

Independent Musicians' Touring Experiences Before and After the COVID-19 Shutdown

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This paper was presented at the [2022 International Summit](#) of the Music & Entertainment Industry Educators Association
May 16-17, 2022

<https://doi.org/10.25101/22.24>

View the Summit presentation at:
<https://vimeo.com/707656947/dc25d5d3a9>

Abstract

Live performance has long been a consistent source of revenue for many musicians. However, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, that consistent opportunity became non-existent for many musicians, who suddenly found venues shuttering operations and audiences staying home, adhering to safety protocols during an international health crisis.

Perhaps most particularly affected were independent touring musicians, who often lack financial support from well-funded record labels, and who may be associated with music genres that have been less commercially successful in recent years. Many independent musicians embark on self-funded and -booked tours in vehicles such as passenger vans, handle many of their own affairs without professional tour management or agency representation, and often operate via razor-thin profit margins. The rapid spread of COVID-19 in spring 2020 exacerbated what was already a challenging effort faced by many of these touring musicians.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of independent touring musicians, both pre-COVID-19 and amidst the COVID-19 crisis, to offer recent perspectives on contemporary cultural production, live performances, and the future of such touring artists.

Research questions include:

1. What were some challenges facing independent touring musicians pre-COVID-19?
2. In what ways did independent touring musicians maintain their financial, social, musical, and personal well-being during the COVID-19 shutdown?
3. What are independent musicians' opinions of touring in the present, as restrictions are eased in several

regions across the United States and populations are vaccinated?

This qualitative study utilizes in-depth, semi-structured interviews with independent touring musicians, which are ultimately themed for presentation. The definition of independent is that the artist(s)—and their tour(s)—do not receive funding from any major label group. This study aims to advance knowledge in the popular culture arena, to provide a contemporary view of how independent musicians maintain their financial and personal viability during an ever-changing and unpredictable health climate. This study will also better inform the industry about recent issues and challenges in independent musicians' touring careers.

Keywords: live performance, touring musicians, independent musicians, COVID-19



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**MUSIC & ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY
EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION**

**PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
2022 INTERNATIONAL
SUMMIT

OF THE
MUSIC & ENTERTAINMENT
INDUSTRY EDUCATORS
ASSOCIATION**

– MAY 16 & 17, 2022 –

Music & Entertainment Industry Educators Association
1900 Belmont Boulevard
Nashville, TN 37212 U.S.A.

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