BREXIT MEANS DISCORD FOR UK MUSIC FESTIVALS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A ‘hard’ Brexit could mean the end of European festival goers and bands attending UK events – leaving a £767 million hole that may silence the UK festival scene:

1. Britain’s festival industry is balanced on a knife edge: in the wet summer of 2012 57 UK music festivals were cancelled. The Big Chill, Sonisphere, Oxegen and Cloud 9 have all fallen silent recently, and last year alone Temples Festival, All Today’s Parties, Down to the Woods, Forgotten Fields 2016 and Hevy Fest were all cancelled.

2. The saviours of the UK festival scene are overseas visitors - predominantly from the European Union. In 2015 767,000 EU festival ‘music tourists’ visited the UK, spending £38m on tickets and an average of £1000. If all these European festival-goers were to stop coming to Britain, that would leave a £767 million shortfall in income for Britain’s endangered festival scene.

3. Overall music tourism (including West End musicals, music clubs, etc) generated £3.1 billion for
the UK economy in 2014, with a 39% rise in overseas tourists attending music events in the last four years.

4. Around 1,000 EU-based bands and artists currently visiting the UK to play festivals and venues say they are likely to abandon playing British events post-Brexit because of problems around visas and carnets for their equipment.

5. One-third of Italians and Spaniards, 30 percent of Germans and a quarter of French festival goers said the Leave vote would make them less inclined to travel to the UK.

6. Bands visiting the UK could find themselves in the same position as those visiting the USA. At least seven bands due to play at the South by Southwest festival in Austin this year were reportedly turned back by US Customs: with some spending the night in jail before deportation!

7. Touring bands say carnets for their equipment cost them between £1000—£2000, and the carnets last just 12 months. That's too much for struggling new musicians.

8. With the collapse of income on royalties on physical music sales (records and CDs) bands are increasingly reliant on merchandise to generate an income. However, post-Brexit the tariff payable on a T shirt would be 12%, plus VAT of 20%, if Britain falls outside the EU single market.

9. Emerging British bands trying to make a name performing in European festivals would face exactly the same extra costs and delays as EU performers wishing to perform in Britain following a ‘hard’ Brexit deal. Managers are warning the potential need for visas, carnets and safety checks on equipment would make costs too high for smaller UK bands.

10. The many UK festivals twinned with EU events would also face unacceptable extra costs on shared ticketing and marketing.
This year around 1000 festivals are planned in the UK, and they are a £2.3bn industry. However, as last year’s hard-hitting ParcelHero report - Facing the Music: The Hidden Cost of Festivals - revealed; music festival finances are balanced on a knife edge.

The key to their ultimate survival or collapse could be tied closely to Brexit. A hard Brexit that makes it more difficult for European festival goers to visit UK events, and for European bands to perform in Britain, could be the final straw.

The Big Chill, Sonisphere, Oxegen, Cloud 9 and the Bloc Festival, have all fallen silent in recent years; and last year Temples Festival in Bristol, Manchester’s All Today’s Parties festival, London’s Jabberwocky Festival, Forgotten Fields 2016 in Tunbridge Wells, Hevy Fest and - ironically - the H2O Festival, were all cancelled through financial issues or the British weather.
Why do so many festivals fail? Because the margins are incredibly tight. The UK's largest festival – Glastonbury – has a turnover of £37m but sees profits of just £86,000: less than 50p per ticket [1]

With rising costs and the Great British climate to contend with, life is already perilous for many festivals this year. What the UK festival scene clearly doesn’t need is any more problems; unfortunately, a Europe-sized hole is about to open up in their revenues.

While 3.5 million Brits are planning to attend a music festival this year, the saviour of the UK festival scene is very often overseas visitors - predominantly from the European Union.

Says Paul Latham, Chief Operating Officer, Live Nation: ‘Trips by foreign music tourists increased by 16 per cent last year. Not only that, but while here, overseas tourists spend on average over £1,000 per festival trip. One thousand pounds per trip! That is a phenomenal amount and the highest spend we have recorded in any year.’

In fact, not only did overseas festival goers rise by 16%; but in all, 767,000 EU festival ‘music tourists’ visited the UK, spending £38m on tickets and an average of £1000. [2]

If all these European festival goers were to stop coming to Britain, that would leave a £767 million shortfall in income. The UK festival scene would have a hard time facing the music.

