

THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE

A short paper prepared by Geoff Ellis,
DF Concerts initially for Dr John Harden,
Deputy National Clinical Director and
for wider circulation amongst Scottish
Government.

It is hoped that this content helps to
illuminate a pathway to safely returning
to live entertainment and events.



Overview

Live Entertainment cannot just turn the tap on. Large music tours, especially international ones, like theatre, take several months to set up. From booking PA, lights, video, caterers, hotels in every city, flights, several articulated lorries and tour buses as well as arranging carnets and visas, the logistics are complex. If a modest sized tour already scheduled for, say late April 2021 onwards and doesn't receive a green light to go ahead before the end of 2020 then it is likely to cancel or reschedule. If restrictions on events were to be lifted tomorrow, other than smaller gigs with local artists it will be March 2021 at the earliest before any larger concerts (1000+) not already scheduled could take place.

It is unlikely that there will be any large scale international touring indoors before Q4 2021. Some international artists have outdoor shows planned in the UK in the Summer of 2021 which everyone remains cautiously optimistic about however, any international artists who haven't already got dates on sale/sold out in the marketplace are looking to 2022 and beyond. This means that, whatever happens, the live music industry will come back gradually as restrictions are lifted.



Who Goes To Concerts?

It's easy to think of the answer to this question being "most people aged 16–25". Whilst this might be the most common demographic for some music festivals the reality is much wider. Those 16 year old punk rockers in 1976 are now 60 years of age! The second summer of love ravers in 1990 are now approaching 50 years of age. It is a fact that live music is regularly enjoyed by all ages with a large proportion of people between 30–60 attending concerts on a reasonably regular basis. When the question is expanded to live entertainment, then almost the whole spectrum of ages is relevant.

Insurance Risk

The unavailability in the Insurance market for **any** COVID 19 related cancellation cover is the single biggest prohibiter to restarting. The risk to event organisers, artists and suppliers to late cancellation of events due to localised outbreaks and/or increased restrictions is huge and on some shows the financial risk is in the millions. This needs to be understood as no other sector is expected to carry these potentially catastrophic risks that could be brought to bear on future concerts at any point. It is essential that UK government (as insurance is not devolved) work with insurers and the industry to find a workable, affordable solution.

Where We Are And Where We Need To Be

Scotland needs to get major events back for next Summer to drive tourism, hospitality, hotel bed nights and for the much needed multi-million pound economic impact boost to our towns and cities. Scotland's economy needs these key drivers as it plans its post-COVID-19 recovery. In cultural and social terms over a year will have lapsed since the last meaningful live entertainment took place to its return. There is an overwhelming need for the nation's health and wellbeing to get back to live entertainment and events. Most events are simply not able to viably return whilst any form of physical distancing remains in place. **The barrier to an events driven economic, cultural and social recovery is physical distancing.**

After The Vaccine...

Until a vaccine is in circulation, it has been stated several times by Scot Gov that physical distancing will not be removed.

We must plan now for the stages that follow a vaccine being distributed.

Whilst it is too early to know when the vaccine will be distributed there seems to be certainty that it will be early 2021 at the latest. Vaccinations for the vulnerable in society becomes the game changer that allows us to manage and mitigate the remaining risks from the virus. Our industry is well versed in mitigating a whole array of existing risks and are capable of doing the same with COVID 19.



THE PLAN: Remove Physical Distancing

With the most vulnerable in society able to be vaccinated it should be possible to move to the next stage. This stage should allow the return of events and live entertainment **without** physical distancing. This brings back into play the Full Capacity Plan devised by Melvin Benn, of Live Nation and Festival Republic, that has been previously circulated.

Of course, prevention of the spread of the virus should still be paramount however it must be accepted that the consequences from any mitigated risk is significantly reduced hence the need to allow some relaxation in approach. Other robust safety protocols can remain in place for as long as the virus is determined to be a serious threat to general public health.



Reduced Capacity Bridge Events

It would make sense from listening to Scot Gov concerns that there was a bridge between the current scale of restrictions and having events return with no restrictions around physical distancing. It would no doubt increase public confidence too.

