

BIOGRAPHY

Brett Smith lives and works in Reykjavík. He is an artist, composer, sound designer and performer currently exploring the threshold into the unknown. His work entangles music composition, live performance, mixed-media installation and improvisation as a way to engage with the unknowable and see, hear and feel it in a new way.

Originally trained as a jazz saxophonist in Australia, Brett gained experience performing in a variety of ensembles before a period of detachment and discovery completely changed his way of creating. Brett is actively engaged with interdisciplinary practices and unravelling the audience-performer relationship in music performance practice. A frequent collaborator with a wide range of musicians, theatre-makers, choreographers and visual artists, Brett continues to act as a creative co-conspirator while cultivating new solo works.

rites of presence. music rehearsal as performance

BRETT SMITH

For Wency D'Souza and Dr Robert Faulkner, without whom, I wouldn't have had the courage to be and become myself.

WHEN WE LISTEN TO MUSIC, WE MUST REFUSE THE IDEA THAT MUSIC HAPPENS ONLY WHEN THE MUSICIAN ENTERS AND PICKS UP AN INSTRUMENT; MUSIC IS ALSO THE ANTICIPATION OF THE PERFORMANCE AND THE NOISES OF APPRECIATION IT GENERATES AND THE SPEAKING THAT HAPPENS THROUGH AND AROUND IT, MAKING IT AND LOVING IT, BEING IN IT WHILE LISTENING. — JACK HALBERSTAM¹

On the morning that my mentor, hero and dear friend Wency D'Souza died, Iceland began its first day of strict social isolation laws in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In a strange and fortuitous event, I'd woken up from a dream about a visit to his childhood home in India and moved to the couch, mindlessly flicking through old photos at 3 am. It was unusual. At that stage, I was unaware of Wency's death and am rarely able to recount dreams. When I do, it's usually a result of an evening dancing toe to mouth with a bottle of red wine.

The last time I spoke with him was months earlier on a spontaneous adventure with my girlfriend, enjoying the rare but generous Icelandic sun. Lost and trying desperately to find a farmer's market that we later discovered is more or less unreachable without a car, it was evening in Australia and Wency's 80th birthday. He had resigned to the couch to continue drinking brandy, and we traded thoughts about Narendra Modi, cricket, Portuguese fish, Tony Bennett and the cars people drive in Iceland. "Fjords", of course.

Wency was an incredible human. He was first and foremost a man of rhythm, a drummer born in the tropical climate of Goa and practised in the hallway of an intensely overcrowded apartment complex in Mumbai. He had enjoyed great success in life, writing music for Bollywood films and touring the

globe performing with some of the world's most renowned musicians. He had also endured great hardship, moving to Australia to focus on family and finding himself homeless, broke and eventually with constant back pain that made it increasingly difficult for him to do what he loved most - playing drums.

Eventually, he managed to "fight his way through the qualms and traumas of life"² and found a rhythm in his life that gave him time and space to focus on what he loved, and there was no time for anything with which he wasn't ardently consumed. He had time for music-making, cooking, cricket, awful (I mean truly awful) Bollywood soap operas, friends, puns and brandy. Time was central to everything that Wency dedicated himself to. The importance of phrasing in music, when to add spices to curry and importantly, the timing of a joke, no matter the quality. Wency's passion and awareness of time was infectious. It permeated every aspect of the world around him, that coloured and cultivated a community of musicians, dancers and creative folk and became a lens that continues to infuse the world around me.

In the time since his death, I have had an abundance of time. The first time in a long time. Enforced time. It has been a once in a century kind of time. Time to grieve. Time to think. Time to observe and time to cook. This pandemic has forced a literal halt to life as we've

1. Stefano Harney, Fred Moten, and Jack Halberstam. "The Wild Beyond: With and for the Undercommons." in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe, UK: Minor Compositions, 2013), 2-13, 9.

2. *Sinatra at the Sands with Count Basie and the Orchestra* (Sands Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, April 1966).

3. Olga Tokarczuk, "A New World Through My Window," ed. Chris Adrian and Rebecca Mead, *The New Yorker*, April 8, 2020, www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-new-world-through-my-window.

