

On Artistic Collaboration (and How it Affects Higher Education and Beyond)

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Introduction

For me, artistic collaboration is very important regardless of your standing in the arts world. Artists, of course, possess the skill to be able to create their own projects and installations on their own, but there comes a point where every good artist asks themselves why aren't they working with someone else on the matter? When writing a play, how many times does the playwright wish that they had an extra set of eyes and hands to help them write their four-hour, no intermission production? The point I am trying to get at is, essentially, that at some point in their career, an artist hankers for a bit of company now and then. Artistic collaboration doesn't have to be something solely practiced within the walls of an art school either. Andy Warhol and Jean-Michael Basquiat, for example, collaborated on an exhibit titled: *A Crazy Art World Message* (1985). Panned by the critics at large when it came out, artists like Keith Haring described the exhibit as something like, "The sense of humor, the snide remarks, the profound realizations, the simple chit-chat all happened with paint and brushes" (The Atlantic, Web, 2012). Isn't that a wonderful thing to convey in a piece of art? Granted that the artist(s) that one plans to collab with have at least something like a working relationship with each other. The article itself highlights the usefulness and the raw passion and creativity that can be birthed when artists work with each other, stating, "In the earliest stages of creation, when a person is trying to come up with an idea for a work — a new dance, a new novel, a new piece of visual art — or attempting to flesh out the bare bones of a inchoate concept, spending time with friends or intimates who serve as muses or sounding boards can be invaluable." To use my own senior project as a more relatable example, I am no Basquiat or Warhol, but I do understand the importance of inclusion and artistry, and that I would be nothing without the friends that I made during my time at Purchase. In fact, my senior project is inspired around the power of artistic collaboration, and that, at the end of the day, no matter how the artistic

world views collaborative pieces and shows, it can end up being something so intimate and beautiful. Collaboration, when done well, can be almost cathartic to an artist's skill and creativity. I, realizing the ever rushing force of dread and intimidation I feel at taking on this long task, decided that I should focus my attention on the effectivity of senior projects here at Purchase.

Even still, while collaborative pieces can be a person's "eureka moment" in regards to their craft and how they'll incorporate that piece(s) into future endeavors, other times, a group project can be the bane of the existences of everyone involved. In the article titled "*Enough is enough; no more group projects*" written by an exhausted college student named Troy Pope, he bemoans the college group project. "College is full of challenges meant to test and prepare students for the real world. Some tasks can be intense or overwhelming due to the sheer volume of content that's due for a class. Other assignments are full of tedious research or repetitive memorization. However, no project is the bane of a student's existence quite like the group project." He has other stellar lines like, "The usefulness, if any, of group projects has gone out the window and only serves to haunt students who are desperately looking to graduate." And my personal favorite, "Meanwhile, instructors are forcing students who don't work well together and who aren't oriented to each other to struggle for an extended period of time while learning little to nothing in the process" (Web. 2019). While I do argue beforehand the importance of group work, this is a sad truth that I feel and certainly a plethora of students on this campus can relate to as well. Senior projects don't make this easier since most, myself included, consider it one giant group project that's in your hands to facilitate as both teacher and student and that can become increasingly difficult if you're producing or helping with a production. I hope to continue to explore this more as I document the outcome of my project, as well as conduct and gather more research over the course of this paper.

The Role of Creativity and Student Persistence in Senior Projects

Lack of creativity directly influences student persistence. Student persistence ties heavily to the ideas that by being surrounded by a good campus both socially and academically (good faculty relationship, etc.) can stimulate a student enough to want to persist and earn a degree. I do think that this is very important and something that should be talked about more when discussing the quality of a college. Student retention depends heavily on student persistence and motivation, and colleges feel the effects of this much later when graduates either recount bad memories of their time on campus, or bad faculty experiences, or were simply not impressed with the school and decide to never promote it. That could lose the school money and press to bring in more freshmen and keep its good name. Discussed in this article titled *Introduction to Student Persistence* is the idea that student persistence needs to be addressed more by higher education. “Now, with a changing student body and additional disruption in the realm of course delivery, student persistence models have forked. It is no longer enough to build a bright and lively campus with dedicated program support centers. Modern students need to connect their educational experience with their career, engage in real-world practice, and work according to their own schedule. Students who find their needs unmet are also finding it easier to transfer or drop out” (Kinsey. Web. 2019). I think Purchase does well with adapting to the “modern student” in connecting education with the real world, but where I think there’s still room for improvement is in the aspect of student persistence that becomes most important when undertaking a senior project which involves socialization.

In 1975, Vincent Tinto released his model regarding student departure and all the causes that might influence a student to drop out of college. He originally only measured peer group and faculty socialization amongst a number of students, but later revised his theory to include more

factors like a student's financial situation, their home environment, and their education prior to coming to college after academics like John Braxton wrote a journal titled, *The Influence of Active Learning on the College Student Departure Process: Toward a Revision of Tinto's Theory*. In his journal, Braxton voiced his criticism regarding Vincent Tinto's model (1975-93) of student departure from colleges and what factors into a student making the decision to either not finish their higher education and dropping out, or transferring to a different institution entirely. For a clearer example, Tinto argues in his model that it's essential for an incoming college student to feel as if their social needs are met by both their peers and the faculty of the school; then, they can achieve academic fulfillment. To me, Tinto places more emphasis on students having good social relationships amongst their classmates as a reason college students stay and graduate from their initial institutions. In his journal, Braxton argues that Tinto's methods aren't reflective of all the factors that can cause a student to drop out. He highlights the fact that most of the students used in Tinto's experiment were white students of an upper/middle class background. Braxton notes that Tinto disregards first generation college students, low-income students, and students of color who already have the odds stacked against them when it comes to higher education. While I do like the concept of Tinto's work, I do agree immensely with Braxton, who updates Tinto's data and works to be more inclusive. It is one of the few good revisions of a previously instituted method of data-collecting that I've found during my research. If social integration is that essential to whether or not a college student has a positive college career, then how would it fare in a system where students are required to undertake a year-long process in a school where time is already swallowed whole by constant projects and homework assignments, supported by an already limited schedule?

The "Senior Capstone" or senior project, to some colleges, is defined as a year-long project that a student undertakes beginning their senior year. What keeps this particular module of

education under the favor of the pedagogy, is that the student has near free-roam to decide what to do with their capstone project. It's seen more as a culmination of what the student has learned in their four years of being in a university, and gives the faculty just a snippet of how that student might function in the outside world when we eventually find careers. Now, the thing about senior capstone projects that I found through my research is that they're mostly given to students in the STEM field. One such example is: "...students may be asked to select a topic, profession, or social problem that interests them, conduct research on the subject, maintain a portfolio of findings or results, create a final product demonstrating their learning acquisition or conclusions (a paper, short film, or multimedia presentation, for example), and give an oral presentation on the project to a panel of teachers, experts, and community members who collectively evaluate its quality" (Edglossary. Web. 2019). This sounds daunting enough to the undergrad in a discipline like social sciences, or even a communications major, but what about the art student that makes the choice to create their own project from the ground up?

SUNY Purchase, the school that I call my alma mater, along with four-thousand other undergrads graduating in 2020, is one such school that implements this form of education. Beginning in junior year, we're tasked with creating a senior project; whether it be a case-study or a collective work of your short stories, you can't and won't graduate from here without devoting a year of your life to some topic of your fancy. For example, I belong to the Arts Management major and our assigned form of capstone is a case-study. You can make a case-study about the impact lack of arts programs have on middle-school students, or how Instagram Influencer culture disrupts and harms the artists on that platform, and even use yourself as the example. What I specifically want to tackle is the finished product that is a senior project, as well as the process of creating one and what that does to the student(s) involved. I'm analyzing things like promotion

and place, the marketing aspects of what it means to not just create a student project, but to use my own production to highlight what aspects of senior projects turn out the most effective and what still needs work on behalf of the student body and the faculty on this campus.

