

Bands urge fans to put the phone down

June 26 2013, by James Pheby

There are few experiences which compare to the life-affirming thrill of a live music event, knowing that you are one of a privileged few being treated to a display of raw artistic skill and power.

But just as the atmosphere reaches fever pitch, a sea of illuminated smartphones obscures the view and shatters the intimacy, reducing your memories to a shaky YouTube clip drowned out by off-key gig-goers.

Artists and fans are now speaking out against the rising trend of filming concerts on phones.

"People who would rather record a gig than actually look with their own eyes" are challenging the "very essence of the 'live experience'", said Glenn Max, a producer who has worked with Massive Attack, John Cale and Patti Smith.

"It is clear to artists that audiences are moving away from experiencing the music directly, preferring to feel it through their phone."

Tim Burgess, who in April released memoirs detailing his 20 years as lead singer of indie band The Charlatans, urged music fans to use the "recording device in our brains", which "have far better effects than you can get on a phone".

Footage "filmed from half a mile away with the 'director's' mates singing at the top of their voice" cannot capture the emotion of a gig, he told AFP.

Max, artistic director of London's Village Underground cultural project, added that as well as affecting the crowd's enjoyment, those on stage were also bothered.

"It affects the artist's experience tremendously and on many levels," he said.

"Artists work hard and very carefully to be represented as they conceive their own work. Imagine singing your heart out to an audience that's stripping you of this dignity."

Iconic British indie performers Ian Brown and Jarvis Cocker have also spoken out about the craze, but it is not confined to the world of popular music.

Polish pianist Krystian Zimerman recently stormed off stage at the Ruhr Piano Festival in Germany after spotting an audience member filming his performance.

"The destruction of music because of YouTube is enormous," Zimerman said on returning to the stage.

Up to the music industry to act

But should anything be done to limit the trend?

After all, thanks to online amateur footage, fans in countries not served by the travelling live music circus now have a chance to sample the concert experience.

Russia and India were recently highlighted by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) as huge potential markets for this.

Singer Burgess also points out the benefits to those who cannot afford tickets and "kids who maybe aren't able to get to a gig" due to age restrictions.

But many artists remain opposed.

US art-rockers Yeah Yeah Yeahs took matters into their own hands, posting notes on the doors of New York's Webster Hall asking fans not to film "as a courtesy to the person behind you and to Nick, Karen and Brian (the band)".

The power to enforce a ban ultimately rests with the battered music industry, which has already seen technology decimate its revenues from record sales.

Record companies own exclusive rights to record their artists' music, meaning promoters have to do "what they can" to prevent unauthorised filming, explained Chris Cooke, legal expert and co-founder of online news provider Complete Music Update.

Although not "specifically illegal", promoters could sue transgressors for breach of contract if filming is forbidden by the ticket's terms, he said.

Apple meanwhile mooted plans in 2011 to block its smartphones from recording at concerts, but such moves risk creating a consumer backlash.

For all those who fear amateur recordings could lead to live DVD sales going the same way as record revenues, there are others who sense an opportunity.

Most attempts to create subscription-based or ad-funded live music websites have failed, but many are still hopeful of developing a profitable model "and that may contribute to resistance in the business

regards phone-based gig recordings", said Cooke.

Some labels are "dabbling with the idea" of creating websites which would combine crowd-sourced footage with "a decent capture of the sound from the sound desk", he added.

However, phone-wielding directors appear to pose little threat to the industry's [live music](#) revenues, which have risen globally every year since 2006, hitting \$23.5 billion in 2011, according to GrabStats.com.

As Jem Finer of punk band The Pogues told AFP: "You can't experience a live show without being at a live show."

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