

**“Live and Direct:” the Impact of Live Nation on
Contemporary Popular Music Performance**

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“Live and Direct:” the Theoretical and Qualitative Impact of Live Nation on Contemporary Popular Music Performance

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Chapter 1
”Y’all Enjoy the Show...”¹

The first concert that I took myself to was a double bill between Incubus and the Deftones at the Pageant in St. Louis MO. I was not there for Incubus—white people with bad voices making contemporary alternative funk will never be an interest of mine—but the Deftones had been a powerful force in my life up to that point. Like many white suburban youths, I had a lot of confusing and confused angst, and listening to that band’s heavy, grinding music felt like embracing and then detonating that angst. The music not only captured my feelings: it felt like it was coming *from* me. “Lifter,” “Engine No. 9,” “Ihabia,” “Dai the Flu”—these were the sounds of my adolescent and pre-teen emotions and contradictions being constructed and loudly, violently, and definitively settled again and again through my headphones. When I was 12 and 13, the Deftones records were both what I sounded like on the inside, and what I hoped to sound like in the future.

At some point in his or her life, every person is transformed. At least once, we all experience something that awakens dormant parts of our psyche, connects us to something larger than our previously known world, amplifies our perspective and necessitates a shift in our consciousness. The Deftones’ performance that I saw when I was 13 was one of my earliest transformative moments. Their energy and the sounds they were making filled me with impossibly complex matrix of emotions—fury, acceptance, passion, comfort to name some—so new and moving that I felt like I was inhabiting someone else’s skin. It was an epiphany: I had jettisoned my preexisting expectations of

¹ All of the chapter titles and section headings are popular music references. I have provided a key to the references in Appendix C.

how music and the people making it were supposed to make you feel, and a brand new world of bolder views and methods of expression lay before me.

I was, quite simply, hooked. Buying music to listen to at home became kind of a stopgap, a necessary formality to go through if I were to get the most out of seeing that band or musician live. From the ages of 13 to about 16, I listened to music so that if/when a performer came to town, I could better enjoy their performance. When I listened to CDs, I imagined myself seeing the same song performed live. During class, I made lists of perfectly complementary double bills and festivals, fantasy set lists for my favorite bands, and sketchings of my ideal venue. I bought tickets to see bands I didn't like so that I could be in a performance setting. My being hooked became my being obsessed.

During my freshman year of college, as my obsession finally tempered, I began to view my hobby more rationally, and a number of things became clear to me. First, it was clear that my interest in live music was essentially fueled by a desire to recreate the indescribable experience of my first show. The Deftones had turned me into a seeker, and I had committed a gigantic array of resources to chasing what I first found at the Pageant. This realization immediately preceded another one—I hadn't found it. More and more, I struggled to establish the connection between both myself and the music, and myself and the dimly lit corners of my psyche. Shows were entertaining, but they were not transformative. Though I pursued it with great dedication, the ineffable and incredible transformation I had undergone eluded me, and I wanted to know why.

At first, I blamed the bands. If I left a show feeling uninspired, unmoved, or generally untransformed, it was because they had failed to create the forces necessary to inspire, move, or transform me. This, however, soon proved counterproductive. I ended

up disliking my favorite bands for what I assumed were their failures as performers, and I briefly ran out of music to like. This method would not do. I then directed my blame to other concertgoers. Fans who jeopardized the performance environment by rudely violating my personal space or not giving the band their complete attention were the reason why I could not reach the intense, transcendental peaks of my first show. This theory too soon failed as I remembered the thick, drunken mass of bodies in which I stood at that first show. With no personal space and a small girl, eyes closed and head drowsily dangling down from her neck and slumped on my shoulder, I was transported to new realms: not having enough floor space and being around less passionate people wasn't the problem. I still needed answers.

In high school, I was first exposed to what I saw as a sharp distinction in the music business between major and independent labels. I had an admittedly unrefined understanding of this dichotomy. While the corporate-owned, suit-wearing major labels sought to capitalize on the latest generic and “inauthentic” trends in popular music, the out-muscled independents somehow managed to do things “the right way,” working tirelessly to find and support real musicians who sought to make “pure” music unspoiled by the pursuit of revenues. To me, this was a self-evident, almost reflexive reality in the world of popular music, and it shaped both my tastes and consumption habits. It wasn't until college that I began to connect this perceived truism of recorded music to my experiences with performed music.

Like many college freshman interested in the humanities and social sciences, I was bombarded with postmodern, poststructuralist, and anti-capitalist ideas during my first two semesters at Tufts. I had already been exposed to and accepted a lot of these

ideas, but I think that being unrelentingly re-exposed to them at a time when I was looking to explain a gap in my life made it convenient for me to try and apply what I was learning in school to what I was feeling every day, or at least every time I left a concert. Since I was so steeped in literature that faulted faceless, inhuman corporate interests for every social ill from air pollution to the deterioration of the American family, it was not a leap for me to blame the indiscriminate greed of profit-driven entities for the ill that most affected me—the deterioration of the concert-going experience.

After a little research, it seemed clear to me that the major/corporate-independent dichotomy that defined recorded music also applied to live music. In the same way that huge national and multinational groups like Warner Bros. and Sony/BMG exercised enormous control over the recorded music industry, disseminating antiseptic, uninspiring products to appeal to wide consumer bases, Live Nation, AEG, Ticketmaster and other live music powerhouses bought up the nation's venues and promotional apparatuses, using them as little more than sources of revenue. Their corporate sensibilities could not place a price tag on the kinds of transformative experiences that I sought through performed music, so this kind of pursuit was meaningless to the corporate live music business. In the same way that corporate recorded music entities jeopardized the quality of their output for commercial reasons, I thought that the corporate climate of the live music industry was having the same effect on my concert experiences.

While the corporate side of popular music performance complicated and perverted my concert-going experience, my reasoning continued, independent promotional and administrative entities endeavored to preserve the kind of ideology and event that facilitated my performance goals. Less interested in profits and more interested in pure,

authentic, quality live music than their corporate competitors, independent venues and promoters, I thought, were both capable of and interested in creating environments that would encourage the emotional and spiritual processes that I first enjoyed when I was 13 and had been searching for ever since.

This project began with these assumptions, but as my research yielded more and more data, my initial assumptions about the contemporary popular live music climate and live music in general quickly changed. By coupling a synthesis of ideas within the popular music studies, ethnomusicology, and sociology fields with first-hand descriptions of the live music climate and experience, I have arrived at an understanding of corporatization and consolidation that both builds on existing theories and answers questions they do not.

Popular music researcher Keith Negus provides a broad philosophical interpretation of the recorded music industry that both contradicts my initial dichotomous understanding of the music business and echoes the findings of my research. While many researchers (and, as I can personally attest, at least some fans and consumers) view recorded music as a struggle between the pure, creative independents who endure financial hardship to support “music the way that it should be” and the calculating, greedy corporate fat-cats who huddle together in smoke-filled room hatching plans to squeeze every last cent out of a music product in which they aren’t otherwise interested, Negus takes a much more textured and complex view of the dynamic. He concedes that large multinational corporate interests do hold a powerful sway over the kinds of recorded music available for mass consumption, and that by filtering this music through

the major labels' profit-driven ethos, corporate entities affect musicians' creative output. In other words, Negus concedes that industry produces culture.

However, in at least two ways, the role of the consumer, listener, and fan is equally powerful in socially constructing and evaluating popular recorded music. First, while corporate entities propagate and shape much of the popular music product, they do not do so robotically. The corporate structures that seek to capitalize on recorded music and mold it accordingly are operated by humans—individuals whose decision making is informed by the same emotional, ideological, and aesthetic forces that drive you and me. They tend to be fans themselves, with refined and complex personal tastes and beliefs of how quality popular music should sound, and these tastes and beliefs play a role in determining the ways that corporate entities shape the music they sell. Secondly, though major labels control most of the recorded popular music market and much of what consumers are able to hear, they do not control how the audience interprets or reacts to the product they receive. Drawing on active listener theories, Negus believes that the audience is uniquely empowered to evaluate and define the actual meaning of the musical product in ways that transcend the scope of corporate influence. While Negus' theory pertains specifically to recorded music, I appropriate his overall premise—that the relationship between artists and corporate and independent industry actors in popular music is far more complex than a simple duality between negative greed and positive purity—and essentially verify that this is true in popular music performance as well as recorded popular music.

To do this, in part, I view the characterizations of performance and contemporary live music landscapes that I obtained from interviews with performers through a lens

heavily influenced by sociologist Emile Durkheim. To Durkheim, religion is essentially defined as the cultivation, sharing, and enjoyment of collective effervescence, a kind of energy that distinguishes “religious” events from routine daily activities. When people gather with a shared, expressed or implied objective, Durkheim argues, the group is capable of generating a powerful and unique metaphysical energy that they are then able to focus on an object or person and worship. This intense energy and the group experience that is necessary to achieve it provide people with a range of spiritual, philosophical, emotional, and generally esoteric benefits which I believe fall into three categories: revelry, communion, and transcendence.

While I am not as interested in the “religious” elements of collective effervescence, the concept will prove crucial for my research. Based on my interviews, I have established that performers of all kinds of popular music and from all kinds of backgrounds use their performances to seek some form of the energy associated with collective effervescence. Moreover, and more importantly, I have isolated a range of instrumental, administrative, and psychological factors that can facilitate or hinder artists’ pursuits of collective effervescence, and established that, as far as the performers that I spoke with are concerned, the corporate model of live music promotion better enables popular musicians to attain the collective effervescence they seek.

However, my findings do not suggest that the sole purpose of popular music performance is the attainment of these grandiose and romantic metaphysical aims. Performers are quick to point out (and consumers are quick to realize) that performance offers a slew of unique and rich opportunities for revenue, and this, in addition to the cultivation of collective effervescence, is a primary goal that performers associate with

their performances. However, like with their more esoteric pursuits, performers report that the corporate model provides the performer with a number of benefits that allows them to optimize their financial pursuits.

In the pages that follow, I will go from the ideological and theoretical roots that bred my earlier assumptions to the interviews that dispelled them. In Chapter 2, I will outline the different areas of literature relevant to my question: theories on deregulation, theories on the relationship between media deregulation and media consolidation, and theories on popular music consumption and industrial dynamics. In Chapter 3, by viewing the past, present, and future operations of the nation's largest live music corporation, Live Nation, through a political economy lens, I will draw connections between Live Nation and the consolidated media model discussed in Chapter 2. I will then conclude that based on these similarities, one would expect Live Nation's overall effect on the US's contemporary live popular music landscape to be systematically negative.

Chapters 4 and 5 will rely almost exclusively on interviews that I conducted with several contemporary music performers, whose responses summarily dispelled the theoretically negative impact of Live Nation on contemporary live music. I selected and was able to contact a group of performers from various musical backgrounds—distinct and disparate genres of music, different amounts of performance experience, different levels and types of success—and asked them a set of questions ranging from the broadly philosophical to the specifically practical.² I asked performers to generally define performance, to characterize their objectives, and the things that foster or hinder attaining

² I will better detail the interview process and discuss my respondents in Chapter 4.

them. I also asked performers to consider the distinctions—if any—between independent and corporate performance experiences (specifically experiences with Live Nation) as they relate to these objectives. Through these interviews, I discovered that many musicians share both overall performance objectives and beliefs regarding the facilitators and impediments to achieving them. More importantly, I discovered that performers do experience a distinction between independent and Live Nation’s corporate live music cultures as they relate to these objectives, but it was not the one I expected to find. I then systematically present them.

First, I will introduce the financial objectives that performers associate with their live show. Next, I will use the Durkheimian concept of collective effervescence to explain three different but closely related metaphysical, emotional, and phenomenological objectives with which my respondents more closely identified, and I will briefly describe the few ways that Live Nation’s operating model interferes with performers’ abilities to attain these goals. Then, I will show that overall, in a variety of aesthetic, logistic, and financial areas, Live Nation has not hindered and has in fact better enabled my respondents to attain both the economic and esoteric goals that they associate with their performance. Lastly, I will draw attention to a challenging negotiation between personal ideals and professional pragmatism that defines many musicians’ live performance experiences.

This thesis will not address the effect that corporate interests like Live Nation have had on the experiences of concertgoers (although that would be an excellent follow-up project for future research). Moreover, it does not offer any solutions to my conundrum—I still do not know why I have not and likely will not be able to recreate the

grandiose and transformative magnificence of my first time (and I do not really care any more). What I do know, and what I seek to show in my thesis, is that despite what the existing theoretical frameworks indicate, from the perspective of the performers that I spoke with, consolidation, corporatization, and commodification of the live music experience does not worsen and in fact improves performance of contemporary popular music.

Chapter 2
"Don't Get it Twisted Now:" Deregulatory Thought, Media Consolidation, and Popular
Music Theory

A great deal has been written about the philosophy, mechanisms, and implementation of media deregulation from the time President Reagan was elected to the time President Clinton helped pass the 1996 Telecommunications act. Moreover, scholars have discussed at length the implications that deregulatory policy during this period has had on a variety of media outlets, including long distance telephone, cable television, and particularly broadband Internet service. A group of popular musicologists and media sociologists have generally succeeded in linking media deregulation to the marginalization of musicians in recorded forms of music by linking deregulatory policy—especially the Act of 1996—to fundamental changes in popular music radio. However, contemporary scholarship largely has not yet explored the implications of media policy on contemporary popular live music in commercial performance venues.

The salient literature regarding media deregulation and the music industry rarely addresses live music directly, but many of the conclusions and analysis in the body can be extended to the music performance industry. Also, many scholars have established important theoretical and ideological frameworks to view media deregulation, media policy, and their effects on other media and entertainment industries. These frameworks, though not necessarily intended for the live music business, can in many cases be appropriated and deployed for my work.

“Great Release:” Thoughts on deregulatory theory

In his extensive political and economic history of American media policy, an essay called “American Theories of Media Deregulation,” sociologist and media theorist Richard Barbrook examines the ideological roots of deregulatory policy, explaining how, ironically, a tremendously pro-business approach came in the guise of strict government regulation. Barbrook argues that when Congress established the FCC in 1927, they intended the Commission to control the broadcasters who had access to radio airwaves. In effect, this is what the FCC did, but it did so in such a way as to render it “the method of monopolizing airwaves on behalf of big business.³” By entrusting control of the airwaves to an imperfect, pro-business body, Congress helped amalgamate the nation’s sprawling web of unaffiliated independent radio stations into branches of larger corporate networks like CBS, “consolidat[ing] control” of the airwaves “in the hands of Morgan, Rockefeller, and other financial houses which controlled” both the established corporate radio networks and more generally “the American economy.⁴”

As the radical ideological climate of the 1960’s threatened to overthrow this system, a core of conservative economists from the University of Chicago published heavily in defense of this form of deregulation. In the 1960’s, ideologues like George J. Stigler, Ronald H. Coase, and Sam Peltzman advocated—in the mass media as well as in

³ Richard Barbrook. “American Theories of Media Deregulation.” March 1988. <<http://www.imaginaryfutures.net/2007/01/19/american-theories-of-media-deregulation-by-richard-barbrook/>>

⁴ Barbrook, “American Theories.”

other areas of society—market capitalism and supply-side economics, which understood consumer demand for products and services to be a factor of how readily producers could supply them. To the Chicago School, the market for media services did not need governmental controls or regulations; in fact, by impeding the media market with controls, regulators would produce a variety of destructive side effects. The market, in all areas of life, was “a self-correcting mechanism which would enter a depression only if outside interventions prevented its operation.⁵”

Not only did these so-called supply-siders see unfettered markets as an economically efficient and formidable necessity, but they also believed that only markets could ensure that the public’s interests were being served. Whereas their predecessors within the New Deal’s brain trust believed that, through judicious and compassionate interventions, the government and its elected officials were best suited to represent the nation’s interests, the Chicago School believed that “the people could only express their economic needs and desires through the market.⁶”

Fundamentally characterizing “the public” as a group of rationally acting, financially driven individuals, the supply-side model believed that the power of the consumer dollar was more effective at mediating broadcasters and media providers than the government could be. By choosing in a free market which goods, services, or in this specific case, TV/radio stations they desire, the public effectively represent their own interests and do so much more accurately than the government could. While government can only respond on behalf of the public within the scope of existing laws and do so with the grace and speed of a lumbering bureaucracy, the argument goes, consumers can react

⁵ Barbrook “American Theories.”

⁶ Ibid.

on their own behalf by withholding their money from the providers they believe are not acting in their interest. This philosophy, we shall see, forms the backbone for much of contemporary media policy, including the philosophy that engendered Clear Channel and, eventually, Live Nation.

Barbrook notes that many supply-siders extended this argument to business monopolies. According to him, “some theorists argued that even limitations on monopoly profits were undesirable because this discouraged innovation in these types of companies,⁷” thus undercutting the public interest. By capping the amount of market share and profits companies could accrue, these theorists argued, regulatory policy removed these crucial incentives from the corporate agenda, thus giving businesses little reason to invest in the research and development of goods and services that would theoretically be better for the public than the existing versions.

This argument had (and has) particular poignancy in the media and telecommunications industries, where technological possibilities seemed to be advancing at breakneck speeds. As radios and televisions began filling the nation’s living rooms, the telecommunications industry seemed poised to unveil increasingly convenient, entertaining, and accordingly desirable technologies. In order to encourage this process, businesses that stood to benefit financially from these technological advances required driving incentives such as limitless profits and market share. Conservative economists considered anti-trust policy a regulation that denied these incentives and hindered technological development and, as such, needed to be done away with. This will prove to be an important argument for the supporters of Clear Channel/Live Nation.

⁷ Ibid.

“One More Time:” Deregulatory Policy and the Telecommunications act of 1996

Numerous authors contribute crucial scholarship depicting the Telecommunications Act of 1996 as a watershed moment in both deregulation and media policy history, a view that I share. By separately analyzing implications of each title of the Act on the various telecommunications sector they are meant to govern, cultural journalist and communications policy analyst Patricia Aufderheide surmises that the Act is, “without a doubt, the first step in a decisively different regulatory universe for communications.⁸” To Aufderheide, each section of the Act intentionally weakens the government’s regulatory stance towards the telecommunications sector, as it equates pro-business policy with policy that will best serve the public interest.

Though Title I of the Act, the section directed towards telecommunications services, ostensibly benefits consumers in some ways, the language and the actual legislation ultimately benefit the corporate entities providing the services. On paper, the law seems to promote competition amongst telecommunications providers. For example, the law purportedly makes it easier for Bell operating systems to immediately compete with other types of providers in long distance markets. However, though the law may be pro-competition in letter, it ultimately benefits large corporate providers. “Clauses intended to provide a handicap for new competitors and to rein in the former monopolists’ ability to skew the game,” for example, “all have significant exemptions

⁸ Patricia Aufderheide. *Communications Policy and the Public Interest: the Telecommunications Act of 1996*. New York: Guilford Press, 1999. 8.

and offer substantial leeway for interpretation.⁹” The law’s ambiguity and leniency not only subverted any de-monopolizing effect that its architects intended, but also allowed the existing monopolies to further entrench their position as dominators of the telecommunications market.

Aufderheide specifically cites the Title’s pricing model as an example of this inefficient, ambiguous weakness. The law seems to empower the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to set prices for local phone services, but in practice, the companies are really in control of pricing. All parties—the providers, the states, and the FCC—have to agree on these established prices, and they almost never do. This has enabled incumbent phone companies to challenge the FCC’s prescriptions and in effect decide their own non-market prices and eliminate competition from potential local providers. By “leav(ing) the FCC and the states (in an unclear formulation) the determination of what price is fair for resale,” Title I’s language effectively allows the existing monopolies to continue unchecked.

Title II, the one geared towards broadcast services, serves a similarly pro-corporate agenda. The law adds space to the radio spectrum to allow broadcasters to move from analog signals to digital ones. Presumably, this transition benefits consumers: simplifying the move for providers from a lesser product to a more advanced, seemingly superior one makes digital broadcast more available to the public. However, the spectrum that Title II appropriates for digital signals is actually taken from smaller broadcasters and given to the large corporate ones at no charge. Not only is this an unfair business

⁹ Aufderheide, *Communications Policy* 67.

practice, but also, by weakening community broadcasters, the Title denies consumers their chief provider of locally oriented content.

However, more damaging and crucial to my research are what Aufderheide argues are the pro-consolidation reforms that Title II of the 1996 Telecommunications Act codified. By loosening the structures governing concentration of ownership for both television and radio broadcasters and limiting the amount of obligation and responsibility placed on public oversight, Title II “gives broadcasters greater powers of concentration and cross ownership, greater security in the holdings of their licenses, and more spectrum.” Overall, “the largest change in this section is permitting cross ownership of broadcast and cable systems,” a change that, we will see, extends to other areas of the media as well.¹⁰

Title III extends the deregulatory zeal into cable television. In the early 1990s, Congress established regulatory power over cable rates. The Telecommunications Act generously relaxes those regulations, benefiting large, existing cable companies who were freed to use their huge market share to set below-market rates that un-established competitors could not. Because the existing corporate giants had so much control over the market, they were able to temporarily establish artificially low prices with which, in a natural market, start-up providers could not compete. While cheap cable may seem like a beneficial service for consumers, this is deceiving. These below-market value rates functioned more as a corporate defense mechanism, used to prevent competition in the cable service market. As fewer and fewer alternatives to the existing corporate providers could afford to enter the game against such artificial conditions, the established providers

¹⁰ Aufderheide, *Communications Policy* 67.

continually fortified their market dominance. The corresponding local and national monopolies all but forced consumers to go with the corporate providers, who, in the absence of any competition, had little incentive to develop their products or seek innovative ways to keep consumers satisfied. By encouraging monopolization and consolidation, Title III greatly benefited the established corporate interests in the cable television sector.