I'm working on a collaborative dance piece that will feature my friends who I have both lived with and closely associated with since my freshman year, but even now I stress the question in my mind, "Is this enough?" Is it enough for me to just be closely acquainted with two people outside of my major, or would it even make a difference if I did as much of it on my own? Three months, if not longer out of the year, I share a campus with four-thousand students and I come away only knowing about less than half of them beyond the casual passing by during transition periods and that's only because I've spent all four years in the same classes with them. There's a stark lack of availability for me to form any sort of professional or even personal connection with students that learn under different disciplines with me, and I believe that this is one of the leading reasons why turnout rates for senior projects tend to range anywhere from fifteen people to ninety-nine in a single showing. Researching this, and writing about it don't do much to settle my nerves, but it does help me brainstorm a good marketing technique to enhance the effectivity of my performance for the two nights it'll be running. I aim to pay attention to both the development of my senior project and if it defies my expectations of what becomes of senior projects, which is, low turnout or low support when the time comes for the senior in charge of their project to promote their work.

For majors like the conservatory students, dancers, painters, and actors, they have to either star in another student's production, or create and star in their own productions. Dancers often produce collaborative pieces centered around one theme. Actors star in a staged production of either their own creation or someone else's. Painters, make their own pieces and participate in an

exhibit either solo or collaboration. The recurring theme here is that you're solely responsible for your own project, regardless of the help you take. Notice the senior project page on the Purchase website, "Beginning junior year, you'll begin intensive, individualized work with a faculty member as your mentor" (purchase.edu.Web.2019). This is written as the gist of what a senior project is. I remember my first two years being full of no one really knowing what the senior project was for our major; every time I asked I was always met with an, "I don't know" and even the responses I got from faculty whenever I was in a meeting with them always consisted of the general message that I was only going to find out more about when it came my turn to start my senior project. The Purchase website gives off much of the vague language that I encountered whenever I asked about it. I specifically chose to include the page from the website itself because I wanted to show the apparent lack of effort Purchase puts into helping ease the students into the inevitable process of having to create and execute their senior projects. I want to highlight the repeated use of the word "you" and "your" with sprinklings of allowance and acceptance of the notion that students may need or opt to choose peer work, and the website slightly nudges you in that direction that students tend to take. "You'll bounce ideas off your peers and have their support along the way." I like that Purchase makes an attempt to get you to reach out to your peers, but how realistic is that when my peers are either working on the same project or busy with their own?

Purchase's participation system directly affects how my senior project will turn out for a number of reasons. If the students themselves aren't motivated or influenced by certain aspects of my piece, then obviously they won't show. But what I've noticed is that promotion regarding senior projects is shoddy at best, and that's not entirely the fault of the student body, because we can only do so much with the resources given to us by the school, and what we can utilize ourselves to further combat this issue, but it does impact a lot regarding the outcome of a senior project. The

theory of “reference groups” in sociology is interesting and relevant I think to my next statement about the lack of participation on the students’ end. “The term reference group can refer to any and all groups that influence the attitudes and behaviour of individuals. The theory is often used to describe two major types of relationships between individuals and groups. These two major dimensions are known as ‘normative’ reference group behaviour and ‘comparative’ reference group behaviour. Because some reference groups teach individuals how they should behave, ‘normative’ reference group theory is sometimes referred to as a guide for individuals' behaviour” (Dawson, Chatman. 2001.) What I specifically find fascinating about the theory is the fact that it could be a good start when trying to identify the often clique-y mindset of the students that attend this campus. If you spend a good day or two walking around and watching the students, you’ll find that almost all of them are in a group of people or at the very least walking with another person. It’s something that culture-shocked (no pun intended) me the most when I first came here, the fact that most students on this campus attempt to make as many friends as possible the moment they start attending and tend to stick by them for as long as possible. If you live on campus or know enough people, you’ll eventually always be asked if you want to go to the Hub together for lunch. But the special thing about all this kindness and camaraderie on this campus is that you only truly experience it if you’re deemed acceptable to the reference group of your liking. I’m not trying to paint this in a negative light in the slightest, but merely highlight that there is a mindset here that you are loyal, but fiercely loyal to those of your friend group. To place all of this on the students and who they choose to associate with is wrong; Purchase’s system doesn’t allow much room for students to change that social behavior either and it manifests within the student body’s social life in ways like how we’re able to promote our projects for maximum, or even minimum output.

