

Data Analysis

Bofan Ma - RNCM PRiSM

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Introduction

I am incredibly grateful for being involved in NMC's Big Lockdown Music Survey project. As a new music practitioner with a main interest in subjectivity-driven musical experimentation, it has been an invaluable opportunity to research and identify patterns and similarities amongst diverse musical approaches to experience, navigate, and interpret the peculiarities of a locked down England. And it is always good to be reminded – now with solid data evidence – that our personal resilience and willingness to engage in music-making are the main catalysts for creating meaningful and captivating work, regardless of any physical and technical constraints out there.

Bofan Ma
RNCM PRISM

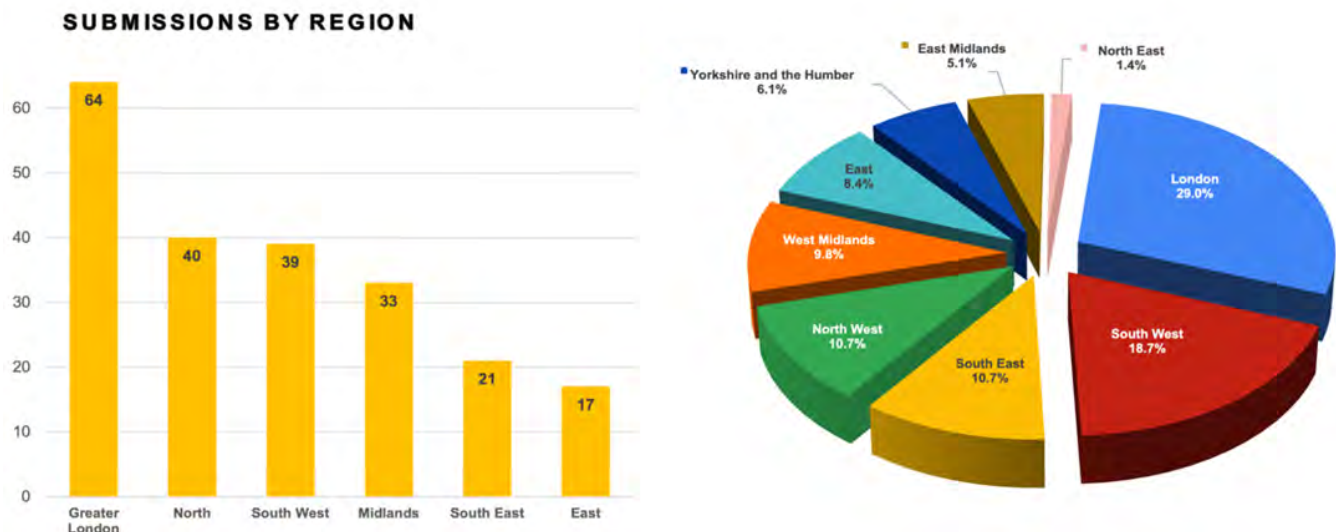
An Emerging Bigger Picture

As a crucial part of the project, we collectively designed a rather extensive *About You* questionnaire. It was deployed in the submission process to gather both quantitative and qualitative data on the demographics of music creators interested to be involved, as well as on the background stories of the music they would like to share with us and with a wider public.

Based on the 214 submitted responses from all over the country, we outline some highlights as charted below.

SUBMISSIONS

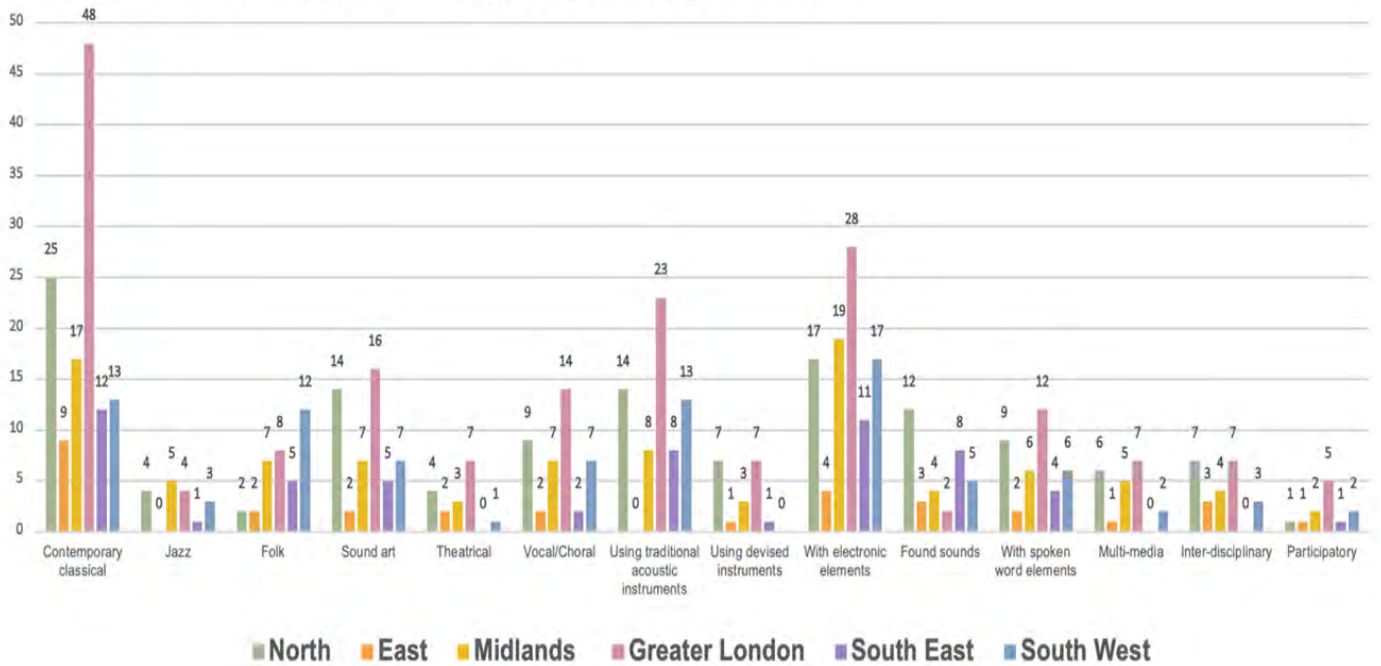
1) 71% of the applicants made their submissions from areas outside Greater London, with more than 50% of the submitted music being created in the South West, the North, and the Midlands.



2) A great number of the submitted recordings featured the use of electronic elements on top of traditional acoustic instruments. And almost 70% of the submitted recordings are assigned at least two keywords, and have hybrid stylistic features.

