 2024].

Davies, D. (2009). Works and performances in the performing arts. Philosophy Compass, 4(5), 744–755; doi: 10.1111/j.1747-9991. 2009.00235.x.

de Peuter, G., Oakley, K., & Trusolino, M. (2022). The pandemic politics of cultural work: Collective responses to the COVID-19 crisis. International Journal of Cultural Policy, 29(3), 377-392. doi: 10.1080/10286632.2022.2064459.

Dixon, S. (2015). Digital performance: A history of new media in theatre, dance, performance art, and installation. London: MIT Press.

Doustaly, C., & Roy, V. (2022). A comparative analysis of the economic sustainability of cultural work in the UK since the COVID-19 pandemic and examination of universal basic income as a solution for cultural workers. Journal of Risk and Financial Management, 15, 1–17; doi: 10.3390/jrfm15050196.

Eikhof, D.R. (2020). COVID-19, inclusion and workforce diversity in the cultural economy: What now, what next? Cultural Trends, 29(3), 234–250; doi: 10.1080/09548963.2020.1802202.

Elstad, B., Jansson, D., & Doving, E. (2021). The COVID-19 pandemic and cultural workers: Fight, flight or freeze in lockdown? In E. Salvador, T. Navarrete, & A. Srakar (Eds.), Cultural industries and the covid-19 pandemic: A European focus (pp. 83–97). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Field, A., Greenaway, S., & Wypych, A. (2022). State of the arts survey, Aotearoa, February-March 2022: Report on survey findings. Dovetail. Available from: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/66302a2be2c53361e9bd5ceb/t/665e7a89e8d97d05b843a400/ 1717467786910/Q3-Feb-March-2022-Aotearoa-State-of-the-Arts-Report..pdf [last accessed 19 July, 2024].

Flore, J., Hendry, N.A., & Gaylor, A. (2023). Creative arts workers during the Covid-19 pandemic: Social imaginaries in lockdown. Journal of Sociology, 59(1), 197–214; doi: 10.1177/14407833211036757.

Haapakorpi, A., Leinonen, M., & Otonkotpi-Lehtoranta, K. (2022). Time, space and agency in the Finnish cultural sector at the time of COVID-19. Challenges, 13(1), 1–16; doi: 10.3390/challe13010004.

Hesmonhalgh, D., & Baker, S. (2010). A very complicated version of freedom: Conditions and experiences of creative labour in three cultural industries. Poetics, 38, 4–20; doi: 10.1016/j.poetic.2009.10.001.

History of the COVID-19 Alert System. (n.d.). Unite against covid-19. Available from: https://covid19.govt.nz/about-our-covid-19response/history-of-the-covid-19-alert-system/.

History of the COVID-19 Protection Framework (traffic lights). (n.d.). United against covid-19. Available from: https://covid19. govt.nz/about-our-covid-19-response/history-of-the-covid-19-protection-framework-traffic-lights/.

Horrocks, R. (2016). The arts in New Zealand: A changing field of forces. New Zealand Sociology Journal, 31(7), 132–145.

Hunter, L.B. (2019). ‘We are not making a movie’: Constituting theatre in live broadcast. Theatre Topics, 29(1), 15–27; doi: 10. 1353/tt.2019.0002.

Hylland, O.M. (2022). Tales of temporary disruption: Digital adaptations in the first 100 days of the cultural Covid lockdown. Poetics, 90, 101602; doi: 10.1016/j.poetic.2021.101602.

Alhojailan, M. I. (2012). Thematic analysis: A critical review of its processes and evaluation. West East Journal of Social Sciences, 1 (1), 39–47.

Jacobs, R., Finneran, M., & D'Acosta, T.Q. (2022). Dancing toward the light in the dark: COVID-19 changes and reflections on normal from Australia, Ireland and Mexico. Arts Education Policy Review, 123(1), 29–38; doi: 10.1080/10632913.2020.1844836.

Lee, H.-K., Chau, K.L.-F., & Terui, T. (2022). The Covid-19 crisis and 'critical juncture' in cultural policy: A comparative analysis of cultural policy responses in South Korea, Japan and China. International Journal of Cultural Policy, 28(2), 145–165; doi: 10. 1080/10286632.2021.1938561.

Lindgreen, M., & Packendorff, J. (2007). Performing arts and the art of performing- On co-construction of project work and professional identities in theatres. International Journal of Project Management, 24(4), 354–364; doi: 10.1016/j.ijproman.2007.01. 005.

Long, N.J., Appleton, N.S., Davies, S.G., Deckert, A., Fehoko, E., Holroyd, E., ... & Tunufa'I, L. (2022). Pathways and obstacles to social recovery following the elimination of SARS-CoV-2 from Aotearoa New Zealand: A qualitative cross-sectional study. Journal of Public Health, 44(4), e548–e556.

