

Marika Pratley

The biggest shock has probably been not being able to be in the physical presence of other artists and humans - whether it's in an art gallery opening or a concert. I think over all there have been ebbs and flows adapting to change. I am feeling good today but a day or two I was really struggling with the loneliness. I am drawing on a lot of tools I have learned from my struggles with PTSD and depression which have proved to be useful with the unpredictability and adapting to sudden change.

I feel like in some ways coming back to the basics has been good for my focus and I'm learning to re-engage with my fundamental needs as a human.

I think a lot of working class/beneficiary artists struggle sometimes with the basics because they often have to work multiple jobs or it becomes overwhelming sometimes keeping up with what others are doing while also maintaining a practice.

I am trying to practice mindfulness and presence in this crisis and to learn how in crisis sometimes an opportunity arises ie. one door might close but two more will open.

I also feel lucky as an artist that I have something creative I can focus on in isolation. Many people don't have that kind of outlet or might not have awareness of expression and I personally feel art and music is essential to mental and spiritual health.

I can't speak for everyone but the issue for rent and quality housing is an epidemic in itself. Property companies like Quinovic and particularly the role of the property manager add to this stress as they basically have installed it to be a natural phenomena to have rent raised every year for no reason. I am volunteering on the action station housing campaign at the moment dealing with those issues which I would say impact majority of New Zealanders - not just artists.

As I was on a benefit already i have been scraping by for some time as I'm not well enough to work in a conventional job with my current health situation. I think for musicians who are financially dependent off live performance this must be very challenging shock.

Not only are we in lockdown but the reality is - long term we will not be able to allow for gatherings/performances.

We must also be mindful that as we are entering a depression people who may have had money for concerts or even music lessons are not going to necessarily have that disposable income anymore. Even busking is unsafe under the pandemic.

It also raises to the forefront the value of art and when it is legitimised as being worthy of economic investment or acknowledgement. Neoliberal infrastructures which have normalised a state of ambiguity as to whether music or art is worth investing in don't help.

Many musicians are social and perform in bands or ensembles so suddenly having no routine of rehearsals and the energy which comes with collaboration must be a struggle for some too.

As a freelancer I play in at least 5 or 6 ensembles and I definitely miss performing and learning new music.

In my internal music space I am either in my bedroom making music or listening to artists. I live between the town belt and Oriental Bay so I'm lucky that when I go on a walk I can hear the birds and sounds of nature. One positive I have noticed is the birds coming to the forefront of the soundscape and that in some ways there is a reduction in pressure to be at lots of things at once.

I am really enjoying the lack of noise pollution from cars and traffic. I read a few months ago that the native bat in Waikato had been dwindling in numbers due to noise and light pollution and I am curious as to whether or not this lockdown has made a difference for that animal.

Aside from there being more bird calls in Mount Victoria the variety and diversity has increased. I am not sure if that's because lack of noise pollution means they can hear vast distances and travel further to each other. Anyway it's a beautiful thing. I heard the dawn chorus outside my room the other day from the first bird. I might try to record a sound walk sometime but maybe in the evening when less people are walking their dogs.

Going for a walk and hearing the birds makes me feel very grounded and connected especially when I can't see my friends or family in person at the moment. It's very essential to my mental health in the lockdown.

One of the most important lessons from this is to think about time, presence and the importance of the Now. Because of the nature of how I experience PTSD, which often has a suddenly disruptive impact on my sense of self identity, narrative and how I may plan for the future, I feel more prepared for this situation than others, as I'm used to constantly having to adapt.

When the future is unpredictable or stressful I find focusing on the present and slowing down helpful i.e. only thinking for today or even reducing to the minute or second of where I am in that point of time.

I find improvisation very useful for this too. It's a reminder of trusting our instincts, listening to our instincts, letting things go without fear of consequence, and always building on the moment before. This is against our instinct in a crisis which is often to hold on to control and desires to micro-manage or hold onto what is familiar.

I also want new Zealanders to have some perspective. We are living under a government which takes public health and science seriously and has allowed this to prioritise over short term concepts of conspicuous consumption.

On a global level, we make food locally, are in a less dense population which will help reduce the risk and rate of infection and will give us an advantage of managing the best we can with the resources we got. As long as we are sensible and cooperate we will manage and be creative to adapt to this and likely come out stronger and more resilient than we anticipated.

I strongly recommend people think of the sloth- which only climbs down a tree once a week to do it's essential pooh - risking it's life (just like how we only go to the supermarket once a week to hunt and gather our groceries). People usually laugh at sloths but they survive in the Amazon amongst some of the most poisonous and deadly predators, while literally spending all day hugging trees and eating snacks and nap time.

This is how they got through evolution, doing the essentials and prioritising self care and needs.

We will get through this through cooperation and compassion, and being kind is not just to others but remember to be kind to ourselves.