Advertising on this campus consists mainly of email, word-of-mouth, and the vast array of posters that are strewn about all over the buildings. These are not the most effective means of promotion. Students hardly read their emails since we get flooded with them from 9-5, seven days a week, and even long after the faculty sending the emails go home. Emails are vital to the campus' education, but when it comes to promoting or even reminding the student body of your production or club, it's unlikely that you'll garner much attention or interested parties that way. Another mode of promotion students use in lieu of emails is the SUNY Purchase Open Forum. If you type in senior in the search engine for the group, you'll find post after post of students posting flyers and posters for their project, more so in the spring semester. Some are looking for auditions, others are informative and are just letting all six-thousand members know that their opening night is fast approaching, and we should all 'like totally come if we can make it'. The likes vary anywhere from none to around forty people, but even then we have to consider that most of the people who are responding to the post are those that are already in the show and are trying to keep the post up long enough for people to see it as soon as they check the group which gives the post twenty comments with at least half of them saying, "bump!" by those involved. It can be dismaying when you're constantly sending out messages that you're in need of help for your project, or would just like for people to come watch and no one responds, or leave the post with a simple thumbs-up. Students also use their social media, but the Facebook group has the most potential reach. But how come promotion fails so badly on this campus and how does that affect how we see the value of our work and motivation for our project? I'll consider the four Ps of Marketing.

Whenever I think of Purchase's scheduling options, I'm reminded of my own sacrifices just so that I could abide by the rules of what this school deems "well-timed" class scheduling. Most times it would be eating since I would only have close to twenty or thirty minutes to get

something to eat and then walk all the way back to the class just before all the good seats are taken. Another, but slightly more important sacrifice that I make is not enough connections. Three months, if not longer out of the year, I share a campus with four-thousand students and I come away only knowing about less than half of them beyond the casual passing by during transition periods. There's a stark lack of availability for me to form any sort of professional or even personal connection with students that learn under different disciplines with me. Purchase's much-referenced slogan is "Think Wide Open"; of course, if you were to ask a plethora of the students that have spent longer than a year here, they consider it a type of running joke. For lack of better words, it is impossible to think wide open when you are only allowed so much time to work on your craft and meet others like you that do more than share a schedule and a major. There is also the matter of attending an art school in the first place. In an article regarding the burnout rate in a music school, it's commonplace to joke about being depressed and tired and sick of your work all the time (Orzel. 5). The stress of attending school is already one thing, but to go to school and earn a degree for art is another entirely. Students are expected to work long hours on their projects and homework, as is expected of us, but when the homework and projects revolve around someone painting a series of drawings, or a person having to have at least ten pages added to their play by the end of every week in the semester, how could we not feel burnt out? Added with the pressure of undertaking a senior project, it simply can become too much for a student who's most likely already biting off more than they can chew.

The Impact of COVID-19

Well, a semester later and the state of the world has changed quite drastically since I last wrote this essay. I closed the first initial ten pages with the assumption that by this time I was going to be staging the most glorious rendition of a visual narrative for Hozier's album *Wasteland*,

Baby! (2019) but then the world was suddenly and viciously overcome with the novel coronavirus also known as COVID-19. This virus is easily spread, more specifically through the saliva droplets produced by infected people, and can also last on surfaces and clothing for longer than three days. As a reaction to stop the spread, everyone in nearly every country have been ordered to maintain a current lifestyle of social distancing and state-wide lockdowns. Now, due to the social-distancing rules, everyone, for the duration of the outbreak, has to maintain a distance of six-feet apart from each other as well as having to avoid places where crowds of fifty plus people can congregate. That's a hard lifestyle to maintain when you're living in a college dorm where you're all pretty much packed like sardines and share a bathroom, among other rooms that risk everyone in the dorm contracting and or possibly dying from the virus. So, as a result, colleges closed their campuses and sent everyone home for the rest of the semester. Classes are being held virtually through an app called Zoom, and consequently, any senior projects that require a crowd and a stage were forced to be cancelled or postponed until next semester.

