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SEX, DRUGS & PAPERWORK: UNSIGNED BANDS AND BREXIT

As festival organisers, we do notice the consequences of Brexit, but we don't have to deal with them in the way touring artists do. For example, bands from the UK have started travelling without backline more often, which usually means an increase in rental costs for us, but that's a small sacrifice compared to hassle it's been for artists. Glasgow based band Pizza Crunch played Left of the Dial in 2021 and their bass player Craig Mcdermott did a research project looking at the impacts Brexit has had on unsigned bands from the UK trying to tour and perform in the EU. He was kind enough to share his findings with us. →

by CRAIG MCDERMOTT –
slightly edited by LOTO

In 2016, the UK voted to leave the European Union. This would change the lives of many in a varying and vast array of ways. Brexit also has had an impact on up-and-coming bands who are trying to gig or tour in the European Union in the hope of building their fanbase and signing a record deal. Since the Brexit deal went through, artists are required to provide a portfolio of documentation to travel freely through Europe, including carnets for their equipment and merchandise which is just one of the many hurdles that did not exist prior to Brexit. These administrative hurdles can be bypassed by signed artists who have labels and admin teams to sort through all the paperwork, but what does it mean for a band trying to do it all on their own?

A mountain of paperwork

In the wake of the Brexit vote, the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) was established and as a result musicians from the UK could no longer work freely in Europe and would have to comply with new visa and work permit regulations.

A report from the Musician's Union and Incorporated Society of Musicians stated that there simply is not enough work in the UK for practitioners to survive, meaning that they must find work abroad.

Prior to Brexit it was a straightforward process with freedom to move and work within the EU but now musicians face a mountain of paperwork and expensive administrative red tape. An example of this red tape is the ATA carnet which is required for temporarily transporting goods throughout Europe such as instruments and merchandise. A carnet is a list detailing exactly what equipment is being transported through customs and costs £360 plus a deposit, which for instruments is around 30 to 40% of the equipment's value. These carnets can only be approved at certain entry points into the EU which does not include the Eurostar. This is problematic as this is a common route taken by musicians entering Europe and only adds to the inconvenience. Taking instruments as "personal luggage" can bypass the requirement for a carnet. Artists can transport equipment on their person but not as extra luggage or if their equipment is travelling separately. This usually means they can't take equipment such as amps and drums, which then have to be provided by venues or festivals. Their investments in backline, or the rental costs per show will result in less fee for the artist, or more expensive tickets for the audiences, because the production costs are just getting too high. Artists who need it most and are still building their careers are not benefiting from this in any case.

Another hurdle

According to the report by the Musician's Union and ISM, one of the major problems is the uncertainty about the administrative requirements and lack of support from the UK government for artists trying to navigate the new regulations. The report highlights the inconsistencies between different countries' visa and work permit requirements. Although work permit/visa free work has now been secured in 21 EU states in some form, UK Music warns that different countries have their own individ-

ual demands such as France, where performers must be employed by a registered venue. The report also draws attention to the range of requirements performers are being asked to provide such as translated documents and proof of higher education qualifications. The costs of these requirements also change from country to country adding another hurdle for artists to contend with.

