

PRESS RELEASE

UK and EU Music Industry Chiefs Join Forces to Urge Political Leaders to Tear Down Barriers to Touring the EU

Musicians and industry leaders from the UK and Europe have joined forces to demand urgent action to remove the barriers to touring across the EU.

They are warning political leaders that the current arrangements for UK acts touring the EU and EU acts touring the UK are “not working” and are depriving millions of music fans of the chance to see their favourite acts perform live.

Backed by thousands of people working across the UK and EU music industries, an open letter to UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, European Council President António Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, has been organized by the Musicians’ Union, the Association of British Orchestras, LIVE, Pearle*, the Independent Society of Musicians and UK Music.

The open letter – which has more than 550 signatories from organisations and individuals - outlines how the barriers of soaring costs and red tape means “audiences, artists and venues in the EU and UK are missing out on the enormous benefits which closer cultural exchange would bring”.

The letter concludes: “Our strong collective desire to share, learn and inspire in the creativity from both the EU and the UK is united. As our political leaders, we call on your combined efforts in these important talks to overcome any obstacles and barriers affecting the economic and cultural growth of this important sector, that currently stand in the way of fulfilling this relationship.”

Their call for action to remove the barriers facing those seeking to tour and work across the EU comes ahead of the key EU-UK Summit to be held in London on Monday May 19. It also comes ahead of the annual celebration of European music this week which culminates with the 2025 Eurovision final on Saturday May 17 in Basel, Switzerland.

Among those supporting the letter - signed by more than 550 individuals and organisations - are Blur drummer, Dave Rowntree, British mezzo-soprano Dame Sarah Connolly, broadcaster and LIVE chair Steve Lamacq, British conductor Sir Mark Elder and British oboist and conductor Nicholas Daniel, OBE.

Since the UK’s exit from the EU in January 2020, the music industry has faced a number

of challenges. These include increased costs and bureaucracy due to requirements for visas, work permits and carnets for touring UK artists, merchandising costs and the need to navigate complex cabotage requirements for trucks and hauliers that support UK tours in the EU.

Sir Elton John is among those who warned of the “brick wall” of extra bureaucracy and paperwork faced by UK acts touring the EU to be torn down. He also joined the campaign to improve post-Brexit arrangements for younger stars and crew.

According to the latest UK Music figures, the UK music industry contributed £7.6 billion in terms of Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2023 to the economy. The sector also delivered exports of £4.6 billion and provided employment for 216,000 people.

Pre-Brexit, in 2019, the EU was the UK’s largest live music market, worth four times the size of the US - the UK’s second largest market.

Tom Kiehl, Chief Executive, UK Music, said: “The ability to tour the EU free from barriers and restrictive red tape has been central to the UK music industry’s incredible success for decades. And it is absolutely essential to its future prosperity. This country continues to produce swathes of amazing artists who are being deprived of the opportunity to build crucial new international audiences, while fans are missing out on the chance to discover some of the most exciting talent emerging from the UK.

“The costs of touring the EU are challenging for the entire UK music ecosystem, from artists and musicians to engineers and technicians, but at a grassroots level they are posing an existential threat, with many artists prevented from growing the kind of global fanbase they need to survive. It is vital that these barriers to our nearest neighbours are removed so that our world class talent is free to flourish.”

Naomi Pohl, General Secretary, Musicians’ Union, said: “We believe there is a genuine will from the UK Government to remove barriers to touring in the EU for UK musicians and their crew. It must be a priority in trade negotiations if we are to see a resurgence in touring activity and our members' businesses thrive. Touring internationally and domestically is a key part of the music business; crucial to musicians' livelihoods and their relationship with fans. The costs and admin currently faced by our members working in Europe, which are frankly nonsensical in some cases, disproportionately impact grassroots artists with small teams and limited resources. We look forward to a resurgence of touring and revitalised cultural exchange in our closest neighbouring market.”

Jon Collins, CEO, LIVE, said: “The breadth of companies, organisations and

individuals that have signed this letter is clear evidence that the importance of resolving touring issues crosses borders, genres and functions. To have leading European promoters line up alongside venue operators, artists, crew and more is testament to the widespread desire to unlock the economic, cultural and societal benefits that will come for all concerned if the EU Commission and UK Government can deliver improved touring arrangements.”