And the festival and live music industry is hugely important for the wider UK economy. This increase in music tourism provides a huge boost to employment throughout the country, with 39,034 full time jobs in 2015 sustained by music tourism in the UK.

A report by UK Music in 2016 [3] revealed that in addition to this the overall music tourism (including West End musicals, music clubs, etc) generated £3.1 billion for the UK economy in 2014, with a 39% rise in overseas tourists attending music events in the last four years.

ParcelHero’s research reveals around 1,000 EU based bands and artists currently visiting the UK to play festivals - such as the specialist festival for new music, Brighton’s The Great Escape - and permanent music venues, say they are likely to quit British events post-Brexit. If the UK music scene loses these performers and their travelling audience; that could be tipping point for some smaller festivals.
BREXIT: OUT OF TUNE WITH EUROPE

The problem for the festival industry is that the vote for Brexit leaves British festivals out of tune with the rest of Europe. The impact could be lower overseas visitor numbers and fewer European bands able to tour UK festivals. According to the professional services firm Deloitte, 63 per cent of inbound holidaymakers to Britain are from countries of the European Union. [4]

And the problem is that it seems EU festival-goers sentiment towards the UK has changed following the Brexit vote. Travelzoo conducted an online survey of nearly 5,000 members across France, Spain, Germany, the US and Canada, and sponsored independent research of 1,000 consumers in Italy.

One-third of Italians and Spaniards, 30 per cent of Germans and a quarter of French holidaymakers said the Leave vote would make them less inclined to travel to the UK.

This is partly about the perceived potential increase in difficulty in visiting Britain once it has left the EU. The UK is outside the Schengen area of border-free travel that is at the core of the European Union, so we have to show passports on arrival in France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece and so on. The same would apply after a Brexit. But crucially, EU rules allow European citizens to come to Britain with only a national identity card. A post-Brexit UK Government could re-impose the rule that all foreign nationals must have a passport, making us a less attractive destination.

It is also likely that visiting the UK will become

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more expensive in terms of travel costs: if global firms, particularly in financial services, move their EU bases (and international conferences) away from the UK, it would lead to a reduction in inbound business travel - many of the air links to and from Britain are primarily used (and paid for) by business travellers. But those planes also carry millions of tourists in the cheap seats. If business-class cabins start to empty, then airlines may cut flights that become unprofitable, reducing the supply of seats available for inbound holidaymakers.

**DON’T BAN THE BANDS**

Many foreign tourists are ardent followers of their favourite bands; but will their bands still be able to tour the UK, following the divorce with the UK?

As Paul Reed, general manager of the Association of Independent Festivals explained to Pitchfork just before last year's historic Brexit vote: “The festival market has developed as a truly European market and that is a great strength, especially when you consider the incredible festivals that have emerged across Europe, aimed at Europe-wide audiences. There is an argument that if Britain votes to leave Europe, it will become more complicated to work across borders in this way. We could also potentially see a reduction in so-called ‘music tourism’, which generated £3.1 billion for the UK economy in 2014, with a 39 percent rise in overseas tourists attending music events in the last four years.” [5]

The point is colourfully made by Austrian tour manager Sarah-Anne Grill, who is clearly already disenchanted by UK festivals, and looks unlikely to tour her bands in the UK post Brexit: “I am from Austria—touring the UK is really shit, and I mean that in the nicest possible way. You just get the bare minimum. Venues pay for no production, no backline, and everyone’s like, ‘You should be happy you’re allowed to play in the UK.’ Even though the UK is built on festivals and musical culture, they don’t really put a lot of funding into it, whereas in the rest of Europe, they fund it. So I think if the UK leaves the EU, there will be even less emphasis on cultural programmes and how to deal with touring artists, because they’ve got no comparison, and they don’t need to compare themselves because they stand alone.”

As Mark Wilding argued in Vice in June last year: ‘If things tighten up on visas and entry, it could definitely hit shows in regional towns. We’re at a good point now when you can see Jeremy Underground and Gerd Janson and Mister Saturday Night all on the same night in Nottingham, or Hunee and Tama Sumo play shows in Cambridge, which hasn’t always been the case. That could evaporate if playing the UK takes even a small uptick in the amount of forward planning.’[6]

The big problem facing UK festivals is that touring European bands attract British crowds and loyal European followers. If we erect more barriers to both bands and fans coming to Britain, the already wafer thin profits of most festivals could snap entirely.