Furthermore, the Act relaxes regulations for cable operators who were in direct competition with niche video providers, such as satellite master antenna television (SMATV). Lastly, similar to Title II, the section governing cable TV does nothing to protect local or public access cable channels from newly empowered corporate cable providers who seek to expand their ownership of the TV spectrum.

Title's I-III enact sweeping changes in media ownership by concentrating on specific sectors of the media market. Title IV, however, is devoted solely to reforming the government and the public's overall regulatory abilities. In effect, the government voluntarily and enthusiastically forfeits its control over the media industry by codifying its pursuit of regulatory "forbearance."

Title IV defines forbearance as the government's decision "not to conduct or enforce regulation that interferes with the public interest," an interest that the law goes on to define as a "competitive or pro-competitive environment." Ignoring the fact that many of the preceding Titles actually undermine pro-competitive environments by benefiting established corporate providers and broadcasters over upstarts and local ones, Title IV defines the "public interest" not, for example, as quality programming, fair prices, or a range of legitimately different options but as a business-friendly, profit-driven

environment. In other words, “the law explicitly equates competitive environment with public interest. If the commission determines that such forbearance will promote competition among providers of telecommunications services, that determination may be the basis for a commission finding that forbearance is in the public interest.¹¹” This legislative dynamic between the public interest and the corporate interest forms the crux of deregulatory ideology, and though Aufderheide never addresses the Act’s implications for live music or even contemporary music more generally, her discussion of this concept is absolutely crucial to my analysis.

Sociologist and media critic Eric Klinenberg also critically looks at the 1996 Act in *Fighting for Air: the Battle to Control America’s Media*, cogently explaining the relationship between the landmark law and the rise to prominence of Clear Channel, the nation’s largest conglomerate owner of radio stations and the corporation that established and owned the venture that would become Live Nation.

Pouncing on the opportunities created by the 1996 Telecommunications Act’s relaxation of anti-trust regulations, conglomerate holding companies voraciously bought up the nation’s radio stations in a race for market dominance. Soon, the larger companies, particularly Clear Channel, were buying up the smaller companies and their assets, concentrating ownership of American radio broadcasters under the auspices of a handful of corporate owners.

To Klinenberg, this had a variety of devastating ramifications for consumers, many of which fall outside the scope of my project. For example, he suggests that the concentration of programming decisions greatly empowered broadcasters by giving them

¹¹ Aufderheide, *Communications Policy* 74.

the authority to establish play lists for literally thousands of stations nationwide.

Klinenberg argues that this all but necessitated shady dealings within the music industry, as record labels and other parties fought to get their artists on the radio. Accordingly, Klinenberg is committed to analyzing the mechanisms and prominence of payola in the post-1996 Act Clear Channel-dominated radio climate.

Payola, a process by which “independent promoters representing record labels bribe DJs and programmers with cash and gifts to get their clients on the air,¹²” is both a fascinating issue and one inextricably linked to the implications of media deregulation on *recorded* music. However, it does not directly pertain to the topic of *live* music.

There may be an argument to make that connects payola and recorded music to Live Nation and, as a result, to live music that centers around the dynamic between Live Nation and Clear Channel. As we will see in Chapter 3, the executive overlap between the two conglomerates and their unique mutual history suggest that there *could* be a potentially collusive relationship between Live Nation and Clear Channel, but there is not enough evidence at this time to support this theory. While any kind of collusion between Live Nation and Clear Channel would provide a fascinating (and dangerous) link between industrial modalities and both the recorded and live music climates, any such link would be pure speculation.

Nonetheless, consolidation of broadcasting power, especially in the example of Clear Channel, has far-reaching implications for the entire music business, including live music. The decisions that allowed corporations like Clear Channel to possess a stranglehold on the market, the synergistic dynamic that they were able to achieve as a

¹² Eric Klinenberg. *Fighting for Air: the Battle to Control America's Media*. New York: Macmillan Press, 2007. 72.

result of their dominance, and the business model under which they operate are issues that Klinenberg intelligently and eloquently explores, and all have great significance to the following analysis of the live music business.

“Come Together, Right Now:” Consolidation and the Effects of Deregulation on Mass Media Industries

Similar to Klinenberg, noted media critic and journalist Ben Bagdikian explores the nature and implications of the consolidation of mass media, particularly newspapers and magazines, although he omits the music and live music industries from his study. Nonetheless, his insightful and trailblazing work, *The Media Monopoly* and its later revised editions, provide an invaluable overview of media’s relationship to huge, powerful large corporate interests and the effect that this has on media products.

Central to Bagdikian’s argument is the ominously named Big Five. Through deviously collusive, fundamentally anti-competition business practices, these “Five global-dimension firms...own most of the newspapers, magazines, book publishers, motion picture studios, and radio and television stations in the US.” These five corporations—Time Warner, The Walt Disney Company, Murdoch’s News Corporation, Viacom, and Bertlesmann—exert nearly unilateral control over not only the media industry, but also over contemporary life worldwide.

Just as Aufderheide sees the legislative equating of public interest with business interests as the crucial link between media policy and media consolidation, Bagdikian identifies a similar source. Lying at the root of the mentality that both permitted and encouraged five entities to ultimately own virtually all of the nation’s media is a faulty interpretation of free market capitalism, a concept first made famous by 18th century

Scottish political economist Adam Smith. In Book IV of his legendary work *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Smith vociferously opposed any government participation in markets or economic processes. To Smith, governmental restraint of commercial operations, including tariffs and taxes, renders economies sluggishly inefficient and ultimately less productive. To him:

the statesman, who would attempt to direct private people in what manner they out to employ their capital, would not only load himself with a most unnecessary attention, but assume an authority which could safely be trusted, not only to no single person, but to no council or senate whatever, and which would nowhere be so dangerous as in the hands of a man who had folly and presumption enough to fancy himself fit to exercise it.¹³

To Smith, capitalism only works when non-market forces do not impede or meddle with the exchanges that define market-based economics. When there are no other forces acting on either the production or consumption of goods other than those established by accurately evaluated prices (free markets), producers of goods will be able, and indeed will have to, compete with each other for people's business by producing goods that are consistently cheaper and better than those of their competitors. The consumer, then, gets the best available goods and the best producers of those goods are rewarded by staying afloat. Ultimately, Smith champions free markets, and any limitations put on those markets, be they in the form of monetary taxes on raw materials or legal restrictions on the amount of holdings a corporation can own, directly curtail the efficiency and health of both capitalist economies and societies. Bagdikian believes this argument serves as the foundation of contemporary deregulatory policy.

¹³ Adam Smith. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Ed. R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 456.

However, the Big Five, according to Bagdikian, interpret a free market not as “an all-out rivalry in which merchants compete by keeping their prices lower and quality higher than their fellow merchants¹⁴” but as a state of being in which the merchant has “freedom from all responsibility¹⁵” to anyone but their shareholders. Moreover, this line of deregulatory thinking completely ignores one of Smith’s stated caveats: monopolies (or some kind of concentrated ownership) must be rooted out at all costs. Smith was conscious of the potential for a handful of producers to become substantially more successful than their competitors within free, unregulated markets, and that this effect would eventually eliminate both those producers’ competitors and the need for competition. In a sense, Smith saw monopolies as a kind of regulation, insofar as they interfere with the competition that defines a healthy capitalistic marketplace.

Not only do the Big Five operate off of this misreading, Bagdikian continues, but so too do their allies in government. As fantastically wealthy and ubiquitously powerful cultural entities, the Big Five exert force on legislation in a number of ways, such as bankrolling strong lobbyists and agreeing to provide favorable news coverage to politicians who cooperate with their expansionist business models.¹⁶ The influence of

¹⁴ Ben H. Bagdikian. *The New Media Monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004. 6.

¹⁵ Bagdikian *The New Media Monopoly* 15.

¹⁶ One particularly powerful example of this that Bagdikian cites involves former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. When Australian media mogul Rupert Murdoch moved add two of the UK’s most influential newspapers to his steadily growing portfolio of publications, England’s Monopoly Commission prohibited the deal. However, by using his media influence to help elect the conservative Thatcher to the nation’s highest political post, Murdoch brought to power both an ideologue with a similarly conservative political and economic agenda and someone who owed the mogul a favor. Murdoch’s deal to acquire the *Sunday Times* and (daily) *Times* was approved soon after Thatcher was inaugurated.

both their wealth and their access to voters allow the Big Five to circumvent the law in ways that other corporations often cannot.

Additionally, in circumventing the law, they are able to further fatten their wallets and entrench their dominance. Though no Big Five member possesses a literal oligopoly, the cooperative, anti-competitive nature of their dealings amongst each other allows them to function as a collective monopoly. This is particularly easy when the salient corporations operate all over the world. For example, though Time Warner is seemingly in direct competition with Bertelsmann in the US, the two are partners (along with News Corporation) in Europe, where they share ownership of European cable operation. So, when Time Warner needed to inflate advertisement sales figures in 2001, it turned to its competitor/ally Bertelsmann, who bought \$400 million worth of advertising from Time Warner. In exchange, Time Warner Europe traded to Bertelsmann shares of a European company in which the two megaliths were already partners.¹⁷ In essence, then, the Big Five can collaborate to grow their empires, allowing them to protect their markets from upstarts and keeping the bulk of the world's business within their close-knit cooperative.

A major focus of *The New Media* is the effect of the Big Five's oligopoly on the type of news that media providers offer the public. Bagdikian argues that, as ruthlessly operated, profit-driven entities, the Big Five are compelled to offer content that will be the most profitable but not necessarily the most beneficial to the consumer. In the same way that Aufderheide views the Telecommunications Act's equating of public and corporate interests as detrimental to the type of programming that broadcasters should provide, Bagdikian believes that the Big Five's corporate operating model drives them to

¹⁷ Bagdikian, *The New Media Monopoly*. 4.

prioritize scandalous, violent, and sexual programming that appeals to the lowest social common denominator over challenging, intellectual content.

Bagdikian also concentrates on the ways that the political agendas of the Big Five and their extravagantly wealthy management and ownership influence the content of their broadcasts and publications.¹⁸ Not only do important moguls and players like Rupert Murdoch enter the fold with reactionary social, religious, and political beliefs, but also, given the massive economic interests at play when discussing the Big Five, it is no wonder that the world's media giants fear changes to the structure from which they profit. "It is not simply a random artifact in media politics that the largest broadcast outlets insistently promote bombastic far-right political positions."¹⁹ This is a fascinating and important byproduct of media conglomeration, but its applicability to the music industry is dubious.

Because he is dealing with the news media, and because the news is a completely different product media product than live (or performed) music, some of Bagdikian's findings, though engaging, cannot simply be applied to the performance music industry. Moreover, Bagdikian's systemic, corporate lens is too broad to focus on any one industry within the media, much less one as specific and relatively minute as live music. Nonetheless, he does provide an important framework for my argument. His characterization of the Big Five's business model and underpinning philosophy directly applies to the forces that generated and sustain Live Nation today, and though Clear

¹⁸ Perhaps the seminal work on this topic is *Manufacturing Consent: a Political Economy of the Mass Media* by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky. I have not included it here because I feel that Bagdikian's work addresses the contributions that *Manufacturing Consent* make to my thesis.

¹⁹ Bagdikian, *The New Media Monopoly*. 15.

Channel/Live Nation are not as powerful or wealthy as Time Warner or Viacom, the influence that they exert over the industrial spheres in which they operate is proportional to that of the Big Five.

While Bagdikian's framework is too general to directly transfer to the live music sphere, others have written extensively on the impact of media deregulation—particularly Reagan-era deregulation—on entertainment industries. These writers contribute to my work in two ways. First, and more generally, rather than approach the issue of media deregulation by comparing multiple forms of mass media, these writers cleanly focus their analysis on a particular media outlet during a particular time period, a method that allows the researcher to identify and scrutinize one cultural institution instead of a unified, monolithic cultural landscape. Secondly, because live music is an entertainment industry, a theoretical understanding of the relationship between media deregulation and the entertainment media product can better be applied to live music than Bagdikian's broader framework. Though, as I discuss later, a lens centered around either a general kind of "entertainment industry" or even any one specific form of entertainment media would not sufficiently explain the live music sphere, the work done to achieve these lenses contributes numerous crucial ideas to understanding the unique entity of live popular music.

Sociologist Jennifer Holt, for example, compellingly documents the variety of ways that the President's philosophy negatively impacted Hollywood in the 1980's. She claims that through deregulation, studios, movie theaters, and other forces in the movie industry were able to merge, consolidating their separate but related assets into a synergistically powerful economic juggernaut.

Up until 1948, the Hollywood model was a vertically integrated oligopoly. The handful of major film studios—20th Century Fox, Paramount, Warner Bros., RKO, and Loew's/MGM—owned almost the entire filmmaking process. Not only did this so-called Big Five create the films, but, through contractual obligations, they also controlled the writers, directors, producers, and actors involved in their films. They owned the labs involved in the processing and finalizing of the actual film on which the movies were recorded, and most importantly, they owned a large share of the theaters throughout the country. This final cog allowed the largest theaters to guarantee venues for their products and, if they so chose, to deny venues to their competitors. This model allowed the major film studios to profit from nearly every step in the filmmaking process and made it virtually impossible for small, less established studios to compete in a market so thoroughly dominated by the Big Five.

In 1938, the federal government sought to end the oligopoly. The Department of Justice filed a suit against Hollywood, which was settled two years later in a consent decree requiring the major movie studios, among other things, to divest themselves of their theater assets. Hollywood, not surprisingly, did not comply with this decree, and the case eventually made its way up to the Supreme Court. In *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc* (1948), the Supreme Court ruled against Hollywood, upholding the conditions previously outlined in the decree and effectively dissolving the vertically integrated oligopoly that the Big Five movie studios held over the film industry.

Reagan's deregulatory policy, Holt argues, directly undid this landmark Court ruling. His appointment of J. Paul McGrath, a pro-competition, pro-market, laissez-faire economist, as chief of the antitrust division of the Department of Justice ultimately

nullified the 1948 decision. In 1985, McGrath and the Justice Department announced that “while it would not formally terminate the *Paramount* decrees, it would support such motions” that sought to do so. The reason, Holt continues, that McGrath would not seek to formally terminate the decrees was because he saw it as an inappropriate allocation of Department resources, not because he or the Reagan administration viewed them as important legislation.

To Holt, this move subverted the decision enough as to nullify it. “By removing the looming threat of a government lawsuit and declaring themselves amenable to their eventual dissolution, the Department of Justice eliminated the most compelling reason to comply with the *Paramount* consent decree.²⁰” This allowed corporate Hollywood to reconsolidate and reintegrate throughout the years of the Reagan administration, 45 years after a regulatory governmental regime ended their oligopoly. At the end of the 1980’s, the eight largest film conglomerates owned nearly 90% of the domestic market share.²¹

Though Holt’s look at the role of government action (or inaction) in the entertainment industry will prove crucial for the work to follow, it would be a mistake to simply extend her findings vis-a-vis the film industry to the live music industry. Though a number of theoretical similarities exist between media industries, the realities and rules in sectors like film, television, and literature differ based on the differing natures of the media and the corresponding distinctions in public consumption patterns. For example, the film and music industries exhibit big differences in both the methods of circulation and reception of and the cost and human investment necessary to produce the media

²⁰ Jennifer Holt. “In Deregulation We Trust: the Synergy of Politics and Industry in Reagan-Era Hollywood.” *Film Quarterly* Vol. 55, No. 2 (Winter, 2001-2002), pp. 25.

²¹ Holt, “In Deregulation We Trust” 22.

product, and ignoring these distinctions “is to gloss over a series of significant differences on form, content, production, and consumption, and social mediation.²²”

Any analysis of live music would have to draw heavily on literature that deals with the music industry. To be clear, recorded music is different from live music, and in the same way that we cannot transfer findings regarding the film industry to the live music industry, we cannot simply deduce that what is true in the recorded music business is true in the live music business. However, though recorded music is different from live music, the two mediums are obviously related, both in their product, their manufacturers, and their consumers, but also in their ownership. Because of the industrial consolidation that grew out of legislative deregulation from 1980-1996, many of the corporations that dominate the recorded music market also, in some ways, dominate the live music market. While being cautious to not overstate or oversimplify the relationship between live and recorded music industries, it is possible and indeed important to transfer a number of theoretical findings regarding the recorded music business to the business of performed music.

“Chaos Theory:” the industrial dynamics of listening, recording, and consuming

It is crucial to consider that, in the same way that the frameworks of Bagdikian, Holt, and others cannot simply be transferred to the live music sphere, the findings of popular musicologists and sociologists dealing with recorded music do not necessarily characterize the ways people make and consume live music. To name a few of the many fundamental distinctions between live and recorded music, the mechanisms for

²² Keith Negus. *Popular Music in Theory: an Introduction*. Middletown: Wesleyan Press, 1996. 22.

producing, disseminating, and consuming live and recorded music are completely different, tend to employ different personnel, and have different levels of relevance for different artists. Ultimately, they are distinct forms of media. However, they are more similar than, for example, live music and printed media, so I have chosen to heavily predicate my research on the frameworks from this field. Moreover, given the dearth of substantive theory regarding popular live music and both the depth and breadth of writing on recorded music, I believe that it is necessary to draw on the extant popular music studies and ethnomusicology literature on recorded popular music.

A number of musicologists and writers in the popular music studies field view the recording industry through a political economy lens that “highlights how production occurs within a series of unequal power relations, how commercial pressures can limit the circulation of unorthodox or oppositional ideas, and how the control of production by a few corporations can contribute to broader social divisions and inequalities.”²³ Theodor Adorno is perhaps the father of this line of thinking. Born in Germany and forced by the Nazis to immigrate to the US, Adorno synthesized his experiences with the Nazi propaganda programs with his exposure to mainstream American music, particularly radio music, into a highly critical, market-driven view of popular music. To Adorno, the disseminators of popular music construct it as a kind of mind-control device to support authoritarian governmental regimes. By asking little of its listeners, popular music engenders a form of “de-concentrated listening” whereby people psychologically deteriorate to a simple, uncritical state of mind and “behave like children.”²⁴

²³ Keith Negus. *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*. New York: Routledge, 1999. 15.

²⁴ Theodor Adorno. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Ed. J Bernstein. London: Routledge Press, 1991. 44.

Adorno's critical view of listening behavior extended to musicians, who he viewed as little more than cogs in a culture-making machine, replaceable parts of a "synthetic, planned method of turning out its products."²⁵ Songs, as Adorno saw it, were simply cobbled together by taking a handful of commercially proven melodies, lyrical patterns, and structures and mechanically assembling them in a process "motivated purely by commercial gain and social manipulation."²⁶ Any musical nods to creativity or subversion either failed or ultimately served the authoritarian, capitalist machine that allowed the song to reach the market: music, and popular culture overall, had no other uses.

Adorno had many followers who recognized similar patterns in more contemporary incarnations of the popular music industry. Pointing to the enormously concentrated powers of record production and dissemination (a point to which I will return in the pages that follow), musical political economists like Reebee Garofalo and Steve Chapple believe that the consolidation of the record business directly influences the quality and content of the music that available to consumers. Moreover, they continue, any potentially subversive or "anti-materialist" music is ultimately co-opted by an industry that, though at times apparently progressive and oppositional, is in fact "firmly part of the American corporate structure."²⁷

Even seemingly independent and oppositional music genres are susceptible to the processes described by Adorno. In analyzing late-1970's British punk, musicologist Dave

²⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. John Cumming. New York: Continuum, 1982. 163.

²⁶ Negus, *Popular Music in Theory* 37.

²⁷ Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo. *Rock'n'roll is Here to Pay: the history and politics of the music industry*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977. 300.

Laing concludes that even this most apparently subversive, anti-establishment musical movement feeds into the corporate recorded music structure that it purports to oppose. Far from being a culturally and musically pure subculture, one in direct opposition to the established popular music model of, for example “corporations...and narcississis[tic] lyrics,” punk really “represented a re-working of motifs familiar from rock history.”²⁸

Laing further critiques elements of the punk aesthetic—such as the derivative, hetero-normative/patriarchal names of many of the genres’ most successful bands and the machismo of punk performance—and ultimately concludes that while this outlandish, sonically abrasive and confrontational genre may appear independent of the conventionally corporate record industry, the punk subculture is actually part of a long rock ‘n roll tradition, one that could easily and ultimately would be co-opted by the establishment it sought to undermine.

But while Adorno inspired a legion of writers who used his political economy standpoint to be critical of both listeners and performers of popular music, a school of popular music studies that directly opposes Adorno’s view has also emerged. Cultural studies researcher Iain Chambers fundamentally disagrees with Adorno’s assumption that corporate interests can control the interpreted meanings of popular music. Rejecting Adorno’s notion of audiences as psychologically turned off children, Chambers suggests that though corporate structures like radio stations and record labels are able to control the types of music available to the consumer, the consumer is able to decide for him or herself what those types of music represent and how they are to be received both in the

²⁸ Dave Laing. *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985. 32.

ear and in the market. Far from being easily led, automatous “children,” Chambers argues that musical audiences are active listeners and consumers.

Similarly, in her analysis of MTV viewers and the behavior of these people at what she calls “fan events,²⁹” Lisa Lewis suggest that by actively participating in the music consumption process, fans of popular music play an informed and important role in setting the parameters of creative and meaningful music. Through her studies of MTV viewers and fans at concerts in the early 1990’s, Lewis arrives at a theory about audiences as “imaginative, discriminating people” who “create communities with a collective shared sense of identity that is built around their appreciation of a particular performer.³⁰”

Both the political economy lens and the less critical active listener lens offer important notions to the popular music studies field and to my project, but neither fully explains the maze of complexities operating within both the recorded and live music industries. For its part, “the conclusions reached from the perspective of political economy are often predictable, portraying corporate ownership leading to rigid forms of social control and having a detrimental impact upon the creative activities of musicians,³¹” an interpretation that appears (and that my findings have proved to be) too heavy-handed to account for the range of subtleties and distinction—between, for example, musicians of different genres, different levels of commercial success, or different standards by which they measure their careers—to really tell the whole story.

²⁹ Lisa Lewis. *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990. 150.

³⁰ Negus, *Popular Music in Theory* 26.

³¹ Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* 15.

At the same time, however, active listener theories tend to overlook or at least understate the crucial role played by powerful corporate interests in the administration and organization of music performance. While fans and consumers of popular music may be more independent and empowered than Adorno's children, there are limits to the influence that fans and more appropriately for this work, the artists themselves, can have against forces as powerful and established as huge record labels or, in the case of my work, promotional and venue owning corporations. All three parties—consumers, artists and their representatives, and their corporate business partners—hold significant influence over the music industry, and to suggest that one of them figures more prominently into the production/creation of a music media product overlooks this sort of power-sharing arrangement.

The dynamic between these two perspectives has established a largely binary debate that does not properly characterize the music business. Too often, when discussing the political economy lens versus the active audience lens, researchers end up debating between

independents (creative, art, democratic) versus majors (commerce, conservatism, oligarchic); Machiavellian individuals (cynical exploiters) versus struggling musicians (innocent talent); subcultures (innovative, rebellious) versus mainstream (predictable, unchallenging).³²

By not accounting for interplay between corporations and the musicians they represent or employ, these false dichotomies, like the poles that comprise them, are not capable of telling the whole story of cultural production. Keith Negus, a former musician writing in the popular music and popular cultural studies field, provides an approach that best accounts for the mutual activity between the creative and commercial parties

³² Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* 28.

involved in music making and, for my purposes, performing. To Negus, the recording industry lacks the capacity to assemble markets for its products, create some kind of autonomous consumer that corporate entities can control, or intervene in the interpretive processes that gives music meaning. In these crucial areas of cultural production and consumption, power lies with the fan and the musician. However, though he does not imagine the record industry as an all-powerful, all-controlling force of greed and co-optation, Negus believes that “industry produces culture,³³” an idea that explains how entertainment corporations (including live music promotion corporations) arrange their business activities in ways that produce media products that will make the parent company money. This arrangement, Negus continues, has a direct impact on how we consume and value popular culture commodities. Though his theory entails a large amount of information unrelated to my work,³⁴ Negus’s negotiation between the poles of the popular music theory debate is one of the central points of this study, and his theory will figure prominently into my analysis in the pages that follow.

However, while Negus’ understanding of the ways that “industry produces culture” will prove crucial to my research, his second observation—that, reflexively, “culture produces industry”—is at least equally important to understanding the corporatization and consolidation of contemporary popular music. While Negus concedes that corporate structures—their arrangements, machinations, and overall imperatives—ultimately serve to commodify popular music in ways that can marginalize or impinge

³³ Ibid 14

³⁴ Negus seeks to explore topics related to genre construction, such as “questions about how genre sounds are interpreted and about the relationship of genre codes and newness,” as well as the potentially “transformative” nature of genre. While relating these issues to popular music performance may be an interesting part of another work, they fall outside the scope of this one.

upon creativity, he asserts with equal emphasis that these structures and in fact all of the parties involved in popular music are comprised of and operated by human beings who bring their own emotional and personal baggage into the machine.

The workings of the industry ultimately dictate the kinds of musical products that are available for consumption, but those workings are not determined by profit-driven automatons; quite the opposite in fact. Negus found that the various levels and sectors of the recorded music business are populated by avid music fans whose interests in their product extend far beyond its mainstream appeal or marketability. In other words, to the operators of the industry producing machine, music has a bevy of other non-commercial values, and these meanings play on the decision-making of music businesspeople and, accordingly, on the corporate structure that they comprise. Moreover, Negus continues, industrial employees are not the only party complicating the simple “industry produces culture” dynamic. Consumers play an integral role in processing the musical product.

Echoing the active listener model proposed by Chambers, Lewis and others, Negus recognizes the limits of corporate power in defining their product. While institutions like record labels play a decisive role in constructing their good, “[t]he media or music industry cannot simply ‘construct’ a market, ‘produce’ a type of consumer, nor determine an artists meaning.³⁵” Rather, Negus implies, the core tasks of successful corporate music marketers and disseminators is to capitalize on existing markets and seek out products that satisfy what they believe to be existing types of consumers. Most importantly, the influence of corporate music entities stops outside the consumer’s head. The label may construct an image of an artist or suggest a particular way of internalizing

³⁵ Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* 29.

their music, but the fan has the ability to accept or reject these corporate interpretations, and the public (or different subgenres) can establish their own, potentially widely divergent understandings of the corporate product. In this way, culture produces industry.

This complicating view of the music business contributes a great deal to my research. First, by introducing more human, socio-cultural aspects into an analysis of the music industry, Negus incorporates an important but often overlooked approach to understanding the live music climate. By highlighting the importance of the human players within esoteric, theoretical corporate superstructures, Negus makes researching live music a more humanistic (and enjoyable) enterprise and, I think, adds depth and credibility to his findings. This approach, I might add, compelled me to conduct the interviews that constitute the bulk of my findings. Second, and more philosophically, both Negus' refusal to view corporate music entities as ruthless, faceless, Orwellian machines governed only by their lustful pursuit of money and his multi-valence notion of the popular music landscape as more than a simple binary between corporate and non-corporate forces lays the foundation for a wide, nuanced understanding of popular contemporary live music within the contexts of corporatization, consolidation, and monopolization.

Popular music sociologists Grant Black, Mark Fox, and Paul Kochanowski come the closest to linking the effects of media deregulation to live music, but only very briefly. In an article called "Concert Tour Success in North America" written for the scholarly journal *Popular Music and Society*, they analyzed data from the top 100 gross revenue tours (as rated by Pollstar) from 1997 to 2005 seeking to describe "concert trends

by investigating pricing and attendance, the superstar phenomenon, and structural changes in the way the concert tour industry operates.³⁶”

Most of their findings, though interesting, contribute little to answering my question—what are the effects of media deregulation on the contemporary popular music performance experience? For example, they established that ticket price has relatively little impact on demand for concert tickets. They cite the success of James Taylor’s concerts, which saw their ticket prices increase by 18% between 1997-2005 but their average attendance increase by a whopping 296%, skyrocketing the artist 66 places in the rankings of the period’s top 100 grossing tours.³⁷ Black et al. suggest that non-market factors, such as critical appraisal for an artist, play at least as important of a role in establishing demand for concert tickets as does their price.

Their data further echoes a growing trend in the music industry towards a financially top-heavy trend. In live music, the “superstar phenomenon” occurs when “the distribution of gross revenues for any particular year is strongly skewed toward a few very large values.” The *Pollstar* data, according to Black et al., “provides strong evidence” for this: while 87 of the top 100 tour artists or groups had gross tour revenues of \$30 million or less, the Rolling Stones and U2 exceeded \$150 million.³⁸ Though Black et al. concede that the bottom deciles of the top 100 are closing the economic gap between themselves and the superstars at the top, their data confirms a lopsided revenue phenomenon.

³⁶ Grant C. Black. “Concert Tour Success in North America: An Examination of the Top 100 Tours from 1997 to 2005.” *Popular Music and Society*, 30:2 (May 2007) p. 149-172; pg. 149.

³⁷ Black, “Concert Tour Success” 160.

³⁸ *Ibid* 162.

Deregulatory policy and consolidation does not enter into their study until its conclusion, when Black, Fox, and Kochanowski explore the structural changes in the concert industry that they consider crucial in producing their findings. It is surely no coincidence that the period on which they concentrate begins when the 1996 Act took effect. Charting the industrial forces that culminated in the concentration of concert promotional power, they provide a firm analytical foundation for my study, and I will draw heavily on this piece in the pages that follow.

Chapter 3

The Blueprint: the History and Political Economy of Media Consolidation and the Rise of Live Nation in the US

During the years immediately following World War I, a number of debates arose challenging the nature of life in America. To name just two, The Palmer Raids and Espionage and Sedition acts problematized free speech and activism in the US, and the complicated finagling of the Treaty of Versailles changed America's role in the global community. Perhaps lost among these monumental moments in American history are the beginnings of another watershed debate that would in many ways challenge Americans to define their national experience: the debate over the role of the media. Because of rapid advances in telecommunications technology, the early 20th century would see the birth of the media policy debate that, though continuously modified to keep pace with technological developments over the decades, would remain essentially the same for the rest of that century and beyond.

“Some things last a long time:” the history of American deregulation and media policy after 1945

Before the 1920's, radios blossomed from prohibitively bulky, technologically deficient objects and began appearing in homes as consumer items. A booming national economy complemented (and surely facilitated) the advancements in radio construction

and broadcast technology, making it easier for broadcasters to both expand the range of their networks and disseminate better programming, and for consumers to obtain the devices that would allow them to tune in. As radio exploded in popularity within economically vibrant pre-Depression America, complex industries quickly developed to administer, organize, and distribute programming for this new cutting-edge technology.

Along with this boom in popularity also came a set of new and complicated questions. Who owned the airwaves through which radios communicated with each other? How could we use this exciting new technology in responsible ways, while still behaving responsibly and civilly? What, ultimately, were the proper uses of the airwaves? In the years leading up to the 1920's, three different parties defined the debate. Corporate interests—including the American Marconi Company (owned by the inventor of many of the crucial technological advances that led to the telephone)—believed that the airwaves should be privatized so that the new radio industry could maximize profits. Conversely, the US military believed that the government should have sole dominion over the airwaves and use them for wartime purposes. In the middle fell the American public, represented by a group of amateur radio users who “saw the airwaves as a form of public property, to be used by citizens to communicate with each other.”³⁹ It was becoming increasingly obvious to Americans and their government that these issues would have to be addressed if the country was going to maximize the potential of radio.

Corporate entities, however, were not interested in waiting for the government to decide. With radio, they saw opportunities for profits, and they seized them. Inspired by a marketing ploy used by a department store in Pittsburgh, Westinghouse, a leading

³⁹ Croteau, David and Hoynes, William. *The Business of Media: Corporate Media and the Public Interest*. Pine Forge Press; Thousand Oaks, 2006. 53.

manufacturer of radios, began financing the broadcasts of musical radio programming in order to sell more radios. If there was sufficient entertaining content on the radio, they believed, more people would be interested in purchasing the devices needed to access it. This would soon become a crucial element of the corporate radio model.

Shortly thereafter, the government began trying to sort out the radio situation. In the early 1920's, Herbert Hoover, then the Secretary of Commerce, convened a series of meetings with members from the various parties pertinent to the radio usage policy debate. The collective outcomes of these meetings would not only lay the groundwork for several decades of radio policy, but for the entire American media mentality for the rest of the century. The Radio Act of 1927 represented the culminating achievement of Hoover's conferences, and it basically sided with the American Marconi Company and other corporate entities. The Act established the Federal Radio Commission (which would later become the FCC), whose job was to distribute federal licenses that allowed radio stations access to the airwaves to profit-seeking entities. In order to be on the radio, in other words, one needed a license, and in order to have a license, one had pay the Federal Radio Commission and keep paying to renew the license.⁴⁰ The airwaves, then, would be both a vehicle for manufacturers of radios to increase the value of their product, and a commodity space to be leased out to advertisers by the profit-seeking "owners" of the airwaves.

Thus was born the American commercial broadcasting system. "By supporting new radio programs to stimulate the sales of their hardware then turning to advertising so that they could generate revenue from broadcasting...corporate broadcasters in the

⁴⁰ Croteau and Hoynes, 54.

1920's ultimately defined the underlying strategy of the industry that would predominate for nearly a half century,⁴¹ not just in radio but in emerging technologies as well.

While Herbert Hoover was meeting to address issues of radio policy, inventors were working on another technology that America would soon have to address just as it had with the radio. Televisions finally appeared in the US by the late 1940's, and by the 1960's, "90% of American households had television sets."⁴² Soon, television reached a greater number of American consumers than did any other medium, including radio.

Though television sets were spread out over a large group of consumers, the new industry's power was concentrated in a few familiar corporations. Television broadcasting required both an enormous amount of investment capital and a substantial amount of technical experience. Accordingly, only a handful of US businesses had the right combination of financial might, technical experience, and political savvy to even begin broadcasting: the radio networks. ABC, NBC, and CBS—the three television networks that dominated US programming from the late 1940's to the late 1970's—all made their names in the radio industry. Both their experience in the broadcast business and the fortunes they made in it perfectly suited the networks to take full advantage of the emerging new technology.

And take advantage they did. In addition to their experience and profits, ABC, NBC, and CBS also transferred the commercial broadcast model from the radio industry to the television industry. Like radio, television offered advertisers access to the throngs of viewers, and the more people who watched television, the more valuable the airwaves were to advertisers. So the challenge for broadcasters who, in addition to investing

⁴¹ Ibid, 55.

⁴² Ibid, 56.

significant amounts of capital into television broadcasting, were compelled by their shareholders to turn a profit, was to find ways to attract as many viewers as they could.

What followed was, again, crucial in determining the future mass media climate in the US. Driven by the need to profit, broadcasters opted to use television not in ways that would benefit the public—investigative journalism, educational programming, children’s programming—but in ways that would attract and not offend the most people. The less offensive or personalized the programming, the bigger the audience, and the bigger the advertising revenues. Not only did broadcasters offer exclusively non-polarizing programming, but they did so in homogenous ways. “Because all three major networks were competing for shares of the mass mainstream audience, they followed very similar business strategies that led them to develop very similar programs.⁴³” This model continued to dominate the television landscape until the 1980’s when cable television began to compete with the network broadcasting for viewers.

In some ways, the growth of cable television would change the US mass media model, but overall, the 1980’s would essentially see a redefining, entrenching, and expansion of the commercial broadcast model established by radio in the 1920’s and continued by television in the 1940’s. Through a tremendously pro-business, anti-regulation political climate, the new technologies and virtual spaces that would grow during the 1980’s would also eventually fall into the commercial broadcasting model.

“That ‘80’s high:” deregulation during the Reagan era

⁴³ Croteau and Hoynes,

Seeking to empower capitalist markets across American society, Ronald Reagan ushered in a new wave of increased deregulation that left few corners of American life unprivatized, including media entities. Reagan's philosophy and his fundamental commitment to applying deregulatory thought throughout American life would lay the groundwork for the media consolidation that would ultimately lead to Live Nation's position atop the live popular music climate.

"Reaganomics," the catchphrase used to describe the President's economic philosophy and legislative agenda, has direct roots in the Chicago School of economics discussed in the previous chapter. Milton Friedman, for example, who received his MA in economics from the school in 1933 and studied under its founders, advised Reagan during his presidential campaign in 1980 and served on his Economic Policy Advisory Board for the 8 years that Reagan was president. Before Reagan nominee to the US Court of Appeals Richard Posner was confirmed and began serving his term on the bench, he taught economics at the University of Chicago.

Here, it is important to recall Negus' adage about how "culture produces industry." By empowering these people—all products and disseminators of a particular ideology—to define the nation's political and industrial character, President Reagan encouraged his deregulatory denizens to shape American society to embody that particular value system. These kinds of thinkers both indicate the kind of social and economic policies that President Reagan advocated and influenced the realization of those policies in many different sectors of American life,

To use a well-researched and particularly telling paradigm, the Reagan years saw a sweeping deregulation of health services in the US. *The Journal of Public Health*

Policy characterizes this movement as “an attempt to restore the laissez-faire economy of the nineteenth century...based on the theory that the troubles of our faltering economy and society are the result of government interference.⁴⁴” Seeking to decrease the role of the federal government in public health activity, Reagan sought huge cuts in federal money given to state- and community-level health services such as preventive care. The president also planned to cut federal aid to health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and professional standards review organizations (PSROs), intending to “lift the heavy burden of federal taxation from the American people.⁴⁵” As part of the president’s overarching policy of deregulation and shrinking of the federal government, federal expenditures for health programs from the Occupational Health and Safety Administration to Medicaid decreased during the Reagan presidency, empowering state governments to pick up some of the slack and encouraging the private sector to do the rest.

By reducing government spending in the health sector, Reaganomics sought to accomplish two things. First, because government was spending less, it would need less money from its citizenry, allowing Reagan and his allies from the Chicago School to lower federal taxes. The tax base, then, freed of some of their obligations to the federal government, would have more freedom to consume and decide through markets what services and goods they valued. This feeds directly into the second primary objective of Reaganomics vis-à-vis health policy (and media policy): privatization. Because federal health services were under-funded, Americans were encouraged to seek private health care providers like insurance companies to obtain the market-driven services that

⁴⁴ Editorial. “The Meaning of Deregulation.” *The Journal of Public Health Policy*. Vol. 3, No. 1 (Mar., 1982), pg 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

consumers desired. By entrusting the market to determine the health services available to Americans, this approach not only sought to ensure that Americans would receive precisely the kind of health services they wanted, but it would also increase the amount of revenue flowing into the American businesses that provided the services. These businesses employed Americans, and the wealth that these consumers were accruing through privatized health services would “trickle down” throughout society as they spent it on goods and services provided by other American businesses.

These goals, however, were not realized. In nearly every measurable way, deregulation and privatization had a drastically negative effect on health services in the US. Cutting funding to government health subsidies did not “trickle down” to millions of Americans who lost their government-provided healthcare and were unable to afford privatized services. In effect, deregulation left millions of Americans with inadequate health care and millions more without health care at all. If the role of healthcare is to keep citizens well, then Reaganomics’ deregulation and privatization undercut the fundamental purpose of health services in the US. This result would have been predicted by the frameworks offered by the previously mentioned frameworks of Bagdikian and others, and extended throughout American life during the Reagan era.

During the Reagan presidency the processes of deregulation and consolidation that touched the health sector was mirrored in the media business. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the eagerness with which the enactors of Reaganomics applied laissez-faire and “trickle down” philosophies to areas of public life like health policy also extended to private entertainment and artistic sectors like the film industry. The aforementioned Holt piece is, to my knowledge, the best scholarship on the relationship

between deregulation and entertainment industries during the Reagan era, and it clearly locates the links between legislative deregulation and corporate consolidation. Because J. Paul McGrath and the Department of Justice undercut the *Paramount* decrees, the largest entities in the film industry were able to exercise unchecked market control. Their free spending allowed the Big Five Hollywood studios to integrate and synergize their operations in ways that upstart or small-scale film producers could not, allowing the most powerful forces within the film industry to entrench their position and virtually establish a monopoly over film production in the US.

Holt notes that, similar to the deregulation of health policy, the purpose of allowing and even encouraging this kind of consolidation was commercial. “Deregulation in the Reagan era [was] not the mere absence of regulation, but instead [was] the presence of a politicized and carefully crafted government stance of support for marketplace policies.⁴⁶” Reaganomics wanted American industries like the film industry to consolidate, integrate, and synergize so that they could keep production prices down and dominate both national and increasingly international markets for American media. Low prices theoretically meant that the Big Five could offer their products at lower prices than their competitors, thereby controlling the market for film products and their derivatives (like soundtracks) and generating huge amounts of revenue that could “trickle down” throughout American markets and society. Consolidation, in other words, was not an unfortunate byproduct of deregulation and privatization: it was the goal.

With health care, it is easy to quantify the impact of deregulation: fewer people had health care after the application of Reaganomics than before it, so it is not difficult to

⁴⁶ Holt, 27.

peg deregulation as having had a negative effect on health care. With film and media products, however, assessing the impact of deregulation is trickier, for several reasons. First, ascertaining the purpose of a media product like film is essentially impossible. Whether films should entertain, critique, confound, inspire, do all of these things, some of them, none of them, or some combination is entirely a matter of opinion. Secondly, were it possible to arrive at some kind of understanding or definition of the role of film, it would likely be prohibitively difficult to quantify how successful a film has been within that definition. If, for example, the role of film (or music, television, etc) is to inspire, I am not sure how you would prove *how* inspiring people or even one person found a particular film. These issues make it difficult to assess the effect of deregulation and consolidation of the film industry on that industry's product.

However, one way to potentially sidestep these issues is to rely on critics. By looking at the critical acclaim that films receive, we can bypass questions of the purpose of films and the subjective level to which films serve these purposes, entrusting experts to assess the overall quality of films and rank them accordingly. Using this method, it can be argued that Reaganomics and deregulation has had a deleterious effect on the quality of film output.

Though consolidation and integration has rapidly increased film output since the early 1980's,⁴⁷ most critical lists of history's top films feature fewer films made after 1985, the year when the Justice Department announced their intention to ignore the *Paramount* decrees, than any other time period. The critics who compiled lists like the

⁴⁷ Holt, 22.