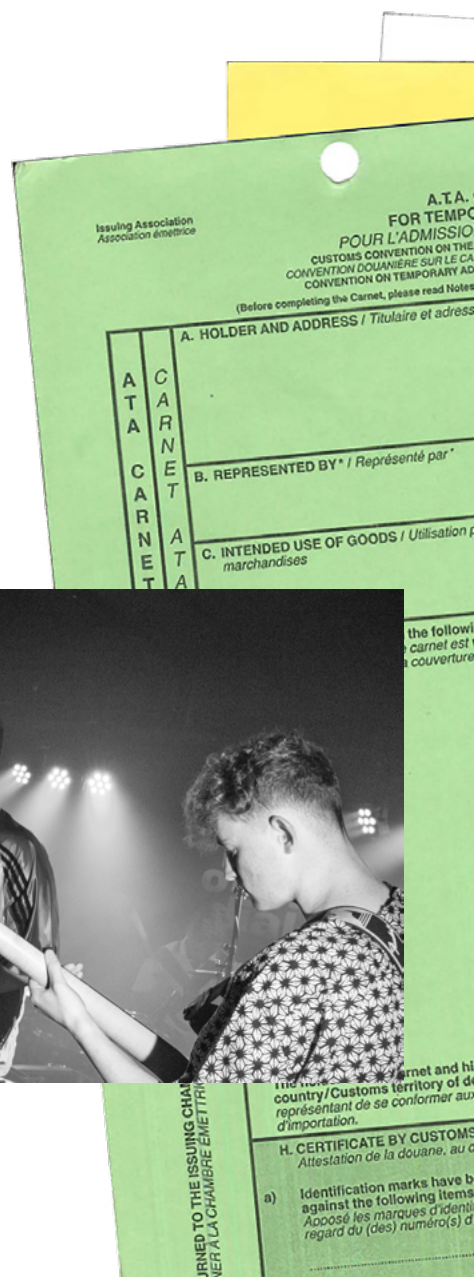
Different reports draw attention to the struggles of up-and-coming bands, who may not have the help of a label, and how they do not have the support around them to deal with the overwhelming and costly administrative requirements. UK Music have suggested that the UK Government should set up a Music Export Office to aid performers and workers and help them navigate the new regulations. Without this support to help artists overcome the drastic increase in paperwork, delays are inevitable. The government's unwillingness to agree on reciprocal arrangements with the EU is remarkable.

Lack of support

It's clear. There is an absence of support from the UK government for smaller, less established artists since Brexit and it's the low-income bands that are suffering the most from these new regulations. European promoters are far less prepared to take the risk on shows that might not breakeven and the post-Brexit bureaucratic paperwork, particularly the ATA carnet, has negatively affected artist income. It affects the fees venues can afford to pay artists and makes selling merchandise more problematic. The founder of a promotions company and booking agency in London that works with UK artists touring in Europe explains: "The promoter is less willing to take a risk on a show that costs him double the amount that it would

LEFT OF THE BREXIT

Left of the Dial (like many other European festivals) tries to help UK artists in various ways. To avoid carnet issues since Brexit, the festival has invested in backline for all its venues so that the artists could take their instruments as hand luggage and avoid needing to make any payment at customs for equipment such as amps and drums. Left of the Dial also offers a merchandise service and will print all merch on demand at the festival, so bands won't have to bring T-shirts and won't have anything to declare at customs.



PIZZA CRUNCH bass player
Craig McDermott at Left
of the Dial 2021 (Kirsten
Heskamp)



have three years ago. It just means the idea of becoming an exciting new band in Europe is more complicated. Due to the new costs such as carnets, booking agencies must now demand more of a fee, which means it's harder for artists to get their first European tour. It's not that people don't want to book artists from the UK, it's just that the cost is now higher, it means it's a lot more difficult process.' He doesn't believe things will change for the better any time soon: 'The live music and arts industries feels pretty low down the pecking order in government priority.'

A depressing view

Everything suggests that the negative effect the new post-Brexit legislation has had, could be even worse if European venues are not prepared to invest in backline for their venues or pay the booking fees of slightly more established up-and-coming artists. European promoters are now less inclined to take the risk on booking a smaller UK artist, as it is very unlikely that the ticket sales will outweigh the costs of putting on the show. Due to the costs having as much as doubled since Brexit, it means that it's too risky to take a chance on an unknown artist who may not have many guaranteed ticket sales compared to an experienced band who have built up a fanbase in Europe over the course of several albums and tours. Artists without the necessary support to overcome the new hurdles will not be able to succeed on the continent. It is evident that the overall cost now to put on a show for a UK artist in Europe since Brexit has increased and the artists or their audiences are paying for it.

The contrast between before and after Brexit is stark and makes for a depressing view. The amount of UK artists touring in Europe has dropped since Brexit and will continue to drop as it seems that everything is stacked against them, and they are offered practically no support from their government, who have shown little interest in improving the situation. Artists, however, need the shows abroad to survive, so at the end of the day, Brexit also contributes to a deterioration of the English music scene. Without a government supporting touring performers overcome the current situation, the future looks bleak. ☹️

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on cover page 3 / A

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