

COVID-19 Is Totally Changing Concerts and Music Festivals—That Isn't a Bad Thing

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You know that moment when an artist looks out from atop the stage, the entire arena literally vibrating with the screams of everyone around you, and they reach out into the crowd and touch the hand of a screaming superfan (who, um, paid thousands for tickets

because, superfan!), who to *this* *day* hasn't stopped crying their eyes out because [Billie Eilish](#) touched their hand? It's fine. I'm fine!

Going to a concert is about *waaay* more than just listening to music. It's about trying to secure tickets from your phone, your mom's iPad, and laptop at the same time the second they go on sale; the anticipation and excitement building for months before the show; picking out the *perfect* outfit and then the *perfect* backup outfit; and, of course, screaming in the crowd with thousands of your new friends. It's a night you'll never forget. It brings us all together, giving us an excuse to forget about our problems and just dance. I effin' love concerts, okay!!!

Will We Ever Watch Another Kissing Scene Again?

Anyway, those moments are over, sadly. At least for now, anyway.

At this point, you already know: Most (side note: this should be all! ALL!) concerts have been postponed or canceled into the foreseeable future due to the current COVID-19 [pandemic](#). An exclusive survey conducted by Suzy, a real-time consumer insights platform, found that 38 percent of concertgoers ages 21 to 35 will not attend a concert until there is a vaccine for the coronavirus. Twenty-seven percent said they would not attend a live concert until 2021 at the *earliest*.

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I sat down with experts in the music business, the people behind the music festival [Tomorrowland](#), and one of the most successful DJs around, Steve Aoki, to talk about the future of the concert experience. Will it go extinct? Will it be back but unrecognizable? Or will we be able to get heavily tipsy in a crowd full of strangers again, all of us crying our eyes out to [Adele](#) (her new album is supposedly due out later this year, JSYK)? Seems promising, IMO.

Big-name artists will not play in-person live shows until it's safe and there is a vaccine.

I know, bummer. But it's for the safety of everyone involved, including the artist. Ahem, country singer Chase Rice put on a show as normal in Tennessee to 1,000 fans, where most *didn't* have masks on. ([Kelsea Ballerini](#) was one of many who dragged him on Twitter. We stan.) Listen, all artists want to get back to performing but not at the potential harm of their fans.

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Imagine being selfish enough to put thousands of people's health at risk, not to mention the potential ripple effect, and play a NORMAL country concert right now. @ChaseRiceMusic, We all want (and need) to tour. We just care about our fans and their families enough to wait. 🙏 <https://t.co/eJaLnGu28k>

— Kelsea Ballerini (@KelseaBallerini) [June 28, 2020](#)

DJ Steve Aoki is notoriously known for getting the crowd amped when the beat drops (e.g., the cake at each show. Cake!!). Steve tells me:

“It all depends on a vaccine and on the control of the virus. We know certain things that we can do like social distancing, wearing a mask, washing hands, and it's clearly worked in certain countries. I think as we go toward the vaccine stage, we can continue to flatten that curve. If we get the vaccine and get past that and get back to standing-room crowds, that's what we all want. We all want to get back to that. There's nothing compared to hearing and feeling and being with people at live shows. They're so magnetic. We're a social species, we want to feel and connect with other human beings and that feeling we get when we listen to music.”



Ethan Miller/Getty Images

Music festivals like Tomorrowland are going virtual while working on bringing fans back IRL.

Tomorrowland isn't just a music festival, it's *the* music festival (sorry not sorry, Coachella). When I say virtual, I'm not talking about a Zoom conference call. Tomorrowland Around the World has custom-designed and 3-D-built eight digital stages that guests can virtually walk through, including their signature stages that fans know and love like Atmosphere, Core, Freedom Stage, and Elixir. *pauses for your brain to explode*

Debbly Wilmsen, Tomorrowland spokesperson and lead show organizer, tells me:

“Each stage will feature music from the world’s best artists in dance and electronic music—catering to all different genres—and a large portion of fireworks and laser shows characteristic of Tomorrowland. We pride ourselves on uniting people from over 200 countries every year in Belgium, but by going digital, we hope to attract even more people to experience Tomorrowland firsthand without having to travel.”