The dilemma here being that for the graduating class of 2020, this semester is our last semester of college entirely, and waiting until the fall semester to showcase our projects is simply not an option. A lot of us are given no choice but to put our productions on the back burner until we can find another time to stage them. I won't be among those numbers seeing as how I've quickly come to terms that my time has come and passed, and while I commend a lot of the other upcoming Purchase alum, I think a lot of us have come to this heart-breaking decision. However, while this virus has done a remarkable job with bringing down the morale of nearly every person in the world, especially countries with alarming rates of infections and infection-related deaths, I think that it's quite beautiful in the way we've all collectively turned to artists, and to the need to create while we all sit locked away in our homes waiting for a break during this dire time. Likewise,

I applaud artists for quickly coming together to do what we can to help spread even a little joy and creativity in this otherwise bleak time. Of course, none of us can do this entirely on our own, just the same as when it comes to creating collaborative pieces.

With the social distancing and the lockdowns in effect, everyone quickly took to the virtual meeting website called Zoom. And I don't mean this lightly when I say everyone. Its original purpose is to provide virtual meeting rooms for conferences and general office meetings, but soon it turned into a virtual classroom for students, as well as daily meetings for those that are fortunate enough to work from home. While current events transpired, and cities and countries remained on lock down for extended periods of time, this meant that "essential" and "non-essential" businesses quickly categorized what the governments thought should stay open during quarantine and what should not. Of course, it should not be surprising that most arts organizations were chosen as non-essential. In fact, this quarantine has been responsible for shutting down Broadway, a NYC theatre staple, until June 7th (CNN.com. 2020.), as well as several museums and arts venues that would otherwise be packed with foot traffic of New Yorkers and tourists alike. This pandemic has affected artists to the point where there's even emergency funds being created to help them stay afloat. "Conceived by the consortium of nonprofits, the Artist Relief fund aims to quickly assist artists impacted by the Covid-19 economic downturn...The emergency package has an initial pot of \$10 million for 2,000 grantees" (QZ.com. 2020). Nevertheless, artists have always stared into the face of hardship and continue to create despite it all.

While Zoom is used for more formal occasions like classes and virtual conference calls/meetings, artists have also flocked to the video communication site to increase morale during an otherwise desolate time thanks to the work-at-home orders placed in states most affected, like New York. Like the cast of the infamous play *Hamilton* took part in a Zoom call to serenade a

nine-year-old super fan. “For her ninth birthday, all Aubrey wanted was to see the smash-hit musical *Hamilton* staged in Jacksonville, Florida. But the coronavirus shutdown meant she had to miss the production and stay at home...(The Guardian. 2020).” The rest of the article goes on to explain that Jon Krasinski, also known as Jim Halpert from “The Office,” had her as a guest on his show *Some Good News* and surprised her with a Zoom conference of the cast singing the opening song of the play. “For Aubrey, who rates her *Hamilton* fandom as ‘a million’ on a scale of 1-10, seeing her favourite song from the show performed by the cast is just too much. The episode already has more than 800,000 views on YouTube.” SNL has also just recently begun recording episodes of the show while the cast remains in quarantine and socially-distancing through Zoom and even hosted recently recovered COVID-19 survivor, Tom Hanks on its first episode of its return from the indefinite hiatus.

Keeping along this theme, the cast of the Broadway musical *Les Misérables* hosted their own quarantined, Zoom version of the song *One Day More*. “The video features all of the performers going about their days in self-isolation...Last week, [Jordan] Grubb put out a request on social media asking friends to contact him if they were interested in participating... ‘Everyone’s footage you see in the video is filmed from themselves. It was kind of this artistic community labor of love for what we do.’” (CNN. 2020). Other arts organizations, like The Public Theatre, hosts a virtual class called Watch Me Work. “Watch Me Work is performance piece, a meditation on the artistic process, and an actual work session, featuring Suzan-Lori Parks working on her newest writing project...During the final forty-minutes of class, Parks will answer questions from students about being a writer and the writing process (publictheatre.org. 2020).”

