

WHY MUSIC MATTERS IN OUR PROFESSIONAL SPACE DURING COVID-19

By Samantha Tran

As we enter the twelfth week of the shelter-in-place order, we are all looking for peace in chaos, camaraderie in isolation, and productivity in malaise. From unconventional work-from-home practices to the ever-increasing screen time, lack-of-childcare complications to communal workspaces, stress abounds in ways we likely have never experienced in our lives. So what can we do to cope? Or better yet, what can we do to help ourselves maintain a semblance of normalcy during the abnormal? Surprisingly for some and needless to say for others, we have turned to music to provide us with a sense of control, comfort, and solace in the blurring between our private and professional lives.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, stress was already one of the well-established hazards of being a lawyer. Deadlines, changing laws, business pressures, and law school debt are just a few of the reasons that make the practice of law one of the most stressful professions. A 2016 study conducted by the [ABA Commission on Lawyers Assistance Programs](#) and [Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation](#) found that 28 percent of attorneys suffer from depression and 19 percent from severe anxiety, a disproportionate amount compared to the general populace. Additionally, COVID-19 presents new supplementary stress due to fear of looming infection and drastic effects on the economy. With heightened stress levels, and fewer means available to de-stress such as working out or grabbing a drink, music provides a unique outlet that is still obtainable within our own

homes. Studies have shown that listening to music has been associated with the decrease of cortisol, the “fight or flight” hormone released when we are under duress. An excess of cortisol can result in weight gain, mood swings, headaches, extreme fatigue and a number of other side effects that negatively affect health and productivity. Means of regulating cortisol include physical exercise, meditation and laughter, all of which are more readily achievable through music. By controlling our cortisol levels, music can help us maintain healthy stress levels in uncertain times.

Another benefit of music is boundaries. While some of us are lucky enough to have work-dedicated spaces, many of us are learning to work in communal spaces dissimilar to a traditional office with a closed door for the first time. Children, roommates and partners are the new constant and unfortunately, affect our ability to work and concentrate. People we normally rush home to at the end of the day are now not unwelcome but an obstacle to completing work. Music can provide ambient noise to partially drown out distractions and inoffensively signal to others that you are busy. Be it a living room, kitchen table or other converted space, music is a tactful tool to create necessary boundaries to foster productivity and maintain healthy relationships with those that we love and share spaces with.

Across the world, we have turned to music in our time of need. Viral videos of citizens singing on balconies in [Italy](#), six-feet apart block parties blasting songs of hope onto the streets of

Oakland, household names creating at-home musical experiences—music creates a sense of community within isolation.

Ultimately, this pandemic has shown us the utmost importance of our health and the health of others; we struggle apart so we can be together in the future. Music helps bridge the gap until we meet again.

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