

Transcript of Interview with Terra Lopez by Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Terra Lopez

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

Date: 04/21/2021

Location (Interviewee): Sacramento, California

Location (Interviewer):

Transcriber: Angelica S Ramos

Some of the things we discussed include:

Learning about the pandemic before it hit the United States and taking precautions pre-lock down. Transitioning from a busy schedule regularly touring 8 months of the year to the feeling of a novel “2 week break” at the beginning of the pandemic, to picking up speed, making art throughout the pandemic, the waning availability of work more recently, and awareness that once touring becomes possible again it will be even more competitive. How COVID-19 amplified the marginalization of artists, and that this will be a lasting problem. Releasing a record in September 2020 and creative problem solving in advertising it without touring. Learning new technologies and taking on new expenses for them for the purpose of creating audience connections over Live Streams. The decision to attend Black Lives Matter protests after George Floyd’s murder in spite of fears related to COVID-19 and crowds. Learning to take a holistic approach to health over time. How healthcare structures compound the margination of already marginalized people. That rising vaccination rates may change ideas about safety. Difficulties of negotiating COVID-19 related boundaries, the practices of respecting others’ boundaries, and friendships lost along the way. The benefits of partnership during the pandemic and access to affection. Newly bringing a dog home and how that changed a sense of purpose. Experiences of anxiety and depression.

Kit Heintzman 00:01

Hello.

Tara Lopez 00:03

Hi.

Kit Heintzman 00:05

Would you please start by telling me your full name, the date, the time and your location?

Tara Lopez 00:10

Yes. My name is Tara Lopez. It is April 21, 2021. It is 11:06 and I'm located in Sacramento, California.

Kit Heintzman 00:21

And do you consent to having this interview recorded, digitally uploaded and publicly released under a Creative Commons license attribution noncommercial sharealike?

Tara Lopez 00:31

Yes, I do.

Kit Heintzman 00:33

Would you please start by introducing yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening to this? What would you want them to know about you and the place that you're speaking from?

Tara Lopez 00:44

Yes, I am a full time musician, touring artists recording artist along with being a music publicist.

Kit Heintzman 00:53

I asked what the word pandemic means to you. What does that conjure?

Tara Lopez 00:59

Despair. Mmm. Yeah, a very trying time.

Kit Heintzman 01:10

To the extent that you're comfortable sharing, would you say something about your experiences with health and healthcare infrastructure prior to the pandemic?

Tara Lopez 01:19

Prior to the pandemic? Um, you know, I think health care obviously, has always been such a major issue for marginalized communities and for musicians and artists. And it definitely, you know, I've experienced lapses in medical care, especially while being a full time artist and in the industry, they don't really provide opportunities for health care. So pre pandemic, it was already a pretty big issue, and then obviously, was exacerbated with the pandemic.

Kit Heintzman 02:01

And staying in the pre pandemic times, what was your day to day looking like then?

Tara Lopez 02:07

In the pre pandemic, I was very busy, I was constantly touring on the road. But eight months out of the year, I would say, I was also working in the studio a lot, recording writing, just ever, it seemed as if I had work every week, whether it was touring, or writing or recording with folks. I had very little downtime.

Kit Heintzman 02:38

And how has that changed in a beginning, mid post pandemic world.

Tara Lopez 02:47

So in the beginning of the pandemic, probably like, a lot of people I thought, you know, this is kind of a novelty. So there was a bit of, you know, excitement, I guess, you know, Oh, I get a break, finally, thinking it was going to last two weeks a month max. And so in the beginning, nothing really changed too much other than okay, like, I get a little bit of downtime. So I'm going to work on some songs or writing or, or various other projects, I didn't have time for the middle of the pandemic, I still had some optimism and was still very busy with live streams. And continuing on projects remotely with folks towards now in the pandemic, it has really wavered over the last few months of just very much struggling to find work to get work. Live streams have kind of fallen off. There's

just really not much to to work on right now. And it's very difficult to plan with, with so much uncertainty around when live shows will come back. And even if it's safe to do so.

Kit Heintzman 04:10

Would you provide a kind of verbal illustration of what the live streams have been like?