4. Meredith Monk and Bonnie Marranca, *Conversations With Meredith Monk* (New York, NY: PAJ Publ., 2014), XI.

known it. In Iceland, there has been a ban on gatherings, schools and universities closed, jobs lost, people learning to work from home, the sick and potentially sick are in quarantine, and many more have to isolate physically. Personally, I lost my job, felt abandoned by the University that I ventured across the world to attend, indefinitely postponed the project that I had invested the last year developing and have no way physically or financially of returning home to Australia.

It has been a lonely and distressing time. And my struggles are by no means comparable to those of the resilient people working tirelessly in medical fields risking their lives, to those who have lost loved ones, others who have lost work and those who are without help or support in any way or form. The coronavirus has spread fear and helplessness, and I have considered myself fortunate to be where I am – far from the real depth of pain and suffering that it's caused. This time, this pandemic, has been a stark reminder that ...

... we are delicate creatures, composed of the most fragile material. That we die—that we are mortal. That we are not separated from the rest of the world by our "humanity," by any exceptionality, but that the world is instead a kind of great network in which we are enmeshed, connected with other beings by invisible threads of dependence and influence.³

The world is in a place of undetermined time, and we are venturing into uncharted territory, whether we like it or not.

It is impossible to comprehend

the magnitude of what is happening at the moment, and I have been searching for how to proceed. How will this interruption shape the future? What does this virus mean for the human race? What will life look like once this has passed? When will this pass?! I am, we are, in a time of an unmitigated and unadulterated unknown.

Before this disruption in time, I had become occupied with the intersection between music and the unknown. What we don't have the capacity to fully understand as humans – death, love, the experience of ageing, climate change – a deadly virus? How do you create an experience for people that allows them to engage with the unknown and see, hear and feel it in a new way? How do you open up the possibilities of perception, so that when you go back into your life you might be more open to the moments of life, and see things you haven't been aware of before?⁴

Like falling on black ice for the first time, sliding in slow motion towards the pavement – here I am suspended. Ungracefully flailing my arms grasping for support and desperately hoping that the recovery won't be too difficult. Existing inside a threshold, discovering a different rhythm and a new experience of time.

For the philosopher Henri Bergson, the scientific notion of time, or "clock time", didn't address what he understood to be the inner or lived experience of time. He believed that thought and language weren't capable of describing the experience because it's an accumulation of sensations, emotions, and perceptions that are in a constant state of change. In his early work, *Time and Free Will*, Bergson sought to articulate the lived experience of time as a concrete, material, and actualised phenomenon that he called "pure duration". He said: "Pure duration is the form taken by the succession of our

5. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. Frank Lubeck, Pogson (London, UK: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1957), 180.

6. Adrian Heathfield, "Durational Aesthetics," Adrian Heathfield, 2012, <https://www.adrianheathfield.net/project/durational-aesthetics>, 140.

7. Damon Linker, "When Time Stops," *The Week* – All you need to know about everything that matters (The Week, April 17, 2020), <https://theweek.com/articles/909137/when-time-stops>.

8. Damon Linker, "When Time Stops."

9. Ruth Little, "Thresholding," *Animated: Current Issues and Practice in Participatory Dance*, 2019, file:///Users/brettsmith/Downloads/Ruth%20Little%20(1).pdf, 40.

10. Fred Moten, *Stolen Life* (Durham, UK: Duke University Press, 2010), xii.

11. Anne Bogart, *And Then, You Act: Making Art in an Unpredictable World* (London, UK: Routledge, 2008), 50.

12. Cassie Tongue, "Livestreamed Play Readings Instead of Theatre? It Just Reminds Me of What We've Lost," *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, May 29, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/may/30/livestreamed-play-readings-instead-of-theatre-it-just-reminds-me-of-what-weve-lost>.

13. Nicholas Berger, "The Forgotten Art of Assembly," *Medium* (Medium, April 4, 2020), <https://medium.com/@nicholasberger/the-forgotten-art-of-assembly-a94e164edf0f>.

inner states of consciousness when our self lets itself *live*, when it abstains from establishing a separation between the present state and anterior states.⁵ Meaning for us, as human beings living our lives in time, the experience of the present is continually evolving. With "no sensation ever being the same as a previous sensation; duration is a continuous movement of differentiation".⁶

Maybe this experience of stillness or 'lack of' differentiation is why this time feels so significant and challenging? Uncoupled from the future and an unforgiving landscape of productivity, we're stranded in the present and unable to ignore the feeling of futurelessness and ourselves. In writing about the extensive shutdowns during the pandemic, U.S political science reporter Damon Linker suggested that "our sense of ourselves is partly who we're trying to become".⁷ As futural creatures, we are always looking forward, trying to find meaning through our accumulative experience⁸, which dances intimately with Bergson's theory of pure duration. Linker proposes that ...

