

***Pitchfork* shocks many fans by announcing the end of its Chicago music festival: “Corporations ruin everything”**

James Martin
13 November 2024

On Monday afternoon, music magazine *Pitchfork* announced that its famed summer music festival in Chicago, which it first held in its own name in 2006, would not return to the city in 2025.

In a statement posted on its website and social media, *Pitchfork* pointed vaguely to a “music festival landscape” that “continues to evolve rapidly” as reason for ending the festival, not offering much more detail.

The music publication added,

For 19 years, Pitchfork Music Festival has been a celebration of music, art, and community—a space where memories were made, voices were amplified, and the shared love of music brought us all together. The Festival, while aligned with the taste of the Pitchfork editorial team, has always been a collaborative effort, taking on a life of its own as a vital pillar of the Chicago arts scene.

The statement went on to thank “artists who graced our stages with unforgettable performances, and to the fans who brought unmatched energy year after year.” And while the statement noted that “Pitchfork will continue to produce events in 2025 and beyond,” it remains unclear what the fate of its sister festivals in Paris, London, Berlin and Mexico City will be, locations to which the original festival expanded.

Fan outrage against Pitchfork’s corporate takeover

Numerous festival fans noted in comments on social media that this was the logical outcome of the corporate takeover of the music publication by global media giant Condé Nast, which acquired *Pitchfork* in 2015.

Various comments posted on the magazine’s Instagram page expressed shock and outrage at the demise of the festival, a mainstay of Chicago independent music for nearly two decades.

One individual simply wrote, “Corporations ruin everything.” Another remarked bluntly, “Profits > Community...” A third

commentator added, “Would have been more romantic to hit the 20th year mark no? But evil corporate management wouldn’t even let us have that.”

Considerable anger was directed specifically at Condé Nast: “Condé Nast killed the *Pitchfork* brand and legacy fast and furiously.” Another said, “*Pitchfork* is officially dead. Knew the absorption under *GQ* meant demise, and here we go.”

Earlier this year in January, Condé Nast’s chief content officer Anna Wintour announced the *Pitchfork* publication would be merged with men’s magazine *GQ*, which was followed by a round of layoffs. Several writers, editors and senior staff were let go. Staff took to X/Twitter and other social media to express their outrage at the layoffs, part of a wave of mass layoffs in the media, entertainment and publication industry.

Pitchfork’s origins in championing indie music

Founded in Minneapolis in 1996 by Ryan Schrieber as an online music magazine, *Pitchfork* played an important role in reviewing independent and alternative music. The magazine was known for its often biting reviews and criticism of various forms of popular and alternative music, quickly becoming influential in assisting a younger generation to discover new and intriguing bands.

The publication brought attention to music ignored by various mainstream print newspapers and music publications. Indie music favorites such as Arcade Fire, Spoon, Broken Social Scene, Silver Jews, Sufjan Stevens, Andrew Bird and many others were made popular through the publication’s commentaries.

Following the Intonation Music Festival in 2005, *Pitchfork* hosted its first official music festival the following year in Chicago and the latter quickly became a major artistic event, drawing in thousands of young people.

The 2005 Intonation Music Festival, curated by *Pitchfork*, featured artists like the Decemberists, who wrote scathing songs about the Bush administration and the Iraq war such as “The Legionnaire’s Lament” and “Sixteen Military Wives.” The gifted multi-instrumentalist Andrew Bird also performed on that occasion.

The first official Pitchfork Music Festival in 2006 featured numerous talented acts, including Spoon (led by singer-songwriter Britt Daniel), the immensely sensitive Silver Jews (led by the late David Berman), the “shoegaze”-style and experimental Yo La Tengo, the Brazilian Tropicalia band Os Mutantes, the Walkmen and many more.

Later, *Pitchfork* festivals would feature veteran bands and musicians like Sonic Youth and Stephen Malkmus, along with indie notables such as Iron and Wine, Grizzly Bear, of Montreal, Cat Power, Beach House, Animal Collective, Vampire Weekend, Fleet Foxes and other bands that would become popular in the 2000s.

The problems of music and art in this period

The indie music of the late 1990s and 2000s had genuine strengths, including an oppositional element to it during the Bush years. The music became weaker and tamer as certain social layers were caught up in illusions about Barack Obama and his promise of “change.”

The limitations of this social milieu, generally anti-establishment but still tied to the Democratic Party or its orbit, found reflection in much of *Pitchfork*’s commentary, which while at times sharp, often veered into pretentiousness and snobbery. An indie artist’s profile could rise or fall on a single *Pitchfork* review and rating. The satirical publication *The Onion* parodied some of this pretentiousness with its well-known piece, “Pitchfork Gives Music 6.8.”

Perhaps a larger problem was the predominance of various strains of academic postmodernism and identity politics as they worked their way down and through to these circles, to the critics and the musicians themselves. For the most part, both groupings were distant from broad layers of the population and their needs and interests.

Much of the music, even some of the best examples, tended toward introspection, preciousness, and a lack of lively interest in the world as it existed and its burning problems.

The continued promotion of anti-communism, the rightward lurch of liberalism, the suppression of the class struggle over an extended period by the trade unions—especially following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the supposed “end of history”—had an extremely corrosive impact on artistic and cultural life in the US, including the indie and alternative music of the 1990s and 2000s.

At its best, the independent streak at *Pitchfork*, relatively free (at least for a time) from the baleful influence of corporate America, found an audience among young people looking for serious art and hostile to the unending state of war and growing attacks on democratic rights.

Pitchfork, however, especially following the takeover by Condé Nast, became more and more obsessed with issues of gender, race, sexuality and various forms of identity politics. It often gave glowing reviews to music that hardly merited high praise. The

foulest aspect of this was its embrace of the ruling class-promoted #MeToo campaign and its anti-democratic smears against artists, including the talented Win Butler of Arcade Fire.

The broader attacks on art and culture

Despite the publication’s contradictory and even checkered history, the layoffs at *Pitchfork* and the shutting down of its music festival need to be seen as part of a wave of attacks on access to culture by the corporate and financial aristocracy more broadly.

These attacks include the onslaught on public education that has been taking place for more than two decades by both big business parties, the closure of over a third of museums during the pandemic, the attacks on classical musicians and orchestras, and the gutting of the film and media industry following the actors and film workers strike last year.

More recently, school districts across the country have come under renewed assault. The latest attacks in Chicago include the proposed closure of seven Acero charter schools, funded by the Chicago Public Schools, provoking anger and opposition among educators and families of students. Plans for the closure of over 100 CPS schools have also been leaked.

Further attacks on culture and education are coming following the election of the fascist Trump, which will not be seriously opposed by the Democrats. For both parties, there is endless money for global war, the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza and the bloody US-NATO war in Ukraine against Russia. But a mere pittance is provided for education and the cultural needs of the broad mass of the population, while over 800 billionaires in the US have a combined \$6.22 trillion in wealth.

The defense of art, culture and high-quality education is entirely bound up with a struggle against the capitalist profit system and the fight for socialism. The growing resurgence of the class struggle, including mass strikes of workers in the US and internationally, and the emergence of a genuine anti-war movement will play a powerful role in galvanizing this fight.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact