Let Them Make Art: Why Unified Arts Festivals are Beneficial for Independent Artists

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corporate, and independent (mainstream and underground, if you will). The corporate market accounts for a small fraction of all artists and reaches the largest audience, while the independent market accounts for the vast majority of working artists, yet remains niche. There is no marketing. Even the most successful independent artists cannot match the selling power of large companies. This project seeks to illustrate the potential of unified arts festivals to facilitate greater audience exposure for independent artists, and how this may benefit the artistic community. The arts community at Chapman University have a similar dynamic to that previously addressed. University produced concerts and plays draw the largest audiences, while student-produced work is showcased on a much smaller level. This project utilizes a variety of current arts festival models to demonstrate the potential of a unified arts festival to draw larger audiences for independent artists through the planning process at Chapman University. This project examines contemporary combined arts festival models, focusing primarily on the relationship between artist and audience – as well as seeks to study the differences between audience experiences within the arts festival environment and those restricted to a genre. All of these will be studied in the contemporary context to prove the benefits of unified arts festivals for independent artists.

**Burning Man**

Along with encouraging the creative production of all participants, Burning Man hosts a wide range of professional artists, performers and installations. Unlike typical arts festivals, Burning Man does not book artists, artists go to Burning Man. Artists form small villages, also known as “theme camps”, where they can showcase their work within, the greater festival community. This requires the collaboration of many artists to create an interactive environment supportive of their individual or collective work. “Your theme camp should create an ambiance, a visual presence, in some way provide a communal space or provide activity.” The theme camp format eliminates commercial bookings, while creating an environment where artists can more closely connect with their audience. This also allows artists the greatest amount of creative freedom given the event’s reliance on participants to create the experience.

**Lightning in a Bottle**

Lightning in a Bottle (LIB) is a unique arts festival in California, in which scheduled activities range from nearly all varieties of music and performance, to speakers, workshops, yoga and interactive art installations. “Bestselling authors, accomplished visionaries and master lecturers will be sharing insights and inspirations on diverse subjects including ancient civilizations, forward-thinking economics, human consciousness, sustainability and more.” When compared to other festivals, LIB is rather small and still growing, but with both 2012 and 2013 estimating attendance at roughly 15,000 people, there is a far greater potential audience than most independent artists can individually attract. Visual artists like painters and sculptors have no way of individually drawing 15,000 people to a gallery for a show, but when showcasing their work in a festival setting, they can begin to come closer to this level of exposure.

**Chapman ArtsFestival**

**Commercial EDM, the crowd is f**ked up kids basically. They don’t care about the music. They want to hear one or two songs and that’s it. I prefer to play to people who actually give a s**t about the music.**

- Flume | DJ

In his interview with digital spy, DJ and producer Flume discussed his bias against mainstream EDM (electronic dance music) festivals, favoring crowds of rock and roll fans. He cites the problem as the festival structure itself, stating, “There’s no festival that caters to my sound, kind of like Disclosure - they can do rock festivals and they can do dirty EDM festivals because there’s no real festival that has that.” While his comments border on childishly egotistical, he makes an excellent point. EDM festivals tend to create umbrella genres for artists such as rock or EDM, failing to celebrate the artist’s true individuality of creative expression.

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- Moby | DJ

“During the 80s and 90s festivals were almost exclusively about music. But with the rise of Burning Man and Bonaroo and Wanderlust, people are realizing a festival can involve music, but also be so much more.”

- Moby | DJ

Veteran DJ and producer Moby takes a different approach to the festival culture. When asked why he chose to play at Lightning in a Bottle festival, Moby stated in his interview with inthemix.com: “My criteria for evaluating a festival is only partly informed by the music. The community that people have is standing in the audience watching a band. Which can be fun, but it can be limiting. At a festival like Lightning In Bottle, community counts.” Moby goes on to explain how his music is enjoyed across the country. Festivals beautifully facilitate this dynamic, allowing vending artists and motivated festival goers to network in a way that helps further spread artist expression while providing mutual financial benefit.

**LET THEM MAKE ART**

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