Lynch, K. (2021). Covid-19: New Zealand's elimination strategy explained. Available from: https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/ explained/126445683/covid19-new-zealands-elimination-strategy-explained.

Manatu Taonga | Ministry for Culture and Heritage. (2023). Arts and culture COVID recovery programme. Available from: https:// www.mch.govt.nz/our-work/apply-funding/arts-and-culture-covid-recovery-programme-funds#closed-funds [last accessed 23 August, 2024].

Matthews, J., & Nairn, A. (2023). Holographic ABBA: Examining fan responses to ABBA's virtual 'live' concert. Popular Music and Society, 46(3), 282–303; doi: 10.1080/03007766.2023.2208048.

McCarthy, K.F., Brooks, A., Lowell, J., & Zakaras, L. (2001). The performing arts in a new era. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

Ministry for Culture & Heritage. (2021). New Zealander's cultural participation in 2020 and future participation in a post-COVID environment. Available from: https://www.mch.govt.nz/publications/new-zealanders-cultural-participation-2020-and-futureparticipation-post-covid.

Musgrave, G. (2022). Losing work, losing purpose: Representations of musicians' mental health in the time of COVID-19. In G. Morrow (Ed.), Rethinking the music business (pp. 11–28). Cham: Springer.

Nairn, A., & Guinibert, M. (2020). A dance of excellence, accessibility, money and national identity. A discourse analysis of the Royal New Zealand Ballet's website. International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Marketing, 25(3), 1–12; doi: 10.1002/ nvsm.1671.

Nairn, A., & Gumbley, S. (2018). Creative entrepreneurialism: The use of social media as a promotional tool for fiction writers. International Journal of Cultural and Creative Industries, 5(2), 26–43.

Pickles, K. (2011). Transnational history and cultural cringe: Some issues for consideration in New Zealand, Australia and Canada. History Compass, 9(9), 657–673.

Pulignano, V., Domecka, M., Muszynski, K., Vermeerbergen, L., & Riemann, M.L. (2021). Creative labour in the era of COVID-19: The case of freelancers. Brussels: European Trade Union Institute. https://www.etui.org/publications/creative-labour-era-covid19.

Rodriguez-Camacho, J.A., Rey-Biel, P., Young, J.C., & Sanchez, M.M.R. (2021). Artists in the COVID-19 pandemic: Use of lockdown time, skill development, and audience perceptions in Colombia and Spain. In E. Salvador, T. Navarrete, & A. Srakar (Eds.), Cultural industries and the covid-19 pandemic: A European focus (pp. 141–173). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Roulston, K., & Choi, M. (2018). Qualitative analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), The SAGE handbook of qualitative analysis data collection (pp. 233–249). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Rowlands, L., & Handy, J. (2012). An addictive environment: New Zealand film production workers' subjective experiences of project-based labour. Human Relations, 65(5), 657–680; doi: 10.1177/0018726711431494.

Theatre Scenes. (n.d.). Aotearoa New Zealand Theatre and Covid-19: A timeline. Available from: https://www.theatrescenes.co.nz/ timeline/.

Schulze, D. (2017). Authenticity in contemporary theatre and performance: Make it real. London: Bloomsbury.

Serow, D. (2021). For what it's worth. Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales, 154(481/482), 91–98.

Shah, N., & Banker, A. (2020). Performing artists in the time of COVID-19. Liberal Studies, 5(2), 27–34.

Skills Active Workforce Scan. (2020). Performing arts. Available from: https://www.skillsactive.org.nz/assets/0-ALL-DOCS/Researchand-projects/2020-Scan/7c3c9f021f/Performing-Arts_Workforce-Scan-2020-FINAL.pdf.

Spiro, N., Perkins, R., Kaye, S., Tymoszuk, U., Mason-Bertrand, A., Cossette, I., … & Willamon, A. (2021). The effects of COVID19 lockdown 1.0 on working patterns, income, and wellbeing among performing arts professional in the United Kingdom (April–June 2020). Frontiers in Psychology, 11, 1–17; doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.594086.

Timeline: How the new coronavirus spread. (2020). Aljazerra. Available from: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/31/timelinehow-the-new-coronavirus-spread [Accessed 23 May 2020].

Trnka, S., Long, N.J., Aikman, P.J., Appleton, N.S., Davies, S.G., Deckert, A., … & Tunufa'I, L. (2021). Negotiating risks and responsibilities during lockdown: Ethical reasoning and affective experience in Aotearoa New Zealand. Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand, 51(1), 55–74; doi: 10.1080/03036758.2020.1865417.

Volkerling, M. (1996). Deconstructing the difference-engine: A theory of cultural policy. International Journal of Cultural Policy, 2 (2), 189–212.