**TURNED BACK AT THE BORDER**

Looking at the issues facing bands crossing borders outside the EU currently, there could be bigger problems facing bands travelling between
Britain and the EU post Brexit than changing sentiment and passport requirements.

While touring between EU countries is currently easy for European and British bands; an example of the potential difficulties that could easily arrive if there are stricter border controls is that of European bands seeking to perform at US music festivals. This year’s famous South by Southwest festival, held in Austin, Texas, has become infamous for the problems bands faced getting into the US.

At least seven bands due to play at the South by Southwest festival were reportedly turned back by US Customs. If EU-based bands face a similar ‘welcome’ arriving in the UK, many of their followers will be highly likely to stop attending British festivals.[7]

For example, the Italian band Soviet Soviet wrote on their Facebook page in March 2017 that they’d been denied entry by US Customs agents in Seattle, and had spent the night in jail before being put on a plane back home! “Around 10:30pm, two prison officers frisked us, handcuffed us and brought us to jail in a police car. We spent the night in jail and had been escorted there as though we were three criminals,” the band wrote. “The following day, after having completed all jail-related procedures (mugshots, declaration of good health and signatures), two other agents came to get us. We were searched, handcuffed and again escorted in a police car. “

Soviet Soviet wrote that they’d hope to travel to South by Southwest (known to festival goers simply as SXSW) using something called an ESTA, a visa waiver that bands generally use if
they are playing unpaid shows in the US (playing paid shows requires a work visa). In addition to playing an unpaid SXSW showcase, the band was also scheduled to perform at the Seattle radio station KEXP, another unpaid show. “The control agents who did a quick check on the concerts we informed them of noticed that two of the venues were asking for entry fees and this was enough to convince them that we needed work visas instead of an ESTA,” they wrote. [8]

CARNET CARNAGE

As well as the risk of being expelled unceremoniously from Britain, bands could also fall foul of UK Customs over the equipment they bring with them.

Any restriction on movement across Europe could have two expensive, complex implications for touring bands: individual visas to enter each EU country, and the introduction of the carnet, a document detailing every single piece of equipment on deck, to prevent the import or export of products without paying VAT. On average, UK bands say carnets cost them between £1000—£2000, and the carnet lasts just 12 months. [9] EU bands would face the same regulations if attending UK festivals.

What exactly is a carnet? Following any medium or hard Brexit deal bands visiting the UK from the EU (and vice versa) would need to hold an ATA Carnet to avoid paying import duties and taxes on their equipment. A carnet is an international customs and temporary export-import document that is a kind of goods passport. It is used to clear customs in 86 countries and territories without paying duties and import taxes on items that will be re-exported within 12 months.

Sir John Sorrell, the founder of the Creative Industries Federation, has recently argued that touring acts could be driven off the road due to visa and carnet costs in a post-Brexit Europe. These will all slash the margins of an artist's primary source of income. Sorrell said the creative sector is “a key driver of wealth and global success” for the UK. “To imperil that would be to imperil our wider economy.” [10]

A carnet enables an overseas band’s equipment, from guitars to video screens, to enter the UK as professional equipment and not incur tariffs or taxes – and the same goes for a British band travelling beyond the EU. The ATA carnet system is very likely to be required by British Customs for EU-based bands, and vice-versa, following the final split between the UK and European Union.

The cost is divided into two parts: the first is the issuing fee; a standard charge payable to the issuing chamber of commerce, and the second is the guarantee amount.

As an example, a carnet issued through via Glasgow Chamber of Commerce for London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (who host the Carnet scheme) costs:

Member Rate: £167.80 + VAT = £201.36

Non Member Rate: £276.30 + VAT = £331.56

[11]

The second part of the cost is the security amount – and this is where things get
expensive. Because an ATA Carnet alleviates the need to pay import duties/taxes some form of security is required to cover these charges should, for example, the equipment not return to the country it was shipped from. This security is generally around 40% of shipment value, and must be for an amount equal to the highest rate of duty and taxes applicable to the goods in any country of destination, and transit if applicable. Sir John Sorrell’s view that this could slash the margins of touring bands is understandable.

