

Interviewee: Vanessa Sheren

Interviewer: Patricia Chisholm

Date: Saturday, March 13, 2021.

Place: Interview conducted via Zoom both Located in Vancouver, B.C., Canada

[0:00]PC: I am Patricia Chisholm and I would like to acknowledge it is my honour to live, work and study on the unceded ancestral territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Coast Salish Nations. Today is March 13th 2021 and I am interviewing Vanessa Sherren.

PC: Thank you so much for joining me

PC: Can you state your name please

VS- Vanessa Sheren

PC: and do you consent to being interviewed?

VS: Yes, I do

PC: OK, I thank you so much for taking the time to sit with me today and discuss the effects that the covid-19 Pandemic has had on you as a live performer.

PC: So, The fun question to start, You just won a free ticket to see any person or band, Who would it be and why?

VS: The Distillers On my shirt, Brody Dalle, The singer and guitarist for that band, She was my inspiration for wanting to get into music in the first place. When I saw their first video on MuchMusic 20 years ago when they still played music [*laughs*]. And I've seen them a few times in concert -But ahh- I've always wanted to meet her in particular, and pick her brain and stuff, so.

PC: being a fangirl is always fun, you know there's always that one person where you're like Will I be able to control myself when I meet them ( both laugh)

Both of us Laughing

VS: My track record for meeting people that I admire so far has been good so I would hope so

PC: Fantastic, Now the fun stuff, I just want to let you know as a disclaimer The focus of this interview Is on the many impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on the Live

performances. I may ask a question or questions which you may feel uncomfortable answering. I want you to know that you can decline to answer any one of them that I ask.

VS: Yup, Okay

PC: What type of performing do you do?

VS: I perform in cover bands. I'm in a Motley Crue tribute And another band that just kinda does generic Rock covers.

[2:22] PC: How long have you been performing?

VS: Not long, just about five years. Took my entire life to work up the courage and belief that I could actually try this at the very least, to get around to doing it.

[*Vanessa adjusted her laptop, 2:31*]

PC: Do you have any pre or post-show rituals?

VS: Pre-show definitely a warm-up...a vocal warm-up and just unclenching my entire body, cause that's its normal state. (We both laugh) and I find that relaxation and just like grounding/centring for lack of better words is key to my throat not clenching up on me.

PC: that's fair, yup.

VS: -Post-show is usually just going straight to bed.

PC: It gets tiring I'm sure. What are your favourite aspects of performing live?

VS: Just the energy from the audience mostly and doing the whole Livestream thing and I've seen a lot of bands doing that and I've been really reluctant because there's nothing you have words on the screen maybe. And I want to hear people's voices, I want to see their faces, I want to hear them singing along. And that gives me energy in return.

PC: I would think that doing it online you would almost feel like you were lip-syncing

VS: A little bit, Yeah

PC: yeah, I've been wondering, intriguing

PC: Do you feed off the audience?

VS: Definitely. Like I just said yeah, that's kind of everything for me and without that... It's just not at all the same experience.

[4:26] PC: You might as well be singing in the closet. Laughs..

VS: [*Laughs*], I'm talking in the closet right now.

PC: Exactly

PC: So in the spring of 2020, did you have any shows booked when the province went into lockdown?

VS: YUP, we were supposed to play the Roxy that May and like everybody else I was like oh it's going to be a couple of weeks and we'll be back at it, play our show and Hello here we are a year later.

PC: How would you say that made you feel when you first found out?

VS: I was super disappointed. Besides the Roxy being a pretty mainstream busy venue It was going to be our second show with the Motley Crue tribute after our first show which had gone really really well and gotten an amazing response from the crowd and we were really hoping to gather some momentum by playing again. I was frustrated and upset.

PC: Absolutely, that's understandable

PC: Would you say that your band had just gotten going, so to speak and you were told

VS: Yeah, we had been rehearsing for about a year and we were really excited and really proud of the work we had done and just wanted to get it out there.

PC: That's fair I understand that.

PC: How long did you think you would not be allowed to perform?

VS: Like everybody else, a couple of weeks. It would blow over and yeah again hello here we are.

PC: ah yes, it's rough

VS: yeah, as time went on I was trying not to think about it because we didn't know anything. It just kept going on and you know it seemed to get worse. I was hopeful towards the end of the summer when things started opening up again, but not so much.

[6:27] PC: Here we are

PC: Have you been to perform since larger venues were cancelled, so I guess I mean in smaller ones?

VS: Yes, there's a couple of places out in Surrey that have been booking since June [2020]. Obviously, with reduced capacity, you have the plexiglass tuning going on everywhere. More recently they have had to basically promote these shows to private groups or send out individual invitations because people are snitching on them even though the cops show up and say you're fine and they leave. But yes, so long story short, yes-So sure there are a couple of places that have still been booking and we have managed to play a handful of shows.

PC: I would think that would help you emotionally a little bit, at least being able to do something.

VS: Yeah

PC: Are there any aspects that are the same?

VS: Once you're up there on stage yes, it does feel -once you get into it it does feel pretty much the same. -The surroundings just kinda fall away and you're just into it and you see the crowd in front of you, and everything-so-even though - it's not busy and people can't dance- the motions (*emotions?*) feel the same.

PC: -Okay, well that's interesting and at least you get something back in that respect.

[8:00] PC: So I am going to do the disclaimer again,

VS: Okay

PC: I may ask a question or questions which you may feel uncomfortable answering. I want you to know that you can decline to answer any one of them that I ask.

PC: How long into the disruption of shows did you start to see the emotional or mental effects?

VS: It was pretty soon into it I just felt like everything I had wanted to do my entire life had been ripped away from me. Which for the majority of people to be relatively mild. I

definitely have some unpopular opinions about all of this, but uh, they are probably not scientific but emotionally charged nonetheless.