It is not viable for events to take place at Level 0 but once it is safe to do so, and that point should be when the vaccine has reached the most vulnerable, reduced capacity events could take place without social distancing at designated venues in various locations. These reduced capacities could be set by local authorities working to Scot Gov guidance so that individual venue risk assessments could determine the capacity. We could begin with seated venues, then standing venues, increasing the capacity as we progress through the bridging programme. It is important that meaningful capacities are set, e.g. at least 500 initially, then perhaps 1000 so that realistic data and behaviours are captured to inform future decision making.

There could be an agreement with Scot Gov that these bridge events could be run in designated approved hubs, for example – one venue each in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness. The advantage of this is that the government would not need to ease restrictions nationally and only do so for the pre-agreed hubs. This would eliminate the risk that inexperienced operators could rush into staging live entertainment without the necessary safeguards in place. It would also mitigate the impact of several venues operating simultaneously to allow for a slower, steady movement towards general re-opening giving everyone confidence.

For example a venue such as SWG3 in Glasgow would be an ideal location to run several reduced capacity events at, with a variety of entrances, large circulation spaces, plenty of exterior space for queuing, good ventilation systems, large floor areas and very high ceilings. Other venues in Glasgow will also be suitable. There are suitable venues that could be used in other cities to allow a geographical spread. These bridge events could operate for a period of up to two months before allowing full capacity events to return.

A modest level of Government support would be required for these “hubs” to operate where the government would fund the short fall in capacity but the promoter/venue takes the risk on the majority of ticket sales.

How It Could Work

A key safety factor could be a combination of mandatory testing of audiences, say 48 hours before they attend a concert or event, and the three month “freedom pass” referred to by Sir John Bell, Regius Chair of Medicine at the University of Oxford whereby people who self-isolate after testing positive should be given an enabling pass. The test itself:

- could be a universal one that links in with NHS test & trace.
- would have to be one that was viewed as credible by Scot Gov and NHS.
- would need to have a price point under £5 to the customer.
- would link in with Ticketmaster digital ticket app for smart phones and with third party health information companies like CLEAR Health Pass or IBM’s Digital Health Pass along with testing and vaccine distribution providers like Labcorp and the CVS Minute Clinic.

Over the next weeks and months further advances will be made on rapid testing therefore it would be pointless trying to specify one test at this stage.

It should be understood that there may be a small level of risk with mass testing of audiences however this should be viewed as an acceptable one with the vulnerable vaccinated. As an alternative to mass testing audiences, consideration should be given to events just testing the over 50s who haven’t been vaccinated. This should meet the aim of reducing the pressure on hospital beds and the NHS. It is appreciated that currently, reliance on anything other than a PCR test is deemed too much of a risk but surely this position can be softened once the most vulnerable have been vaccinated and we are over that understandable and significant obstacle on the re-opening pathway.

As evidenced in Liverpool just now mass testing is difficult without an incentive to take a test. As Melvin Benn’s Full Capacity Plan highlights, requiring a test to attend a concert is an effective motivator to get tested.

Managing Safety & Risk

Venues and established promoters are experts in running safe events. They are specialists in crowd assessment, dynamics and management relative to the size and scale of their operation.

Venues are licensed by local authorities with stringent safety measures set and adhered to including safe occupant capacity, fire safety, alcohol management plans etc. Outdoor concerts are even more stringently regulated by the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) multi-agency approach to ensure that the Public Entertainment Licence can be granted.

Risk management is a day to day operation for the events industry. For example, DF Concerts organise close to 1000 concerts each year ranging in size from 100 people to over 60,000. A risk assessment is done for each individual concert (including over 300 in King Tut’s) as well as an end of night report. This enables future concerts to be better planned taking cognisances of audience behaviours and any other lessons learned. Very large concerts have a detailed planning regime and a thorough debrief process.