ATA Carnets have been used to cover some fascinating items recently, according to the US Council for International Business. As well as being used for the shipment of Paul Mccartney’s band instruments for a music festival, and the New York Philamonic’s instruments; they have also covered a Van Gogh Self-portrait, Ringling Brothers tigers, satellites and human skulls! [12]

Though they are expensive for smaller bands carnets have many benefits:

- One document – one application.
- Covers commercial samples, professional equipment, and goods for exhibitions and fairs.
- Eliminates duties, taxes, and temporary importation bonds (TIBs).
- Easy exit – easy re-entry.
- No uncertainty, no hassles.

But for a small touring band they are possibly one expense too far, and carnets do not exempt holders from obtaining necessary licenses or permits.
And problems with carnets can escalate from an annoyance into a crisis quite quickly. For example, Oasis intended to include Norway (in Europe, but outside the European Union - much as Britain will be post-Brexit) as part of a European tour. However, some of the band’s equipment, including its huge video screens, were stopped at Norwegian Customs because they didn’t have the full carnet paperwork. By the time the issue was resolved, the concert date was past, and the whole event had had to be cancelled! It’s not hard to envisage this problem hitting EU bands attempting to perform in Britain; and Brit bands planning to perform in EU festivals.

**MERCHANDISE MISERY**

For small bands without a record deal, the sale of merchandise is one source of revenue that can mean the difference between touring and not touring. Here again Britain’s exit from the EU is likely to make this far more difficult.

Samuel Nicholls, Senior Lecturer in Music at Leeds Beckett University and ex-guitarist in the band Forward Russia told the Metro ‘Dependent on what the agreements are, it could mean having to declare any merchandise you are bringing into the EU zone (T shirts / CDs / vinyl), and possibly pay duty on them at entry / exit.’

Said Samuel: ‘This could involve having to carry a Carnet of ALL your equipment, so as to determine and sign off what comes in and out.’ [13]

In recent years a band’s merchandise has diversified, and is now one of their main income sources following the collapse of physical music sales. Typical band merchandise includes:

- T-shirts
- CDs
- Vinlys (coming back into vogue!)
- Posters
- Badges and patches
- Tote bags

The problems facing bands selling their merchandise, once outside the EU’s single market, is that duties and taxes may well be payable on these items. This quickly becomes a complicated calculation.

Let’s just use a T shirt as an example. A typical T shirt might be HS commodity code 6109.10.0010. (Boys under 14 T shirts of cotton).

The import duty rate for importing a T shirt into the UK is 12%, however, the import VAT for an under 14’s T shirt is 0% into the UK (UK buyers don’t pay VAT on childrens’ clothes). The tariff on a T shirt is also 12% on shipping into France; though there would also be 20% VAT to pay as kids’ clothes are not VAT exempt there.

The addition of these costs may well make the overall price of a T shirt imported by a band into the UK from the EU, or vice versa, uncompetitive.
Similarly tote bags are HS code 4202229090 and subject to 3.70% duty and 20% VAT when imported into the UK from outside the EU.

Interestingly, vinyl records are code 8523 80 99 00 and there is no duty at all on them from outside the EU, such are the vagaries of the Customs system; though there would still be VAT to pay at the local country rate (eg 20% in the UK).

Few bands are likely to sell-out their merchandise at a festival, so the customs and tax issues involved at borders returning home can become quite interesting!

Of course, larger bands merchandise sales will be dealt with by their record labels; but, alas for the musicians, not every band to tour the UK festival scene will have a record contract – and nor will every British band seeking to visit EU festivals.

**LINKED IN?**

Many British music festivals today don’t stand in splendid isolation, but are increasingly twinned with overseas events; mostly in Europe. How this arrangement will survive the Brexit divorce is very much open to doubt. The twinning movement has been happening for around a decade. Back in 2010 at least a dozen festivals, including Bestival, Glade, Field Day and the Isle of Wight Festival, had already twinned with festivals of a similar size and ethos and promised to promote each other’s festivals, take part in artist exchanges and share ideas about funding and investment, often sharing tickets for competitions, etc.
Twinning isn't just about attracting each other's clients, says Stefan Lehmkuhl, director of Germany's Melt festival, which teamed up with Dorset's Bestival in 2010.