Warnecke, L. (2020). Art and performance during the time of COVID-19 lockdown. Agenda, 34(3), 145–147; doi: 10.1080/ 10130950.2020.1783889.

Webb, A. (2021). Digitalising live performance: A pathway for post-pandemic recovery in the performing arts. In C. Larsen, J. Kipper, A. Schmid, & C. Panzau (Eds.), Transformations of regional and local labour markets across Europe in pandemic and post-pandemic times (pp. 333–356). Baden- Baden: Rainer Hampp Verlag.

Wenley, J. (2023). We need to break the cycle of crisis in Aotearoa New Zealand's arts and culture. It starts with proper funding. The Conversation. Available from: https://theconversation.com/we-need-to-break-the-cycle-of-crisis-in-aotearoa-new-zealandsarts-and-culture-it-starts-with-proper-funding-199772 [last accessed July 19, 2024].

Yuki, K., Fujogi, M., & Koutsogiannaki, S. (2020). COVID-19 pathophysiology: A review. Clinical Immunology, 215, 108427; doi: 10.1016/j.clim.2020.108427.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the hard work of our research assistant Carmel Cedro. Without her commitment to the project, we would have struggled to complete this research. We would also like to thank all of our interviewees who took the time out of their busy schedules to share their

thoughts and feelings on the state of Aotearoa New Zealand's performing arts sector. We are truly grateful for your candor.

APPENDIX TIMELINE OF COVID-19 IMPACTS IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Date	Year	AKL level	Regional level	Event	Long description
28 Feb	2020			First Case	First case of COVID-19 reported in Aotearoa New Zealand
19 Mar				Indoor Ban	Indoor gatherings of over 100 people banned
19 Mar				Borders closed	Borders closed to all non-residents and NZ citizens
20 Mar				Arts Package	Creative New Zealand announces initial NZD$4.5 million emergency response package
25 Mar		LEVEL 4	LEVEL 4	Lockdown Starts	National lockdown (the whole country moves to LEVEL 4 and self-isolation)
13 May		LEVEL 2	LEVEL 2	Arts Return	New Zealand moves to Alert LEVEL 2 – some arts can return with social distancing encouraged
28 May				Cultural Funding	New Zealand Government announce the Cultural Recovery Package that will see an injection of NZD$175 million into the arts
8 Jun				COVID Free	No COVID-19 cases in New Zealand
19 Jun				Theater Resumes	Live Theater resumes
11 Aug		LEVEL 3	LEVEL 2	Auckland Level 3	4 new cases of COVID in community. Auckland moves to alert LEVEL 3, rest of country in alert LEVEL 2
30 Aug		LEVEL 2	LEVEL 2	Auckland Aligns	Auckland moves to alert LEVEL 2; aligned with the rest of the country
21 Sep			LEVEL 1	NZ Minus Auckland Level 1	All of the country except Auckland move to LEVEL 1
7 Oct				COVID Free Again	New Zealand is COVID free
14 Feb	2021	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 2	Auckland Level 3 Again	Auckland moves to Level 3 when 3 new cases of COVID are reported. Rest of the country to LEVEL 2
22 Feb		LEVEL 1	LEVEL 1	Unified Level 1	All of New Zealand is now at alert LEVEL 1
27 Feb		Fluctuate	Fluctuate	Auckland Fluctuates	Auckland moves in and out of levels in response to perceived community spread
12 Mar		LEVEL 1	LEVEL 1	Auckland Returns Level 1	Auckland returns to LEVEL 1
17 Aug		LEVEL 4	LEVEL 4	Delta Lockdown	Arrival of Delta variant – whole of New Zealand moves into lockdown

21 Sep		LEVEL 3	LEVEL 2	Auckland to Level 3	Fluctuating alert levels for the rest of the country. Auckland moves from Level 4 to LEVEL 3
29 Sep				Delta Funding	Government injects money into the sector through the Delta Relief Fund
22 Oct				Vaccination Push	COVID vaccines are encouraged to allow for the country to reduce restrictions
2 Dec		ORANGE	ORANGE	Traffic Light Orange	New Zealand introduces traffic light system, Country moves to traffic level orange. Restricted size of performances
16 Dec	2022			Omicron Detected	Omicron arrives in New Zealand
23 Jan	2022	RED	RED	Red Level Restrictions	Country moves to RED LEVEL in traffic light settings. No performing arts
2 Feb	2022			Arts Sector Boost	Additional NZD$121 million injected into the arts sector by New Zealand Government
13 Apr	2022	ORANGE	ORANGE	Performances Resume	New Zealand moves to ORANGE LEVEL and there are no limits on capacity at venues. Performances begin again
12 Sep	2022			Restrictions End	All restrictions are abolished (no masks required) and the traffic light system ends