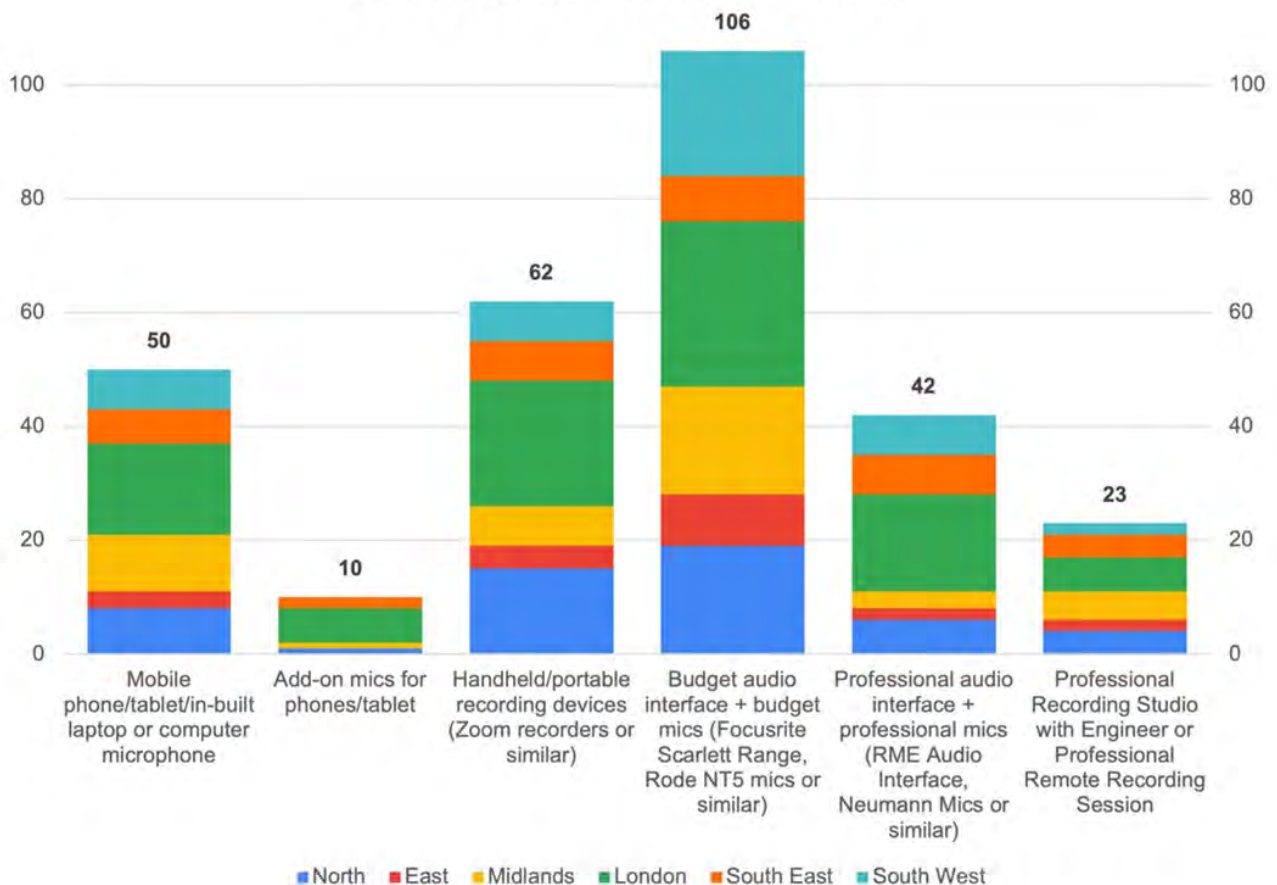
SUBMISSIONS BY 'GENRES' / DESCRIPTIVE KEYWORDS

(each applicant was invited to self-describe the music submitted using any or any combinations of the keywords listed)



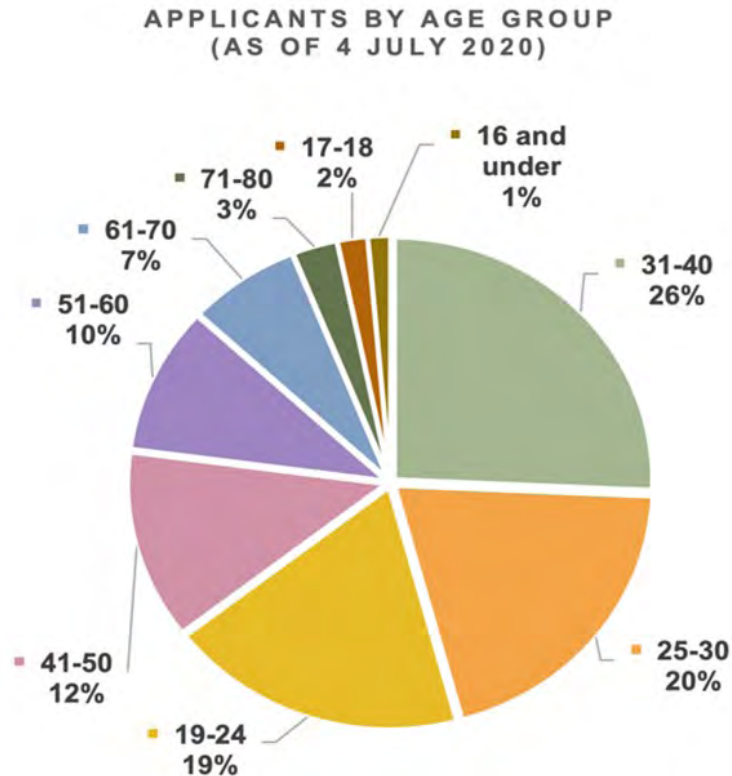
3) The majority of submitted recordings were created using portable and accessible devices or a budget home studio set-up (e.g. entry level microphones and audio interfaces, handheld recorders, mobile phones either with or without add-on accessories).

