

In the face of continuing COVID pandemic: Dangerous “science experiment” being carried out on music fans, musicians by industry officials

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A recent Science & Medicine article in the *Los Angeles Times*, “Coronavirus Today: When live music becomes a science experiment,” points to a disturbing trend: the return to “normal” in the concert world. The trend is being driven, above all, by the large conglomerates who dominate the field.

The author, *Times* Science and Medicine editor, Karen Kaplan, first notes that “politicians on TV or Twitter” are “saying life can—and should—return to normal,” and suggests that the population may well “decide to believe them because we want them to be right.”

Of course, people are not given a genuine choice in the matter. The central and overwhelming responsibility for the present state of unpreparedness lies with the government, media and corporate elite, who are engineering the “return to normal,” or desperately trying to, for their own selfish economic and political reasons. Young people are being bombarded with the message that the pandemic is over. Everyone, from President Joe Biden on down, is lying to them.

Kaplan goes on to observe that the “recent Coachella and Stagecoach festivals [both held in Indio, California] provided the perfect natural experiment to test the hypothesis that if people ignore the coronavirus, it will return the favor.”

The results are perfectly clear and widely reported. According to *People*, in fact, COVID-19 cases “jumped up 139% in the last two weeks in Riverside County, California, after hosting the 2022 Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival for two weekends.”

The weekly report from the Palm Springs Wastewater Treatment Plant, the magazine went on, showed “that the concentration of COVID-19 in wastewater samples have

jumped up in the last week, going from an average of 360,433 copies to 617,875. The plant called it a ‘significant jump.’ The majority of cases are caused by the omicron variant.”

Coachella, which took place over two weekends in April, attracted an estimated 750,000 people. “The festival is held outside, but did not require proof of vaccination, testing or masks for attendees. And throughout the two weekends, many brands like Revolve and Spotify hold their own parties at homes and venues in the area,” reported *People*. The Stagecoach country music festival, which “had also dropped all COVID safety precautions,” drew some 80,000 participants.

The same general picture emerges from other music festivals, large and small. In the aftermath of the Duluth [Minnesota] Homegrown Music Festival, “several” positive cases of COVID-19 were reported among attendees, festival organizers announced. Everyone who attended a show was recommended to be tested for COVID.

A Memphis, Tennessee television station reported that “After a Mother’s Day weekend filled with gatherings and music fans coming into Memphis for the Beale Street Music Festival a week earlier, Shelby County is experiencing an increase in COVID cases.” The local health department explains that the county’s “seven-day average for COVID-19 cases is hovering in the triple digits again. There were 132 cases as of Monday.”

Meanwhile, *Variety* reports that “As Mask and Vaccine Mandates Fall, COVID Rates Soar Among Touring Musicians.” The April 19 article, unusually outspoken, observes that “mask and vaccination mandates continue to fall across the country, in the face of all credible scientific

evidence that yet another coronavirus surge is not only taking place, but raging.” Given that, the article continues, “it is not surprising that touring music artists are continuing to postpone dates as bandmembers or crew test positive for COVID-19.”

The piece comments that “all one needs to do is look at social media to see dozens of postponed or canceled concerts or tours due to someone in the artist’s party testing positive.” *Variety* cites the tweet by singer-songwriter and musician Sasami [Ashworth] earlier this year, “I am not a big band, if we get COVID and have to cancel shows I’m fully FUCKED. If you love me at all, please wear a mask and buy merch [merchandise] so we can keep touring.”

This is the situation for all but the biggest names. *Variety* explains that those hit hardest “are the mid-level and indie-level touring acts, the ones who rely on live performances for their livelihood and see little income from streaming.” These artists are “playing much smaller, more tightly packed and less well-ventilated venues” than the most prominent figures “and they tour with fewer people, increasing the impact when a member of the touring party tests positive. A postponed or canceled date impacts those artists much more than a superstar act, which has larger teams (and thus can absorb the loss of a staffer or two much more easily) and can afford the costs associated with postponements more readily.”

Bob Mould, formerly of Hüsker Dü and Sugar, according to the *LA Times* article, “has been particularly vigilant about COVID-19 safety. Before he embarked on a three-week tour last fall, he made sure everyone in his band and on his crew was fully vaccinated.” He risked alienating fans “by telling them he expected them to wear masks that covered their noses and mouths. If they weren’t down with that, or with showing proof of vaccination if a venue required it,” Mould recommended they obtain a refund.

However, in April Mould reported on Facebook that he too had tested positive for COVID and needed to cancel shows. He told an interviewer, “I blame myself for not being enough of a hard ass. I don’t think there’s any question we have to be wearing masks when we congregate indoors with drinking and yelling and singing.”

Conscientious bands and performers, in other words, find themselves in a nearly impossible situation.

As for the media, recording and performance industry giants, they are more than happy to proclaim “business as

usual,” so that revenue continues to roll in.

Live Nation, the large promoter, merged with Ticketmaster in 2010 and formed Live Nation Entertainment. The latter, a quasi-monopoly, controls more than 200 venues globally, promotes over 30,000 shows per year and sells around 500 million tickets worldwide.

The reality of bands and performers having to cancel shows, which “can mean a tour that was profitable is suddenly unprofitable,” according to *Variety*, “flies in the face of sunny touring season forecasts from Live Nation and other major live-entertainment companies, which, along with so much of the rest of the country, is ‘getting back to normal.’”

During the company’s most recent earnings call in February, *Variety* continues, “Live Nation CEO Michael Rapino predicted ‘record financial performance’ and ‘the strongest multi-year period ever for the concert industry.’ Omar Al-joulani, Live Nation’s co-president for touring, told the *New York Times* in April that “It feels like we’re much more back to a normal pace and cadence,” reporting that as many as 40 tours are scheduled for next year and beyond.

The notion that staging concerts is a “science experiment” gives far too much of a benefit of the doubt to the music industry giants. For such events to be truly experiments, the possibility of a wholly positive outcome would have to exist. Here the only unknown is the *exact amount* of physical and emotional damage, short-term and long-term—that there will be such suffering is not even a question. The corporate executives involved, who keep themselves as safe as can be, are more than willing to sacrifice the health and well-being of hundreds of thousands of young people in the interests of profit.



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