

COVID-19: The Way the Music Died?

“Why,” Candice Holdsworth asks at British web site *spiked*, “aren’t more artists standing up to lockdown?” “The lockdown has completely decimated the live-performance industry,” she writes. “And yet we hear very little from leading people in theatre, music and the arts criticising the lockdown and what it is doing to their industry.”

There are exceptions. Probably the most prominent is Van Morrison, who’s recording lockdown protest songs (with, among others, Eric Clapton) and using the revenues to fund grants for working musicians left unemployed by government mandates.

But the exceptions prove the rule. Most entertainment celebrities have gone along with, and some have even actively promoted, government shutdowns of everything from movie theaters to nightclubs in the name of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even if one supports such measures, it’s important to understand that they impose costs on all of us.

As both closures and non-closure restrictions stretch on month after month, some performance venues will doubtless close permanently. They can’t pay rent, keep the lights on, and feed their owners forever without generating revenue.

How many musicians, dancers, and stage actors — aspiring, up-and-coming, or long-working but without financial resources to wait the pandemic out — have already given up and sought work that neither utilizes their talents nor brightens our lives nearly as much? How many will never return to entertainment?

Technology helps. Music can be recorded, videos produced, shows live-streamed to home viewers. But for many artists and many fans, there’s just no substitute for live, in-person performances.

And speaking of audiences, the lockdown measures cost us as well. Missing those evenings out at the club or theater may not be *Oliver Twist* level deprivation, but it’s definitely a quality of life downer.

In late November, my wife and I went out to a club to see a band for the first time in ten months. Same club (the High Dive in Gainesville, Florida) and same band (The Grass is Dead — a fantastic combo melding bluegrass musicianship with Grateful Dead and related music) as the last time, in January.

The difference between the two gigs was stark. Masks, of course. Severely reduced audience size. No dance floor (you could stand next to your chair and dance, but not mix).

Drinking outside only.

I'm not complaining as a customer, mind you. It wasn't just better than nothing, it was fantastic. There's nothing like joining fellow fans in a room to hear great musicians doing their thing and doing it well.

But with an audience of maybe 20 or so (The Grass is Dead can pack a venue in normal times), I have to wonder how either the band or the club made enough money on the show to keep going for very long. And in many places, that show couldn't have happened at all, even with social distancing, masking, etc.

Politicians and bureaucrats, whose paychecks continue to arrive in full and on time, are doing terrible and likely long-term harm to both performers and fans in the name of fighting COVID-19.