As an industry, we regularly plan for a multitude of risks e.g. the avoidance of crushing, anti-social behaviour, rigging of flown equipment / weight loadings, fire safety, safe use of pyrotechnics, construction of stages, drug and alcohol abuse, searching protocols; safeguarding, prevention of spread of communicable diseases, prevention of health risks such as salmonella, operation of plant and machinery, prevention of terrorism, etc.

COVID-19 is one more risk to mitigate for.

Example Timeline

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Date A – | VULNERABLE VACCINATED |
| Date A + 2 weeks – | REDUCED 50% CAPACITY SHOWS (500 CAP [^]) BEGIN IN SEATED VENUES * |
| Date A + 3 weeks – | REDUCED 50% CAPACITY SHOWS (500 CAP [^]) BEGIN IN STANDING VENUES* |
| Date A + 4 weeks – | REDUCED 50% CAPACITY SHOWS (1000 CAP [^]) STANDING / SEATED * |
| Date A + 6 weeks – | REDUCED 75% CAPACITY SHOWS (1000 CAP [^]) STANDING / SEATED* |
| Date A + 8 weeks – | FULL CAPACITY SHOWS * |

(* = NOT physically distanced)

([^] = Approx capacities. Actual capacity to be determined by local authority based on each venue’s specific criteria and risk assessment)

Local/Venue Mitigation Measures

- Hierarchy of Control approach to prevention and mitigation measures
- Mandatory Pre-event test (negative test validates mobile ticket to gain entry) or even just a mandatory test for those over 50 who have not been vaccinated
- Ticketmaster digital ticket app to verify fans' vaccination status or whether they've tested negative for the coronavirus within a 24 to 72 hour window.
- Temperature checks on entry
- Potential to insist on wearing of masks (except for consumption of food and drink). This could be applied to queuing, general circulation areas, etc.
- Availability of hand sanitiser at entry and exit points, in toilets, at bars and in circulation areas
- Enhanced venue cleaning & hygiene measures – these will become a regular feature at events
- Additional, dedicated staff training
- Air-handling systems producing regular changes of fresh air per hour
- Use of COVID 19 respondent Sniffer dogs
- Increased use of contactless payment
- Staggered arrivals and egress
- Re-purposing fire exits as entrances too
- Creation and management of “backstage bubbles”
- Contactless mobile ticketing
- Potential for increased use of RFID
- Daily testing of events staff

Further Information

Scot Gov should consider events in other parts of the world to help inform decision making.

- Estonia full capacity (1500) project scheduled for early December
- UAE – trialling at event testing with 37 second results (possibly reducing down to 25 seconds) with 100% accuracy
- China, Singapore, Taiwan, New Zealand – large scale events now happening indoors without social distancing and currently without any vaccine in place
- Return to arena concerts announced in Australia
- Institute of Occupational Medicine report
- Full Capacity Plan (author Melvin Benn)
- Leipzig, Germany non-socially distanced test event with 1,200 attendees on 23rd August, where the findings suggest that indoor concerts have a “low” impact on infection rates, providing they are well ventilated and follow hygiene protocols.
- Ticketmaster framework for smart phones to verify fans' vaccination status or whether they've tested negative for the coronavirus within a 24 to 72 hour window.

Touring Mitigation Measures

Already, the most experienced Production Managers working with the biggest global artists are proactively discussing and sharing ideas and potential protocols for future touring. These conversations are happening now with major promoters and venues across the globe. The solutions for going forward need to be global solutions primarily with localised adaptations. Smaller, touring bubbles will become the norm with regular testing of all touring personnel. Many touring parties will now include a dedicated COVID-19 officer empowered to make decisions around artist and tour safety. Stage and backstage areas are likely to be limited to the touring bubble only – no meet & greets, no in person media interviews, etc. Questions are already being asked about the relevance of support acts at this point; not using local stagehands for touring equipment; the promoter being asked to supply more equipment to be used solely by the tour rather than the tour carrying that equipment and the relevant personnel (on basis that it can be left untouched for, say 48 hours); dressing room “riders” are likely to become a thing of the past, etc.