RECORDING DEVICES USED

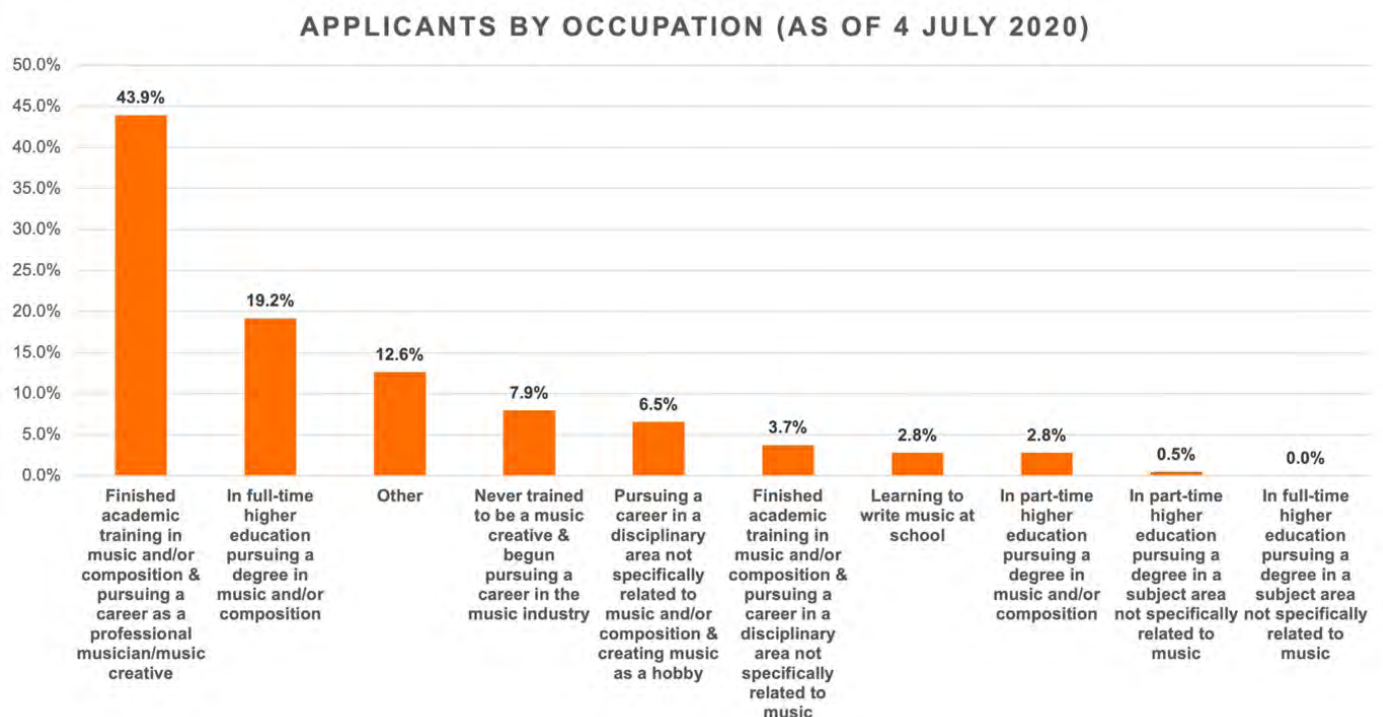


APPLICANTS DEMOGRAPHICS

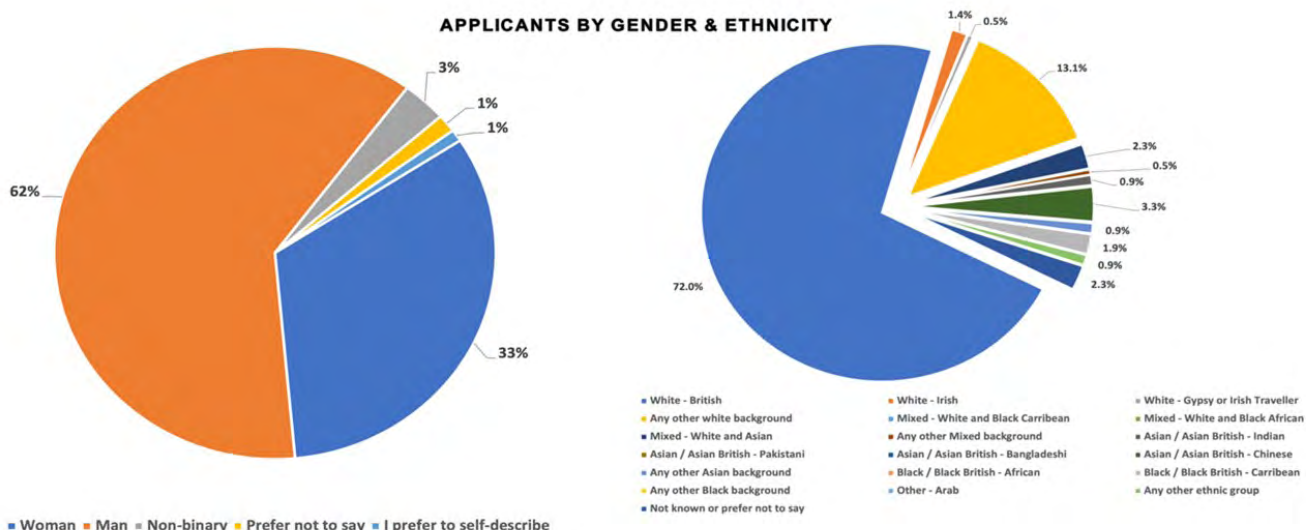
1) 42% of the applicants were under 30 (as of 4 July 2020).



2) Out of all applicants, more than 30% were trained, or being trained, or working professionally in disciplinary areas not specifically related to music and/or musical composition (as of 4 July 2020).



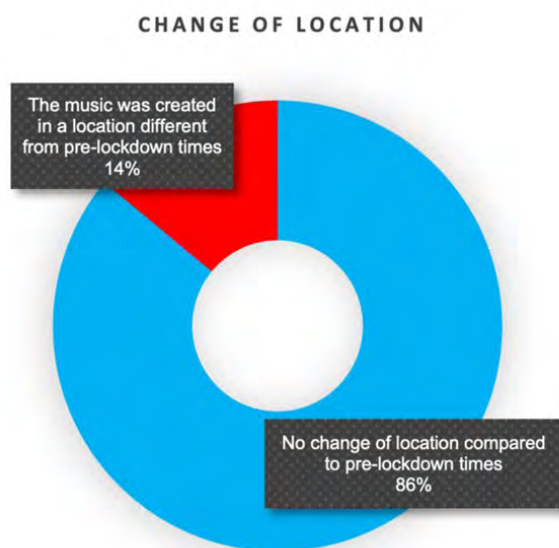
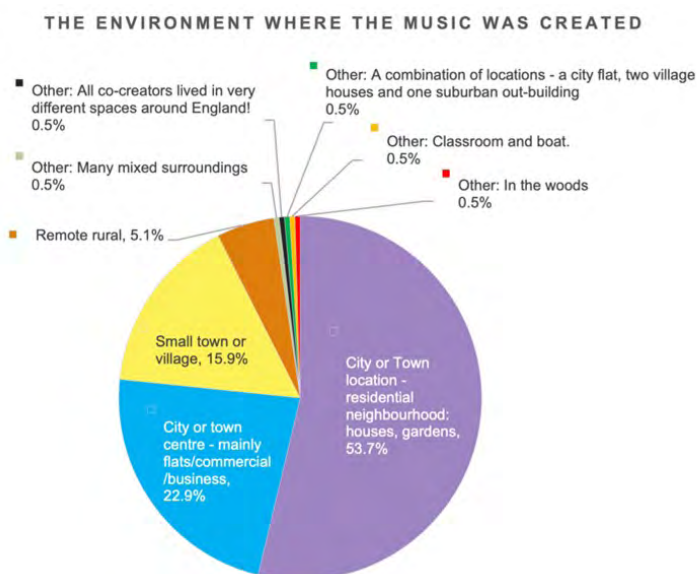
3) Out of all applicants, 33% self-identify as women, 3% as non-binary, and 23% as of a minority ethnic group.



ENVIRONMENT AND CONTEXT OF CREATION

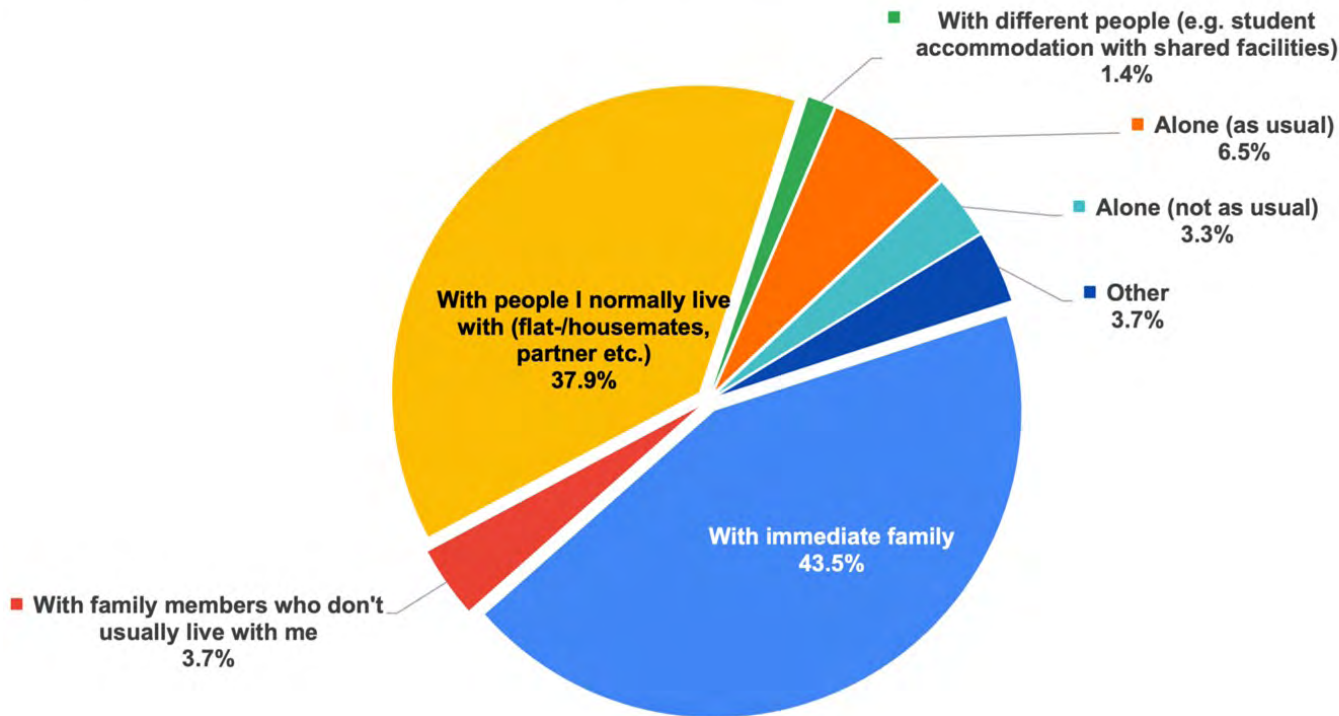
1) Over 20% of the submitted music was created in places outside major cities and towns in England, with more than 2% being created across many different locations, mostly due to collaborating remotely with other artists.