Anita Debaere, Director, Pearle*, said: “We, at Pearle* – Live Performance Europe, support strong cultural partnerships and easier mobility between the EU and UK for musicians, performers and technical workers across the live performance sector. Removing touring barriers is vital to foster artistic collaboration, economic growth and cultural exchange, benefiting professionals of the sector and audiences alike.”

Judith Webster, Association of British Orchestras (ABO) CEO, said: “Our celebrated, world-leading orchestras have used their international renown to take the best of British culture across Europe year on year. The EU remains UK orchestras’ largest foreign market. It is absolutely critical to resolve ongoing touring barriers which will enable UK orchestras to drive growth, create opportunities for future generations and deepen the strategic relationship between the UK and the EU.”

Deborah Annetts, Chief Executive, Independent Society of Musicians (ISM), said: “A better arrangement for our touring artists and creative industries is in the best interests of both the UK and the EU. The wide-ranging support for this letter demonstrates that the creative industries are united across borders on this issue. All these years after Brexit, I really hope that the upcoming summit is the beginning of a process which ends with a better deal for musicians, the music sector and the creative industries not just for the UK but also the EU.”

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UK Music is the collective voice of the UK's world-leading music industry. We represent all sectors of our industry – bringing them together to collaborate, campaign, and champion music. The members of UK Music are: AIM, BPI, FAC, The Ivors Academy, MMF, MPA, MPG, MU, PPL, PRS for Music. UK Music also has an informal association with LIVE (Live music Industry Venues & Entertainment).

Musicians' Union

The Musicians' Union is a globally respected organisation which represents over 36,000 musicians working in all sectors of the music business.

As well as negotiating on behalf of musicians with all the major employers in the industry, the MU offers a range of services tailored for the self-employed by providing assistance for professional and student musicians of all ages. The Musicians' Union has specialist full-time officials available to immediately tackle the issues raised by musicians working in the live arena, the recording studio, or when writing and composing. Such issues can range from copyright protection to valuable contractual advice or from the recovery of unpaid fees to crucial work in health and safety.

MU members, regardless of their genre of music, are part of one of the leading music industry bodies in Europe and the Union's democratic structures offer every opportunity for musicians to influence MU policy. Add to this the many services that the Union provides and you have an organisation that can assist its members throughout their professional careers and beyond.

www.musiciansunion.org.uk

LIVE

LIVE (Live music Industry Venues & Entertainment) is the voice of the UK's live music and entertainment business. LIVE members are a federation of 16 live music industry associations representing 3,159 businesses, over 34,000 British artists and 2,000 backstage workers.

LIVE works to ensure that the interests of live music in the UK are understood and communicated to Government, policymakers, regulators, the public and the wider music and entertainment industries.

LIVE was initially formed in response to the unprecedented pressure and devastation faced by the industry due to COVID-19 and is structured around four pillars: lobbying, economic analysis, messaging, and skills & diversity. Its work is driven by a series of sub committees on topics including festivals & outdoor events, venues, touring, people and sustainability.

www.livemusic.biz

Pearle*

Live Performance Europe is the European federation regrouping through its members over 13,000 organizations and companies in the music, performing arts and live event sectors.

www.pearle.eu

Association of British Orchestras (ABO)

The ABO is the national body representing the collective interests of professional orchestras, youth ensembles and the wider classical music industry throughout the UK. The ABO's mission is to enable and support an innovative, collaborative and sustainable orchestral sector by providing advice, support, intelligence and information to the people who make British orchestras a global success.

<https://abo.org.uk/>

Independent Society of Musicians (ISM)

The Independent Society of Musicians (ISM) is the UK's largest non-union representative body for professional musicians. Founded in 1882, the ISM champions the importance of music and protects the rights of those working in the music sector. The ISM has over 11,000 members who work across all genres and disciplines of the profession. They are supported through a range of services, resources, professional development and legal advice. The ISM is a wholly independent, non-profit making organisation.

www.ism.org