Time magazine “Top 100” list,⁴⁸ the American Film Institute’s “100 Years...100 Movies-10th edition” list,⁴⁹ and noted critic Roger Ebert’s “Great Movies” list⁵⁰ believe that the years following consolidation and synergy-making in the film industry were defined by worse films than the years before deregulation, meaning that according to this method of analyzing critical reception, Reaganomics had a negative impact on the film industry’s output. Again, this result is consistent with the model offered by the theorists mentioned in the previous chapter, and contributes to the implication that the deregulation and consolidation dynamic would have had a negative impact on the live music industry.

Regardless, as authors like Holt and the editors of the *Journal of Public Health Policy* rightly note, the prevailing themes of the Reagan years were his fiscal approach and the mentality that underpinned it. The conflation of federal regulation and control with inefficiency, unprofitability, and general undesirability that Ronald Reagan and his administration propagated throughout American life represented an ideological and political milestone whose effects would linger long after his terms elapsed. While later administrations would temper this pro-market, pro-business approach to government and social life, Reagan’s philosophy would carry over into the next decade’s policy-making in ways that would ultimately engender future consolidated, integrated media conglomerates, including Live Nation.

⁴⁸ Richard Corliss and Richard Schickel. “All-time 100 Movies.” *Time* magazine, online version. 2005.

<http://www.time.com/time/2005/100movies/0,23220,listyear_20,00.html>

⁴⁹ American Film Institute. “AFI 100 Years...100 Films—10th Anniversary edition.” 18 January 2007. <<http://www.afi.com/>>

⁵⁰ Roger Ebert. “Great Movies List.” 2009.

<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/section?category=greatmovies_fulllist>

“’96 Gon Be That Year:” The Telecommunications Act of 1996, Clear Channel, and the sprouting of Live Nation

Though American deregulation reached its apotheosis under Ronald Reagan, his efforts on behalf of that philosophical and legislative approach would have residual effects throughout the late 1980’s and 1990’s. In a number of enterprises, including environmental protection and financial markets, President’s George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton loosened federal restrictions and shrank the roles available to federal bureaucracies. However, one of the most glaring examples of deregulation post-Reagan and the one most pertinent to media policy is the Telecommunications Act of 1996, a sweeping communications bill that plainly and articulately codified the driving thinking behind Reaganomics and would lay the corporate foundations on which Live Nation would directly rest.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, Patricia Aufderheide insightfully explains the implications and meanings of each of the bill’s provisions. Overall, the act “boldly equated the public interest with a competitive economic environment, in which consumer and producer desires and needs can be matched efficiently in the market place, not structured by regulators,⁵¹” particularly in Title II of the act, which established an environment in which a handful of corporations would soon exercise near-total control over local media markets and the national radio broadcast market.

Before the 1996 Act, a number of laws made it illegal for one entity to own the primary media outlets in a given national or local market. For example, in 1975, the FCC established the newspaper-broadcast cross-ownership ban “to help ensure that citizens have access to a wide range of sources and perspectives, and that a leading local media

⁵¹ Aufderheide, 61.

company cannot decide which issues or positions get a public hearing and which do not.⁵²” Believing that diversity of ownership encourages diversity of political, economic, and cultural thought, and that democracy was best served by facilitating a broad array of voices from communicating within the public discourse, the FCC had a longstanding tradition of regulating against this form of synergistic corporate media consolidation.

This all changed with Title II of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The provision that “gives broadcasters greater powers of concentration and cross ownership, greater security in the holdings of their licenses, and more spectrum” ultimately enabled San Antonio-based corporation Clear Channel Communications to consolidate media outlets in ways that would have been illegal prior to 1996. The Act’s lifting of regulations set off a mad dash among media corporations to amalgamate as many media outlets as possible—including radio stations, television stations, newspapers, and advertising media—before their competitors did. In the wake of the 1996 Act, Clear Channel would come to be the largest owner of radio stations in the United States, and they would use their prominence over the airwaves to build a diverse, synergistic international media empire.

“By 2002, Clear Channel employed 60,000 people in 63 countries and generated \$8.4 billion in revenues...reach nearly 154 million people (75% of US over 18)...26,000 annual concerts, events, and sports competitions that attract more than 66 million people.⁵³” Ultimately, Clear Channel Communications would come to own over 1200 radio stations, billboards and other outdoor advertising in all 50 states, nearly 40 television stations, news networks in 8 US states, media outlets across the 6 habitable

⁵² Klinenberg, 123.

⁵³ Klinenberg, 63.

continents, and at one point, a well-funded, highly integrated concert promoter called Clear Channel Entertainment (CCE).

Initially structured in 2000 as a branch of Clear Channel, CCE was envisioned as a way for the parent company to broaden its access to different sources to revenue. Most of Clear Channel's revenue derived from the fees businesses paid to advertise on the billboards and airwaves that the corporation owned. By striking out into the live music/event arena, Clear Channel did not seek a new outlet for the exciting media products that they were passionate about delivering—they sought more and new forms of advertising, and a broader audience for them. As founder and chairman L. Lowry Mays said in 2003: “We’re not in the business of providing well-researched music. We’re simply in the business of selling our customer’s products.”⁵⁴

This approach proved fruitful until 2005, when CCE filed with the Security and Exchange Committee to spin off from Clear Channel in part because it feared regulatory action by the government against Clear Channel and itself.⁵⁵ In order to avoid potential legal action for anti-trust violation even in the post-1996 Act climate, CCE split from Clear Channel but retained its holdings of live music venues around the country and a tie with the parent company that should at least be recognized.

“Yeah, that’s the jump off:” Live Nation ascends the popular music performance landscape

Although Live Nation officially broke from CCE in 2005, one family—the Mays family—maintained executive control of both corporations. Randall T. Mays, son of CCE

⁵⁴ Christine Chen. “Clear Channel: Not the Bad Boys of Radio.” *Fortune*, March 3, 2003.

⁵⁵ Security and Exchange Filing 10-12B. 10 August 2005.

<<http://www.hoovers.com/free/co/secdoc.xhtml?ID=55576&ipage=3843615>>

founder L. Lowry Mays and CCE's president and chief financial officer,⁵⁶ was Live Nation's first chairman and remains on its board of directors, along with his father, who is currently chairman of CCE.⁵⁷ It is unclear to what extent this relationship affects either Clear Channel or Live Nation's actual operations or exchanges, but it is safe to assume that the same philosophy that drove and drives Clear Channel is also represented in Live Nation's executive ranks.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, despite (or perhaps because of) this link between Live Nation and its parent company, it was seen as important to publicly distinguish the two from one another, so Clear Channel came up with a new name for Clear Channel Entertainment. So was born Live Nation (NYSE: LYV), a company that has gone from a tangential holding of a radio conglomerate to the largest concert promoter in the world and beyond in less than five years. Every year, they produce over 22,000 concerts for 1,600 artists in 16 countries around the world. In 2008, they sold over 50 million concert tickets, and their website received 70 million unique hits. With 4,700 full-time employees and nearly 16,000 more part-time, they are the largest employer among concert promoters in the world.⁵⁹

They are also the wealthiest. Their most recent financial reports list Live Nation's total revenue at nearly \$4.2 billion, their total assets at \$2.7 billion, their total equity at \$907 million, and their operating income at \$82.1 million. There are no concert

⁵⁶ Clear Channel Corporate. "Executives." <<http://www.clearchannel.com/Corporate/PressRelease.aspx?PressReleaseID=1168&p=hidden>>

⁵⁷ Live Nation. "Corporate Governance." <<http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=194146&p=irol-govBoard>>

⁵⁸ This would be a fascinating research question in the future.

⁵⁹ Live Nation corporate overview 2008. <<http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=194146&p=irol-irhome>>

promoters in the world that can even marginally match the scale of these figures; AEG Live, a subsidiary of the Anschutz Entertainment Group and Live Nation's nearest competitor in the US, is so comparatively small that they are not publicly traded and do not publish their financial statements, and Mergent Online, a database of technical corporate information, lists mega-conglomerates CBS Corp. and The Walt Disney Co. as its nearest competitors. There is, simply, no other concert promoter like it in the world.⁶⁰

So what do they do?

Concert promotion and venue ownership

During the first few years following the spin-off, that question had a relatively straight-forward answer, and an answer that is at least partially still accurate today: Live Nation is a concert promoter. They own hundreds of live-music venues of varying sizes across the country occasionally including, like their parent company before them, all of the concert venues of a given size in particular markets. Until recently, for example, Live Nation owned all of the medium-large concert venues in Philadelphia, so unless a performer could fill the 20,000+ capacity Wachovia Center or was comfortable playing to sparse crowds in small, casual bars, they would have to perform in a Live Nation venue if they wanted to reach Philadelphia and its enormous market.

To date, Live Nation owns or exclusively operates almost 100 such venues in the US, and this number has been steadily increasing since 2005. In 2006, for example, Live Nation purchased then-third largest US promoter, the House of Blues (HOB) chain of

⁶⁰ Though it is important to note that the Live Nation empire extends to three different continents and that the corporation has shown increasing interest in overseas markets, it is a US corporation and the overwhelming majority of their operations—particularly as a concert promoter—takes place in the US. Moreover, my thesis focuses on the impact of Live Nation on the popular performance climate in the US, so the rest of my discussion will be about Live Nation's activities and presence in the US.

concert venues/restaurants, for \$350 million, a move that at least “promises to put all but a handful of the nation’s outdoor venues in one company’s hands.”⁶¹ HOB currently operates medium-large outdoor and indoor venues in 13 markets nationwide, and Live Nation’s acquisition of the chain exponentially increased the distance between it and AEG, its nearest competitor.

However, this is not to say that Live Nation’s impact on the contemporary popular performance experience is limited to medium-large-sized performers and performance spaces. In addition to *owning* venues, Live Nation also *promotes* concerts at venues—typically huge arenas like the Wachovia Center—that the corporation does not own. As we will see in Chapter 6, the array of administrative affairs that go into promoting a concert, particularly with a performer famous enough to draw 20,000+ people and at a venue large enough to hold them, can be absolutely staggering. From concessions sales to parking to sound production to security to advertising (inside and outside the venue) to countless other facets, the production of popular music performance includes a lot of seemingly disparate entities. Because of the assets that its large size provides—including immense financial resources, highly efficient organizational structures, and standardized transactional and operational practices (which we will also discuss in Chapter 6)—Live Nation is in an excellent position to address the dizzyingly complex set of issues necessary for successful concert promotion.

Before Live Nation’s ascendancy of the popular music landscape, ultra- popular performers like Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band would have to contact (or, in some cases, be contacted by) local promoters in individual markets to plan a tour. The

⁶¹ Ethan Smith. “Live Nation to Buy House of Blues for \$350 million.” *Wall Street Journal*. (Eastern edition). New York, N.Y.: Jul 6, 2006. pg. B.2.

artists' camp would then have to juggle and negotiate a wide range of promotional experience, skills, and resources, and the lack of standardization night in and night out of a lengthy national or international tour made performing a huge logistical issue.

Now that Live Nation has the financial and organizational resources necessary to coordinate long tours, and has them throughout the country, a high-profile performer can simply hand over a tours' administrative powers to a Live Nation. If Bruce Springsteen and the E Street band want to tour, they can just contract a promoter like Live Nation to handle the logistics. Because these performers know they will be playing in and selling out the largest venues in any given market, and they further know that the matrix of issues necessary to allow these shows to happen are too complex for them to even begin to handle in-house, they pay Live Nation to promote individual shows along that tour or sometimes even the entire tour. While other promoters lack the various assets that Live Nation has been able to stockpile and perfect dating back to its roots with Clear Channel, the corporation has the wherewithal to plan and administer the technical, legal, and financial logistics that comprise a nationwide arena tour.

Diversification and the pursuit of synergy

Immediately following the 2005 spin-off, the answer to the question towards the beginning of this section was relatively straight-forward. However, the last several years have seen that answer become increasingly complicated as Live Nation has expressed an interest in and impeccable ability to expand its operations into other areas of live music and the music industry as a whole. This approach would ultimately culminate in a branch of the corporation called Live Nation Artists, the apotheosis of synergy and consolidation within the music business and a unique arrangement that both supporters and detractors

believe will revolutionize the music industry.

In 2006, shortly after Live Nation announced its deal to purchase HOB, the corporation also announced plans to purchase a majority stake in Musictoday, “which runs fan clubs, Web sites, online stores and other services for hundreds of acts, including the Rolling Stones, Kenny Chesney and Eminem.⁶²” Live Nation CEO Michael Rapino characterized the move as one that would provide the corporation with access to revenue associated with but not necessarily connected to live performance. Speaking to the *Wall Street Journal*, Rapino revealed philosophy that belies this merger and Live Nation’s overall approach to revenue generation when he said, “We spend a great deal of time getting the fan to buy the ticket. Why shouldn’t it be: ‘Buy the concert ticket and bundle in the t-shirt, or join the fan club?’”⁶³

This interest in ancillary enterprises and revenue would grow in the following years, branching out into promotional areas like ticketing. Whereas imperfectly integrated promoters and venue owner/operators would have had to contract the technological and particular organization structures of specialized ticketing companies to keep track of who purchased tickets to events and how they would receive them, Live Nation has begun to phase out this intermediate step, seeking to handle all ticketing issues in-house through a series of buy-ups. In the fall of 2008, for example, Live Nation announced huge deals to buy up two of its major ticketing partners. In September, Live Nation announced a seven-year deal to be the exclusive ticket distributor at the nation-wide venues owned by Philadelphia-based company SMG.

⁶² Ethan Smith. “Live Nation to Buy Major Stake in Fan-Club Firm Musictoday.” *Wall Street Journal*. (Eastern edition). New York, N.Y.: Jul 6, 2006. pg. B.6.

⁶³ Ibid.

Then in October, the corporation announced a less auspicious but perhaps more radical deal to purchase New York City ticketing partner Roseland Ballroom. While the Roseland, a venerable medium-sized venue in Manhattan's theatre district, is an important venue in an important market, the deal to ticket at SMG's 60+ venues may seem like a more important venture. However, as industry analysts point out, the deal to purchase the Roseland "means Live Nation execs are getting closer to [ticketing at] Cablevision's New York City empire of live venues like Madison Square Garden and Radio City Music Hall."⁶⁴

It should be noted that while these two venues do host popular music performances, they also host a range of other live entertainment events, including award shows, political conventions, and nearly all of NYC's professional sporting events. This would mean that, in addition to owning and operating the bulk of the venues in New York City and culling revenues from merchandise-related enterprises inside and outside those venues, Live Nation would also have ticketing rights at two of the largest, most frequently, and most variously used venues in North America and *in the same market*. In other words, if analysts are right, Live Nation's acquisition of the ticketing arm of the Roseland Ballroom might ultimately enable the corporation to at least own shares in most of the live entertainment in the biggest city in the US.

By far, however, Live Nation's most visible and most potentially transformative foray into the ticketing business has been its most recent. In March 2009, Live Nation announced bold plans to merge with ticketing and management giant Ticketmaster

⁶⁴ Yinka Adegoke. "Live Nation gets close enough to look Dolans in the eye." Reuters blogs. 14 October 2008. <<http://blogs.reuters.com/mediafile/2008/10/14/live-nation-gets-close-enough-to-look-dolans-in-the-eye/>>

entertainment, a deal that would pair “the world's biggest concert promoter and the leading ticketing and artist-management company [and] create[d] a dominant force in the industry with ties to more than 200 artists.⁶⁵” The deal is still pending as it faces anti-trust scrutiny from the Justice Department and presumably the House of Representatives.

It is not surprising, then, that in addition to politicians and bureaucrats, the pending consolidation of the largest ticket distributor and concert promoter in the world would draw objections from both artists and competitors. AEG CEO Tim Lieweke, for example, believes the deal is “not good for the industry,” and that consumers will ultimately end up paying more after the merger is completed.⁶⁶ Legendary performer Bruce Springsteen went even further, asserting that “[t]he one thing that would make the current ticket situation even worse for the fan than it is now would be Ticketmaster and Live Nation coming up with a single system, thereby returning us to a near monopoly situation in music ticketing.⁶⁷” At time of publication, the merger has not become official, but it is clear that a Live Nation Ticketmaster (the proposed name of the joint corporation) conglomerate would be able to exercise enormous market control over ticketing not only to live music performances but also live entertainment of all kinds nationwide. It is also worth noting that, as of the time of publication, the only hold-up to

⁶⁵ Jui Chakravorty Das and Joe Giannone. “Ticketmaster, Live Nation in Merger Talks.” *Reuters*. 4 February 2008. < <http://uk.reuters.com/article/consumerproducts-SP/idUKN0353154220090204>>

⁶⁶ Hilary Lewis. “AEG CEO Blasts Live Nation, Ticketmaster Merger.” *Businessinsider.com*. 6 March 2009. < <http://www.businessinsider.com/aeg-ceo-blasts-live-nation-ticketmaster-merger-2009-3>>

⁶⁷ Bruce Springsteen. Statement on artist’s website. 5 February 2009. < <http://www.brucespringsteen.net/news/index.html>>

the merger are anti-trust considerations, part of a powerful and longstanding tradition of government regulations.⁶⁸

360 deals

If owning venues is the first step to integration and synergy, and owning fan clubs and ticketing companies is the second, then Live Nation's "360 deals," probably the first comprehensive, wholly integrative business arrangement in the music business, is the logical third and maybe even final phase in the corporation's quest for consolidation within the music business. In May 2007, Live Nation unveiled its most recent subdivision, Live Nation Artists (LNA), an inventive new approach to artist management and representation that gives the corporation access to nearly every source of revenue available to the performers they represent.

Essentially, LNA "will operate as an act's manager, record label, tour agent and merchandiser,⁶⁹" organizing and overseeing its stable of artists' promotional appearances, licensing arrangements, merchandise design/sales, sponsorship, touring, and recording, distribution, and promotion of their albums. In exchange, Live Nation will receive a cut from most or all (the contracts vary slightly from artist to artist) of these areas of revenue.

The artist—so far, LNA has signed U2, Madonna, Shakira, Nickelback, and Jay-Z to these comprehensive "360 deals"—receives a guaranteed contract, in addition to their cuts of the merchandising, touring, etc. The contracts, all of which run for at least a

⁶⁸ With the inauguration of President Obama and his anti-Reagan, fiercely regulatory political philosophy, the fate of Live Nation Ticketmaster at time of publication looks grim. Regardless, it will be interesting to follow the new administrations' treatment of this proposed merger.

⁶⁹ Russ Martin. "Live and Kicking." *Marketing*. Toronto: Aug 25, 2008. Vol. 113, Iss. 15; pg. 18.

decade,⁷⁰ are massive: U2 receives a guaranteed \$100 million, Madonna \$120 million, and Jay-Z a guaranteed \$150 million, sums that only a corporation as savvy and powerful as Live Nation could possibly afford.

However, most industry insiders and performers expect this deal to pay Live Nation massive dividends. Essentially, Live Nation has access to every possible revenue stream available to the artists it represents, and given that it represents some of the most successful and recognizable musicians in the world, it is safe to presume that those streams will be flowing far into the future. As word of Live Nation's new operating model began circulating around Wall Street, for example, value of the company's publicly traded stock quickly began to rise (though it has since cratered, due largely to worsening economic conditions). One performer bluntly told *Marketing* magazine that he believed "Live Nation will make a shitload of money" with these new comprehensive arrangements, and he expects them to "soon become the industry standard."⁷¹ If this is true, then Live Nation and its Live Nation Artists subdivision will have essentially used the organizational wherewithal and real assets acquired as a result of Clear Channel's consolidation to reshape the music business in such a way to both establish and re-entrench its own form of integrative, synergistic consolidation.

The role of the Internet

Scholars seem to be split on the ability of the Internet to shatter media monopolies—does the Internet level the playing the field, providing the public with a cheap (or free), subversive platform through which they can organize and meet their

⁷⁰ While the LNA deals with Madonna, U2, Shakira, and Jay-Z are for a set number of years, Nickelback's deal is instead for three touring-and-album cycles.

⁷¹ Ibid.

demands without corporate meddling, or will it simply be co-opted and controlled in the same way that radio and television have been?⁷² Similarly, assessing the role of the Internet in Live Nation's ascendancy and consolidation is tricky for many reasons. Frankly, it is too early to tell what role, if any, the Internet can play in either growing the corporation's empire or enabling performers to have successful, fulfilling careers outside of Live Nation's influence.

There is some contemporary empirical evidence that the Internet is playing a role in dismantling the *recorded* music industry. Not only does the Internet enable file sharing and piracy of copyrighted material, but as the overhead for recording recedes—producers and bands can now record in their home studios or directly onto their computers—the Internet has in many cases replaced the record label as promoter and disseminator of a musician's recorded product. As already-famous musicians like Radiohead and relative unknowns like up-and-coming Colorado producer Pretty Lights have proved (both artists produced and recorded albums themselves, then hosted them for download on their independently owned and operated websites), it is entirely possible to make and share a record with the use of the Internet instead of a record label, and to do at least reasonably well. One need look no further than the vanishing profit margins of the Recording Industry Association of America to deduce that making and selling recorded music is no longer as profitable as it used to be, and it seems reasonable to at least partially attribute this truism to the Internet.

However, it is unclear how the Internet will affect Live Nation or live music in general. For one thing, while the Internet enables musicians to record and share music

⁷² In the 20th anniversary of *Manufacturing Consent*, for example, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky simultaneously holds both views.

without a corporate intermediary, this benefit does not translate to musical performance: as we will see in Chapter 4, live music experiences are unique and unlikely to be replicated through the Internet. This means, then, that short of building and operating their own venues, performers will have few recourses against Live Nation's virtual monopoly, and very few of these will come from the Internet.⁷³ In other words, Radiohead was able to record and release *In Rainbows* without EMI Records, but the only way they were able to make enough money to pay for it was by touring the album in corporate-owned arenas and amphitheaters, many of them owned by Live Nation.