2) 14% of the applicants relocated during the lockdown period, resulting in their submitted music being created in places different from where they would normally make music pre-lockdown.



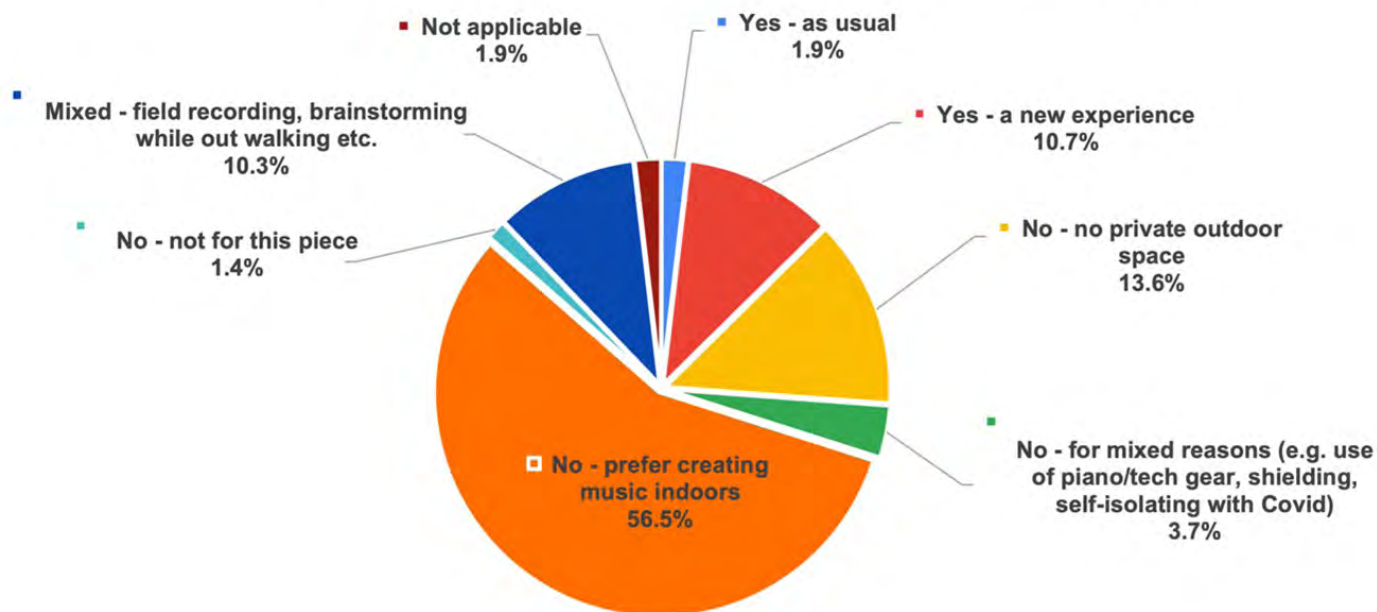
3) 3.3% of the applicants had to live alone unexpectedly when creating their submitted music, and as many as 7% of the applicants were living with people whom they do not normally share accommodation with, especially around that time of the year.

LIVING ALONE, OR WITH OTHER PEOPLE WHEN CREATING THE MUSIC

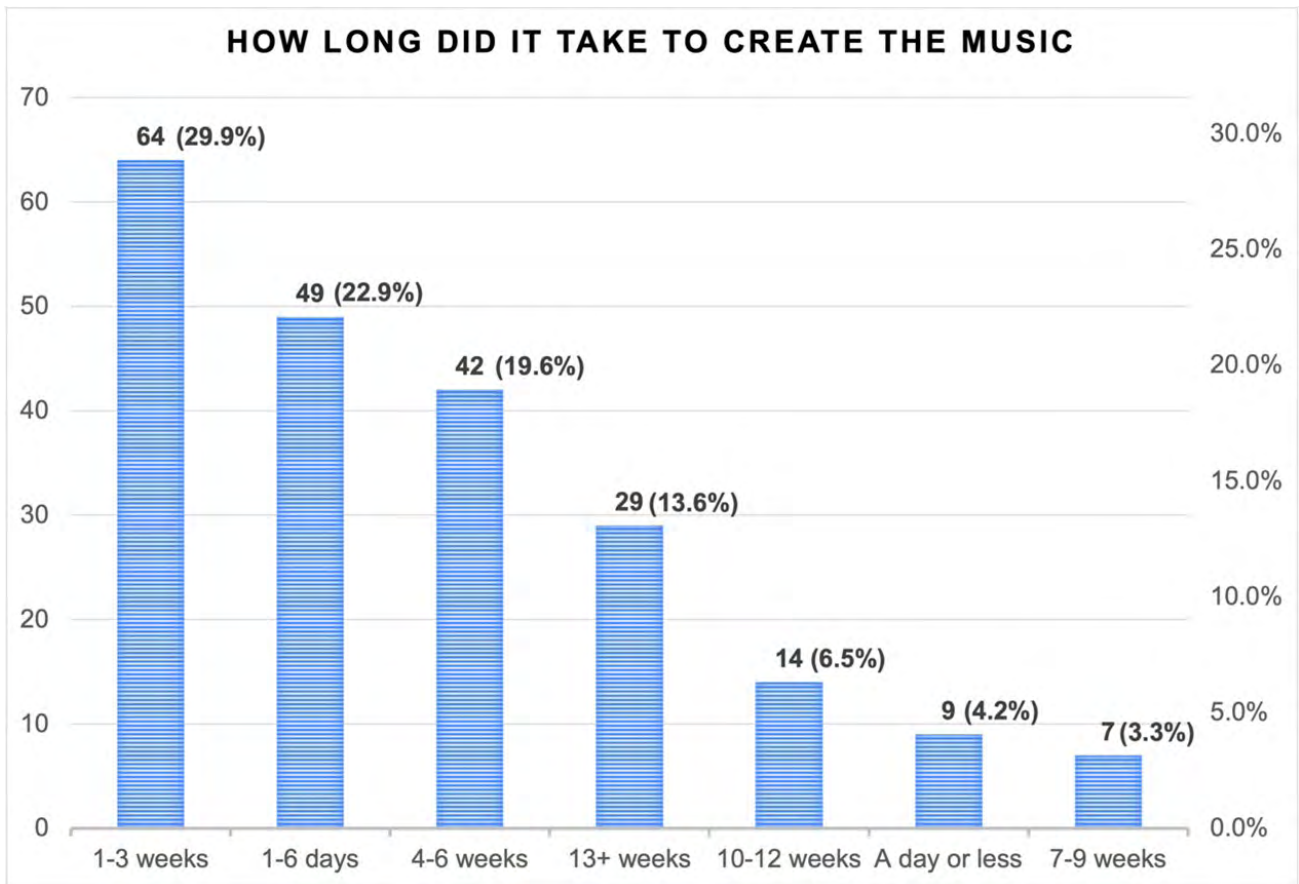


4) Over 20% of the applicants worked in an outdoor environment – either partially or mostly – when creating their submitted music, with over 10% acknowledging that it was a new experience for them.