He told the Guardian: “We can help each other in many ways, even if that is sharing ideas about artwork, or websites, or iPhone apps. You can't only look to your home market anymore. We have to support each other however we can, to be stronger against the big power of the mega companies. Without sounding like a hippy, it's good to be part of that family. We are all in this invisible battle for talent, so if you can offer bands the chance to do gigs in two festivals, it has to be a good thing.” [14]

Such European ideals may find it hard to survive in a harsh post-Brexit world.

**MUSIC AND MOVEMENT**

And Brexit will also impact severely on UK bands and festival goers heading for Europe. Every problem we have heard about that could hit EU bands attempting to play UK festivals will also be just as likely to hit British artists heading to European events.

“I think the biggest thing for me as a production manager would be the addition of a carnet for every show outside the UK,” Joel Stanley, production manager at Production Value, told the live music industry trade magazine IQ in March 2016. [15] “Currently we only ever have to show proof of ownership with the bond and have it stamped in and out if we go outside of the EU – mainly Switzerland – but post-Brexit we'd need a carnet even for a one-off show in France.”
So artists could well be hit in the pocket, which means you’ll be hit in the pocket. The extra cost of the carnet could trickle down to consumers, which is a major worry, but also artists could be discouraged from touring all together, particularly artists trying to establish themselves.

Vanessa Higgins, Director Regent Street and GoldBar Records, BPI Council Member claims that Brexit could stop UK acts touring Europe altogether: ‘We could be looking at not only visas for the artists involved on European tours, but increased safety checks on all equipment (as used to happen) with the increased costs that both of those would incur.

‘That could stop many acts of all sizes from being able to tour in Europe. A real shame for the careers of home-grown talent, for European audiences, and for British audiences who enjoy a festival in the European sunshine.’

Colin Roberts of Big Life Management argues that for both UK bands planning to attend EU festivals, and for European bands heading for the UK, the prospect of Brexit is equally bad news:

“Getting visas is an absolute minefield and it costs a lot of money, and it’s the reason that a lot of people don’t get to tour America. Even going to a country like Japan where visas are quite easy to get, I know how difficult it is having to factor in the cost and the time to acquire a visa. A large part of the PRS [Performing Rights Society] fund goes towards helping bands get to America. Are we gonna be at a point where they’ll have to start a fund to get people into
Europe? I can't see a world in which that isn't a backwards step.’ [17]

And Achal Dhillon, Killing Moon Records/Management MD, is in agreement. He told Metro this April ‘There will be an impact on artists' freedom of movement, which in turn could affect the quality of music produced. While promoting their music on the continent, artists could now have to apply for more costly visas and could find themselves heavily taxed while transporting goods. The document they would need is called a carnet, and would cost around £1000—£2000 for 12 months.’

He says: “The idea of having to apply for visas, insurances and other tax levies that may well occur as a result of leaving the EU – particularly when record release campaigns and indeed our artist management clients’ projects are already on a shoe-string budget that just about makes these project viable as it is – are obviously going to unduly affect both my own business and the UK industry as a whole.” [18]

COULD BREXIT TEACH THE WORLD TO SING IN PERFECT HARMONY?

Some artists, managers and pundits argue that, despite the issues we have looked at earlier, Brexit does offer some opportunities for festival organisers and British artists. UK festival goers have been increasingly heading to the Continent in recent years to enjoy music without mud! UK festivals might well benefit from these UK festival goers staying in Britain and attending our home-grown events.

And there are many signs that the UK's sometimes fragmented music industry and festival organisers are coming together to fight the worst potential impacts of Brexit on the recording and live music industry.

Says Achal: ‘On a far more positive note, over the course of the last six months a great proportion of the British independent sector of music have become more bound together as a community in anticipation of all of this. And the UK is still and likely to remain a champion and chief exporter of musical talent around the world. It is therefore prudent to prepare, but at the same time be optimistic about the changes due to occur over the course of the next few years in particular. We British do love a challenge after all”.

Hopefully, to paraphrase those perennial festival favourites the Rolling Stones, though UK festivals may not get exactly what they want from Brexit, if they continue to try, they'll get what they need.