

ARTIST ADVICE

by LOTD



Although there seems to be an infinite number of music festivals, getting booked for one isn't easy, as competition is stiff. If you do manage to get invited, your very first performance at a festival can be nerve-racking. Especially if you have only played in smaller venues until then. Suddenly you'll find yourself on a large stage and you'll get little to no time at all to do a soundcheck. With that poor preparation, you'll get maybe half an hour to convince the crowd of your musicianship. A crowd that most likely didn't buy tickets specifically to see you and is just hanging around killing time until the main act starts. How do you prepare for such an uphill battle? We asked five Left of the Dial bands for their tips on getting through your first festival show unscathed.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Frank van 't Hof



GETTING BOOKED

ARXX

'Before we found a booking agent, we managed to book ten to fifteen festivals ourselves, which is quite exceptional, because festivals are a million times harder than getting any club show. The best way to go about it is to be really audacious and message everyone. But don't expect a reply! For every festival we got, there were probably hundreds that didn't reply to us. It's helpful to know people but if you don't, just reach out. When you do, they'll definitely need to access your music, so try and give them as much information in the most concise way in possible. We have a link that takes you to a Linktree so you can choose where to stream our music.

Even if you aren't playing, go to the showcase festivals that are near to you like Left of the Dial, SXSW, or the Great Escape and make as many contacts as you can. Also have a business card with your band's details on! People will forget your band's name as soon as they have left the conversation, so make sure they got something to remember you by.' →



STAGE SET-UP

SNAYX

'The best thing to do, is being as prepared as possible. If you're playing without your own backline, ask for a list of things the festival has available, so you know what to expect. We try to set up as much as we can right before going on. The only thing we have to do is carry everything on stage when it's our time. Also, you can rehearse the changeover. We know that sounds super lame, but we've done it so many times now that we're really quick. For example, we wrap all our cables into loops so the only thing we really need to do is plug into the amps.

The best decision we've ever made is to start using in-ears. It costs a lot of money, and it takes some work to set it up, but it's all worth it. It really saves your ears which is important. For the drummer it's easier because she can use a click track and it helps the singer not losing his voice. When using normal monitors, you sometimes have the feeling you have to scream over the instruments resulting in him losing his voice in the middle of tours. That hasn't happened yet since using in-ears, so that's a huge benefit.

What also helps, is having your own sound engineer. We have a go-to guy and whenever we can afford that person to come with us, we'll bring him. When playing for a brand-new crowd, we'll definitely try and have him involved. But of course, he also needs to get his fair share and that sometimes means having to offset the cost and make an overall loss on the show, but it is still worth it because it will win us fans in the long run.

More in general we would say: have the basics down. Know where you need to be and be there on time. Be respectful of everyone. Be professional, don't jam around when doing line-checks and just do what you need to do.'



SETLIST

CUCAMARAS

'There is a little bit more pressure on picking a setlist for a festival because most of the time you only get 30 minutes to play. You'll want to pick the songs that are really giving the best account of you as a band. At a headline show we tend to play more of the slower songs, at a festival we play the fast ones, the ones that tend to get the crowd moving. We try to build up the energy during our set. At a festival there's so much going on and people are constantly seeing one band for ten minutes and then quickly get out to catch another band. You must make the set fun for every type of person in the crowd. The ones catching the last ten minutes get to hear and see the crescendo of the set, while the people who are at the show early will get more involved with a setlist that is building and they'll get more excited with every song.

At festivals there's usually no time for a proper soundcheck and it's really stressful going into a set only having done a line-check. When that happens, we usually start with a specific song wherein the guitars sort of take turns and that helps to kind of check the levels between us. We've learned the hard way that you shouldn't only be focussed on having a good stage presence for the first array of songs, which is also important obviously, and just crack on with crap sound. If you take a little break after the first song and go: "can we have more of this" or "less of this" the rest of the setlist tends to be perfect. It's absolutely worth stopping for a minute and asking.' →

MERCHANDISE

BO NINGEN

'We sort of figured out what works best through trial and error. Sometimes it's harder to sell your stuff at a festival because people are there for the whole day and they don't want to carry around the things they've bought. That's one of the reasons we sell tote bags, if somebody spends a lot of money on vinyl, you make their life easier by giving them a tote. Plus, it's good to have a range of different priced items, from patches for a couple of euros up to a hoody.

Vinyl always sells well, just like exclusive tour merch. People love posters, but when you sell those, you need to bring cardboard tubes as well, otherwise they'll be ruined before the buyer gets home.

Think about the seasons and be prepared to adapt. Keep track of sizes and don't make too many assumptions. We've learned however that if you offer both, you'll usually sell 65% black shirt versus 35% white shirts. The best way to sell a lot with a minimum effort, is to go to the merch stand and sign stuff. Bands too often don't do it, but no fans are going to come up to the band without making a purchase.'





STAGE PRESENCE

CROWS

'Whether the stage is big or small doesn't make that much of a difference to us. On a big stage you have more room to move around, and you might want to make bigger gestures to reach the back of a crowd, but I tend to do that anyway. At the end of the day, it really doesn't matter if you play to 30 or 3,000 people, you've always got to read the room and try to win each and every one over. Especially at festivals, there's usually an unknown factor of what the crowd expects of you. They might not be there specifically for us, but we always aim to get everybody involved. I get into the crowd quite a lot anyway, but even more when, at the beginning of our set, there seems to be little connection, and I won't let anything stop me. Even if the crowd is further away and it means I have to climb over some barriers. It usually seems to help changing the crowd from just being observers into them actually participating in the show. And they are always as much part of it as we are.'