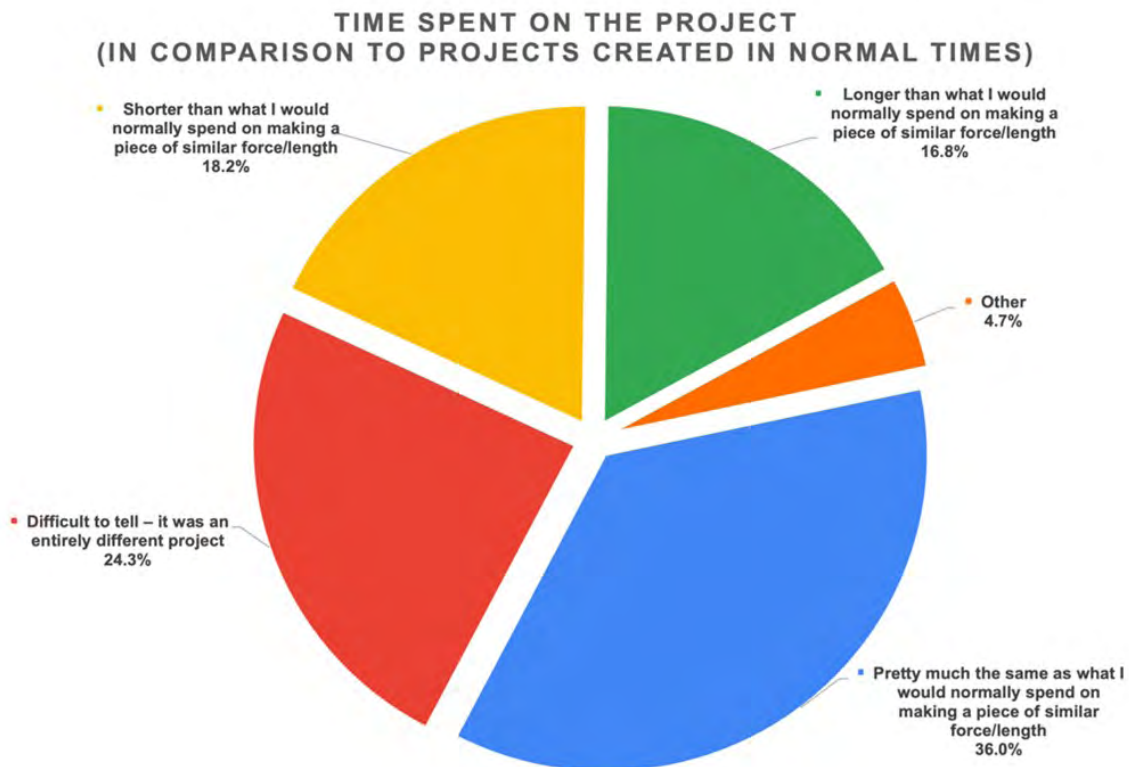
WORKED OUTDOORS WHEN CREATING THE MUSIC?



5) Over 50% of the submitted music was created over a period of up to 3 weeks, with 4.2% created within a single day.

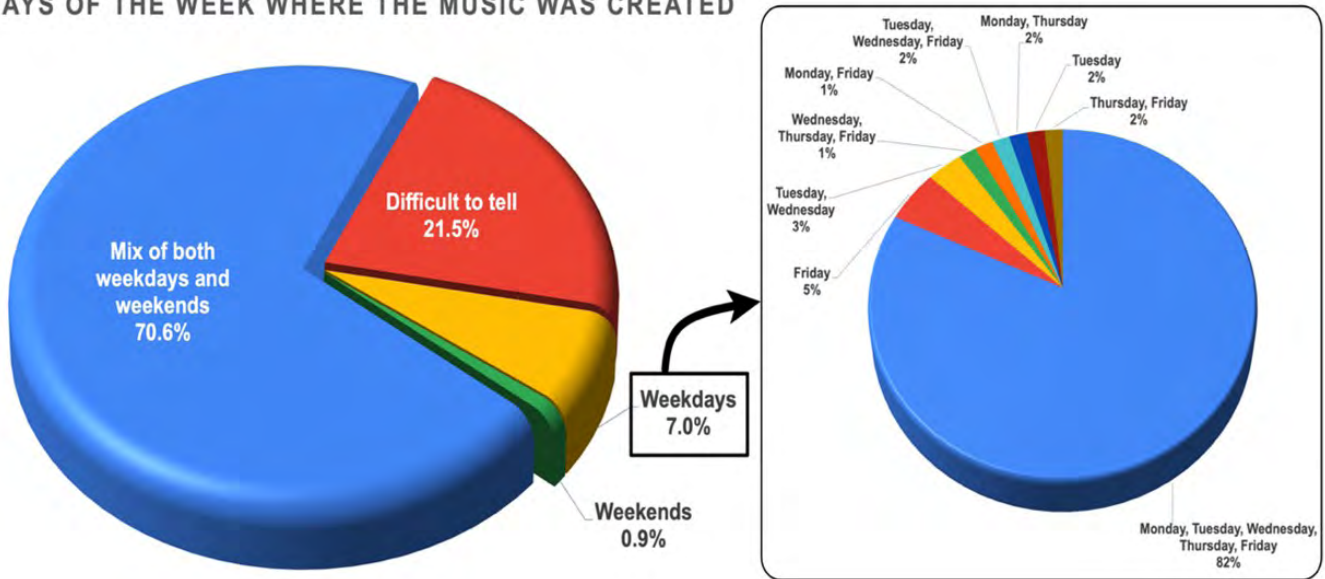


6) Only 36% of the applicants felt that they spent the same amount of time on the project, compared to creating music of similar force/length under non-lockdown conditions.



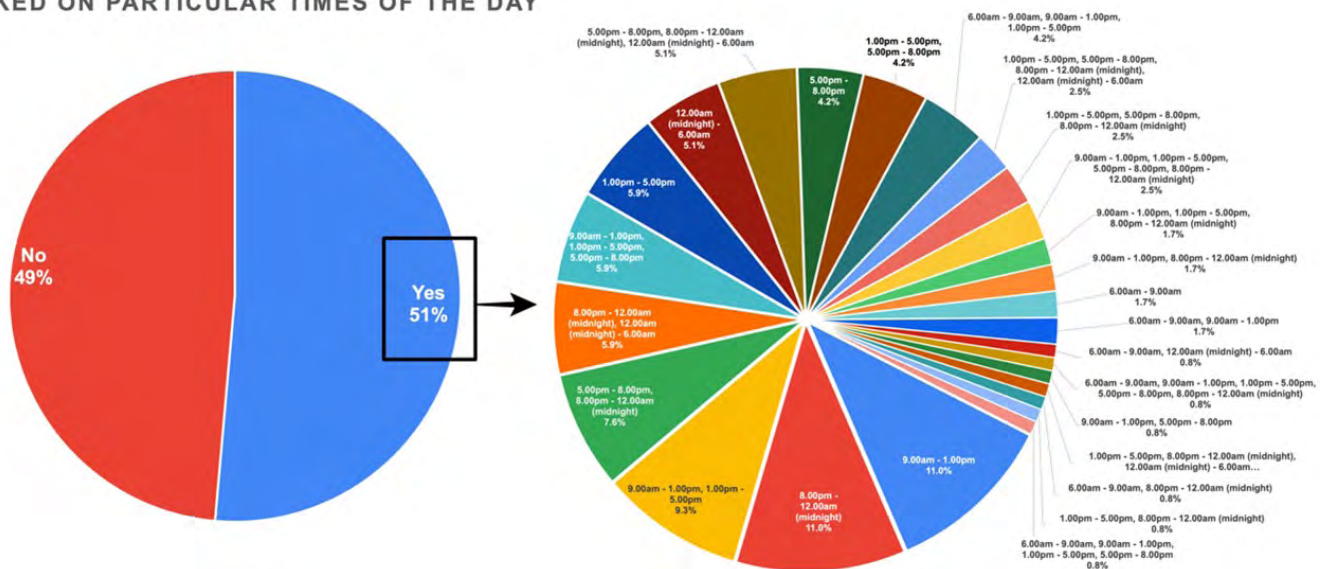
7) Over 70% of the applicants tended to work on the project on a mixture of both weekdays and weekends. However, as much as 21% of the applicants were not able to recall a specific pattern. Many of them also expressed that it was difficult for them to keep track of days and times during that period.