Moreover, it is conceivable that a corporation as savvy and slickly managed as Live Nation would be able to harness the full power of the Internet to extend their brand and influence. We can already see examples of this. Their purchase of Musictoday, for example, allows them to streamline their merchandise sales through the Internet. Their acquisition of ticketing partners allows them to use their partners' digital infrastructure to facilitate cheaper, easier ticket transactions. By lowering overhead and potentially growing revenue, it seems reasonable to expect that Live Nation will in some ways be able to avail themselves of the benefits offered by the Internet, not weakening and in fact strengthening their position atop the contemporary popular music performance landscape.

“Something in the way of things:” the theoretical expectations vs. qualitative realities of Live Nation and the popular music performance experience

Almost all of Live Nation's ideas and structures, past, present, and future—from its historical roots to its early operating model to its stated ambitions for the future—synch up with the mass media model offered by writers like Bagdikian and Holt. In

⁷³ We will look at this issue more optimistically in Chapter 6.

pursuit of a synergistic, integrated media product, Live Nation appear to have overwhelmed their smaller, localized competitors in nearly every American market, operating on a huge economy of scale virtually unmatched by any other business in its industry and occupying an influential position within the music and entertainment industries.

Following the framework that some of the previously discussed writers have established, then, one would expect the overall influence of Live Nation on the popular live music experience to be a negative one. In the same way that deregulation and corporatization of other media industries has compromised the quality of their products, one would perhaps expect Live Nation's apparent monopoly over live music to have jeopardized the experience of musical performance, alienating musicians and fans from one another in the same way that Clear Channel alienates people from their community's individualized radio product. One might expect Live Nation's control over concert venues to marginalize and victimize performers who, for whatever reasons, do not gain access to the live music apparatuses that the corporation controls.

One might then pine for the apparently purer, more ethical, generally superior independent concert promoter that Live Nation's practices and resources have in many cases all but run out of business. In the same way that Clear Channel's delocalizing business model has had dreadful effects on communities that rely on local radio stations, one might assume that neighborhoods, scenes, and local performance would all be substantially better off if the faceless corporate megalith simply packed up and left town. Based on the framework derived from other media and entertainment industries, these

would all be sound assumptions to make. I have found, however, that to performers of contemporary live music, none of this is true.

Chapter 4
“You Can Get it if You Really Want.” Musician’s Financial and Metaphysical
Performance Pursuits

Because deregulation has allowed Live Nation to consolidate and corporatize the live music industry in the same way that deregulation has empowered businesses in other media industries, the effect of Live Nation on its media market would logically be the same as the effect of other media magnates on their industries.

But this has not necessarily been the case. Through interviews with contemporary popular music performers, I have found that, despite the theoretical suggestions to the contrary, Live Nation’s presence in the performed popular music arena has not had the negative impact that potentially applicable frameworks would suggest. In other words, the lived experiences of popular musicians does not confirm the expectations derived from most of our existing theories. In fact, not only do my findings generally fail to substantiate the extrapolations suggested by existing frameworks for media corporatization and consolidation, but many of the responses I obtained also directly and openly contravene the assumptions produced by existing media theories. In other words, not only did the responses of the interviewed contemporary popular music performers fail to validate the theoretical suggestions regarding their careers—they actually completely contradicted them. In the following pages, I will outline the ways that the observed responses differed from the types of theoretically sound responses that we might expect.

“Disseshowedo:” methodology

To conduct my research, I began by contacting performers that I thought would be appropriate for the study through email and telephone. I then coordinated phone

interviews with those who were interested. I sought out musicians with extensive performance experience in different areas of the live music diaspora, that have reputations as charismatic or generally remarkable performers, and that I knew or believed would offer intelligent, thoughtful analysis of performance. The interviews, which took place between October 2008 and January 2009, lasted between 45 and 70 minutes and I conducted them from my home. Most of my respondents also reported to being at home when I interviewed them, although one said that he was driving on the interstate and one said that he was at a hospital while he waited for a friend to be released. I began the interviews by guaranteeing the respondents' confidentiality, which I have made sure to preserve throughout my research. I then continued by asking them questions that addressed three categories of information: how does the performer generally characterize performance, what are the performer's specific experiences with Live Nation, and how do those experiences compare to their experiences with independent promoters and venues?⁷⁴

“Put one up for my crew:” a note on my respondents

It was important for my respondents to meet a set of specific criteria. Because I am interested in comparing Live Nation with their independent, non-corporate competitors and explaining the differences (if any) between the two types of promotion and production entities, it was crucial for me to find performers who have extensive experience in both the corporate and independent business model. It would be useless to ask a performer about their experiences with Live Nation if they have never engaged with

⁷⁴ My full interview guide is in Appendix A.

the corporation, just as a performer who has little or no experience working with independent promoters and venues can hardly be expected to provide a valuable insight into their business practices or the types of performances they can provide.

It was not difficult to find performers who have experience at independent venues; with few exceptions, all touring musicians and performers start their careers playing dive bars, tiny concert halls, and people's basements, and most performers spend substantial amounts of time in this kind of circuit. Finding performers with significant experience at Live Nation or other mid- to large-sized corporate venues was difficult, or more specifically, finding performers with significant experience at these venues *who would talk to me* was difficult. Most contemporary performers who exclusively play at Live Nation or other corporate venues either required that a publicist or editor get in touch with their publicist to arrange an interview, or were uninterested in participating in my study. After hours and hours of interviews with large circulation newspapers and influential magazines—most of which serve some kind of promotional purpose—an anonymous interview with an undergraduate probably seems like a waste of precious free time.

Accordingly, as a matter of logistics and academic access, most of my respondents have more experience with the independent option than with the corporate one because those are the level of performers that were willing to talk to me. However, this does not mean that my respondents are homogenous. In order to make my study as exhaustive as possible,⁷⁵ I sought out performers who play different kinds of music, occupy different niches within the contemporary popular music landscape, have different

⁷⁵ My work is in no way exhaustive, and this point will be addressed shortly.

fans, and/or create different atmospheres and moods at their performances. In other words, my work is not intended to analyze a scene or phenomenon, and the performers that I spoke to represent all kinds of genres—from jazz to hip-hop production to live electronica to drum and bass to house to experimental, avant garde rock music to “indie rock.”

Moreover, while my respondents enjoy similar levels of commercial and critical success, they and/or their bands tend to enjoy differing types or qualities of mainstream success. Whereas some are more successful within their smaller niche markets but less so amongst the general music-consuming, concert-going public, others are tremendously appealing to casual fans, but are less successful at inspiring small, religiously devoted crowds. This means that some of my respondents have gained access to Live Nation’s venues and general performance industry apparatuses through their own wide appeal, while others have done so through the success of other bands (for two of my respondents, for example, the bulk of their experience with Live Nation stems from their opening for prominent acts at Live Nation venues). This distinction in type of fame and commercial success among my respondents might be further explained by some of their differences in career arc. While some of them and the bands they represent have over 10 years of experience touring around the world, others have been performing and recording for only a few years. I believe that these distinctions among my respondents ensure a wide array of perspectives on the topic of the contemporary corporate live music industry and its relation to its independent alternative, and makes the similarities in their responses even more worth noting. For confidentiality purposes, I will not refer to any performer either by name or band name, but when appropriate or relevant, I will identify their musical

genre, the types of audiences that they attract, their career arc, and other descriptive data to help explain their responses.

However, my respondent pool is not as culturally diverse as it is musically and professionally diverse. First, all of my respondents are men. This was not a conscious effort on my part, and I certainly would have liked women to have participated in my research. However, very few female performers responded to my requests for interviews, and the ones that did lacked sufficient experience performing within the Live Nation structure to be helpful to me. I decided that my respondents' most important qualification was that they have ample experience with Live Nation and corporate concert promotion, and this qualification was more important to me than having a sexually diverse body of interviews on which to base my analysis. Similarly, all of my respondents are white. Again, I did not intend to have only white respondents, but the performers of color that I spoke with either were not interested in participating in my study or lacked the requisite experience performing within corporate live music structures to be of much value to this project.

Moreover, while issues of race and gender no doubt operate within the Live Nation model, both characterizing the ways in which they shape the contemporary live music climate and distinguishing them from the ways that they operate in independent live music models falls outside the scope of this project. Also, it would be incredibly difficult to present convincing evidence that the corporation's general business practices are racist, sexist, or both, and frankly, the work needed requires far more resources than

are available to me at this time.⁷⁶ Such important questions are therefore left to future research.

My research is focused on the ways in which media deregulation has generally affected popular music performance from the perspective of the performers vis-à-vis the corporate promoter Live Nation: has deregulation created a consolidated market, and has that market interfered with popular musical performers' ability to fulfill their aspirations and have satisfying careers? In short, my research indicates that it has not.

“Live and Direct:” Performing to a Performer

To understand the impact of Live Nation on the overall performance experience, it is necessary to establish the unique meaning of performance to popular musicians. In other words, if we want to know how Live Nation has affected artists' abilities to achieve the goals that they associate with their performances, than we first need to know what these broad goals are. Given the relative heterogeneity of the performers that I interviewed, particularly in their musical styles and the audiences that these styles attract, responses varied slightly, but, as will be a theme of much of my research, respondents generally shared the same purposes and goals for their live music experiences. The first section addresses the economic benefits that performance offers popular musicians. The second, third and fourth sections cover a series of different but connected metaphysical, emotional, and spiritual aims that my respondents report to seek through their live show.

⁷⁶ I have provided an introductory overview of what this undertaking would require in Appendix B.

Financial opportunities

Most respondents acknowledged the important financial place that live performance occupies in their overall careers. As was mentioned in the Chapter 2, the Internet has helped produce a business model for popular musicians that is vastly different than the one that existed 20 and even 15 years ago, when record sales constituted the bulk of an artists income and exposure on radio and television were crucial marketing opportunities for musicians looking to make enough money to quit their day jobs. Today, as the traditional recording, marketing, and distribution channels become increasingly alienating and economically unviable, alternative sources of income—from licensing to ring tones—become increasingly lucrative and convenient to many performers. While revenue streams like licensing (in which musicians allow their music or portions of it to be used in other settings such as commercials, television programs, and video games) can provide musicians with large lump sums of profit for minimal amount of work, many musicians—including many of my respondents—make music that is either too abrasive, too subtle, or otherwise generally unsuitable for most licensing purposes. Moreover, even those artists who do make music that licensers would find useful face stiff competition from cheaper alternatives like commercial composers who can produce for their contractor songs that sound similar to existing songs at a fraction of the cost of licensing.

In today's music industry, the steadiest, most lucrative revenue stream available to most artists is the live performance channel, a notion embraced by all kinds of respondents. According to a hip hop/electro producer from New York, who I will call "Bruce," "most musicians today, aside from Lil Wayne and Kanye [West, referring to

two of the most prominent and successful musicians of the decade] are getting their money from licensing or live shows, and I don't really license, so this is what I got." From a financial perspective, artists seem to value the convenience and relatively low costs of touring over more conventional revenue mechanisms. "Brent," from a Canadian live electronica band that has been successfully touring for over 10 years, says that his band doesn't have to deal with the issues associated with recording and hawking singles to radio stations, bypassing the many intermediaries of the standard marketing process "because we don't plug songs to the radio and we're a self-contained, self-sustained unit. We can just kind of pick up and go we don't really need all of these specifics."

Similarly, "Rick," a jazz-influenced keyboard player whose many musical projects have both headlined and opened at Live Nation and other corporate venues, talks of the relatively low overhead for touring musicians, particularly those just starting out. Whereas traditional revenue streams require huge levels of investment—be it to the expensive studio that you needed to master your single, the radio promoter you contract to get it played on air, or the magazine or website where you took out an ad preceding the release of your new album—touring bands, especially little-known ones, can "just call up tons of places to give [you and your band] gigs...[and] there's no expenses except for gas and wherever [you] want to sleep." From what I have found, the relatively high levels of convenience and ease paired with the relatively low levels of overhead and initial investment make touring a far superior source of income than traditional models of commodity exchange for many musicians.

Additionally, the performance scenario can also give musicians an arena to host these traditional exchanges on more favorable terms. Many performers use the time

before, after, and occasionally during their time on stage to sell their merchandise—t-shirts, out-of-print albums, posters—to concertgoers. Because fans are perhaps more likely to buy goods like t-shirts as souvenirs commemorating an evening than simply a well-designed garment, respondents report selling large amounts of merchandise while on tour, and receiving cash for it instead of a delayed check. Moreover, because the consumer is literally inside the building, the performer/vendor does not have to pay to market their merchandise, allowing him or her to sell their goods at little mark-up. This not only encourages the concertgoer to purchase merchandise (a consumer may be more willing to buy a CD that is normally \$15 at the store if its only \$10 at the venue), but it can also enamor fans with the artists, whose relatively low price-setting directly contrasts with the historically high mark-ups at retailers. The loyalty and respect that this kind of transaction produces—both of which can result in increased consumption by the fan/concertgoer—is another kind of currency that performing offers musicians and traditional music business revenue streams do not. Nonetheless, while my respondents all acknowledged the crucial financial role that the many elements of performing play in their career, my research revealed a much more powerful and transcendental philosophical, metaphysical, and emotional characterizations of and aspirations associated with the live music experience.

“Baraka:” Performance, Collective Effervescence, and the esoteric aims of live popular music

Though all of the respondents recognized performance’s commercial benefits when asked to describe its meaning and importance to their career and lives, this answer invariably came as a response to my asking them a question explicitly about the financial

elements of the live experience. Conversely, when I openly and vaguely asked the performers to describe what performing means to them, each artist—literally all of them—responded with some kind of definitive, sweeping statement that either hinted at or overtly acknowledged the emotional, spiritual, and phenomenological value of performing live music. In general terms, “Stan,” whose Philadelphia-based experimental rock/electronica band has been touring for nearly 10 years, views performing live music as “the most amazing experience that doesn’t compare to anything,” and perhaps more definitively, “Curtis,” whose New York-based “indie”/alternative/college rock band has been together since 2004, says that for him, his band’s performance “makes everything have a purpose.”

Sociologist Emile Durkheim posits that religion is essentially defined by the powerful energy that usually socially independent individuals manifest when they come together, an energy he names “collective effervescence.”⁷⁷ People gather so infrequently, Durkheim argues, that when they do for ostensibly religious purposes, the energy and life force they generate is so immense and so distinct from their normal daily experience that the energy itself becomes sacred or religious. Often, people will concentrate this energy onto some kind of idol, thereby making that object or person sacred, but ultimately, the idol only has spiritual value because it represents the powerful, holistically satisfying spiritual energy that develops when people congregate in the presence of spectacular sensory stimuli for explicitly spiritual purposes.

⁷⁷ Emile Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Trans. Carol Cosman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 158.

Ethnomusicologist John Blacking's seminal research on both musicians and audiences begins to bridge the gap between Durkheimian collective effervescence and music, clarifying the metaphysical and psychological processes that take place during an energetic exchange and specifying the role of this exchange in the human experience.

Rebecca Sager best summarizes Blacking's salient argument when she writes that

Blacking insisted that transcendent states [achieved through musical performance] were natural, normal, and even necessary for the full development of a human being...contingent upon experiences of the other self—a 'transcendent state of self.' He would argue that it was through the intense experience of transcendence that people could best realize their full potential...⁷⁸

While I am not quite able to verify that specific claim, my research indicates that in many ways, Blacking was on the right track. Based on their responses, I believe that performers use live performance to attain some form of collective effervescence. In broad terms, it seems that performers intend their music to help create the dynamic, essentially spiritual atmosphere that Durkheim describes among their audience and within the performance venue, and that achieving this atmosphere is one of the ultimate measures of a performance's success. Moreover, not only do performers derive fulfillment from helping create the atmosphere, but as sharers of the group's energy, they report intense emotional and spiritual experiences catalyzed by the invisible but no less palpable group dynamism of a successful performance. I have identified three categories of emotional, spiritual, philosophical, phenomenological, and metaphysical concepts that performers attain by achieving strong collective effervescence in a live musical setting: revelry,

⁷⁸ Rebecca Sager. "Creating a Musical Space for Experiencing the Other-Self Within." *The musical human: rethinking John Blacking's ethnomusicology in the twenty-first century*. Ed. Suzel Ana Reily. Burlington: Ashgate, 2006. 143.

transcendence, and communion. Powerfully raw and deeply satisfying, my respondents report that attaining these experiences is a primary goal for their performances.

Revelry

The simplest way that the live setting allows performers to attain collective effervescence is by giving them an arena in which to facilitate a sensually encompassing revelry. Successful live experiences—often replete with an array of visual and even olfactory accessories—can help synthesize a powerful kind of Bacchanalian spectacle. With their entire performance aesthetic, from the music selection to the decorative accoutrements on the stage, many performers report trying to cultivate a holistically stimulating experience, one that ideally manifests itself in an almost palpably positive collective energy.

This atmosphere is important for several unspectacular reasons. Plainly, performers value this atmosphere because it is fun. As “Bruce” summarizes, “That’s what we do. We party. I don’t want my performance to be taken too seriously, in a concert hall where you sit down and wait until the end to clap. I like a party. I like the atmosphere of a party.” The positivity of a visibly, genuinely satisfied crowd, moreover, is good indicator to a performer that his or her audience appreciates their effort and their music and acknowledges what “Rick” identifies as the performer’s obligation to be an entertainer. Energetic revelry both serves an entertaining, socializing experience for the performer and helps him or her feel successful in their career and their art.

However, the language that some of my respondents used to describe this enveloping sense of joy and positivity indicates that the experience means much more to performers than simply building their self-esteem. For example, “Bruce” talked about the

responsibility that he feels to himself and to his audience vis-à-vis a crowd or venue's overall energy. Speaking of a particular show that had happened the night before I spoke with him, he said, in a solemn, almost morose tone:

Last night there were 700 people in a room and they were all digging it... it's a lot of responsibility. You have the whole thing in the palm of your hand. Literally with the touch of a button, you can ruin the energy or extend it. So I get nervous with that kind of responsibility...it's an event versus a show, you turn a live show into an actual whole happening or experience. That's something special.

The severity with which "Bruce" distinguished this comment from the rest of the interview, which had a relatively unremarkable tone, is significant. It did not seem like "Bruce" was concerned with not receiving the self-esteem boost that an animated, celebratory crowd could provide, nor did he mention that he was concerned that his potential inability to provide the stimulus for this kind of revelry experience would alienate fans from his music and make him less money. The obligation and "responsibility" that he spoke of, one valuable enough to make a veteran performer like him nervous on a regular basis, suggests that the holistically satisfying live music experience also has deeper, more emotionally and spiritually relevant roots.

I suggest that my respondents' concern—the concern that "Bruce" eloquently voiced—over interfering with the holistic revelry that a successful live music experience produces stems from their subconscious (or conscious) belief in and respect for Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence. The reason that "Bruce," for example, is nervous about deflating the intensely positive, celebratory atmosphere that he both helps create and in which he participates is that he fears sullyng or damaging a dynamic, highly energetic experience and a gathering that, in its optimal and purest condition, holds immense value to people. Ultimately, my respondents value the vibrant, highly

energetic atmosphere of a successful performance because they value the spiritual force of a celebratory crowd. While that spiritual force is valuable as a pleasurable release of positive energy, it has other spiritually cathartic benefits as well.

Transcendence

Several respondents report experiencing a blissful kind of metaphysical liberation while performing music on a stage and in front of an audience. These respondents struggled to fully explain this sensation, even expressing frustration at their lack of sufficient vocabulary and syntax, but as I understand it, these musicians undergo a sustained and powerful physical and emotional catharsis while on stage. In some cases, this effect is catalyzed by the high level of physical or emotional exertion that the artist commits to their performance, while in others, it seems to be the intense concentration that improvisation and live experimentation requires. In both cases, the personal sacrifice seems to disentangle one part of the performer's psyche from the rest of their collective body, allowing the artist to enjoy, in the words of "Rick," "an out-of-body experience."

"Rick," whose music and live performances rely heavily on improvisation, openly seeks and treasures the "spiritual level of performing" which entails "getting in the zone of musical unawareness," a zone that he struggled to describe but that apparently has emotionally moving consequences. Improvisation, the act of engaging with and musically responding to an artist's creative instincts, requires him to access his immediate psychological capacity, "getting to the core of [his] self." This emotional process, he says, provides "Rick" with a unique and powerful spiritual transcendence that in some ways defines his performances.

Similarly, due in part to his famously physically taxing live performances, “Curtis,” the keyboardist, lead singer, and front man of his high-energy band, compares the aims of his performance experience to an exorcism, “when a man of the cloth removes the demon, [which] is kind of the same thing” as a successful live musical performance. This performer’s onstage exuberance, which includes simultaneously impassioned singing and key playing, dancing, and operating a variety of visual accoutrements, apparently takes an incredible toll on his body. Flatly, he says, “It’s like burning a candle at both ends.”

This awesome guy once had his 80-something year old grandma come hear us play. He had his grandma there, and to her credit, she stood in the front row the entire set while kids were crashing around and stage diving, and she stood there the entire set. I don’t know if she dug it, but we filmed her going on a rant about it later. She was saying, ‘All the screaming and yelling, they can’t do that all the time. They’re never gonna live to be my age. They’re crazy people!’

Nonetheless, he reports that these kinds of health hazards are worth the catharsis that they enable him to access, giving his life meaning (as noted above) and providing him with an admittedly indescribable but no less gratifying emotional and spiritual reward.

Though the metaphor may seem straight forward, the exorcism that “Curtis” identifies is more complex than he at first lets on. While the “demon” that he refers to generally represents his own personal emotional and spiritual baggage and, accordingly, the “man of the cloth” represents the performance experience, he was quick to add that the roles and overall exchange has many different dimensions. He added that while he himself feels “exorcised” by the demanding and sacrificing act of performing, there is a relationship between the band and the audience that renders he and his band “sometimes...the man of the cloth,” the exorcists and the collective audience the

exorcised. This close relationship constitutes part of the second metaphysical pursuit that my respondents acknowledged.

Communion

An artist's ability to perform an "exorcism" on a rapt audience indicates a unique and close bond between performers of live music and concertgoers that many respondents cited as a major element of their live experience. For both aesthetically creative purposes and personally emotional ones, respondents report that an intimate and healthy relationship between themselves and their fans is a crucial element of their musical careers and their extra-professional lives. A (perceived) mutual connection between performer and audience can both inspire better musical output and satisfy a performer's desire for interpersonal connection in ways that other endeavors—musical and non-musical—cannot.

Eloquently summarizing the views of a number of my respondents, "Brent," whose band's live show is more than "just playing a set," but rather a seamless blend of rehearsed material with live improvisation, explains the important creative role of a close, mutual performer-audience dynamic. "When we have a stronger bond with our audience, we play a better show," successfully tapping into the collective mood and tastes of that night or city's crowd and responding accordingly so that "the audience enjoys it more, and then we feed off of that, et cetera." For "Brent," as well as other respondents, the musical creativity that this relationship fosters is so unique and central to his band's aesthetic aims that he views the intimacy necessary for this bond as a top priority in organizing his band's performances. Instead of playing one night for 1500 people at a city's medium-large sized venue, which his band certainly could do, "Brent" and his

band mates “would just do two nights at [independent Cambridge, Massachusetts venue]the Middle East [with a capacity of 600, this is tiny venue for a band of ‘Brent’s’ stature] for a total of 1200 people, and we prefer that. We like the intimacy of a smaller crowd, and we think it tends to be more satisfying to perform in that environment.” For “Brent,” as well as a number of my respondents, a central aim of musical performance is the closely shared, artistically inspiring dynamic that an artist and an audience can forge.

For other respondents, this kind of dynamic is still the goal, but for different (or additional) reasons. With his live performance, “Stan” experiences and seeks the same kind of “feedback loop” between audience and musician as does “Brent.” However, while “Stan” acknowledges the impact of positive feedback on his musicianship, his responses also indicate a non-musical benefit to the union between performers and their fans. “Stan” talks of moments when he is “really getting feedback from [an audience] on (musical) changes and things like that...[which] push his energy into different places” with the same kind of frustrated transience that marked “Rick” and “Curtis’s” descriptions of the transcendental power of live music.

Though “Stan” stopped short of referring to any spiritual or philosophically altering properties, his sharp distinction between other areas of his musical career and the unique convention between performer and audience that he feels at successful live performances suggest a different valuing of the two endeavors. For example, while recording and writing songs “has an intellectual payoff” for “Stan” that he acknowledges and appreciates, he doesn’t speak of it with the same kind of passion and earnestness as he does the “pure energy experience of a live show,” which he sees as a wholly separate area of his career. Indeed, not only does positive audience-performer feedback and the

communion it allows set performance apart from other creative areas of “Stan’s” career as a musician, it sets the live music experience apart from his non-musical life. When asked to characterize a successful live show replete with a strong bond with his audience, “Stan” replied that it is “the most amazing experience that doesn’t compare to *anything* [my emphasis].”

“Curtis” essentially agrees, speaking candidly, passionately, and vulnerably about several specific occasions in which his musical performance helped him establish a sympathetic and tender relationship with his audience. An admittedly and avowedly earnest songwriter, “Curtis’s” music provides him an avenue through which to share the most personal and sensitive details of his life with whoever chooses to listen. He tells of the painful but rewarding experience of writing and recording one particular song in his band’s repertoire, and like “Stan,” does so in a way that distinguishes the definitive writing/recording process from the recurring, constantly challenging process of “singing words that I wrote that...are very personal and...took a lot of time to put together.”

Whereas writing and recording a song—regardless of how deeply personal it might be—yields a completed, finished product (the LP for example), performing the same song live can require the musician to revisit the potentially damaging or traumatic events and experiences that precipitated that song on a regular basis. In this case, the “very personal” song inspired by his disturbing “childhood and fucked up adulthood” was also (and perhaps not coincidentally) the most successful song from his band’s breakout album and a fan favorite, making it a staple of their live sets. While this constant confrontation of emotional demons may seem like a frustrating and emotionally counterproductive coping mechanism, “Stan” reports that his ability to share this song

with a sympathetic and sensitive audience has more than helped him move beyond the traumatic experiences behind this and other songs.

We played a show in Atlanta...all ages show, and were playing [I have deleted the name of the song to preserve the respondent's confidentiality]. I wrote that song, a very personal song for me that took a lot of time to put together...and halfway through the song, I was just trying to focus on singing it all right and I had my eyes closed, and I realized that someone just gave me a big bear hug while I was singing, then just slinked off into the darkness. Then afterwards, the guy came up to me and said 'I just had to let you know at that moment in that song, I wanted to let you know what it meant to me.' I still get the chills thinking about it.

For "Curtis," the performance arena provides him with an intimate setting in which he can emotionally and, in some cases, physically connect with his audience, a process that, based on this and other anecdotes, may be a source of the transcendental catharsis that was discussed above. Regardless, the comments of respondents like "Curtis" indicate that, for both creative and psychological purposes, many musicians seek and treasure the ability of their performance to commune them with their audience. This is not, however, the only kind of interpersonal communion that my respondents spoke of.

For many musicians, the unplanned, dynamic environment of a performance provides a special avenue through which to connect with your band mates or other fellow musicians. Just as my respondents spoke of connecting with and sharing a "feedback loop" with their audiences, they also spoke of seeking to connect—both musically and socially—with the people with whom they share a stage. These two types of connections are similar, but the bond that a performer shares with their audience and the bond that he or she shares with their band mates are fundamentally different. While the artist-audience bond occurs between people who generally do not know each other and probably never will, band mates tend to know each other incredibly well. They can be friends, ex-friends,

or even siblings, and they can certainly expect to see one another after the show is over—be it recording in the studio a few months later or back in the tour bus immediately after the show. The immense personal attachments, history, and general baggage that accompany relationships between band mates or fellow artists distinguishes this type of connection from the kind that can form between an artist and their audience, but both types of communion, according to my respondents, are central aims of the live music experience.

For “Stan,” these moments come during musical improvisations, when he and his band mates occasionally find themselves “locked in, [able to] change on a dime without any signals except for musical ones.” The feeling of connecting, sharing, and cooperating with people to whom you have a close, existing relationship in a completely live and unmitigated setting produces a unique bond amongst friends that, for many musicians, typical, non-musical exchanges can’t provide. While “Stan” describes this kind of communion in a slightly different way than he does the artist-audience “feedback look,” the two types of bond are linked in that they both satisfy some of the performer’s emotional needs in ways that are “really pretty amazing.”

While “Bruce,” a solo producer, tends to be the only artist on the stage during his performances,⁷⁹ he too seeks and finds a similar kind of bonding among friends and making of new ones while performing. Though generally a solo musician, “Bruce” tends to be on the same bill as a handful of other similar performers with whom he has been able to become both musical collaborators and close personal friends. The live performance arena not only gives “Bruce” and his colleagues an opportunity to spend

⁷⁹ While writing this, “Bruce” has formed and performed a handful of shows with a live band that includes a drummer and bass player.

time together, but more importantly and more akin to “Stan’s” remarks, it gives them an opportunity to share the stage in an impromptu, almost guerilla manner that reinforces their friendship bonds. He says, “When your friends are there and you’re DJing or whatever, and people just start jumping up on stage and scratching a track, that’s just so cool.” My respondents report that, like all of the aforementioned esoteric goals they associate with their live performance, this kind of interpersonal bond is not compromised by the Live Nation model. While overall Live Nation has not challenged performer’s abilities to meet this and the other goals that my respondents identified, all of the performers that I interviewed admit that one particular Live Nation operational policy has serious negative effects on their experience: security.

“If it ain’t rough, it ain’t right:” Live Nation’s Security Practices

While my respondents generally felt like Live Nation helped them attain their performance goals, on both ethical and utilitarian grounds, the performers that I interviewed objected to Live Nation’s practice of hiring “total dickheads” to supervise the crowd at their shows. Because Live Nation operates such an expansive nationwide network of venues, the corporation holds collective bargaining contracts with a number of nationwide unions so that they can conveniently staff their events across the country. Similarly, the broad liability insurance that covers Live Nation in the event of an injury to one of their patrons or performers requires that the venue or promoter have a certain (usually excessively high) number of security guards on duty at all times. While this may make things more convenient for the venue and even the promoter, neither of whom have

to worry about finding adequate stage crew or security personnel on a given night, it can pose a number of serious problems for the audience and as a result, for the musician.

Unlike shows hosted by independent promoters at independent venues that are not bound by union contracts, Live Nation shows tend to be staffed by people who have no interest in the artist, no connection to their music, and no personal affiliation with the audience and “scene” that springs up around them (or at least, any connection that the personnel may feel would be completely coincidental). Whereas successful independent events like Los Angeles’ monthly Low End Theory (to which I will return later) feature security guards who are either friends of the promoter, musicians, or venue owner or live near the venue, security personnel at Live Nation events are simply whoever the union or independent contractor decides to send over that particular night. The compensation for the often unnecessarily large security force comes out of the performer’s potential revenue, and the lack of responsibility or accountability to the audience and the performer can foster an unsatisfying, uncomfortable, and frankly dangerous concert-going atmosphere.

Respondents report long, grim stories of security guards and “bouncers” at Live Nation venues overreacting to rowdy and even apparently unobjectionable crowd behavior, often forcibly expelling patrons from the venue, confiscating private property, and physically assaulting concertgoers. Charged with maintaining order and presumably instructed to make sure people do not get out of hand, security personnel at Live Nation venues can take their task and their authority to violent extremes.

For basic moral reasons, performers object to the aggressive, violent kind of treatment of that their supporters receive at Live Nation venues, and they do what they can to put a halt to it. Says “Curtis:”

I mean, we’ve had shows with Live Nation where the security are total dickheads, and we’ve had Live Nation shows in Portland where there was a total shithead security guard who was just really violent and tossing people, threw a few girls out of the club, and we stopped our show until everything got sorted out.

While performers can hypothetically walk off stage in protest of security personnel’s abuse of an audience, there is really little that an artist can do. Not only is Live Nation contractually obligated to continue employing people whose attachment to music and audiences is at best coincidental, but also, from the corporation’s perspective, having an arrangement that allows Live Nation to streamline their operations nationwide constitutes a more efficient, profitable business model. If the band doesn’t like it, they can play somewhere else.

Moreover, the band themselves is beholden to the venue and promoter to finish playing their full allotted time slot, or face the financial repercussions of breaching an official agreement. In the same way the corporation has a signed agreement to employ a certain number of unionized personnel per show, bands have contracts with Live Nation to provide a certain amount of musical entertainment. If that contract is breached, the band risks either receiving a fraction of the money they were guaranteed in it, or in some extreme cases, receiving no money at all. While “Curtis” and his bandmates did what they could to impose their ethical beliefs on the Live Nation operating model, the corporation is ultimately in control. As “Brent” summarizes, “Generally the security are dicks, but there’s nothing we can do about that.”

Not only do performers reject Live Nation's security policies on shared ethical grounds, but also, my respondents report that the atmosphere these kind of authoritative, aggressive, and disconnected security personnel create directly interferes with their ability to achieve the spiritual, metaphysical, and emotional goals that they associate with their performance. As was mentioned above, the pursuits of transcendence, communion, and revelry rely on differing degrees of strong reciprocal bonds between performer and environment, performer and audience, and performer and performer. All of these types of bonds and all of the esoteric ends that they help achieve are by the kind of security presence that Live Nation events contain.

The situation in which "Curtis's" band left the stage in protest of aggressive security behavior is perhaps the most obvious example of the ways in which Live Nation security personnel can interfere with a performer's live experience. Here, Live Nation and their employees obstructed the band's achieving transcendence from their emotional or spiritual anchors, communion with their audience and one another, and a holistically stimulating revelry because the corporation's behavior caused the musicians to stop their show. We cannot know whether or to what degree "Curtis" would have met these needs had the security personnel been more affiliated with the band and its audience or been otherwise impelled to behave more peaceably, but this is precisely the point. On that night, the essence and meaning of "Curtis's" live show was directly influenced by outside actors affiliated with the corporate entity hosting the show, and in this way, Live Nation interfered with his performance.

It is not difficult, then, to imagine more subtle cases in which a performer does not take direct action against the venue's security practices but is similarly impeded from

satisfying their pursuits. For example, when I asked “Brent” if he had ever witnessed Live Nation security personnel mistreating his audience and not cancelled his show but been momentarily distracted from his performance by the security’s behavior, he flatly replied:

Many times. Sometimes it involves us talking to the security, and sometimes the police, between sets to move the security so that they don't interfere with the vibe of our show... sometimes it succeeds, sometimes it doesn't.

Similarly, performers report that the mentality of the audience in Live Nation venues with particularly aggressive or imposing security personnel is often not conducive to forging the kind of interpersonal bond on which the three mentioned objectives depend. In the same way that a performer can be distracted by security behavior they find objectionable, my respondents report that when fans are intimidated by a venue’s security presence or concerned that their behavior will get them or their friends expelled or arrested, the audience is more difficult to impress or connect with. As Bruce says, “Its easier to reach a crowd when they’re comfortable. If they’re uncomfortable when they walk in the doors, its harder to get them to enjoy the music.” He tells of a performance at a Live Nation venue when the security personnel interfered with his performance by making his audience extremely uncomfortable:

In DC, they were bringing kids into a back room and these security guys were scaring the shit out of them. They’d make a kid go out and walk up the dude that they bought their drugs from and then bum rush the dealer. Can you imagine the effect that would have on everyone in the room? So yeah, my main complaint about the corporate shows is that the security is way too hardcore.

Because of the disparate, large economy of scale with which Live Nation operates, it is convenient, economical, and effectively necessary for them to employ security personnel who are largely unaffiliated with the performers or their audience and

who then feel little incentive to keep order in non-aggressive, unimposing ways. The environment that this kind of security presence creates, an environment that my respondents report is less of a problem at independent or non-corporate venues, interferes with the audience and performer's enjoyment of the live music experience and makes it more difficult for the performer to achieve their goals. Additionally, my respondents identified one element of the Live Nation commercial scheme that does not interfere with the attainment of their personal metaphysical and psychological goals but that interferes with the overall success of their performance nonetheless.

“Industry Rule #4080:” Live Nation and Merchandise Sales

The same economic and logistical imperatives that determine Live Nation's security hiring practices that can interfere with a performer's ability to attain their philosophical and phenomenological goals can also interfere with a performer's ability to realize the financial goals associated with their performance. Just as all of my respondents reported that the unique environment of a live show presents them with an important revenue stream (see above), they also all expressed dismay at Live Nation's practice of demanding large percentages of profits of performers' merchandise sold at Live Nation venues. As “Curtis” succinctly puts it:

Here's another lousy thing about Live Nation venues though: the percentage they take off your merchandise. That's why everything [that the band sells] is so expensive at a Live Nation venue—they take 20% off everything, sometimes more.

The thinking behind this business policy is nebulous, but many respondents believe that Live Nation takes a hefty slice of the artist's merchandise earnings because they can. While “Bruce,” for example, superficially “understands [Live Nation's] point of

view, [in that] they're giving us a place to set up shop and make a little money," neither he nor any of my respondents accept the venue policy of claiming part of the once-sacred cow of the performer's merchandise sales. In fact, many respondents, particularly those from less established acts, view it as a form of bullying. Not only does this practice encroach upon performers' non-performance business ventures, but by cutting into this important revenue stream, it forces performers into the uncomfortable position of charging their fans relatively high prices for their merchandise. In other words, because performer's rely on their merchandise sales as a source of income, and because Live Nation practices decrease the amount of income performers see from their merchandise sales, my respondents admit to reluctantly hiking up their merchandise prices to offset the money they lose to the Live Nation fee. As Curtis says:

[Merchandise] is like popcorn at a movie theater; its so expensive because that's what keeps the band going. The venue just takes money wherever they can, and smaller bands like us, we can't negotiate anything. They just tell us what to do and we have to do it.

These conditions can have effects beyond the performer's income. As was mentioned before, the variously low levels of overhead involved in peddling merchandise at concert venues provides performers opportunities to earn a certain amount of social capital or credibility with their audiences. Being able to offer their merchandise for relatively low prices allows performers to distinguish themselves from the corporate entities within the music business—chain record stores or major labels for example—that consumers perceive to be greedy. This lends the performer a certain image or reputation to their fan base that can be tremendously valuable. By substantially extending the overhead associated with merchandise sales at venues, Live Nation denies performers this

opportunity to establish a friendly and respectful rapport with their audience and this decreases the social capital available to the performer in this transaction.

While many performers blame and fault Live Nation for this kind of economic coercion, my respondents were also quick to acknowledge that this practice is not at all confined to Live Nation or even corporate music promoters. Venue owners taking percentages of the performer's merchandise sales, in Brent's words, is "part of the new world order" in which all venues—big and small, corporate and independently owned—seek to profit at every available opportunity. This being the case, it is difficult to say that Live Nation and the consolidated corporate media model under which they operate prevents musicians from realizing their performance goals because promoters that operate under an unconsolidated, non-corporate paradigm behave in the same way.

Ultimately, because corporate and non-corporate promotional entities behave identically in this respect, the performer is forced to make a choice. Like Brent says, "Yes, they're going to take a cut of your merch, but in the end, if it benefits you to sign that deal with Live Nation, then that's just part of the deal." As we will see in the next chapter, for a number of logistical, aesthetic, and financial reasons, respondents seem to agree that in most cases, it in fact *does* benefit the performer to cooperate with Live Nation and their consolidated corporate model.

Chapter 5
*You Think It's Like This, But Really It's Like This: The Qualitative Benefits of
Live Nation on Performance Pursuits*

Though my respondents report that Live Nation's security practices and merchandising policies interfere with both the metaphysical and financial goals that musicians associate with live performance, these responses do not represent the overall sentiments of my interviews. Instead, performers seem to feel that the corporate live music environment that defines the Live Nation experience is generally not antithetical to either the esoteric philosophical goals that musicians seek through their performances or the concrete financial ones. In fact, the variety of logistical and aesthetic mechanisms with which a streamlined, financially powerful, highly corporatized live music business operates ultimately better allows performers to achieve both types of goals.

As discussed in Chapter 3 and as "Bruce" succinctly describes, "[Live Nation] could be selling any product, it just happens to be live music. It's just about the profit." While this paradigm might suggest a disrespect for and corresponding deterioration of the media product (Chapter 2), my respondents report that different aspects of Live Nation's financially minded structure directly contribute to producing successful live performances. In this chapter, I will discuss those aspects, relating them both to Live Nation's corporate model and to the aforementioned esoteric and financial goals that performers associate with the live experience (Chapter 4). Broadly, by establishing a set of firm, unambiguous, and sophisticated arrangements for the financial logistics of performance, and by both generating and investing large amounts of capital into personal amenities and musical production, Live Nation permits musicians to commit themselves to their performance and provides them with the apparatus necessary to sound and look as

good as they possibly can. This allows performers to capitalize on the social and financial revenue streams that the performance experience offers, optimizes the quality of their creative output, and it facilitates the kinds of phenomenological and spiritual goals that performers seek through their performance.

“Can it be all so simple?” Corporate efficiency and the performer

As was discussed in Chapter 3, media conglomerates seek to maximize their profits through a number of organizational and operational procedures, including researching and implementing ultra-high efficiency practices. By painstakingly streamlining their machinations and minimizing capital lost in the various transactions necessary to host live performances, corporate media entities try to get as much money as they can out of their investments. In Chapter 4, I discussed the negative implications of Live Nation’s high-efficiency practice of entering into contracts with large, nation-wide security unions to staff their shows. However, it seems that the corporation’s pursuit of efficiency and administrative simplification also benefits the performer and, correspondingly, their performance.

The live experience offers performers a variety of unique and lucrative financial opportunities, but can also be a complex and resource-consuming venture. When arranging a tour, performers seeking to optimize their revenue ultimately have to do an extensive and nuanced cost/benefit analysis long before they set out on the road. Complicated variables such as the unstable and nationally fluctuating price of gasoline, potentially inclement weather that may delay travel between venues and force a performer to cancel a show, and the presence of another high-drawing performer in a

particular market on the same night are just some of the intricate considerations that affect how and where a musician should perform in order to optimize their income.

“Stan” described one such issue that his band considers in deciding which cities to cover in their notoriously long tours:

...we make sure we cover anchor markets and be where we need to be on weekends and stuff like that, but we also need to make sure that we go places where we haven't been so that the next time we tour, we can potentially have another town where we can do well. It's like expanding your markets. But at the same time, we don't want to go somewhere where no one will come out. We don't want to waste a night, if that makes sense. So it's hard to find a balance between going to new cities but also going places where a substantial number of people will buy tickets.