Theatre Unleashed, a theatre company based in Los Angeles, used Zoom to both perform as well as rehearse and develop Brandie June’s play *Psyche Today*. “So on March 13th, a group of

six actors performed the play on Zoom, while playwright June and a digital audience listened in. And despite a few issues mostly related to flaky internet connections, the event was a success, not only entertaining a live audience but gathering valuable feedback and information for June as she continues to develop her script” (Fastcompany.com. 2020). Even Zoom realizes the importance of artists utilizing the platform as a means to continue their craft, as well as spread and boost morale across the world with their talents. “‘Arts play a very important role in society, and bring joy to people of all ages and cultures,’ a Zoom spokesperson wrote in an email to *Fast Company*. ‘We’re thrilled that Zoom can play a role in helping artists share their craft and bring communities together — particularly at a time like this.’”

“Particularly at a time like this?” While I am under no illusion that we are caught in a troublesome and scary part of history at the moment, pandemics are no stranger to history. Artists have always come together in strange and uplifting ways to respond to pandemics. I don’t even mean artists as people whose sources of incomes and professions consist of creating art, but I mean people in general. Art has always been used a means to relate and to share joy with others. Starting from the hands of the earliest forms of ourselves, smattered in caves, paintings, etched into the stony walls of our first homes, eventually making its way to us telling stories, crafting narratives full of adventure, romance, of hilarity, of tragedy and failure when it would get too dark to roam outside but just late enough that everyone would huddle together just before going to bed. Art has always been the one constant shared across humankind for as long as we’ve been around, and it comes at no surprise to me that when times become especially tough, we turn to art to comfort us in a way that the world we currently exist in lacks.

Pandemics like the Black Plague (1347-53) birthed the song *Ring Around the Rosy* which is a delightful nursery rhyme about people catching and dying from that fatal disease still sung to

this day by children as they play. The 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic that killed fifty-million around the world, and 675,000 people alone in the U.S. (cdc.gov. 2020) was not only one of the most recent severe epidemics in the states, but the trauma from it inspired creations like *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf, who makes her protagonist a survivor of the influenza epidemic. She explores the trauma inherent with surviving a disease that wreaks as much havoc as the Spanish Flu did. “This late age of the world’s experience had bred in them all, men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrows; courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and stoical bearing” (NYTimes.com. 2020). Even still, Mrs. Dalloway doesn’t despair after surviving what was surely a time not unlike our current one, and she, instead of letting what happened break her spirit and her capacity to love, wants to celebrate the life she still had by having a dinner party with her friends and submersing herself in flowers aplenty.

And humans have always done that, I think. Even now, while scrolling through social media I’m almost always passing over a post that describes the happiness or the sheer excitement of the party that the poster will throw once the quarantine lockdown is over, and underneath the post are thousands of comments that share that hope as well. Try as we might to disagree or fight the notion, humans are social animals, that’s how we were able to thrive all these years on this often cruel planet. We take solace in the fact that we are not alone. That we can “Zoom” each other just to share a pint of beer, or to perform karaoke, or just to talk to each other while we’re all stuck in the house. Most of us are stuck with family, or with other friends and that eases the burden of being kept from the outside world just a little. But art, art aids the mind and the soul in ways that we can’t explain or even sometimes comprehend, but we accept anyway.

“...lately a growing group of people are getting more creative with their coping methods: They’re making art. Photography, music, painting and drawing are keeping people busy and

distracted from the stresses of COVID-19” (earthday.org. 2020). This article is right in describing all the ways that people are spending their quarantines. One can seldom pass a “20 Things to do in Your Apartment” article without their being some mention of taking on some type of art project, or even a smaller-scale arts and crafts project. I myself have even taken up crocheting again since I find myself with nothing but time to make that blanket I’ve always wanted for literal months. The article then goes on to explain why we humans always have a penchant to turning to creating art during stressful times: “Neurobiologist Semir Zeki found that just viewing art causes joy, similar to the sensation of falling in love.”