DAYS OF THE WEEK WHERE THE MUSIC WAS CREATED



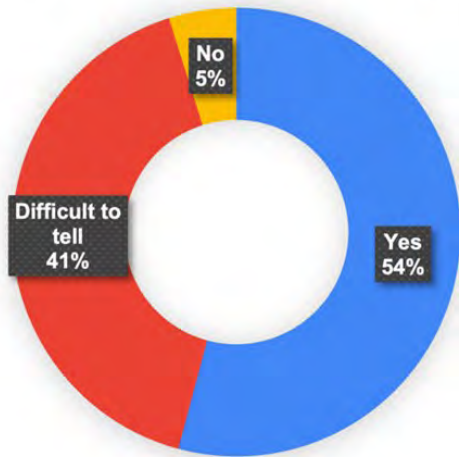
8) Amongst the 51% of applicants who tended to work on the project on particular times of the day, many tended to work in the evenings or even overnight.

WORKED ON PARTICULAR TIMES OF THE DAY

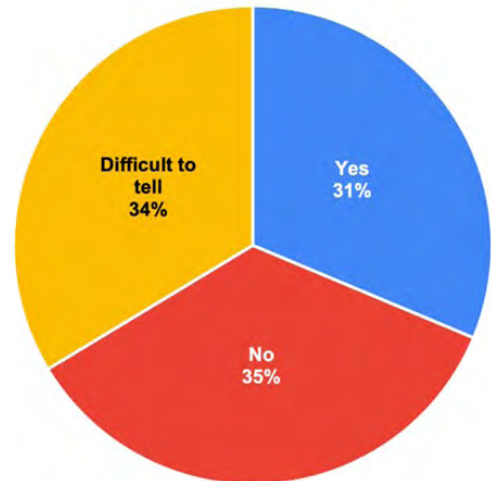


9) 54% of the applicants suggested that they worked on days and times where they considered themselves to be most productive; 31% considered themselves to be most productive on different days and times under lockdown conditions.

WERE THESE TIMES WHERE YOU CONSIDERED YOURSELF TO BE MOST PRODUCTIVE?

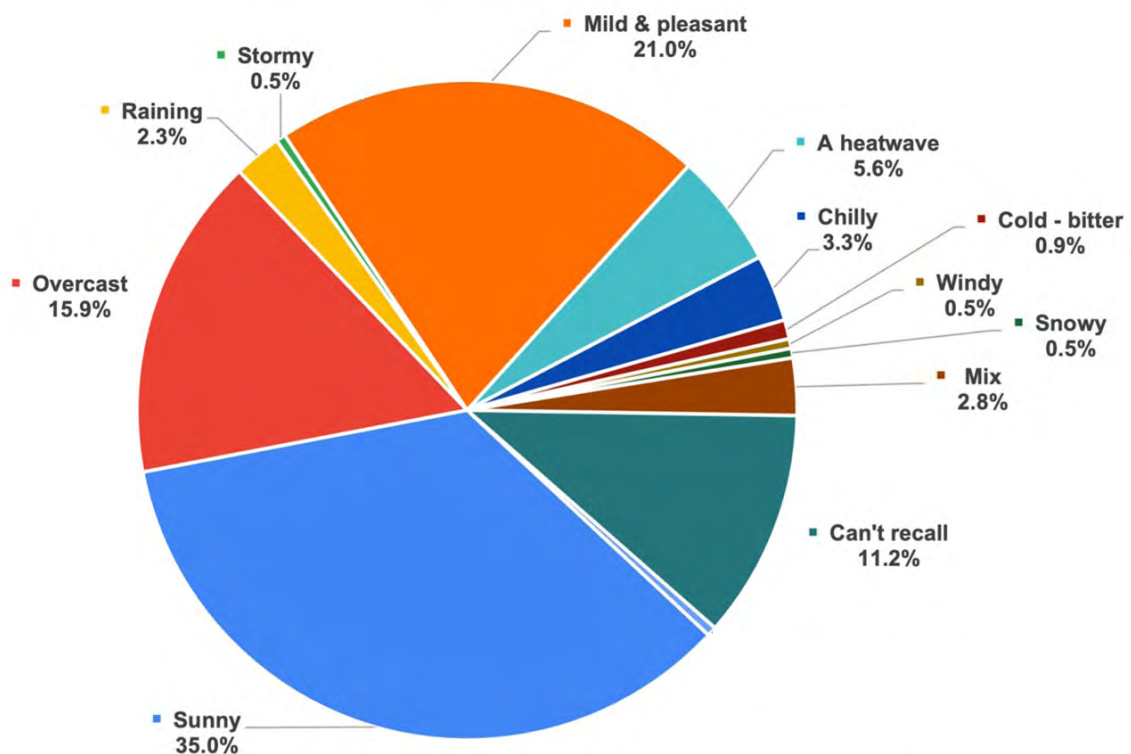


WOULD YOU CONSIDER THE DAYS AND TIMES WHERE YOU TENDED TO BE MOST PRODUCTIVE DURING LOCKDOWN DIFFERENT FROM 'NORMAL' TIMES?



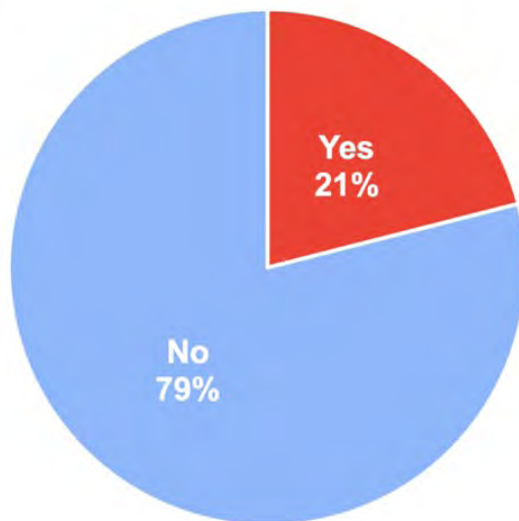
10) Over 50% of the applicants remembered the weather outside (when they were working on their submitted music) to be either sunny or mild & pleasant.

WHAT WAS THE WEATHER LIKE WHEN WORKING ON THE PROJECT?



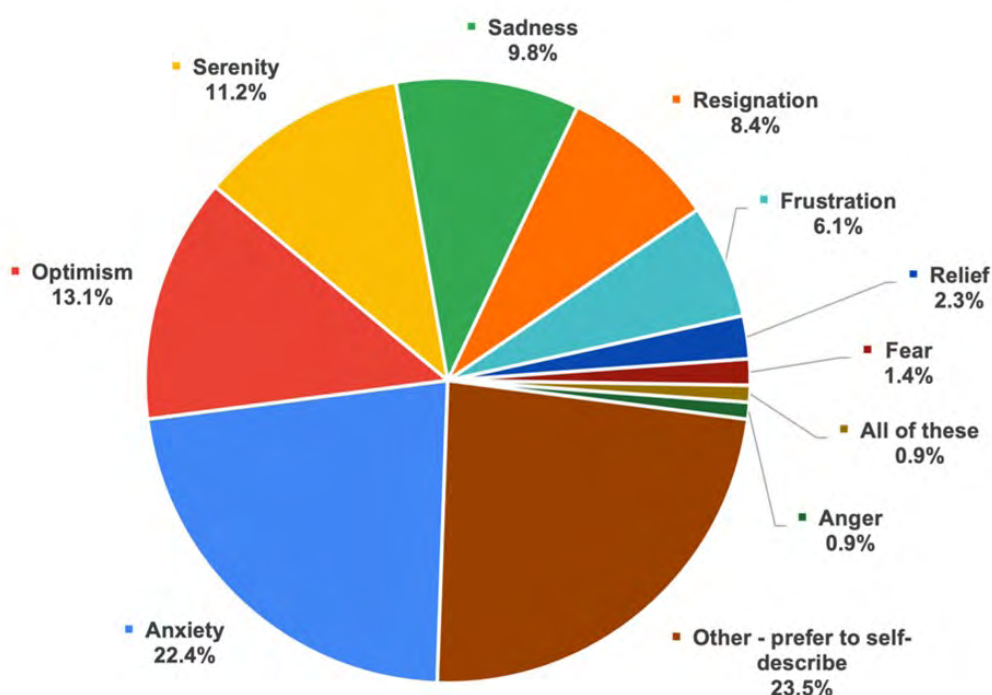
11) 21% of the applicants endured direct impact of the pandemic as they created the submitted music (e.g. contracting Covid-19, living with someone who contracted Covid-19 or with someone who worked in the public health sector, shielding due to existing health conditions, suffering from the loss of close family members, navigating various challenges around pandemic-induced unemployment).