Tara Lopez 04:18

Yes, so in the beginning, the live streams were, there was a lot of excitement from our fans, and even for ourselves. Because pre pandemic, we had never done a live stream. We never needed to, I guess. And so there was a lot of excitement because it was new territory. And we really had to learn a lot about about technology about software and we had to teach ourselves because there wasn't a lot of at the time in the beginning there. There really wasn't a lot of people doing it. So early on. We started in March of 2020. So a week maybe into the pandemic we started teaching ourselves and so the process has been very complex, a lot of different layers, we've had to buy a lot of gear and invest in a lot of gear for this process, and basically kind of relearn how to perform live. Because, you know, it's so different than performing in front of a crowd, there's no energy exchange, there's, you know, you're basically playing to yourself or to your family in a room. And so, but we've been able to really come up with some creative ways to make it interesting and to make it fun. And there is an element that is still very fulfilling, because we are still playing music. And so at the end of the day, it's, it's something that we're still able to find some joy in.

Kit Heintzman 05:49

What are some of the things you've been doing to try and bring that fun back into the performance?

Tara Lopez 05:56

We tried, we've tried various different locations, which has been really interesting, playing in locations where we have never played before, whether it's different studios, around town, or in our rehearsal space, which is normally just for rehearsal. We've invested in really nice camera equipment so that it looks really good. We've invested in various backgrounds to make it a little more lively. And yeah, I mean, we're trying to we try in any way to make it look really good, but also have fun while doing it. So maybe doing a q&a after the performance or some type of, you know, live Instagram chat with fans so that they can engage with us afterwards.

Kit Heintzman 06:52

Would you tell me about one of those interactions that have been really positive for you?

Tara Lopez 06:58

We released our record in September of last year, and we did we performed a live stream. And after the live stream, we did a very fun raffle giveaway with a ton of merch for fans who answered some trivia about the band or asked us interesting questions. So we gave away a lot of signed merch, a lot of apparel, and future tickets to show so that was really fun. Because we were able to kind of bring back the the energy and the, you know, to humanize the live stream, which we were really missing that interaction.

Kit Heintzman 07:43

Would you be willing to say a bit about the kinds of financial and technical decisions that went into learning new recording means learning new technologies, and also purchasing new technologies.

Tara Lopez 08:00

We probably spent at least a couple grand just getting the basic software and equipment in order to perform a live stream up to our standards, our live show has a lot to it with lights and with gear. And so we really wanted to create a live stream that at least looked partially how our normal live shows are. So yeah, we had to buy that meant by new mics. That meant by new interfaces, software programs, Final Cut, video editing software, backgrounds. We had to rent spaces we had to pay engineers to help us mix the the show, there was a lot that went into it, we had to pay our lighting designer to basically create a brand new light show for a video specific performance, which I had no idea is very different from a typical life set. So yeah, we probably spent 1000s of dollars just to be able to pull off what we felt was, you know, up to our standards.

Kit Heintzman 09:24

You touched on this a little bit already, but I was wondering if you would be willing to say a bit more about your initial reactions to the pandemic when you first heard about it what you were hearing what you thought

Tara Lopez 09:36

So initially, I had been following the pandemic news that was coming out of China for at least a month before really hit us in the states and so I was already pretty anxious about it and nervous and you know, really kept trying to inform people in my life but no one I felt at the time was really listening. So I was feeling really anxious about it, but you just kept trying to plan life as normal. And so as soon as we got the stay at home orders in California, I kind of knew, like, Okay, this is happening. And so I'm gonna hunker down and, you know, work on music. And at first it did feel kind of like a mini vacation, I even felt exciting and fun, not the scary news of, of death and sickness, but the news of okay, I get to stay at home and maybe read more books, which I love to do, or work on songs that have been sitting on my computer, or, you know, workout at home instead of the gym. All of it felt very new and exciting. And just felt like a much needed rest, which I'm not very good at doing. So it kind of forced me to stop and stay still. So in the beginning, it was Yeah, I would say it felt exciting, I was optimistic that we were gonna figure it out and get out of this. And that it wouldn't, it wouldn't be that long of a pause.