Viewing art and joining others in making something beautiful can be almost cathartic to people, whether they consider themselves artists or not. The article also makes mention of the viral videos of people in Italy, trapped in their homes during lockdown, singing with each other. Singing songs about love, and how everything was going to be okay as we are all suffering from this virus and we’ll be stronger if we realize the power of being surrounded by community. “Every day, as the bells chime 18:00 in our Roman neighbourhoods, we open our windows and sing uplifting Italian classics with our neighbours. Yesterday, it was Nino Manfredi’s *Tanto pe’ Canta’* (Just for Singing); today, it’s Al Bano and Romina Power’s *Felicita* (Happiness); and tomorrow it’ll be Rino Gaetano’s *Ma il cielo e sempre piu blu* (The sky is always bluer). We turn up the volume, dance at the window and wave to our neighbours across the piazza” (bbc.com. 2020). Videos of people singing in Spain and other countries as well have flooded YouTube and other social media channels showing that humans truly cannot help but to work together to create art, as well as to use art to make not only ourselves comfortable, but to help make our community, our homes comfortable and safe as well for the uncertain times ahead spent in quarantine.

The New Yorker writes about a group of three musicians in their twenties named Rai Benet, Klaus Stroink, and Guillem Boltó who all live together in the same apartment. “They took a trumpet, a trombone, and guitar upstairs, along with some beers, and started to riff.” The article then goes on to say that they caught a bit of attention on social media with their funky beats, and comedic lyrics like, ‘Please stay homa./Don’t want the corona./It’s O.K. to be alona’...Word started to spread through the Catalan music scene, and, as other artists offered to collaborate, the three watched their social-media accounts went from having a few thousand followers to tens to thousands, practically overnight.” While I want to highlight how collaborative efforts are kind in the face of this virus, I also want to show just how effective collaboration through artistic endeavors can pay off for the artists in question. What started as just a passion project between these three friends, turned into an actual collaborative effort that inspired other artists to help join them in their mission of wanting to make people happy and entertained while quarantined, this shows just how well-placed social promotion and engagement can increase the reach and the impact of even something as small as three guys drinking beer, making fun songs off the top of their heads to stave off boredom.

Since the lockdown started in America, arts organizations have even taken liberties of bringing more entertainment to your homes in a period where that is now increasingly difficult. Movie theatres and play theatres are shutting down left and right, but there are still services provided, like the Met Opera House giving the public free access to their operas on their website, and already releasing their schedule for the week of April 6th-12th as well as the link for the week of the 13th-19th (timeout.com. 2020). There have also been a plethora of websites that have showed up since the lockdown began. “As the coronavirus pandemic continues, there is a surprising amount of good news for lovers of musicals. The theater-streaming service BroadwayHD is

offering a seven-day free trial. You can watch performances from Broadway, the West End, and other elite venues around the world in your living room. Shows on offer include classes like, “The King and I” “The Sound of Music,” and “Driving Miss Daisy” starring James Earl Jones.” (wtxl.com. 2020).

But, this still begs the question of “are artists truly important in society?” If you answered anything that didn’t involve the word “yes,” then this paragraph should help you understand just how incorrect you are as well as provide some information as to why you should reconsider your mindset on why you consider artists unimportant. As I stated previously in this essay, humans have been doing it since we were able to stand upright, if not earlier than that. There are countless articles online that show the caveman paintings that are still intact and gazed upon in both awe and admiration, as well as the countless museums across the globe that hold ancient artifacts created by those belonging to times well before ours. I also invite you to reconsider what you define as a person who is an artist. Do you characterize this person as an artist because they paint for a living? Because they’re poor but still choose to find a publishing company for their novel instead of looking for a “real job” like the rest of us?

