

## The festivalization of live music: Introduction

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Live music has moved center stage in the contemporary music industries. While the music business in general has been severely hit in the last decades by the effects of digitalization, resulting in the plummeting revenues from recorded music, recovery has set in slowly but gradually since the turn of the century. This recovery came from two developments. The first was the newly found profitability of digital sales and streaming of recordings, which has taken some time to develop into a viable business model. The second came from another segment of the music industries: live music. According to Naveed et al (2017) the revenues from live performances account for the majority of the overall revenues of the music industries between 2010 and 2015 (Naveed, Watanabe & Neittaanmaki 2017). Consultancy firm Ernst & Young (EY 2014) likewise showed in 2012 that across the EU, half the revenues of the music industries was from live music. While we are certainly not the first to signal this trend (Frith 2007; Holt 2010; Mortimer, Nosko & Sorensen 2012), it indicates how crucial live music performance has become for the business models of the music industries (Mazierska, Gillon & Rigg 2020; Williamson & Cloonan 2007).

It is critical to ask who has benefited from this development and how it affects the music business as an institution, but also the practices of musicians and bands. Recent research suggests that it is mainly the

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absolute top tiered artists who have been able to secure rising revenues from live music (Krueger 2019). For most artists playing live is part of their daily routine of being in the music business and while that has always been the main source of their livelihood (Rutten & Smeets 1997; Krueger 2019; IJdens, Von der Fuhr & De Rooij 2008) we can only presume that they have had to intensify their touring schedules in order to make up for possible losses from the sales of their recordings.

As recently argued by Mulder, Hitters & Rutten (2020), not only has the position of live music within the pop music industries changed over the last decades; the festival is becoming the primary form for the staging of live music. As Simon Frith (2007) argued, festivals have been used as a strategy by music promoters to increase their audiences as well as their revenues. In economic terms, festivals allow for economies of scale. While the first pop festivals date back to the 1960s, their commercial impact and growth accelerated in the last two decades (Webster 2014, Van Vliet 2019). Research from the Netherlands suggests that there is almost a 10% growth annually in the number of music festivals between 2014 and 2018. Most of the Dutch music festivals only existed for ten years or less (Van Vliet 2019).

While the importance of the music festival economy is often suggested (Holt 2010; Van der Hoeven & Hitters 2019; Webster et al. 2018) it is difficult to measure its economic performance. Much of its impact is indirect in that it generates revenue outside of the confinements of the event itself, which is notoriously difficult to measure and easily overestimated. In Australia the value of live music to the community was estimated at almost 10 billion US Dollar for 2014 (Whiting 2015); According to UK Music *"the UK's live music sector's contribution to the economy grew to a record high of £1.1 billion, which is a 10% overall rise on 2017"* (UK Music 2019). When looking at specific company performance, Live Nation reports continuous growth, both in attendance and revenue, while profits added to a whopping US \$98 million in 2019 (Live Nation 2020).

## 1 The festivalization of the music business

It is clear that the economic as well as the societal impact of live music is expanding. It is changing live music as an organizational field. During the last two decades competition for the traditional 'brick and mortar' venue has become stiff. No longer is the performance of live music confined to dedicated spaces, which have been purposely built and designed as a music venue. Increasingly, existing unused structures are modified to be used as music venues, such as churches and factories, while other large event locations like theatres and stadiums are also hosting concerts. And last but not least, temporary festivals are mushrooming, using spaces such as parks, squares, fields, empty factories and whole neighborhoods and villages (Kronenburg 2012). Live music and festivals are becoming an established element of our urban as well as rural fabric.

The concept of festivalization is widely used to refer to the effects of the expanding festival industry (Bennett, Taylor & Woodward 2014; Mulder, Hitters & Rutten 2020). In the 1990's, when new festivals were beginning to pop up all over the globe in advanced western economies, Haußermann & Siebel were among the first to use the concept of festivalization in their discussion of the increasing importance of cultural festivals in urban development and image politics. Interestingly, they tie this trend in with the mediatization of society. *"In order to maintain audible and visible in the cries of the mass media, urban politics is concentrating on temporal and spatial aspects: festivalization as media-oriented staging of the city"* (Haußermann & Siebel 1993: 15). For them, and likewise later on for Hitters (2007), Richards (2010) and Jakob (2013), festivals are considered a strategy within the scope of urban planning and policy making aimed at generating positive external effects for cities and regions.