Kit Heintzman 11:10

And how have some of those reactions changed over time.

Tara Lopez 11:15

So it went from feeling optimistic and excited for a pause to I would say probably summer fall of 2020, feeling very anxious about not being able to tour around our album release, for instance, which was in September, which is a huge thing to not be able to tour in the summer and fall months, which is, you know, prime touring season. That was when things started to really hit me that this is not going to be a typical year, we are going to have to figure out ways to not only engage with our fans and get our music out there so that it gets heard, but also find clever ways in which to, you know, figure out income streams, so that way, we can still pay for our many different, you know, expenses as a band. So around fall, and winter of last year, things started getting pretty depressing, I would say definitely battled some depression and a lot of anxiety. And just really surrounding the uncertainty of what does being a musician right now entail? What is it going to look like and be like, and that's definitely it's been a wave of emotions, where some moments I feel optimistic, and other moments, I don't know what the point of this is. So really trying to find a balance and not feeling too much joy and too much sadness.

Kit Heintzman 12:59

So 2020 was a pretty big year. 2021 is also framing itself to be not small year, I'm wondering what some of the bigger issues on your mind have been throughout this period of time.

Tara Lopez 13:14

Concerning the pandemic, specifically, it has been, you know, if I'm thinking just through a music lens and artists lens, it is wondering how are we going to be able to sustain a career in music right now, as a developing artist, conversations that I have a lot or at least even just thinking about it myself, is trying to figure out ways in which you know, wants to arena opens back up, it's going to be very competitive, because there's going to be less venues and less booking agents. And it was already a very competitive industry. And now it just seems if you're developing artists, it's going to be 10 times harder. I hope it's not that way. But right now, it seems like that's the reality. And so I've been really concerned about you know, when touring will open back up, if it will be safe, and if people will come out to support it felt feel comfortable coming out to support. There's also so many issues in the world that I'm currently worried about social justice issues and whatnot and for marginalized communities, but in the music through the music lens. I'm just wondering if you know how many bands will remain after this?

Kit Heintzman 14:39

Are you willing to speak a bit more about some of the broader social justice issues that have been on your mind?

Tara Lopez 14:45

Definitely, I am very involved in various organizations or social justice issues and advocacy in my community. And so, you know, throughout last summer in the, with the protests for George Floyd In Black Lives Matter, I was very heavily involved and even went protesting. While I was completely out of my comfort zone with COVID. It was something I felt compelled to do with me and my partner. And so definitely Black Lives Matter issues, LGBTQ plus issues. And really trying to also figure out our unhoused population, in just the community in Sacramento alone, and how they've been affected with COVID. And just seeing in my own community, just just how much the pandemic is really affecting individuals. That's like, those three issues have really been on my mind this year,

Kit Heintzman 15:48

I'd love to hear a bit more about the experience of going to a protest during COVID-19 the different kinds of calculations when makes in the decision to go and how to participate.

Tara Lopez 16:04

It was really interesting, because I've been heavily involved in protesting for almost, you know, a decade and there was never question anytime there was an issue. You know, I was out there on the streets. And so this was very interesting, because it was the first time I felt very conflicted. I felt, you know, obviously, it was really unsafe to be in around so many 1000s of people, there were still so much that we didn't know about COVID. And, you know, everything that you read basically said, Don't do this. But at the same time, I also felt compelled. And I felt like that was a risk getting sick was a risk I was willing to take to be a part of fighting against, and fighting for what I believed in. And so my partner and I had many conversations, we had conversations with our roommates, just to see what everyone felt comfortable with. And once we all agreed on basic rules, we all participated in the protests all summer and fall, actually. And so it was, but it was really interesting to also then, you know, were to masks while you're protesting, and try to be involved, but not be close to people. So you know, whereas in the

past, I would have been right up front, I was in the very back, trying to stay at least 10 feet away from people with my sign. But it still felt really important to be there. And yeah, it was just, it was very interesting to have to, to even worry about my own health seems a bit trivial. Compared to the the issues at large.

17:56

I also wanted to follow up on your use of on house. So there were in a moment of a syntactic shift between what was formally often described as homelessness and unhoused people without housing, I was just wondering if you would say something, a little bit of the around the choice of that language?