IMPACTED DIRECTLY BY THE PANDEMIC (WHILE WORKING ON THE PROJECT)



12) 22.4% of the applicants considered that 'anxiety' best represented their mood during lockdown and during the period in which they created the music submitted, 13.1% chose 'optimism', 11.2% voted for 'serenity', 2.3% felt 'relief', whereas nearly 40% associated their lockdown experience with other negative emotions (e.g. sadness, resignation, frustration, fear, and anger).

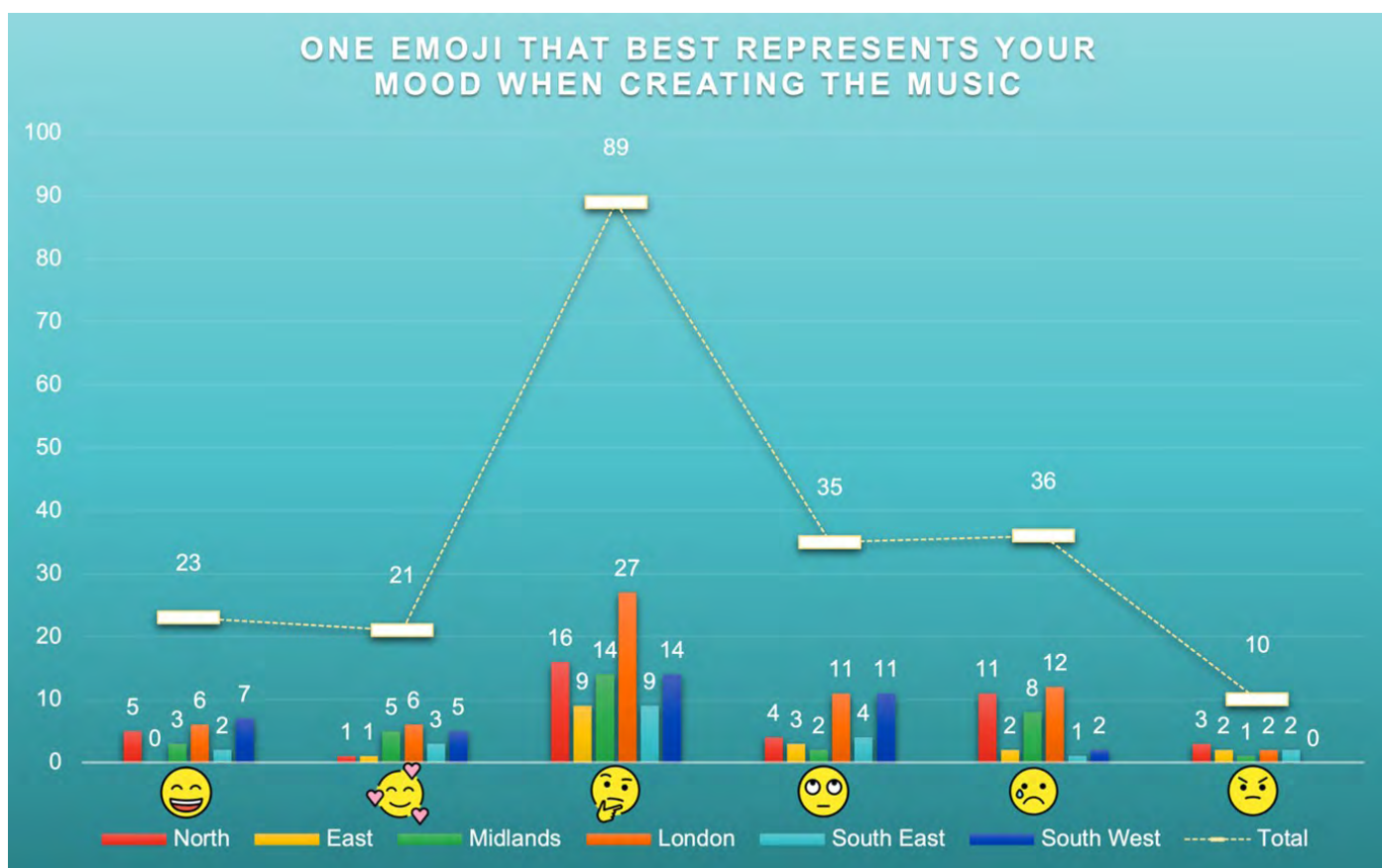
MOOD DURING LOCKDOWN (ESPECIALLY WHEN CREATING THE MUSIC)



Another 23.5% admitted that they were unable to frame how they felt within an umbrella state of mind, with the majority of them describing it as a mixture of both positive and negative emotions. These ranged from ‘depression’, ‘confusion’, ‘exhausted’, ‘the need for escapism’, ‘neurotic’, to the more neutrally toned ‘focused’, ‘thoughtful’, ‘determination’, ‘meditative’, to ‘energetic’, ‘gratitude’, ‘hope’, ‘happiness’, ‘elation’ and even ‘JOY!’.

It was also expressed across many responses that the shifts between different moods tended to get more pronounced during that period under lockdown conditions.

13) From a more playful point of view, we asked the applicants to choose one emoji (out of six options given) to best represent their mood when creating the music during lockdown, and attracted nearly 75% of the votes (41.6%, 16.8%, 16.4% respectively).



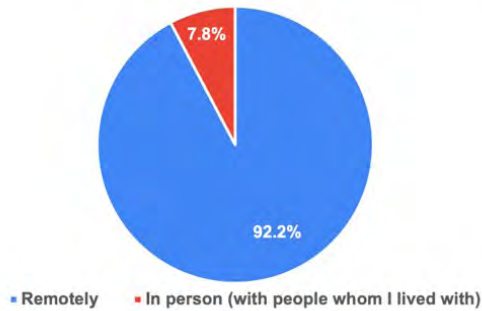
COLLABORATION AND NEW WAYS OF WORKING

1) Out of all 214 submitted recordings, 116 (54.2%) were of a collaborative nature.

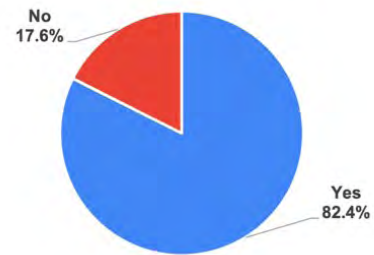
Amongst the 116 collaborative projects, only 7.8% were produced via in-person working, whereas the other 92.2% were put together remotely.

17.6% of these collaborations were with non-musicians.

COLLABORATION - REMOTELY OR IN PERSON?



IF COLLABORATED WITH OTHER PEOPLE WHEN CREATING THE MUSIC - ARE THEY MUSICIANS / MUSIC CREATIVES TOO?



