

Lagging ticket sales may indicate a challenging time for the live music industry

Warm-up question:

Have you ever decided not to attend a concert or event because of the total cost involved?

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A MARTÍNEZ, HOST:

If you had plans to see The Black Keys or Jennifer Lopez this year, you might be **out of luck**. The rock duo postponed their North American tour and are considering booking smaller venues, while Jennifer Lopez canceled her tour entirely, tweeting that she wanted to spend more time with her family. Now, reports indicate that both artists experienced **sluggish** ticket sales. Dave Clark is an editor at TicketNews, which covers live events and the ticketing industry. Dave, so both of these artists are postponing or canceling North American tours. Is this happening to anyone else?

DAVE CLARK: Well, it's early in the summer touring season to know exactly if this is going to be playing out on a more wider scale. But the fan reaction to the way that ticket pricing has gone over the last several years seems to be reaching something of **a breaking point**. And, you know, these are two pretty significant performers that are **calling off**, you know, obviously large-scale tours. So I don't know if this is sign of a wider trend or if it's just a couple of isolated incidents, but it's certainly alarming for the people looking to buy tickets to events coming up.

MARTÍNEZ: Yeah, it's not just the ticket though - right? - because you got to pay for getting there and then parking and then maybe buying some food. I mean, it just - there's a lot more than just the price of the ticket.

CLARK: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. I mean, you know, most people - if you're buying a ticket to a show, you're making a whole night out of it. You're probably getting dinner or drinks before the performance or after. You might have to get a hotel. You might have to be taking a plane to the venue. You're obviously hearing a lot of people are traveling to see Taylor Swift this summer because she's performing in Europe.

So yeah, this is a not insignificant **cost outlay** for consumers at a time where, you know, everybody's looking to save on anything they can with, you know, the inflation that people have been dealing with. And entertainment expenses seem to have been an exception to that for a little while post-pandemic, but it seems like that wave is kind of broken and is receding back to the sea.

MARTÍNEZ: Dave, sometimes, when I see or hear of an artist saying that they just need to take a break, should we just **take them at their word** that they need a break? Or is it because they know that they don't want to show up to a half-empty arena?

CLARK: Well, it's impossible to know, obviously, if you are not in the room when that decision is made. I don't envy artists having to make any kind of decision of this **caliber** with their management. But, you know, there is nothing new about an artist or performer coming up with a reason to not perform shows that, when you look at what the sales have been, don't appear to be selling well. That said, there's any number of reasons to cancel a show, and poor ticket sales are only one of them but usually not one that somebody is going to openly admit to because, well, you don't want to admit that things aren't selling well because that's going to hurt future sales, too.

MARTÍNEZ: Right. How concerning is this development for the industry? And what has to change?

CLARK: Well, I think what we're seeing play out now is kind of the - it's been a long trend in this direction where a lot of the pricing model of how live events have been going has kind of **flipped on its head** because in the past, artists would be selling albums to generate most of their income. So the touring and the ticket sales would be another revenue stream but not necessarily the chief way that they made their living.

Now with the streaming era and things like that, that it's really shifted, where instead of selling the tour to get people to buy the record, now it's the other way around, where you are releasing music to try to get people interested in the tour. So **to that end**, a lot of the pricing has really gotten aggressive. And people seem to have kind of gotten to the point where the pricing has broken them off.

MARTÍNEZ: Dave Clark, editor at TicketNews, thanks.

Vocabulary and Phrases:

1. **Out of luck:** Unsuccessful or unfortunate; unable to get what one wants.
2. **Sluggish:** Slow-moving or inactive.
3. **A breaking point:** The moment of greatest strain at which someone or something gives way.
4. **Calling off:** Canceling or abandoning an event or activity.
5. **Cost outlay:** The amount of money spent on a particular purpose.
6. **Take (someone) at their word:** To believe what someone says without seeking further proof.
7. **Caliber:** The quality or level of someone's ability.
8. **Flipped on its head:** Reversed or changed dramatically.
9. **To that end:** For that purpose; with that goal in mind.

Comprehension Questions:

1. Why did The Black Keys and Jennifer Lopez cancel or postpone their tours?
2. According to Dave Clark, what might be causing fans to reach a breaking point regarding ticket pricing?
3. What additional costs do fans typically incur when attending a concert?
4. How has the pricing model for live events changed in recent years?
5. Why might artists claim they need a break, according to Dave Clark?

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think about the high cost of attending live events? Do you believe it is justified?
2. How do you think the shift from album sales to touring as the main revenue stream has impacted the music industry?
3. Do you believe artists should be more transparent about the reasons for canceling or postponing tours? Why or why not?
4. In what ways can the entertainment industry address the concerns of fans regarding high ticket prices and additional costs?
5. Discuss the potential long-term effects on the music industry if fans continue to be priced out of attending live events.