All of my respondents—either because of their demanding recording and writing schedules or because of personal aversions to handling business affairs—report being incapable of independently calculating this mess of variables to optimize the financial opportunities connected to performance. According to my respondents, because of the variety of calculations necessary for tour planning, performers who have comfortable incomes from their performances require a booking agent and/or a tour manager to address the logistical aspects of organizing their performances. Staffing these tasks out to someone else allows the performer to concentrate on making and performing music, but it also has a number of drawbacks.

Hiring additional employees to handle the matrix of performance and touring-related variables cuts into the performer's revenue stream, and requires the performer to place enormous trust in someone they may not know particularly well. Were musicians able to navigate the negotiation process on their own and remain focused on their performances, they would not have to be concerned that an intervening party was fraudulently pocketing potential income. As it is, for example, the performer has to be

totally confident that their representatives are working on their behalf, making the most business savvy decisions and not embezzling part of the artists' performance fees.

Moreover, the performer entrusts their representatives with a great deal of sensitive information from which the agent or manager could profit. For example, to direct payment to performers' bank accounts, tour managers and booking agents typically have access to performers' social security numbers, tax identification numbers, and even bank account numbers. To make travel arrangements for their clients, booking agents/tour managers usually have copies of performers' credit cards. The agent or manager could abuse the access he or she has to their clients' personal information, and to differing degrees, many respondents admit to harboring this concern.

However, the agent or manager does not have to be acting maliciously to harm the performer. By enlarging the circle of people with access to their personal information, the performer increases the population of people that can get robbed of or misplace sensitive, valuable personal data. My respondents report that these kinds of concerns can occupy their mind during recording and performance experiences, distracting them from their music and complicating the pursuit of the goals that they associate with live music.

Live Nation's efficient business model helps simplify the organizational and administrative processes involved in performance, removing a number of variables from the complicated and distracting calculus. In the same way that standardizing security costs allows the corporation to centralize and streamline their costs, most production costs at Live Nation performances are similarly standardized. According to "Brent,"

...their production costs are fixed because they have a team of accountants across the country figuring it out. And the costs for the monitor man or whatever is the same yesterday as it will be tomorrow, so you can just plug that in before you hit the road.

From technical personnel to equipment fees, the prices for logistical elements at Live Nation performances across the country tend to be fixed so that the corporation does not have to commit valuable resources (employee's time, for example) to responding to changing costs. This standardization benefits the performer in a similar way. Just as the corporation uses these constant figures so that they can focus on maximizing revenue in other areas of their business, the performer's ability to simply insert these numbers into their pre-tour calculus removes an important set of distractions when it comes time to take the stage. Though the musician can still have a number of confusing and uncertain professional issues weighing on their mind while performing, Live Nation's mechanistic pursuit of margin-widening efficiency lessens or in some cases removes nagging business concerns by simplifying the cost/benefit analysis. According to my respondents, this affects the quality of music and, as a result, better enables the performer to attain their more esoteric performance goals. Live Nation's business-first character also provides the performer with more tangible forms of financial security.

For the performer, one such benefit of the mechanized organization of Live Nation's business practices is the certainty that "unless you do something *really* fucked up," a musician will invariably receive their compensation from the promoter. While nearly all of my respondents had stories about shows with independent promoters that still have not fully compensated the performers, they appreciate the "totally straight up, if not totally businessy" way that Live Nation handles their compensatory transactions.

A number of factors contribute to a small-scale, independent promoter or venue owner not paying a performer the agreed upon fee, but most of them can be reduced to some kind of amateur, disorganized blunder. There is, of course, the possibility that the

promoter or owner maliciously withheld full compensation simply because he or she wanted to keep that money for themselves. While this certainly happens, my respondents report that this situation is rare.

Furthermore, though I do not have exhaustive data, I would speculate that this kind of behavior indicates that a promoter or owner lacks the experience and professionalism of a corporate live music entity like Live Nation. According to respondents like “Brent,” who assured me that there are disrespectful, dishonest promoters and venues that he will not work with under any circumstances, when a performer is not compensated after a performance, they often vow never to do business with that promoter or venue again. Moreover, they warn their friends about this particular entity’s crooked business practices and deter them from doing business with the promoter or venue as well. This feedback loop interferes with the promoter or owner’s ability to generate income and continue hosting performances. Again, my interviews suggest that this scenario is generally uncommon, but there are other situations in which performers do not get fully compensated because of the disorganization and ineptitude of the independent promoter or small-scale venue operation.

In many cases, the promoter or owner simply does not have enough money to fully compensate performers after their shows, because they overestimated how much revenue they would generate or because they were unable to negotiate a suitable fee before the performance and proceeded with the booking anyway. Both situations could have been avoided had the show been organized by realistic, experienced people who properly gauge the demand for a particular performer in their market and negotiate an equitable, reasonable performance fee in the weeks and months before the performance.

As “Rick” reports, this can happen when the show is arranged with a close personal friend.

I just played a gig the other day at a tiny jazz club that my friend owns. It was a small deal, a mom-and-pop type place, and there weren’t that many people there, but I still didn’t get paid afterwards. My manager called my friend who put the show together and had to go looking for him to get my check. It was ridiculous.

Contrast this scenario with the cost-controlled, highly organized, mechanistic business system of Live Nation, with whom, as “Brent” says, “you always know you’re going to get paid.” Because Live Nation operates with the cool efficiency of a profit-driven multinational corporation and organizes thousands of performances per year, they are able to negotiate reasonable fees before the performance, arrive at accurate estimates for the amount of revenue they will generate the night of the performance, and have enough money on hand to fully compensate the performer after the performance, or in some cases, before it. Moreover, they have the professional and legal experience to know that if they alienate performers by breaching their contractual obligations, not only will they develop a potentially damaging reputation with other performers, but they will be subject to retaliatory legal action.

Unlike shows at independent venues that do not rely on sophisticated, resource-saving cost calculi or have the organization necessary to properly compensate performers, shows at Live Nation venues arise out of less financial variability, fostering better creative output and more successful performances. Because, for example, the performer is less worried about whether they or their representatives seriously miscalculated during the pre-tour planning process and are more confident that they are both optimizing their financial potential and going to get paid on a given night, they are more free to concentrate on pursuing the out-of-body experiences, establishing and nurturing the

interpersonal bonds, and generally attaining the collective effervescence that roots the philosophical, emotional, and metaphysical goals they seek. As “Rick” mentions, they are more able to commit themselves to their music and their audience and engage in a “musical moment,” a result that directly advances the performer’s overall pursuits. This theme, as we will see, runs through many of the benefits that the Live Nation machine provides performers.

“Safe From Harm:” Investing corporate profits in artist comfort

Through calculated mergers and business transactions, synergistic, high-efficiency practices, and other revenue-driven operations, Live Nation has become the largest, most profitable live music company in the world. Their corporate model has been so successful, in fact, that their assets dwarf those of their nearest corporate competitor, not to mention those of any locally based independent promoter or venue. Live Nation could simply stockpile these assets, turning ever higher profits for their shareholders and executives, but according to my respondents, the corporation has a record of reinvesting these profits in logistical areas of the performance experience, including on-site artist comfort. The huge amount of capital that Live Nation has—far greater than any of their independent competitors—allows the corporation to provide their performers with a range of amenities, services, and rights in ways that their competitors cannot. In the same way that the simplified mechanization of Live Nation’s corporate model allows performers to focus on attaining their live music goals, the corporation’s huge investments in artists’ comfort creates an environment where performers feel safe, satisfied, and better able to commit themselves to their performance.

Security

In Chapter 4, I discussed the negative impact that Live Nation's security policies have on performers and their abilities to achieve their performance goals. Respondents object to the aggressive, disrespectful manner that Live Nation's contracted security personnel treat audiences, and believe that this kind of treatment puts fans in negative headspaces that are not conducive to attaining the audience connection and shared transcendence that performers seek. Nonetheless, and perhaps contradictorily, performers also report deriving great benefits from other potentially unnecessary security measures that ultimately enable the performer to achieve their performance goals.

In addition to contractual union security personnel, performances at Live Nation venues tend to feature metal fences that separate performers from the audience. Similar to the kinds of temporary, mobile walls used by police to block off streets, the fences are placed on the floor in front of the stage and are usually patrolled by security personnel, ensuring that fans cannot leap from the audience to the stage. While this feature may seem alienating, isolating, and diametrically opposed to forming the performer-audience bonds upon which much of the discussed collective effervescence rests, most of my respondents—without my probing them about it—submitted that this added security measure affords them many financial, psychological, and correspondingly artistic benefits and contributed to the pursuit of their performance goals.

Before "Curtis's" band reached the levels of success that would grant them access to the large sized venues that Live Nation operates, they would typically perform in modest sized venues, many of which had a short, unguarded stages or even no stages at all. These types of shows facilitated performer-audience bonds by enabling "Curtis" and

his bandmates to physically connect with their fans (see Chapter 3), but also presented them with a peculiar emotional and very real financial problem:

The only thing that ever bummed us out about playing shows when you're right up on people—and I understand that people want to feel connected to the band or whatever—but people that come to our shows and end up stealing a lot of our stuff. That's been the biggest bummer of the last two years of touring. A lot of our sounds are culled from devices that we've picked over many years of being in the band or even from before the band, and kids just steal stuff...like expensive ethnic percussion bells, like treasures that you find in thrift stores when you were 19. You can't replace it, its lost, gone forever, some kid stole it.

Playing at independent venues that lack the resources (or interest) to invest in artist security measures like a fence in front of the stage make it easier for “Curtis” to connect with his fans, but it also left him vulnerable to the loss of cherished, emotionally charged pieces of personal property. Not only that, but the loss of an irreplaceable instrument has lasting implications ranging from financial (“Curtis” and his bandmates have to pay to replace the stolen item) to aesthetic (without these instruments, the band's songs would conceivably sound different).

While outright theft is an issue at fenceless independent venues, “Curtis” also acknowledged that audience members do not need malicious motives to negatively affect the band. He spoke of a show at a college mere days before our interview in a venue that had neither a railing nor a stage where “[his] keyboard got totally destroyed. People were spitting beer and water on each other and it got on my keyboard and broke it, so we had to cut the show short.” He then quipped, “It sucks, especially when you're playing a really easy to find [*sarcasm*] keyboard.” Here, the fans did not intend to cause harm to the band, but the very nature of the venue created a situation that compromised the safety of the performer's equipment.

Other respondents report that audience members at fenceless, unprotected shows do not have to actually damage musical equipment to distract the performer or otherwise drastically alter the performance. “Stan” told me of a performance at a highly reputable independent venue in which:

...some guy was getting overexcited at a place where there was no barrier and he jumped up on the stage and triggered some of my bass pedals [used to alter the tone of the instrument]. It totally cut out the sound. I’m sitting there yelling at him, ‘If it happens again you’re going to get kicked out,’ and that’s not what I want. I want to be up there performing.

While the audience member didn’t damage the equipment, he nonetheless distracted the performer from his desired activity and disrupted the audiences’ and band’s overall experience. Again, while the fan may not have had malicious intent, the insecure environment of the venue nevertheless created a circumstance in which external forces can and did interfere with the performer’s pursuit of their live music goals.

Because Live Nation invests in added security measures like metal fences in front of the stages at their venues, respondents report that these types of financial, psychological, and artistic interferences do not occur. Because audience members do not have access to the stage, they can’t steal, accidentally damage, or (de)activate a performer’s instrument, so performers do not have to pay to replace stolen or broken instruments and, more importantly, are allowed to concentrate on attaining the range of goals that they associate with their performance. Moreover, they report that the presumably isolating and alienating effects of physical and metaphorical separation are in fact not alienating.

I asked each of my respondents if they were concerned that the elevated stages and fortifications between them and their audience precluded or hindered their ability to

connect, and no respondent recognized a venue's spatial relations as a relevant factor in the audience-performer dynamic. When I asked "Curtis" if, safety and security benefits notwithstanding, he regretted that audience members cannot hug him during his performance like the one in the poignant episode mentioned in Chapter 3, he responded unequivocally:

That stuff is gone if you want it to be gone. If you want to play a show and not hang out or interact with people afterwards, you can. But if you still want to connect with your fans on a personal level at your shows, there really isn't much that can prevent you from doing that.

In other words, if the artist does not wish to establish or preserve a meaningful or personal connection with their audience, that is their choice. If, however, he or she does seek the intimate connection that small, stage-less rooms can facilitate, then there is little that Live Nation or any other corporate entity can do to deny it.

While the geography and spatial relations of Live Nation venues may appear to counteract the kinds of bonds and communion that performers avowedly seek through their performance, musicians report that from their perspective, the venue's design is not particularly important in establishing a bond with their audience. Live Nation's corporate model, then, has enabled them to secure huge amounts of capital that enables them to provide a security service to artists that does not impair and in fact facilitates achieving performers' goals. By protecting their possessions and the integrity of their performance, and by allowing the performer to concentrate on cultivating the shared transcendence and energetic exchanges that help drive their performances, Live Nation's security investments aid in the performer's pursuits. Similarly, Live Nation's financial resources enable the corporation to meet performers' personal comfort needs in ways that independent promoters and venue owners cannot.

Personal Amenities

While some audiences may appreciate the rootsy, approachable character of independently promoted shows at independently owned venues that lack the resources to construct an upscale, intricately designed facility, my respondents do not share this sentiment. Fans, particularly those with strong objections to the corporate operating model, may view the structural or administrative flaws of an independently promoted and hosted show positively. To these people, certain levels of amateur disorganization and architectural deterioration—peeling floor tiles, outdated and rundown décor, inefficient and disorderly systems of entry, understaffed bars—are not only acceptable, but welcome indicators of the authentic, “mom-and-pop” nature of the show that they have paid to see for the evening. Performers, conversely, are professional musicians who spend huge amounts of their private and creative time in live music venues. Whereas the fan member will only be in the venue for a few hours, performers will go from venue to venue for weeks and months in a row, and the performance space soon becomes almost like a home. To them, poorly designed and administered events do not indicate a venue or promoter’s authenticity or legitimacy—they are real, lived experiences of discomfort and unpleasantness, and according to my respondents, they most commonly occur at shows from within the independent model.

Because small-scale independent promotional operations are often short on money, they tend not to invest their limited capital in providing comfort amenities to their performers. Here, I am not referring to obviously outlandish, indulgent, and unnecessary items that pamper the performer. Broadly, comfort amenities entail basic, reasonable items that make performers feel welcomed and relaxed during their stay at the venue.

This can include sufficient healthy food, ample and comfortable private space in which to socialize, and free internet access on the premises. The lack of amenities can make the performer frustrated and uncomfortable, and can have deleterious effects on their performance not unlike the ones mentioned above. In “Stan’s” words:

If you show up at a place and the green room is 6x6 [feet], there’s graffiti all over the walls and some collapsed couch, you might not put on as good of a performance as you would at a place where the staff is nice and you get along with everybody, they feed you well and take care of you.

“Brent” told me of a show that he and his band played soon before our interview—promoted by a successful and prominent independent promoter—where, in addition to a number of technical and production short comings (to which I will return shortly),

...there was a staff who didn’t know what the fuck was going on [and] no towels, no water [which] makes for an uncomfortable show where we don’t have what we need to put on a good performance for an audience.

Here, from the musician’s perspective, the venue and promoter’s inability (or unwillingness) to provide for the artists’ personal comfort interfered with the performer’s goals. By not ensuring that the artist was comfortable and looked after before the show and while he was on stage, the independent promoter did not create an environment that maximized the performer’s creative abilities, and therefore hindered the performer’s pursuit of his goals. In this case, instead of concentrating on that show’s particular “musical moments,” connections, and energetic exchanges, “Brent,” dehydrated and exhausted, had to concentrate on keeping sweat out of his eyes.

He immediately compared that performance environment with the environment at a Live Nation show they played the night after. Speaking excitedly and glowingly about the success of the later show, he explained,

...the promoter of that show was a fantastic guy, and that was definitely a Live Nation event. He was very friendly, he knew the band and our music, and he offered us everything we needed to have. It meant a lot to us, and it really helped.

Similar to “Bruce’s” earlier comment about audiences being easier to connect with when they are comfortable, my respondents report that they are better able to perform and connect with their audience and each other when they themselves feel like they are in a safe, inviting atmosphere. Live Nation appears to be more successful at creating this atmosphere than independent promoters and venues. Because corporate promotional entities both have the organizational and financial means to meet artists’ demands for personal amenities and choose to invest in them, Live Nation better enables performers to put on successful, fulfilling concerts than do independent promotional entities. While Live Nation’s ability and willingness to invest in artist safety and comfort establish environments that facilitate attainment of performer’s goals, my respondents universally trumpeted their ability and willingness to invest in actual aesthetic infrastructure as the corporation’s greatest contribution to the performer’s pursuits.

“The bass tone is merlin, where you at?” Live Nation’s investments in audio production

Though specific elements of live performance administration like a promoter’s ability to satisfy and make comfortable a performer play a huge role in determining a performance’s success, the overriding qualities of performance are aesthetic. According to my respondents, the extent to which audience members and performers connect, cultivate and share the unique kinds of energy that define a successful performance, and

the extent to which people generally enjoy themselves is mostly determined by the sound quality of the music being performed.

This may seem evident, but amidst the complex financial mechanisms and profound philosophical and metaphysical components associated with live performance, we are ultimately talking about a relatively simple notion: people watching, listening, and participating in music making. Ultimately, the financial and emotional benefits that performers derive from performance both stem from the degree to which people—including themselves—like the music being performed. As “Bruce” succinctly puts it, “It’s simple. The whole thing going on that night is about a person making music,” perhaps an obvious belief but nonetheless one that is crucial to understanding the main thrust of my respondents’ appreciation for Live Nation’s corporate model.

Because performance is reflexively inseparable from and indeed defined by the music being made and listened to, it would follow that better sound tends to mean a better show. Setting aside matters of personal preference for one type of music over another,⁸⁰ crisp, deep, clearly resonating music is the most important element of a live music event, and my interviews bear this out. When asked what makes a great show, my respondents’ universal first response was good sound quality. As Stan summarizes, “anything with good production...is a good show in by book.” For both financial and spiritual reasons, this makes sense.

Economically, a musician’s success rests almost entirely on the degree to which listeners like what they hear. The more that consumers enjoy listening to someone’s

⁸⁰ In most cases, it is safe to assume that if an audience member has paid to attend a concert, they probably already have a taste for the type of music being performed that night or the artist performing it.

music, the more records, merchandise, and concert tickets that musician will sell. The more ubiquitous and valued a musician's work is, the more renown and worth he or she will have to advertisers, movie producers, and other people interested in licensing that music. This is clearly not a complex idea—this is the whole premise of the recording industry and of the popular music business as well. Though there are some exceptions, the general rule is: musicians that audiences appreciate enjoy the most amount of commercial success.

When trying to impress audiences in a live setting, this adopts a more complicated angle. Not only must a performer render their music in new and exciting ways that audiences will enjoy, but they also have to rely on the venue or promoter to provide the equipment necessary to communicate those renderings faithfully to the audience. In other words, onstage, a musician can perform an astounding bass guitar solo that would impress and ensnare legions of fans, but if the sound system at the venue does not have sufficient low-end amplifiers, the whole gesture can be lost on the crowd. Even worse, if the amplifiers are so bad as to garble or muddle the low-end frequencies, the audience might think that the bass player has a sloppy technique and decide not to support that musician in the future. In musical performance, sound is the crux of the experience, and that sound not being properly conveyed from performer to listener can have a negative impact on the performer's professional livelihood.

Similarly, if a venue or promoter does not allow the performer to hear how their music sounds to their audience and thus prevents the performer from spontaneously shaping their music according to what a particular crowd wants, the performance experience can reflect poorly on the musician. Venue sound systems are arranged so that

one set of amplifiers disperses music towards the audience and another set, calibrated to much gentler volumes and usually on the stage, amplifies towards the performer so that he or she can monitor what the crowd is hearing (these amplifiers are appropriately called monitors). Performers need monitors to know, for example, if the keyboard sounds too loud to the audience so that they can turn it down, and if the performer is unable to respond to these signals because a show's monitors do not accurately convey this information, his or her performance will not be as appreciated. Said "Bruce" of a series of performances that he did (which were hosted at independent venues by the same prominent independent promoters that "Brent" lamented in the previous section),

...the monitors sucked. The sound system was OK I guess, but everything was just a little off. I really want to have a sound guy behind the boards all night watching you, working with you, and paying attention, and that's not always set up when you're dealing with non-corporate promoters. ...so when I go up there and can't hear what I'm doing and it sounds like shit, people are going to say, 'Oh I don't really like him or his music that much, it sounds bad,' and that might not be my fault.

Interestingly, this comment came immediately after he celebrated the same event and its lax security for enabling the kind of revelry that prominently factors into cultivating collective effervescence. In this case, the poor quality of the sound system and audio equipment counteracted the benefits of the venues' friendly and unobtrusive treatment of the audience. Adequate sound systems and audio equipment, then, are essential elements of a profitable live performance, and according to many respondents, independently promoted shows and shows at independent venues tend to inadequately meet these needs for the same reason that they fail to meet safety and personal comfort requests.