2) Whilst many acknowledged that remote collaboration may have compromised certain aspects of the recordings submitted (e.g. the quality of recorded material being heavily reliant on the collaborators' hardware and production skills, lack of a feedback or conversational process), it is also evident that working together remotely made some positive impacts on the applicants' creative practices. These include:

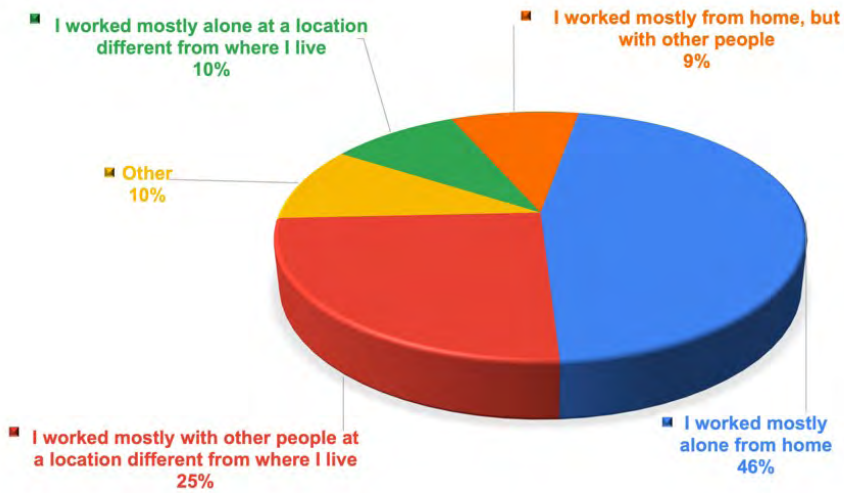
- Enhanced efficiency and productivity (e.g. having more time and space to evaluate collaborators' materials or reflect on concepts, without being pressured to give instant yet inarticulate responses);
- Working with artists living in any other countries;
- Exploring new conceptual, technical and technological possibilities inspired by the limitations of bandwidth, latency, and synchronisation.

It is also fascinating to note that a number of applicants have not yet met their collaborators in-person to this day.

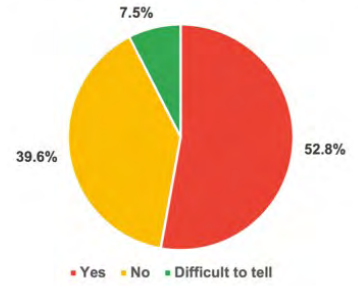
3) More than 50% of the applicants felt that the lockdown has changed their usual ways of working. These include:

- Being more comfortable with working from their home studios;
- Finding more value in collaboration, and in collaborative processes;
- Producing more electronic music, or music involving more elements of digital music production / audio processing / fixed media in their work;
- Starting to pursue a career as a solo artist;
- Reassessing the meaning and value of improvisation, and the hybridity between improvised and fully composed music;
- Becoming more confident about curating and managing larger projects, coordinating remotely with other artists;
- Reassessing the meaning and value of physical space and site-specificity;
- Starting to play more regularly in outdoor spaces;
- Gaining new insights on teaching music, and new ways of communicating musical and technical ideas with students.
- Re-focusing on, or starting to contemplate the pursuit of a career in the music industry as a result of having more time and space to make music.

WAYS OF MAKING MUSIC PRIOR TO LOCKDOWN 2020



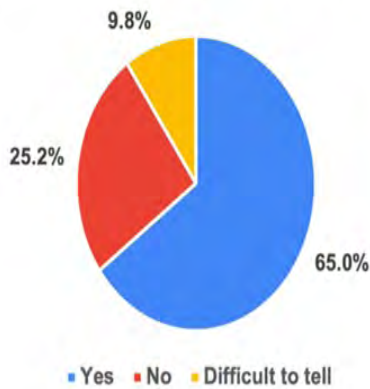
DID THE LOCKDOWN CHANGE THIS?



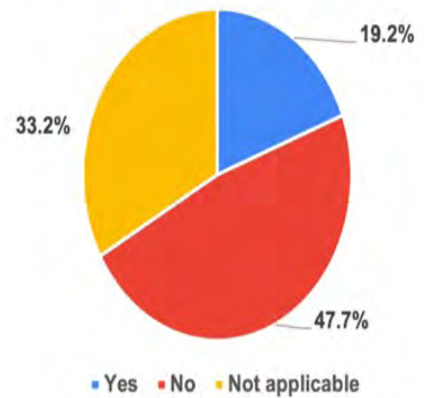
4) 65% of the applicants had acquired new technical and production skills during the lockdown period through creating the music and recordings submitted.

However, only under 20% of them had received any academic, professional, or financial support for them to acquire or develop these new skills.

DID YOU ACQUIRE ANY NEW TECHNICAL SKILLS THROUGH CREATING THIS PROJECT?



WERE YOU GIVEN ANY ACADEMIC, PROFESSIONAL, OR FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR YOU TO ACQUIRE / DEVELOP THESE NEW SKILLS?



Further reflections

We have also encouraged the applicants to share with us, in their own words, how did living through lockdown conditions inform their music-making, their practice going forward, and their relationship with their own work.

The responses have been hugely enriching, from which we have identified a strong emphasis on artists' continuing attempt to 'listen' to, and find their true creative voices within an increasingly complicated ambience filled with uncertainty, emotional challenges, solitude and disconnection.

Many acknowledged that living through lockdown conditions have encouraged them to be more motivated to create music. They have also tended to become more fearless in experimenting with ideas, as well as in embedding themselves into the work they create. Whilst physical restrictions may have hindered practicalities of collaboration in a conventional sense, many have found themselves to be even more collaborative now, thanks to the rapid advancement of remote communication technology over the past few years.

Resilience tended to surface more in and through escapism. Many have started to relish the time and slower pace of life afforded by lockdown, and to find new ways of gaining creative momentum and to put their own physical and mental wellbeing at the start of any creative, professional development, and collaborative processes going forward.

SELECTED QUOTES FROM CREATORS

"It afforded me more time to think and craft my pieces. It enabled me to experiment without judgement or expectation."

"It has further convinced me that sharing and creating music is an essential part of being human, being involved both creatively and imaginatively as performers. [...] It has encouraged me to stretch my own musical world by working with different people from different cultures and breaking down barriers."

"It showed me that putting myself out there is important - essential."

"It also showed me how important music is as an escape from what is going on, and how an ongoing project can give me some sense of focus and clarity even when the world around me is falling apart."

"It became the driving point of my day and something which I now believe I can pursue further as part of my career, not just a hobby. I literally filled every waking moment with composing whether it be reworking an old idea, finishing off a new piece or experimenting with new styles."

"It made me reassess my own relationships with my Chinese identity and the society I live in; encouraged me to further confront the mis-aligned stylistic attributes of myself and - sometimes - of others; pushed me to further engage with technology, as well as to see what impact my creative voice is likely to make in the future."

“Therefore inspiration had to come from within much more than usual, which was a difficult but immensely rewarding realisation.”

“Realising that time off is essential - firstly to prevent burnout, but also allowing the time for compositions to marinate and develop is a lot more effective than setting unrealistic deadlines”

“I had to think music was always created because of my creativity not for other people.”

“It ultimately led to me feeling totally confident that I could not live a life without my music when confronted with the ugly option of financial hardships and a potential to have to retrain after Covid.”

“Learning how to make something with limited resources and time. Making something that is honest and authentic to the things I care about.”

“It affirmed my belief in the transformative power of art: that to participate in the act of creation, whether as a writer, performer or reader, is to be free. It creates a new and better world beyond the mean confines of given possibility. The aesthetic is always political, even (especially) in its autonomy.”

“The fact that people wanted to collaborate remotely - and that choir members wanted to continue meeting over zoom - was testament to how important music is socially.