... our sense of ourselves in the present is always in part a function of our remembrance and constant reinterpretation of our pasts along with our projection of future possibilities. *We live* for the person we hope to become. *We look forward to* who we will be a month or a year or a decade or more from now — and we commemorate the transitions from present to future with rites of passage celebrated in public with loved ones and friends.⁹

It's in these transitions or inside

this transitive stillness that I want to explore. The rites and commemorations that create community and connection in ways that thought and language aren't able to express. Experiences where familiar cultural hierarchies and barriers to inclusion don't apply and incorporative gestures that move beyond what Dramaturg Ruth Little views as "an increasingly distributed, screen-based, static and synthetic experience of the world"⁹ to create what Fred Moten calls "differentiated presence".¹⁰ Or, if we are to look through Anne Bogart's lens: "We are meant to be in the room together, undergoing ideas, undergoing other people, undergoing experience, undergoing metaphor, undergoing history, and undergoing life".¹¹ Creating not rites of passage but perhaps rites of presence? So what happens when you're unable to undergo other people, undergo living because it's unsafe to undergo each other together? What kinds of community and presence can materialise at a distance?

In the immediacy of physical distancing, there was a real sense of urgency to address this question. Notably, and somewhat unsurprisingly, from performing artists. As an overwhelming amount of hurriedly produced content cascaded onto computer screens, it became increasingly clear that the simulation of live performance would not fill the void of 'liveness' that exists when attending something in person. The fragility of the air that exists between the performer and the "irresistible, irreplaceable community that springs up every night"¹² is central to the allure of a *live* performance. Online re-creations satisfy a momentary gap but ultimately "become a reminder of the irreplaceability of the very art form they are so desperately trying to recreate".¹³ The act of assembling for a performance is a manifestation of the invisible, indispensable need to be present with each other.

Wency's childhood home
Mumbai, 2013



↑
Wency's
Sister

↑
Wency

↑
Me, circa 2013

*The forgotten her
name and I
feel terrible about*

This looks so similar to
his Australian home!

Wency's home
Perth, 2016

His Birthday !!!



Wency ↑ Leisa ↑ cake ↑ Brandy ↑ Tony ↑

"Self your help"

14. Ruth Little, "Thresholding," 40.

15. Christine Kearney, "Italians Sing Patriotic Songs from Their Balconies during Coronavirus Lockdown," *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, March 14, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/14/italians-sing-patriotic-songs-from-their-balconies-during-coronavirus-lockdown>.

16. Vanessa Thorpe, "Balcony Singing in Solidarity Spreads across Italy during Lockdown," *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, March 14, 2020), www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/14/solidarity-balcony-singing-spreads-across-italy-during-lockdown.

17. Vanessa Thorpe, "Balcony Singing in Solidarity Spreads across Italy during Lockdown," .

18. David Byrne, *How Music Works* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2017), 9.

This community, this sense of togetherness requires presence and presence is extremely difficult to cultivate when the only real requirements are a computer and a functioning internet connection. "When performance makers ask an audience to attend, they don't only mean to turn up. They mean a-tendre – stretch towards, be present with all our senses, pay somatic attention".¹⁴ Our devices are incredible inventions that enable us to see, hear and network from all over the world, but they cannot replace the transcendent act of experiencing together.