However, festivalization has also increasingly been used in other contexts, mainly to describe the rapid growth in the number of festivals and the displacement effects on regular cultural programming. After a surge in serious European music festivals before the turn of the millennium (Frey 2000), the trend of festivalization spread quickly. Negrier (2014) is critical of what he labels as the 'eventalisation' of regular cul-

tural supply, and he argues that festivalization should be understood as an expression of larger societal developments. As much as the festival has become a growth strategy and a crowd puller, festival organizing has developed into a professional industry. Festivalization then, needs to be understood within the fast growing and changing live music industry.

We argue that festivalization is a phenomenon with broad implications. It needs to be considered beyond a purely instrumental understanding as being a mere growth strategy for the live music business. Also, its impact is more far reaching than just the effects of the numerical increase of events for communities and cities. Our aim is to push for a more sociological and institutional approach for this phenomenon. The festival, we argue, has not only become the new dominant configuration of the live music field, but is – with new digital structures, a new openness for activities in the space of (data) flows as well as with developing issues and partners – becoming a relevant co-organizer of the development of the overall music industry.

While most exclusive music festivals have been and still are cancelled in COVID-19 times, music festivals with showcase events and conferences are being developed further as hybrid festivals in the space of places and at the same time in the space of digital (data) flows (Castells 2010). Even at the time of the greatest crisis in the music industry, even more dramatic than the crisis of the (recorded) music industry (1998-2013), these festivals become even more important in their festive agency periods, in which the gaps between music business actors and other innovative actors of various fields are narrowed. They show that work on the future of music continues in the age of social distancing. With these hybrid festivals as co-organizers of the future of music, the music industry is even expanding its role as a laboratory for the future in the media, creative and cultural sectors.

This work on the future in the field of music currently applies in particular to the very advanced division of labor that has taken place in the music industry and especially the festival industry, which is becoming increasingly complex across the boundaries of industries and even the economy itself with its numerous part time workers and volunteers. We

are currently getting to know the downsides of this advanced division of labor and hopefully overcome them with examples of new organizational forms. Because we learn that the great flexibility, creativity and agility of the industry, which has contributed so much to our musical prosperity, only has a future if it meets an equally advanced social solidarity. The current creative, critical and political work on the development of solidarity structures for and with the increasingly small-scale networked players in the music industry opens a new chapter in the transformative digitization of economy, culture and society. Other actors and industries will later use these, when further developing their labor structures.

This special festivalization issue of the *International Journal of Music Business Research* presents three articles on the relation between festivals, live music ecologies, music business practices and local policies. With contributions from the USA, UK and The Netherlands, the issue offers a diverse international outlook on the challenges of the live music and festival industries.

In "Navigating troubled waters; how are music festivals affecting the local concert industry?", Jeff Apruzzese presents a close-up look into the practices of the music festival industry in the USA, by focusing on radius clauses, also known as exclusivity deals. A radius clause is part of a contract between an act and the festival stipulating that the act cannot perform for a specific period of time within a restricted radius around the festival location. Apruzzese draws up a compelling argument on how these clauses affect local venues and other organizers of live music, effectively obstructing their choice of bands to play for local audiences.

Erik Hitters & Marijn Mulder explore local policies on live music and festivals in their contribution "Live music ecologies and festivalization: the role of urban live music policies". In particular, their focus is on how such policies have been subject to festivalization. They present an analysis of urban live music policies and festival development, complemented by case studies of three cities in The Netherlands, which all show different approaches to the changing and developing field of live music and festivals. Such policies, they argue, are persistently instrumental in na-

ture while offering ample variation within local contexts, resulting in distinct outcomes for local live music ecologies.

A special contribution is from renowned live music researcher Martin Cloonan, who looks back at fifteen years of active involvement in live music research in the UK. In "Trying to have an impact: Some confessions of a live music researcher" he mindfully reflects on the paradoxes of his role as an academic observer and analyst and the need for informed and impactful interventions in the business and policies of live music. His argument revolves around the issue of commitment, collaboration and trust and suggests that impact can be realized by carefully building on established networks.

These contributions, we believe, are characteristic of the methodological scope and interdisciplinary diversity of the *International Journal of Music Business Research*. They present a fascinating variation in scientific approaches while all remaining relevant to the professional field of the music business. We would like to thank all the authors for their contributions, and we are convinced that this special issue can offer insights and understandings to everyone interested in the business of live music and festivals.

The IJMBR is aimed at all academics around the world, from students to professors, from all disciplines and with an interest in music business research. Interdisciplinary papers will be especially welcome if they address economic and business-related topics in the field of music. We look forward to receiving as many interesting papers as possible. Please send paper proposals to [music.business.research@gmail.com](mailto:music.business.research@gmail.com).

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