Is it because the artist in question spends all their time at art museums and has developed opinions about all the art they’ve consumed, so you assume that they’re one, too, because, who else would be so interested in staring at a painting all day if you weren’t working on one yourself? Likewise, do you consider movie stars like Brad Pitt, or Lupita Nyong’o to be artists, too, despite their being household names and walking Red Carpets aplenty? What about your new past times now that we’re stuck in the house; are you watching a lot of Netflix? Do you not consider the directors, the screenwriters of your beloved shows, your current binge-watch, your chosen Netflix party-watches, artists as well? “Public art plays an important role in connecting communities,

humanizing the environment and giving a community a unique identity” (theconversation.org. 2020). I’m of the mindset that this statement is true; the arts have always impacted the community the artist thrusts their work into. Whether or not the community is keen on the subject of art, no matter the medium. Sometimes, even the artist does not intend for intense reactions to their own pieces. Like Dolly Parton’s musical influence on the LGBTQ+ community, and how her style influences drag queens’ styles.

Speaking of celebrities, they have also been trapped in their homes and (are hopefully) adhering to the social distancing and stay-at-home orders pertaining to wherever they are. There have been articles all over the internet about how celebs are doing stuck in their million-dollar homes during the lockdown, and what they’ve been up to. One such example that comes to mind is the video of Ellen DeGeneres getting bored and face-timing all of her equally rich and famous friends because she’s about to go mad from being trapped in her house all day. Another example is the now infamously ill-received video of celebrities singing the John Lennon song “Imagine” as an attempt to comfort all of us who are feeling the effects of the virus, and are just looking for a some kind of light at the end of the tunnel. The video, initially, Gal Gadot’s (Wonder Woman) idea, featured other A-listers like Will Ferrell, Natalie Portman, Amy Adams, Mark Ruffalo, Kristen Wiig, and the list goes on, taking turns singing lines from the song. “On social media, Gadot and her crew were lambasted for bumblingly contributing, well, whatever this is as opposed to money or resources,” This particularly scathing *New York Times* article offers a common opinion about the reception of this three-minute long video. “Their genial naivete, is blinding them to the grossest sin here: the smug self-satisfaction, the hubris of the alleged good deed. The presumption that an empty and profoundly awkward gesture from a passel of celebrities has many meaning whatsoever borders on delusion.”

The above paragraph just goes to show that not all good collaborative efforts will be successive, or even good ones. Gal Godot's fatal flaw when making the video is that her introduction to the song was that she heard a street performer playing it and thought it was "so powerful" and instead of offering any real advice or help before she started singing, she went with one of the throwaway lines that a lot of the rich and famous tend to utter when something actually affects them, which is, "We're all in this together". Keep in mind, that Gal Godot is not one of the millions of nurses and doctors that work on the frontlines, or the supermarket workers, the mailmen and women, the delivery men and women that have to risk contracting the virus and even die from it – every day they go to work just so they can have food to eat and a roof over their heads. Her tone-deafness also shows by not only employing other famous celebrities to sing the song (coronavirus isn't going to be magically cured because you're singing with Will Ferrell) but the song itself. Others have already criticized her for using John Lennon's song, since it has come out that he's abused his wife and his past partners, neglected his son, and also has said racist, and anti-Semitic things, going against his image of being this peace-maker. The message of the song, lastly, has nothing to do with the state of the world as it currently is. *Imagine* doesn't have any uplifting messages about surviving a pandemic, nor does it provide any comfort to the people who are constantly exposing themselves to it, or have lost their jobs because of it. A poorly-researched and poorly crafted collaborative effort often looks like and turns out like Godot's.

Conclusion

My project's goal was to not end up that way. It was supposed to be much like the Spanish project of love that was discussed earlier in the paper, just something that a few friends wanted to perform together. A celebration of our love for each other, for ourselves, for the things we love and the people we choose to love and hopefully that could resonate with the audience. While it

seems like the performance won't be in front of a crowd any time soon, or at the very least, a physical crowd, the dream still lives in my heart and the heart of my friends that were ready to give their best performance for our show. There's a WordPress in progress to help commemorate all those senior projects that were axed by this pandemic, and I'll consider whether I want mine up there as well. As for me as an artist, I continue to write and to create and post my work. I don't think even the end of the world could keep me from that.

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