We need *liveness*. We need to feel the space around us. We need to be connected with and to other people to become present. To become. This need became of its own volition as impromptu concerts and happenings appeared like melodious spot fires during some of the most challenging moments of the pandemic. In Italy, musicians, amateurs and professionals alike, began playing and singing from their balconies across the country, "harmonies echoing down narrow streets as residents ... joined together in song".¹⁵ From the "southern cities of Salerno and Naples, and the Sicilian capital Palermo to Turin in the north, residents of apartment buildings and tower blocks, continued to sing or play instruments, or to offer DJ sets, from their balconies in a trend that spread from Italy across Europe".¹⁶ In Vanessa Thorpe's Guardian article about the performances, she interviewed locals about an invitation to people who can play an instrument to go to their window and perform:

In the flat in front of me, a couple with a small child appeared, the mother carried him in her arms while the father played a children's musical toy. They waved over at us and we

waved back. We've never met ... A little later I heard the sound of people using pans to beat out a rhythm. It turned out to be two elderly women, both small and physically frail, who were testifying in this way to their love of life and of the city. I took two pans myself and followed their beat. Then we said goodbye to each other and closed our windows as it was getting too cold to carry on.¹⁷

Reverberating between walls, winding through the streets, maintaining the necessary physical distance needed to keep each other safe while fostering social harmony. People being and becoming together, connecting through sounds, expressions from and to one another's bodies.

Sound and music have a unique way of creating togetherness. Sound as a tangible element doesn't exist; it's an abstract concept. What we hear is one matter colliding with another, generating movements through the air that are picked up by our ears. It's felt by our bodies, fills space, moves with and through time, becomes a language accessible to all people and can "profoundly alter how we view the world and our place in it".¹⁸ What's more, if we look through Bergson's magnifying glass, when we listen to music, we're not listening just to a succession of detached, independent sounds. For us, each sound infuses into the next; melting into each other. They become so enveloped in one another that we form the complete song. During this pandemic, music has become a way of being together at a distance; travelling between people, providing literal bridges of sound.

In her poem "Somewhere there's a nothing I'm a Part of",

19. Elaine Kahn, *Romance or the End: Poems* (New York, NY: Soft Skull, 2020), 114.

20. Lutz Jäncke, "Music, Memory and Emotion," *Journal of Biology* 7, no. 6 (August 8, 2008): 21-21.5, <https://doi.org/10.1186/jbiol82>, 21.1.

21. Margulis, Elizabeth Hellmuth. "Music Is in Your Brain and Your Body and Your Life – Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis: Aeon Essays." Aeon. Aeon, November 2, 2017. <https://aeon.co/essays/music-is-in-your-brain-and-your-body-and-your-life>.

22. Pauline Oliveros, *Software for People* (Bazzytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1984).

23. David Byrne, *How Music Works* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2017), 9.

24. Non Zero One, "DAWNS," DAWNS (Non Zero One and James Bulley, 2020), <https://dawns.live/>.

25. Pauline Oliveros, *Software for People*, 180.

Poet Elaine Kahn considers music as a way to foster connection and intimacy through its ability to tap into known and unknown memory:

*if I listen carefully
to certain music
I can just remember what
it's like to live
inside the perfect
closeness
of another's breath*¹⁹

While Kahn's interpretation is far more romantic, she is alluding to aspect of music that neuroscientists have claimed regarding music and connection. The direct act of hearing music "activates the entire limbic system, which is involved in the processing of emotions and in controlling memory".²⁰ However, music goes beyond a merely neurological encounter. It is a "deeply culturally embedded, multimodal experience shaped by nearly all other aspects of human experience: how we speak and move, what we see and know".²¹ It affects our bodies, creates sensations, evokes emotion and connects through sound. Music is what composer Pauline Oliveros called "software for people"²²; it pushes beyond the screen and points to the world around us and the world inside us. It can "get us through difficult patches in our lives by changing not only how we feel about ourselves, but also how we feel about everything outside ourselves".²³ Creating connection, creating community, creating commons, creating commonality.

UK Composer, James Bulley and Non-Zero One's work DAWN, is a sound experience that was created as a response to a UK National Trust commission to make a live artwork marking their 125th anniversary. The work was adapted for accessibility and safety during the pandemic and is a celebration of togetherness, difference, nature and light.²⁴ Logging

on to the website at 2:43 am (3:43 am UK time), I sit alone with the unfamiliar hue of the Reykjavik morning bleeding through my window and a provocation to consider my relationship to time, nature and my community. The scratch of the bow against a violin string from North Yorkshire wakes up the back of my neck, and the soothing voice of Cat Harrison speaks to me from Caithness, Scotland as I notice the chirping of the obnoxiously loud birds outside. Slowly, as the sun rises, I become increasingly aware of the vast network in which we are enmeshed, connected with other beings by invisible threads of dependence and influence. Across localities, across time, all of the participants are asked to take a photo at 4:49 am, capturing a singular moment from their perspective, a collation of differentiated experience. Experiencing liveness, experiencing togetherness, experiencing presence, creating ritual and becoming community from isolated space.