Tara Lopez 18:14

Sure. I mean, I just try you know, there's, there's so much I don't know and, um, so much of language I feel is constantly changing, especially within the social justice advocacy realm, but from my experiences working with the unhoused community, I have heard and found from from, you know, their circle and the community itself that they prefer that term. And so just out of respect, and just out of, you know, educating myself just trying to make sure that I'm using terms that that I've personally heard you know, they they would like to be under.

Kit Heintzman 18:59

Thank you so much for that. Would you tell me what health means to you?

Tara Lopez 19:05

Health as I get older health means everything I have understood that health is a I look at health at under a holistic lens of mental health, physical health, emotional health, and well being overall. It is something that as I get older, that's you know, it hasn't always been the case health in the past would just be physical ailments and whatnot. But now mental health is just as important to me as physical health. But especially over this last year and seeing so much despair and the conversation surrounding health. i Every day I am very, very aware that as of right now, I am a healthy individual and I try to have gratitude for that because I think this year has shown all of us just how, you know, just just how much health matters? And if if you don't have it, there's not much else to be concerned about.

Kit Heintzman 20:18

What are some of the things you would like for your own health and the health of people around you? And how do you think those could become attainable?

Tara Lopez 20:27

I would love everyone around me and for myself to have equal access and resources to health care. And that would include again, physical and mental health resources, I would love, especially if mental health resources would be easy to access. Right now, I feel like it's still such a process to find a therapist or, or even have access to locate any kind of resources, medication and whatnot. And I feel very passionately that mental health should be available to every single person. And it should be as easy as calling a phone number. And so I do think that, hopefully, more organizations start popping up and more movements start popping up around mental health, and physical health and just providing easier access more affordable access. I also think, and I hope that there will be some type of program for artists and musicians specifically. Because I do feel like that there's still such a gap with resources for artists and musicians, and there's just, there's nowhere for musicians to go and find these, these

resources, at least, I haven't been able to really find a solid program. So I'm hoping that that will be something you know, a positive silver lining of the pandemic.

Kit Heintzman 22:09

May I ask what safety means to?

Tara Lopez 22:15

Safety? Means? That's a really good question. I would say safety means to feel belonging, a sense of belonging. You know, their safety in the physical sense of feeling safe in your neighborhood or feeling cared for. But to me, it also means to feel like you have space to be yourself and to be able to articulate and voice your opinions and to install so feel heard. So I think for me, it's just overall feeling a sense of belonging.

Kit Heintzman 23:10

You, you also mentioned the answer to this question a little bit, but for but I just wanted to reopen it. How have you been determining under the sort of narrow framework of COVID safety? How have you been determining what feels safe for you? And what are some of the ways you've been negotiating that with people in your life

Tara Lopez 23:31

that has honestly been a struggle throughout this pandemic, it has been very much just an emotional roller coaster of trying to figure out where my boundaries are, how safe I feel, what activities I feel safe doing. And it's been very difficult, sometimes trying to articulate and communicate that even with lifelong best friends, who just didn't see things the way that I did, or didn't feel the same way. And that's actually, a couple of friendships have been severed because of that, unfortunately. So for me, luckily, my partner and I have always been on the same page with how we feel what we feel comfortable with and what we don't. So that's been very helpful. Feeling at least like okay, I'm on the same page with her. Um, but it really has been, you know, I've just tried to stay on top of what the CDC guidelines have been. I've tried to, you know, read the news every day in just trying to see like, what are what's the science behind this? What can I do? What should I do? And I'm still doing that even though I'm fully vaccinated. So it's just been a trial of, you know, just stocking up on hand sanitizer masks and in cleaning supplies and only seen individuals outside I'd and you know, hoping that people understand my boundaries and why I have them. But it's definitely been very taxing, trying to just stay on top of what I feel is safe while also not feeling completely isolated from those in my life.

Kit Heintzman 25:23

I'm curious what has partnership meant to you during the pandemic?