Tomorrowland

Headliner Aoki has been preparing for this digital show over the past few months. “It’s one of the most important, if not the most important, electronic music platforms in the world,” he explains. “I’ve always viewed my Tomorrowland sets throughout the past decade as my way to debut music or showcase my sound for that year.”

But fear not, the festival will be back IRL in 2021. “We are building our Mainstage in Belgium for July 2021 and we are preparing for Tomorrowland Winter in France and we hope to be in Ibiza again with our weekly residence,” Wilmsen says. 2021 seems to be the safe move, as this year, Coachella postponed and eventually canceled its festival, planning to return next year.

Meet and greets could be a thing of the past.

I know we keep thinking about the fan’s experience, but what about the artist’s? They’re people too!!! And we care about Lady Gaga’s safety because, well, we stan. She’s one of many artists who just postponed touring until 2021, so Little Monsters, hold on tight (play “Chromatica II” into “911” on repeat until then and you’ll be fine).

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@ladygaga I love you. Thank you for everything. Thank you for getting me through my hardest days. Thank you for growing with me and thank you for letting me cry to you pic.twitter.com/FxMPR14Akr

— sophia ☾ (@Monster4Gaga24) June 4, 2019

“Fan VIP experiences with artists will likely be altered,” says Graham Micone, vice president of music and entertainment at Momentum Worldwide, who produces brand-sponsored concert events. “And the standard meet and greet may be a thing of the past. A meet and greet moving forward may not involve a handshake or hug, perhaps it’s just some sort of minimum contact photo op.”

Quarantine has given artists a creative reset—so expect some of their best work.

I mean, look at [Ariana Grande](#) and Justin Bieber: They put out “Stuck With You” and it debuted number one on the Billboard Top 100. This time has halted recording in studios, show rehearsals, and touring. It’s given artists a chance to hit pause, reevaluate the changing landscape, and plan how they want to reenter it, stronger than ever.

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Aoki’s been taking a creative reset too. “It’s allowed me not to be so focused on making songs so much as to just jam,” he tells me. “Before when I was hitting 250 shows a year, I’d hit the studio and it was *deadlines*. There was no time to mess around and experiment. I’ve learned to break the routine. When you break out of the routine, then you can start thinking about music in a different direction, your process changes. It adds so much more to your creativity while getting more chops on your production skills. And it’s fun.”

Arenas and stadiums will likely adapt a new normal for the concert experience.

While I don’t think temperatures will be taken at the door, [safety precautions](#) will definitely become a new normal that we haven’t seen before. “Things will likely look a bit different than they were pre-COVID-19,” Graham says. “Overall attendance will be reduced for each venue to keep people spaced out a safe distance. Seats will be removed, there will just be less people allowed in the venue. Line entry into venues will likely be staggered and tickets will be paperless, everyone just having their devices scanned. Concessions will likely look different—venues will have more controls and protection around how it’s prepared and served.”

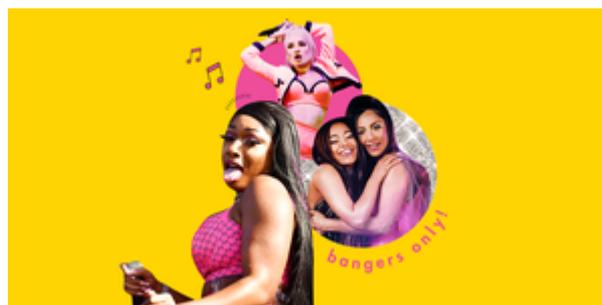


Kevin Mazur/TAS18Getty Images

Stadiums and arenas can take this opportunity to get innovative for the better...like with the dreaded hour-long waiting line to buy concert merchandise. "It could be more of a mobile experience where the merch is purchased on your phone and then you pick it up at a designated location within the venue, so that process is more controlled," Graham says.

So anyway, once it's safe for everyone, artists, managers, venues, and producers are all planning for a return to live shows. *deep breaths* While it does look like the earliest it will happen for big-name artists is 2021, it'll be worth the wait. Until then, don't ever prioritize anything over, oh, I don't know, your health and the health of everyone around you. Wear a mask, listen to Dua Lipa on your AirPods, rinse, repeat.

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