To engage in transitive stillness together, to create rituals and rites of presence, whether isolated or not, we need the agency to partake, participate and assemble. No matter how diverse our lifestyles, histories or tastes in music, commonality might be found in the way that we engage in music together. For Oliveros, "It is no longer sufficient to solely dwell on the music; the perceiver must be included"²⁵, a sentiment that resonates deeply in light of social distancing and isolation. What kinds of presence, connection and encounter become possible when we incorporate the audience into the music and the making of music? What might happen if we try to think of rehearsal as the heart of the practice, or as the performance itself?

A musical rehearsal is a time of preparation used to craft a composition or develop a performance for public presentation. It is a dynamic space that welcomes mistakes in

Fella-og Hólabirkja
Reykjavík, 2020



Hreiðar! Agesif
Recording a new work by
Hjalmar Ragnarsson
I stand
there

Árbæjarsafn
Reykjavík, 2020



End of season Part-hey!!!
I took this just before they
sung 'Sofðu unga ástin mín'
and I cried my little heart out

26. Douglas Harper, ed., "Rehearse (v.)," Online Etymology Dictionary, 2000, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/rehearse>.

27. Tzachi Zamir, "Theatrical Repetition and Inspired Performance," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67, no. 4 (2009): 365-373, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6245.2009.01366.x>, 368.

28. Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5.

29. "Ragnar on Ragnar," Vimeo, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/95749559>, 00:46.

30. W. Tecumseh Fitch, "The Biology and Evolution of Music: A Comparative Perspective," *Cognition* 100, no. 1 (2006): 173-215, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2005.11.009>, 173-215.

31. Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind*, 21.

32. Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, 21.

33. Douglas Harper, ed., "Participate (v.)," Online Etymology Dictionary, 2000, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/participate>.

34. Richard Sennett, *Respect: The Formation of Character in an Age of Inequality* (London, UK: Penguin, 2004), 6.

35. Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, 59.

36. Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: the Politics of Participation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 26.

37. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, 100.

38. Ruth Little, "Thresholding", 39.

search of the magnificent. The etymology of the word 'rehearse' comes from the 13th Century French "rehearsier", meaning "to go over again, repeat".²⁶ The act of rehearsing then is one of repetition. Deconstructing, analysing and "exploring the numerous dimensions that are packed into what appears to be a single possibility".²⁷ In her book "On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind", music researcher Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis identifies that "repetition is not an arbitrary characteristic that has arisen in a particular style of music; rather, it is a fundamental characteristic of what we experience as music ... Not only is music found in all known human cultures, but also musical *repetition*".²⁸ For many artists, the conscious inclusion of repetition within their work was the most authentic expression of human experience. Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson, who is renowned for his repetitive musical performances, discusses this in an interview with himself plainly observing that: "IT'S ABOUT ME! All religions are kind of based on the repetitive. I think it just always has a calming effect on the human psyche. It's all this repetition that soothes us".²⁹ Repetition is what biologist W. Tecumseh Fitch called one of music's basic "design features"³⁰ and is an "important component of music's shareability, of its social and biological role in the creation of interpersonal cohesion".³¹ As Margulis puts it, "repeatability is how songs become the property of a group or a community instead of an individual, how they come to belong to a tradition rather than a moment".³²

The act of rehearsing is itself an inclusive gesture that operates through shared dedication, becoming ritual. It is founded on the repetitive practice and practising of music and is an invitation to participate; to partake, to share and share in.³³ It insists on open collaboration and requires communication and collective action.