Tara Lopez 25:29

You know, I'm very, I realized how lucky and just really how lucky I am to have a partner, we've been together for six years. And so luckily, we had been together for quite a long time before the pandemic started. And so we know each other really well, we know how, you know, our boundaries was with everything, and the fact that I had someone there at all times to, you know, help quell any fears and vice versa, or talk out ideas or talk out grievances or, you know, we're trying to always figure out, you know, the future together, that has been so important, because I do see how my friends who are single, what they're dealing with, and some of them are struggling. And even though I'm struggling, I know it could be a lot worse. So partnership has absolutely made

me feel not alone in this. And just a huge sense of comfort in that. I'm navigating a really difficult time with someone. And I realized that a lot of people are having to navigate this completely alone.

Kit Heintzman 26:49

She'd be willing to say something about how your relationship to touch has changed since the pandemic, you had mentioned it in the context of the protest around distance.

Tara Lopez 26:59

My relationship with touch is, has been very interesting, because before the pandemic, I was a very affectionate person, with my friends, my family, even with strangers, I am a performer. So you know, after each show, I would go to the merch table and hug strangers and pose for photographs with people. And now I mean, for the first time in over a year, I finally was able to hug my mom because she's vaccinated. So if I haven't been hugging my mom, I'm not going to be hugging friends or strangers for for sure. So it's been very interesting. It almost feels in some instances, it's a relief to not have to hug everyone, you know, when I have to leave a place now. But there's also been times where I really wish that I could have a hug or just a closer exchange with a friend after a conversation. It definitely feels just very foreign. And I'm not quite sure how I think I at this point, I feel comfortable hugging other friends who have been vaccinated, but still wearing a mask like it's I don't know, when I might feel comfortable going back to what it was prior or if that's even a thing for a while. I just, I don't know, but touches definitely I mean, beyond that. Touching surfaces. I mean, my hands I've I've literally developed eczema, washing my hands too much. And it's something that I'm very aware of, before the pandemic never bought a bottle of hand sanitizer, and now I won't go anywhere without a bottle on me. So it's it's very interesting to think back about how we were all living before this or most of us anyways, and, and now I can't see going back to a lot of things that I did prior

Kit Heintzman 29:13

Are you feeling about the immediate future?

Tara Lopez 29:19

To be honest, I've been really worried about the future. I'm someone who has, you know, I live every day with a planner and I have ever since I was a kid I love structure in that sense. I love having things to look forward to things to plan for. And projects to work on. And right now most of that has been completely eliminated. And so for me, I'm in this really great area of figuring out what I want to do with my life and what next steps I want to take. There's a part of me that feels very motivated to do so because I'm very driven person and then there's another part of me that just feel so exhausted. So I almost feel just suspended in taking any action. So I guess I would sum it up to say I'm very worried, but trying to be optimistic about the future.

Kit Heintzman 30:20

What are some of the things that you hope for in a long term future coming out the other side of this?

Tara Lopez 30:28

Would that be for myself or for society as a whole

Kit Heintzman 30:32

all of the above.

Tara Lopez 30:36

As well, for society as a whole, I truly do hope going back to some of those social justice elements, I truly hope that we start to see progress. That has been, the thing I've said the most about this pandemic is I do hope that the lessons we receive from this situation is that we need to treat people better. And so I do hope that if anything out of the pandemic we have, it is undeniable that issues that we have in this country. And so I do hope that we finally take real steps in making huge lasting impact towards just creating a more equal sound world for everyone. For myself, I hope that I can, whether it's performing or whether it's taking a completely different avenue, I hope that I can find meaning and purpose with whatever next steps I take, that's my biggest hope for myself is to just live a meaningful and purposeful life.

Kit Heintzman 31:49

I'm curious, self care has been such a strong part of the 2020 2021 narrative, I'm wondering if you would be willing to share some of the ways that you've been attempting to take care of yourself over this period of time.