It was a bit of an identity thing who am I if I'm not performing for people if I don't have this outlet. Can I still call myself a musician or an artist or a performer?

A real lack of that creative outlet was really hard and what am I going to do now should I try something else? Obviously, there are other artistic outlets available, but that was something that I had just started to do and I just started to be proud of what I was doing with it. I had all this surge of energy and momentum and great feedback from people and all of a sudden it was just taken away. It was pretty soon and I went through multiple waves of that over the past year.

PC: You've answered some of my other questions which is great, thank you. Leading off of that, what have you done to try and redirect your emotions since you can't perform?

VS: Well I'm also a visual artist, which I've been neglecting that the past few years, so just been drawing and finding peace in that and looking into getting into tattooing. And we've still been able to rehearse for the most part, except when there was the shutdown of everything. Rehearsing is still a great outlet, so there's been that too.

[11:17] PC: that's good. Now you say you've been looking into getting into tattooing and visual arts, would you say that is primarily how you've been channelling your creative energy.

VS: I wouldn't say it's a huge part. There's just been a lot of waiting. I'm just stewing about it and not being really proactive. Like everybody else, you got these waves of being really bummed and being paralyzed in that. It's been more of a side thing if I need to calm myself down that's been there for me

PC: ok well that's good to hear. So now a year into the pandemic with the possibility of returning to live performances ( V snickers/ I say Right?!, positive hopes I actually rewrote that question) How do you feel to returning to performing.

VS: Oh I can't wait!. I'm just super excited I have no hesitations whatsoever, and as soon as we're given the go-ahead I am there, totally there already. We've talked over the last year me and my bandmates, would we do underground shows where you can't bring your phone in. We're just like whatever it takes right now, you know. So yeah seeing these bands planning tours that has to mean something because that's a lot of money and time and planning to put into something if there's not some degree of hope that that could not return really soon

[12:30] PC: I almost wonder with the recent announcement that we could gather with 10 people, OUTSIDE, I wonder if we could do a little cluster group festival, I have these dreams. What do you think about that possibility?

VS: Like I said, in any way shape or form we can do this I'm there. I mean I see comedians doing tours with venues at half capacity, if they can do that why can't we have bands? Like obviously for someone like the Rolling Stones or a massively popular band it might be a little harder, but for smaller club shows, I mean why not.

PC: Absolutely

VS: and I feel there's been a lot of discrimination with a lot of aspects of the arts. Like we can have fully functioning movie sets [*I misheard this as you will see by my reply, which she doesn't correct*] and we can't have concerts...that pisses me off quite a bit.

PC: That's a valid point, personally I haven't been to a movie theatre\*and personally it makes me anxious just thinking about it. And I'm wondering how it's situated, is it every other seat? I mean like you were saying, why can we apply that to live music, (she went to say something) a space like the Commodore, block the dance floor or this is your square, with your 10 people pod, kinda idea you have to wear a mask, like have protocols in place, have those spacing distances, have the mask policies but let us back, Do you agree?

[14:17] VS: For sure, for sure, there are so many contradictions, they are looking at bringing back sports and religious gatherings. I'm like excuse me, you'll let people tackle each other but you won't let us sit quietly in a theatre to watch a show. Or like the Rio perfect example, they're allowed to show sports, but they're not allowed to show movies? How is this different? And from what I've seen from photos of what they've been doing it's every other seat or two seats empty and four full or people in a bubble or whatever. It's completely doable in my opinion, But what do I know

PC: Right!?

PC: when we're allowed back what do you want it to look like?

VS: Ideally, we would have no restrictions whatsoever, we could pack venues again (PC: yeah) it will be like Christmas

PC: get your shot at the door and then come on in.

VS: Right!? I imagine what's gonna happen is everybody will have their pass on their phone and you just need to scan it or whatever when you come in. whatever they need to do and I think it's perfectly possible, and hopefully, soon we'll be able to have a small venue full of people

P: So Hypothetically speaking, a lot of news articles are stating now that to be able to travel your passport will have to have some notation that you've had the vaccine to -the primary covid-19 virus- be able to travel. Do you think that is something that would be possible for live music to help it restart?

VS: I think so, it was a while ago I think I heard Ticketmaster wanted to do something like that. I mean if you can do it for movie sets and flights why can't you do it for shows?

[16:34]PC: Yup

PC: I have one last question, Can you tell me about a show that had an impact on you as a performer?

VS: One that I played or one that I saw?

PC: ohhh, Both

VS: *[laughing]*

PC: I want both

VS: The first one we played, the first Motley Crue show last January, that was just one of the best nights of my life music-related or otherwise. We went on at midnight and everyone was totally smashed and ready to get into it. And two other amazing bands had played before us there was an AC/DC tribute and then the Black Sabbath- they've been around for like 20 years and they're amazing, these big candelabras and everything that we got to keep up during our set, and it was was cool, fog machines and people up at the front pumping their fists and I felt really good about my performance and we just really brought this energy because it was our first show and we were hungry for it, and we had been waiting to get out here for so long and Club 340 is just so full of energy anyways, the energy of the place and the crowd. I was on a high for about a week after that. It was so much fun.

VS: and one that I've seen, probably when Alannis Morissetts came through and I think it was at the Orpheum an autistic on her jagged little pill tour, 15 years ago, I know there are varying opinions about her voice but I the authenticity she performed with, the power of her voice was inspiring, I was glued to it the entire set.

[18:44] PC: thank you so much for taking the time to sit with me and share your story. If there is anything that you think of that you may want to contribute moving forward, feel free to reach out and we can sit down again.

VS: Likewise

PC/VS: Yay, [*quite clapping*]

PC: Thanks sounds, good and I'll see you next week.