Sociologist and music enthusiast Richard Sennett's observations of rehearsals highlights this idea, noting that "unless the musicians are playing in unison, they have to sort out differences and inequalities, loud against soft parts, or soloists and accompanists working together".³⁴ The playing of music with others is a living, expanding encounter with empathy and respect. Conscious intentionality and presence, crafting music and creating social value; the repetitive rituals of music can "draw out the signature of the individual as well as his or her connection to the surrounding community".³⁵

In considering the presentation of music, Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino identifies two styles of music performance³⁶: the presentational, such as symphony orchestra or popular music performances, and the participatory, such as folk jam sessions or Icelandic *tvísöngur*. Rehearsals exist as part of the development of the two constructs, in that the music requires preparation in order for the performance to exist. However, the invitation to participate only occurs in one, often with the fundamental requirement of knowing the music. If the rehearsal becomes a participatory gesture without a dedicated presentation, with an 'audience', it has the potential to create a third space, an in-between. An expanding space of potentiality suspended between composition and performance. A demonstration of Bergson's theory of "pure duration"³⁷, what Ruth Little calls an "act of thresholding"³⁸, an expression of the space that I experienced in the moment between slipping and 'landing' on black ice and the collective sense of futurelessness experienced throughout the pandemic. It lives in a heightened space of the present and becomes a communal somatic experience. The inclusion of an audience has the potential to transform both the private and public

39. Andrew Evans, *Iceland: the Bradt Travel Guide* (Chalfont St. Peter, Bucks: Bradt Travel Guides Ltd, 2017), 41.

40. Harper Douglas, "Core (n.)," Index, 2000, www.etymonline.com/word/core.

41. Robert Faulkner, *Icelandic Men and Me: Sagas of Singing, Self, and Everyday Life* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 199.

42. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (London, UK: Granta Books, 2008), 304.

experience of a work, creating a unique space, living in and feeling the music together. The rehearsal can liberate music away from the goal-directed purpose of a performance, yet still include its observers in a way that doesn't force participation but gives agency to it.

The significance and value of rehearsing coalesced for me in my migration to Iceland. I learnt very quickly that playing music with others was something I needed for happiness as much as stability. Removed from friends, family, and a known musical network, migration is a straightforward method in identifying nostalgia. Iceland is renowned for so much of its musical enthusiasm and output that finding people to play music with didn't seem unachievable. The choral community in Iceland is so prevalent that the Bradt Travel Guide suggests that "Icelanders will form a choir at the drop of a hat".³⁹ This seemed like the right place to start. Grieving the loss of my 'comfort zone', I began searching for choirs. Feeling a distinct kind of nervousness, one reserved for trips to the dentist or first dates, I found an audition and attacked a 'necessary' shot of whisky before my girlfriend forced me out the door. One successful and sympathetic audition later, I would become a member of the choir *Ægisif*.

After a few rehearsals and weeks in Iceland, it came of no surprise to learn that the Icelandic word for choir is 'Kór'. Sounding 'core', the action of singing together is in the purest sense the meaning of the word: in most part or heart.⁴⁰ Singing connects you directly to your body and your identity, or as musicologist Dr Robert Faulkner wrote: "a vocal construction of self, a song configuring personal and social life through which 'we celebrate ourselves and sing ourselves'".⁴¹ While listening to a choir can be a beautiful aesthetic experience, singing in a choir is like an out of control somatic fireworks

display. The more rehearsals I attended, the more I *looked forward* to the experience, *lived in* the repetition of the music, *lived with* the people around me and *lived through* my voice. The rehearsal is a living 360-degree immersion, the participant becomes both performer and audience, every detail encountered as individual and whole. The joy of rehearsing is one that I have had since I was ten years old, a privilege afforded to me through fortunate timing, the hard work of my parents, and an abundance of scattered passion. The rehearsal time is where I met, and continue to meet, many of my closest friends, including Wency, and the rehearsal was hardest space to leave when voyaging to Iceland. Across time zones, across hemispheres, rehearsals have connected me to context, culture, community and core.

The rehearsal is a space of differentiating time. It is an open space that gives time to discovery, creation, learning, appreciation and unabashed imperfection. It's a space where time slows, friendship develops, community is actualised, and life is shared. A time for embodied encounter and a space that cultivates language, community and understanding. It is a formative time where artists process and the exquisite space where art becomes. It is space in motion and time in momentum that celebrates the miracle of our simultaneous existence and restores our capacity for collective joy. If we have to "abstain from taking hold of the hands of strangers and dancing in the streets",⁴² then let's take hold of music, open our windows, stand on our balconies and sing together, rehearse together, undergo together, be and become together. Let's assemble and dissolve into music together to create presence – an antidote to isolation and a remedy that empowers us to pay closer attention to ourselves and each other.

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