Tara Lopez 32:05

I have been really trying to take care of my physical and mental health. So eating better. Working out on a daily basis has been huge. For me taking really long walks, being outside, I found it's really easy to stay stuck on my computer in the house, and I see the dip in my happiness levels and how depressed I can get. So I try every single day to take a walk outside, listen to some of calming my favorite music that's comforting. And also trying to treat myself more trying to look at life through a different lens of you know, the small victories need to be celebrated because life is really difficult right now. So you know if it whether it's a small victory with the an email that came back with good news, or you know, training my puppy, which is a part of self care, I got a dog for the first time in my life. I'm really trying to do things that make me happy and bring joy whether you know, small or large, just trying to listen to myself more. But I would say probably mental health going to therapy. And working out has been two of the biggest forms of self care.

Kit Heintzman 33:37

I would love to hear anything about the puppy you're willing to share?

Tara Lopez 33:42

Yeah, definitely. So my partner and I have been toying with the idea of a dog for years, but I just never had time, I was always on the road. I never felt like I could give enough of time that that a puppy would need. And I just was never home. And so we found ourselves in the summertime. After all the protests, feeling very exhausted, emotionally and drained. We said let's foster a dog and within 24 hours we adopted the dog. And he has just been such a he's worked as much as my antidepressants have worked. He's incredible and gives us so much joy and also a sense of purpose. I'm someone who I need to have a reason to wake up early. And he is that reason I have to take care of him and even when I feel very lost, he reminds me he still needs to eat no matter if I'm sad or, or anything. So he's really helped my partner and I both have a sense of purpose and have a routine and some type of structure. So definitely, I don't think I ever understood when people would say like get a dog, they'll change your life. I always thought that was cute a cute sentiment, but I never understood it until now. And he definitely has really helped. Just pull me out of some very depressive moments.

Kit Heintzman 35:20

This is my penultimate question in the last one are a bit odd. I'm wondering what so we know we're in this flurry of biomedical and scientific research that's happening around us right now. I'm wondering what you think people in the humanities and the social sciences could be studying to help us understand this moment that as we live through it?

Tara Lopez 35:43

Well, one, I think you're doing an incredible job. Interviewing artists and musicians, I think that that's a conversation that I really haven't heard much about, or you know, how it's really affecting people in the creative space. Social Studies in humanity, I mean, I would, I think it's important to see how this pandemic is affecting marginalized communities. I do think, and I have seen folks doing that, but I think we already were at such a, we had such a, there were so many disparities already. And I really worry about how that's going to look post pandemic, I don't really see much help on that front right now. So I can't imagine that it's going to get any better, if not worse. And I think that's clear. So I would say probably just focusing on marginalized communities and how this pandemic, not only will affect them, or is affecting them now. But how long term effects are going to shape their life? Because I do think we're going to see, for decades, I think we're gonna see the effects of this situation.

Kit Heintzman 37:12

And this is my last question. So this is an oral history interview. And I'd like you to imagine a historian of the future, who has never lived through this moment. So at least one generation out, what would you ask them to make sure they remember, and that, that remember that you think is important? And what kinds of stories you want to be sure are preserved?

Tara Lopez 37:37

Well, that's a really good question. I would like for someone in the future to remember that. This was that real people were affected by this, that there's so much political banter surrounding this pandemic, and so much division. And it's really easy, and was easy to get caught up in that. But at the end of the day, real people are losing individuals. Their lives are getting cut short. And it's really affecting people's mental health, physical health, joy. And we're losing a lot of people to suicide, which I don't think we're talking about enough. And so I would want people to remember that this truly affected human life and quality of life, more so than any political or, you know, discussion or argument. I do worry that you know, how future generations will look at our country and how a lot of the people in the country reacted to this. It's embarrassing. And so I do also want to say, I hope that people see that a lot of people did the right thing, and truly sacrificed for the better. Good. And I think that that's something that I do hope people see in the future, that there were people who cared about others outside of themselves, and did what we're supposed to do.

Kit Heintzman 39:33

I want to thank you so much for everything that you shared with me today. And I'm out of questions. But at this point, I just want to open up some space. If there's something that you would like to say that my questions haven't given you room to say, here is that room.

Tara Lopez 39:50

I appreciate that. I mean, I don't think I have any other questions. I just wanted to thank you for the opportunity. Like I said as musician and artist It's been really difficult not seeing a lot of representation on how the pandemic is directly affecting artists and creative people in general so thank you for giving me the space to talk about that