



Alternate Monetization for Musicians

In the current crisis, it's obvious that many musicians have lost their income from their art due to the collapse of live gigging. However, many musicians are also continuing to create music, and sharing it via streaming and recordings. While you may not be able to create income in the same way from streaming as from a gig, and you may want to keep the music you are creating accessible, there are ways by which you can still receive some income from the music you are making.

Bypassing a venue or promoter, a number of platforms offer ways in which audiences can contribute directly to the artists. Audiences may want to support artists they like during this period, and these platforms can also be a good way of building a two-way relationship with your audience for the longer term, or expanding your audience outside your geographic area.

An audience who contributes directly to your art can be more invested in what you are doing.

Virtual Tips

A number of platforms have emerged to create a digital version of the tip jar in an increasingly cashless society. Most of these are ideal for use in a streaming situation, just insert a link during or at the end of your stream.

[Ko-fi.](#)

As its name suggests, Ko-fi is based on the idea of donating approximately **the price of a coffee** (€3) as a tip to the artist, or higher donations in multiples of €3. It's quick and easy to use, with a [personal page](#). The low numbers and ease can encourage people to donate quickly. The system uses Stripe to take payments, which does incur some processing fees, but not a high percentage, and the remainder is handily paid into your bank account. Like Patreon there are features whereby you can reward monthly subscribers with exclusive content, or set up a system for commissions.

[Paypal](#)

A number of musicians attach their PayPal to gigs for people to donate. This has the advantage of not being restricted to a specific number for donations, and being in **common use**.

You can [add a button](#) to your PayPal page with a label like 'Tip Jar', 'Contributions', and include your own choice of price options.

Anecdotally, people sometimes run into trouble with PayPal's verification system which can take a long time to sort out, so this is a good one to have set up and checked well in advance of when you need it. Check as well to ensure that you can automatically accept tips [without having to approve each one](#).

[Venmo](#)

Venmo is similar to PayPal for exchanging funds, without as much customisation possibility, but again allows freedom to choose any amounts for donation. The amount is selected by the person paying. It's probably more used by a **younger demographic**, and easier to use from a **mobile app**. Venmo could possibly also transition well into a virtual tip jar for live gigs in the future.

[Twitch](#)

Twitch is a platform primarily used for gamers to **stream** their play and receive tips, but is rapidly growing in its popularity with musicians. This is an **interactive model**, where for example, a donation could get a song request bumped to the top of the list. A more out there idea, but one which could have a range of possibilities. DIY Musician suggested some ideas for streaming on Twitch in their article [here](#).

New apps, e.g. [Juble it!](#) are springing up regularly with this virtual tipjar concept in mind, many in the early stages, but it's worth keeping an eye open for one which might be useful to you.

Patronage

[Patreon](#) is based on a **monthly subscription** model, whereby people regularly support artists they like to create any content they want. Your music can be found directly on your Patreon page for an audience, either open to the public or reserved for patrons.

You can leave the patronage open to what your patrons would like to pay, or create **tiers of patronage at different prices**. Artists on Patreon often offer **exclusive access** to content or regular updates to patrons. Patronage tiers can be associated with different levels of rewards

Patreon's fees are 5%, 8% or 12% of you make, and payment transaction fees on what your patrons pay.

Some artists have created very faithful communities around their Patreon. Musician [Amanda Palmer](#) is one artist who is quite vocal about how her patrons have made a big difference to her art.

It's interesting to see some Patreon pages from other disciplines for **inventive ideas on what content** you might like to make available for your patrons. These can be as simple as early access to a new song, or perhaps for higher donations, things like a personalised happy birthday video, or an invitation to a private performance. Poets will sometimes do personalised poems, [food bloggers](#) offer exclusive access to recipes, [podcasters](#) may have Patron-only episode releases.

Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding platforms such as [Kickstarter](#), [GoFundMe](#) or [FundIt](#) are based on setting a **target amount of money and date**, and asking for donations from a large number of people, who each contribute small amounts (Kickstarter and FundIt are specifically for creative fundraising, where GoFundMe is more generally used for a wide range of charitable causes). The target usually has to be reached by a certain date or the money is returned to the contributors. The platform takes a certain percentage for its services.

Crowdfunders are most often used to fund a concrete project, and are popular for **albums** (e.g. Sean Carpio's WoWos album) **or the purchase of instruments** (e.g. Max Zaska's [Guitars for Direct Provision](#)). However, in these days, if you are part of a collective or series, particularly with an already-established audience, a crowdfunder could be a good option to try and fund artist fees. Recently [Kilkenny's Sofa Sessions](#) used [GoFundMe](#) during their 'Sofa Sessions TV' online broadcasts, to collect donations which were used to pay artists for cancelled gigs. With a loyal audience who are accustomed to donating (the series is built on a donation model), this translated well to an online environment.

Funders generally receive or are promised some **benefits** relating to their donation. There are usually different tiers to offer different gifts for different levels of donation. With albums this often effectively works as a subscription system - people pay approximately the cost of an album, and will receive it once the album is complete. For higher contribution tiers, other merchandise can be added, or experiences such as a virtual lesson, all the way up to a private performance.

Ticketed Virtual Events

During our current virtual climate, artists are also transitioning to **concerts fully online**, including a ticketing system. In April, Artists Unlimited (Belgium) ran a [Livestream Online Festival](#), which was completely ticketed, with all ticket income going directly to artists. [Eventbrite](#), and other ticketing platforms like [Tito](#) and [Billette](#) are still available for people to buy tickets to online events. As usual, fees per ticket will be paid to the platform.

Tickets to virtual events will usually involve a private link being sent to the ticket holders shortly before the event. Eventbrite's audience email system is quite customisable, and you can also set up reminder emails some time beforehand.

This might be a good option to replace a **collaborative planned series or event**, i.e. with an Arts Centre or other organisation with a stable audience. As an example, Wexford Arts Centre are currently running a [Jazz Appreciation](#) series online, with modest ticket prices. The added value of a discussion, Q&A or talk could be a good way to encourage audiences towards a performance.

There are however obvious difficulties in the saturated virtual market. It may be difficult to find enough paying audience to make this worth your while. Major artists and venues are offering free streams from around the world, and audiences may not be inclined to pay very much for tickets to an online performance. It's also worth considering whether it is more useful to you to operate on a donation model, and build a positive relationship with the audience, who have the satisfaction of donating.

Although there is a serious problem with the devaluation of art, and artists should of course be paid for their work and skill, in this current climate, you may wish to explore the options open to you.

Merchandising

It almost goes without saying, but it's always worth directing people to any merchandise you have - **albums** for sale, **t-shirts** or anything else. There are possibilities of services like Teespring which can enable you to put out merchandise without a big initial outlay. [Teespring](#) print on demand and retain their costs from there.

For recordings, you want to direct listeners to the platforms that will give you the most benefit - [Bandcamp](#) rather than Spotify. During the COVID-19 crisis, Bandcamp are also running '[no fees](#)' days, which could both give your listeners an extra impetus to buy on that day to support you, and will let you get a higher fee from the sale. At the moment, Bandcamp plans to waive their fees on **Friday 5th June and Friday 3rd July**. Some independent labels have also boosted this initiative by waiving their own fees on these days - e.g. [Diatrobe Records](#) in Ireland.

An easy way to direct attention would be to mention (either in text or during your performance), that whatever track you are performing is available on X album, and include the links immediately so that it's easy to find.

While these monetization streams might only yield small amounts, they can add up to a useful amount, and can be another way to build up your relationship with your audiences.

If we have missed something you think should be added to this article, please let us know at admin [at] improvisedmusic [dot] ie using the subject header 'Resource: Alternate Monetization for Musicians'