Small-scale operations lack the capital to invest in top-of-the-line sound systems, audio equipment, and experienced audio engineering personnel to ensure that music is being optimized to the audience and the performer. Because, according to “Bruce,” independent operations “are trying to cut corners” financially, they tend to skimp on overhead of all kinds, including audio production. This has negative implications for performers, who may be embarrassed and denied financial compensation for their efforts because of the technological shortcomings of the venue or promoter.

Because the parent company has more than adequate capital, however, Live Nation venues feature some of the most impressive sound systems and acoustics in the country. For example, various locations from their House of Blues franchise, a national chain of large concert halls/auditoriums and restaurants, were frequently cited by my respondents as “some of the best sounding rooms in the country,” replete with state-of-the-art speaker and monitor systems, high-tech soundboards operated by vigilant and experienced audio technicians, and other typically costly elements of technical audio production.

For performers like “Stan,” “Bruce,” and “Rick,” all of whom have fairly elaborate and complex instrumental set ups and make textured, often distorted music, capable sound systems and professionals who are able to operate them are essential elements of their performance—listening to their music through inadequate sound systems is basically like listening to a different musician. For them to make their particular brands of music in a live setting and provide audiences with what they have paid to see them make, it is essentially not an option to perform at events that are not able to take this imperative seriously.

However, performers like “Curtis” and “Brent,” both of whom admitted that their production demands are relatively simple compared to some of their peers, complain that independent promoters and venue owners have proved incapable or unwilling of providing even basic audio performance equipment in sufficient supply. Says “Brent,”

We don’t require super ritzy stuff, just a basic minimum that a touring band would need—about 12 mics, a sound system that can put out quality live music at a reasonable volume without packing, and some of the smaller venues we have played lack that budget, and those shows lack because of it...

“Curtis” generally agrees. Though he concedes that Live Nation venues do not invariably have top-notch sound, their promoters’ abilities to meet basic equipment demands stands in direct contrast to that of smaller, less financially capable operations, and this makes for a more fulfilling audience experience.

I can’t say that all of our shows with Live Nation had great sound—some didn’t—but at least they had enough mics and stands, which is more than I can say for a lot of the independent shows we’ve done. You figure that if someone is going to pay to come see you play, one half of it is the experience of see a live performance, the other half is being able to hear the live band play.

“Outtasite (Out of Mind):” Sightlines and visual production at Live Nation venues

While the first half of “Curtis’s” comment—the visual component of live musical performance—may not be as crucial to a performance’s success, it is nonetheless a hugely valuable and in many cases⁸¹ equally self-reflexive element of the live music

⁸¹ DJ or solo electronica performances tend to be exceptions to this rule, in that audiences do not typically demand or expect an unobstructed view of the performer. However, there are some cases, particularly when the performer’s technical skills are central to their performance (turntable scratching, for example) where being able to see the artist’s is so important that focused video footage of their technique will be broadcast on a large screen so that the audience can observe the salient features of the performance.

Moreover, while being able to see the actual DJ or solo electronica performer may tend not to be particularly important to the audience, the visual component of performance at these shows is nonetheless still valuable. In raves, for example, elaborate

experience on which, according to most respondents, Live Nation is more willing and able to deliver than their independent competitors. Both because they have substantial capital to invest in quality visual production and because, from a structural perspective, the venues that they tend to buy or design afford the audience with superior views of the performers, my respondents report that Live Nation shows tend to satisfy the visual component better than independently promoted and hosted concerts. In two main ways, the visual component of live musical performance contributes to achieving the broad range of emotional, spiritual, and phenomenological experiences that performers seek.

Communion through visual contact

My respondents report that being able to physically see their audience aids in establishing the strong bond with their fans that is so integral to the performer's many phenomenological and psychological goals. "Brent" spoke very candidly about this crippling drawback as experienced in the larger venues that his band has performed in throughout their career. When I asked him why he preferred playing in venues that enable a clear view of the audience, his answer was simple:

Connection. Any successful musician who has played arenas will tell you there is no interaction or bond between the artist and the audience when you're playing somewhere that big. That's why some huge bands like to play secret shows at tiny venues, like the [Rolling] Stones, because they're able to have this connection with their fans that is not normally available to them. If you've ever seen footage from the stage of a band playing an arena, it's a black wall. You can't see anyone...well, you don't see a black wall, but you do see kind of a void...

Additionally, it is probably safe to assume that these venues that deny a performer the ability to visually connect with their audience also deny that connection from the

light displays—which, as I will shortly discuss, require a great deal of capital and technical skill to arrange and administer—constitute a huge element of the live musical experience.

audience's perspective as well. Ultimately, the degree of visual contact that performers and audiences have can either add to or detract from the connection that performers report to seeking with their live shows, and according to them, many small-scale shows at small, independent venues do not facilitate this contact.

Because they have little space, small venues that host independently promoted shows tend not to have high stages or stadium seating for the audience. As a result, visual contact between performers, their audience, and vice versa usually suffers. "Curtis," whose band has performed many guerilla shows at tiny venues ranging from bars to college basements, summarizes this: "I guess shows at art spaces are fun, but they're mainly fun for people in the front. The rest of the people are looking at the back of someone's head." He then added, "Aesthetically, its nicer to see bands at a theater than a rock club."

This comment speaks directly to Live Nation, who owns a huge share of the country's popular music-hosting theaters. In Boston alone, in addition to the smaller rock clubs and larger arenas and outdoor amphitheaters that they own, Live Nation directly owns virtually all of the market's medium-large sized theaters that host popular music performances.⁸² With their steep, bowl-shaped designs, substantially elevated stages, and unobstructed sightlines, classic theaters and amphitheaters are structurally able to better facilitate visual connection between audience and performer (and vice versa) than are typical small-scale rock clubs. Moreover, in Boston and other markets around the country, Live Nation essentially has a monopoly on these kinds of venues, so, as my

⁸² They are the Bank of America Pavillion, Orpheum, Wilbur, and Wang Theaters and House of Blues. They also own the Boston Opera House, which generally does not host popular music performances.

respondents report, the corporation is more successful at providing visual contact and, as a result, the exchanges and unique bonds associated with it. Not only do the structural realities of shows at Live Nation venues promote achievement of musicians' performance goals, but also, as was shown earlier, their ability and willingness to invest vast sums of capital in visual production advances the performers' pursuit in other ways.

Visual stimuli as part of a unified experience

Recall Bruce's earlier comments about the holistic stimulation of an ideal live performance: "...it's an event versus a show, you turn a live show into an actual whole happening or experience." This notion is central to collective effervescence and the broad headings that describe performers' metaphysical and spiritual performance goals. Full sensory stimulation encourages and in some cases even constitutes the revelry, transcendence, and communion that give meaning to my respondents' performances, and a crucial element of this stimulation is visual entertainment. Whether as mere accompaniment to the music or as a rehearsed, synchronistic, highly technical, visible component to it, successful visual stimulation at popular music performance—according to many of my respondents—is integral to a successful show.

For "Brent's" band, who plays a particularly uptempo kind of electronica that he believes almost necessitates visual stimuli, this is particularly true.

With lights, and the kind of music we play that requires an environment onstage—we're not [subdued folk singer] Loudon Wainright III sitting on stage singing a song—people need a visual ambiance. We need to create an environment for a listener and watcher to enjoy what they're hearing but also seeing...

Like audio production, visual production can also be a costly, demanding ordeal.

Performers rely on venue owners and promoters to provide them with a bright, usually ornate lighting rig and a capable technician. However, as has been increasingly true in

popular performance, musicians view visual stimulation as so vital to their show that they bring both their own sophisticated lighting rig and their own technician who is familiar enough with the band's catalog to respond to their music with an improvised light show. In this case, the venue or promoter must nonetheless provide the performer with adequate technical capacity (wattage output, an interface for their lighting controls, etc.) and personnel (to install the extra lighting features) so that the performer can achieve what they envision for their light show.

As was the case with live audio production, my respondents report that Live Nation has proved more financially able and willing to invest in the infrastructure necessary to provide a visually stimulating experience than their independent or small-scale competitors. Paralleling my findings about the corporation's higher capacity for quality audio production, Live Nation has more money and financial freedom to procure the state-of-the-art visual production technology, keep it in good condition, and staff it with well-paid, qualified professionals if needed. Because they are both independently capable of providing impressive visual stimuli through their own equipment and capable of accommodating performers' supplementary visual production, Live Nation assists performers attain a holistically stimulating environment that fosters shared transcendence, revelry, and the singular kind of energy exchange that makes performance so important to my respondents, and does so in ways that less wealthy and profitable promoters and venues simply cannot.

Chapter 6
“The End is No End:” the Live Nation Paradox and the Promises of Contemporary
Popular Performance

This project began with one driving hypothesis and a number of associated questions: I believed that the commodification and corporatization of contemporary popular music performance has corrupted an otherwise pure, personally, emotionally and spiritually satisfying experience. How corporations like Live Nation achieved this nefarious end—or even what constituted the live music experience as I knew and felt it—was unclear, but those questions would drive my research and serve as guiding questions to ultimately answer.

In a way, I think I have succeeded at both of these goals. First, my interviews indicate that in addition to this vaguely grasped “live music experience,” there are more tangible financial purposes for musical performance. Secondly, they have provided me with a firmer, clearer understanding of this ill-defined but no less poignant “live music experience.” The ineffable power of seeing and sharing live music is essentially the cultivation and dispersal of energy—a collective effervescence—comprised of revelry, various forms of inter- and intrapersonal communion, and a liberating kind of spiritual transcendence that, for some, seems to be unique to live music. Together, musicians and audiences build and broadcast energy that serves a range of spiritual, metaphysical, and phenomenological purposes, and it is this energy and the esoteric functions associated with it that performers report to seek.

I have addressed the second goal slightly less directly. By establishing that the corporate model for live music administration as embodied by Live Nation does not interfere with and in fact facilitates the pursuit of these goals, I have answered my

research question. How does the cold, profiteering corporate mentality of multi-national businesses like Live Nation corrupt the vital, powerful, primal experience of seeing music? It does not, and in fact, quite the opposite is true. Though in some ways it does interfere with musicians' various performance goals, my respondents report that Live Nation's corporate model provides them with the resources necessary to best administer and produce successful live performances. It would appear, then, that my research questions have been answered. I have obtained responses to my driving inquiries, and those answers have helped debunk the initial assumption that produced them. That, then, is the end of that.

“It’s Coming Back Around Again:” complexity and the Live Nation paradox

However, Keith Negus would surely approve when I say that the reality of the relationship between live music, media deregulation, and corporatization is far more textured than my research might at first seem to suggest. While it is true that corporatization has not negatively and has positively affected the pursuit of some musicians' performance goals, my work should not be construed to advocate for the Live Nation model. Indeed, this research leaves a wide range of crucial questions entirely unanswered.

To be clear, I have merely established how *the performers that spoke to me* feel about Live Nation's contributions to the live popular music climate (and, as we will soon see, even this is more complicated than it might seem). In order to more fully assess the overall effect of corporate consolidation and Live Nation's presence in the performance

landscape, we will have to understand their impact on a number of other crucial players and aspects of contemporary popular music that, as of yet, we simply do not.

For one thing, while we know the live music goals of a small sampling of performers, we do not yet know the goals or overall experience vis-à-vis Live Nation of the performers who are denied access to the corporate model of concert promotion and administration. I can't say for sure, but it would expect that female performers, homosexual performers, immigrant performers, performers of color, and other performers who—for whatever reason—struggle to fully avail themselves of Live Nation's beneficial promotional apparatuses have widely divergent perceptions of the corporation's impact on live music than did my respondents.

Similarly, this work does not explore the impact of Live Nation's role on the live music goals of fans. Both what audiences seek—as concertgoers and as citizens—and how the corporation's operational policies and powerful presence within communities facilitate or impede these pursuits have not yet been investigated. Again I am speculating, but it seems reasonable to expect fans to interpret the role of corporate live music promotion differently than do the musicians they pay to see. Without knowing the answers to these and other questions, we cannot accurately gauge the overall effect that media deregulation, consolidation, and corporatization has had on contemporary popular music performance.

Moreover, while I have found that many performers objectively benefit—both financially and spiritually—from the Live Nation model, I have not found that performers have an overall preference for the corporate live music machine (in the form of Live Nation) over the small-scale, local, “mom-and-pop” model. In fact, despite the

resounding consensus among my respondents as to the benefits offered by Live Nation—their superior organization, dwarfing financial resources, and flawlessly efficient mentality—the performers that I spoke with seem to grapple with frustrating and uncomfortable misgivings about speaking of Live Nation in such avowedly positive terms.

I call this situation the Live Nation Paradox. Though performers report that the corporate live music structure is objectively better at facilitating successful performances, they are nonetheless hesitant to embrace the corporate structure or Live Nation as a business partner. My respondents ultimately annunciated discomfort with a duality that is deeply rooted in the initial assumptions that drove my research. In the same way that I assumed The Man, the faceless, unfeeling, ruthless corporate machine, was destroying the American “live music experience,” there seems to be a conflict within performers over their philosophical and personal ethos—both within and outside of the live music sphere—and the financial imperatives of being a performing musician.

“Rick,” for example, identifies a negotiation that he has to make between his personal philosophy and his role and status as a contemporary popular performer. He speaks of his desire to infuse his personal beliefs into his music career:

I try to support smaller operations than big operations. It’s sort of like supporting local organic farming. I don’t need to buy a tomato from California; I live in New York and there are plenty of tomatoes from here. Supporting the local economy is an important thing to do, and when I organize my own tour, I try to call my friends and see what I can pull off.

The preference he expresses here is telling. Ideally for “Rick,” his career as a performer would echo his choices as a consumer. Instead of participating in a decentralizing, delocalizing process by cooperating with a vast, consolidated media

conglomerate, he would prefer—and is occasionally able—to work, as it were, for and with people he knows from communities to which he feels attached.

However, while he reports to have had some success with this approach, the realities of his career and the live music business, and the financial imperatives that drive people like “Rick”—be they musicians, diplomats, or mechanics—to provide for himself and his loved ones do not allow him to achieve his ideal. As he says, in language that echoes many of the findings from Chapter 5:

When you’re booking a 10-day tour, there are a lot of variables, like the (independent) venue might not be able to pull through for whatever reason. Lots of scrambling and disorganization, and say something like that comes up, it can be the difference between making more or less money...

Moreover, he continues, even if—all other things being equal—an independent venue were able to provide the same economic opportunities as one owned and operated by Live Nation, the performer cannot optimize the pursuit of their performance goals at a disorganized, insecure, technologically inferior venue. For all the reasons discussed in Chapter 5, Live Nation/corporate venues better allow performers to fulfill their emotional and spiritual needs than do the types of places that host shows when “Rick” “call[s] his friends and see[s] what [he] can pull off.”

Essentially, respondents like “Rick” imply that they have to sacrifice something in the live music experience. As we will see, there are some powerful exceptions to this rule, but overall, it seems that performers can generally *either* satisfy their personal preferences to support local economies, community scenes, and, as “Brent” puts it, “the little guys,” *or* they can both satisfy their desire for financial stability, and cultivate and share the collective effervescence that drives people like me to passionately follow live music.

If I may speculate further, I got the sense from the tone and type of responses that the performers I spoke with grapple with other related issues. To be clear—none of my respondents directly reported any of the following conflicts. Rather, I am using my own experiences within the live music industry, my experiences with these individual performers, and the nature of their responses within the specific context of our interviews to extrapolate other root causes of the contention and duality that plagued many of their responses.

It seems to me that the inescapable proximity of the pure, almost sacred energy exchange that defines a successful performance to commodity and profits—both for Live Nation and the performer themselves—may make my respondents uncomfortable. There is something almost taboo or blasphemous about using an esoteric, deeply personal event to make money. Indeed, many of my respondents rely on the profits associated with their performances to meet their basic financial needs. I suspect that at least some of the Live Nation Paradox can be attributed to the misgivings people have about bundling their spiritual releases with their economic livelihood.

Does the juxtaposition of emotionally poignant exchange and a profit-first mentality cheapen or degrade the exchange? Is it ethical to profit from a treasured, primal human endeavor like a successful live performance? By valuing and cooperating with Live Nation and other corporate promoters, have performers in some way succumbed to the materialistic or at least profiteering philosophy that drives the corporate model? I suspect that some matrix of these and other questions weigh on my respondents, complicating their relationship with Live Nation and producing a paradoxical dynamic between the performer and the consolidated corporate conglomerate.

Heralds of Change: resolution and promise in the present and future of contemporary popular music performance

An ideal performance setting would take the benefits of the corporate model—sophisticated organizational and transaction arrangements, comfortable environments and treatment for the performer, and high audio and visual production values—but infuse them into the philosophically satisfying but logistically unrealistic context of a local, community oriented, “mom-and-pop,” operation. While performers rarely report that this utopian performance experience exists in their careers, there appears to be a glimmer of hope for the performer within the American live music climate.

To “Bruce,” whose responses were admittedly the most optimistic of my respondents’, there are today abundant opportunities for intrepid and ambitious promoters to “come in, get the right size venue, get a good soundsystem, and [be] smart enough about the business to get everyone paid on time,” and I am inclined to agree. Looking around the contemporary popular performance landscape, I think that there is at least one sector that the corporate model has yet to permeate: the afterparty/rave niche.

Seeing (perhaps rightly) little reason to invest in an often lascivious live music market with an array of associated illegal activity and thus a potential for legal wrangling and financial loss, corporate promoters like Live Nation exercise comparatively little control over this small slice of the live music diaspora.⁸³ As a result, many local, non-corporate promoters across the country with close ties to their communities have been

⁸³ It is true that particularly large after-parties occasionally take place at Live Nation- or corporate-owned venues. Nonetheless, these are rare and do not represent the overall trend within this particular niche.

able to thrive by hosting late-night or all-night performances almost entirely outside of the corporate model.

By no means is this a new development. Musical “subcultures” that (at least initially) thrived on their opposition to mainstream music and society—from disco to hip-hop—crystallized as underground, often guerilla social and musical gatherings that had no backing from any kind of corporate mode of music making or performance. The contemporary late-night/afterparty climate shares a number of similarities to these earlier subcultures, and in fact probably owes a great deal of its success to the pioneering efforts of American disco, hip-hop, and other initially non-corporatized musical movements.

However, it does seem that in some ways, today’s alternative late-night performance options stand apart from their historical forbears. Contemporary after-party music culture takes on various forms across the country, and rarely centers on one type of music or corresponding culture. Often, the promoters, venues, performers, and fans that seem to rally around this kind of performance do not pursue a certain *kind* or *sound* of music, but instead the lattice of philosophical and spiritual goals that the seemingly pure, independent performance of *music itself* can generate.

This occurs in many different forms nationwide. In New York, for example, the DJs and promoters from Dub War NYC have established the nation’s premier monthly dubstep event completely free of any corporate influence. Taking full advantage of the soundsystem at Manhattan’s Club Love—considered by some to be among the best in the world—Joe Nice, Dave Q, and MC Juakali have been disseminating the dynamic electronic music genre since the mid-2000’s to phenomenal local, national, and international renown.

On the other coast, Los Angeles' weekly Low End Theory events have had earned similar accolades. With a wide cast of talented resident DJs, regular guest appearances from some of the world's most exciting performers, and a soundsystem that rivals the one at Club Love (says "Bruce:" "...they bring in the most *banging* system, and they never skimp on the bass."), the Low End Theory sits comfortably at the forefront of a west coast musical revolution that has begun permeating aesthetic sensibilities worldwide, and does so without any influence from Live Nation.

For example, while Live Nation's pursuit of cost-cutting drives them to contract their security services to union-bound personnel who likely have little connection to the music or performance at which they are working, security and in fact all personnel at Low End Theory parties "are just dudes from the neighborhood," that, according to "Bruce," are "mellow and chill, but if someone fucks up, they're going to get thrown out on to the street." This kind of amicable arrangement that host Daddy Kev and others from The Low End Theory have cultivated with their neighbors/contractors affects the mood of a performance, the crowd, and correspondingly, the exchange. Says Bruce, "If you treat the crowd with respect, they'll treat the venue with respect, and that's one thing that Live Nation will never understand."

Through a different lens, the election of President Barack Obama and the regulatory zeal that his administration has shown throughout his first three months in office could have huge implications for the state of all consolidated media conglomerates, including Live Nation. If the current administration's handling of the economic crisis and the collapse of the American automotive industry indicates their general philosophical bent, it may be that the federal government means to restore the guidelines and standards

that Ronald Reagan and the Telecommunications Act of 1996 dismantled. As American life—including the media—becomes increasingly re-regulated, the influence of consolidated media conglomerates like Clear Channel and Live Nation may wane as the federal government enacts and upholds tighter regulations on cross-ownership, collusion, and anti-trust violations. It certainly seems safe to assume that media conglomerates and deregulators face a less receptive government now than they did in 1980 or 1996.

Regardless of the contemporary successes of independent promoters across the country and of the potential for re-regulation during the Obama presidency, my research indicates that we need to adopt a newer, deeper view of corporate structures and their effect on the media products than the view suggested by the prevailing theoretical frameworks. Overall, the US's contemporary live music landscape is a rich, sophisticated, truly wonderful sphere of public life, and we need a unified understanding that somehow reflects this. It will be the task of future researchers to reconcile the financial, aesthetic, and corresponding spiritual and phenomenological issues involved with negotiating contemporary popular performance, but for now, it seems appropriate to appreciate these issues and their complexity, find a good spot by the speakers, and just enjoy the show.

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Appendix A:

Thanks a lot for agreeing to help me with my research. I want to remind you that everything we discuss today will be kept confidential. If, for any reason, you feel uncomfortable answering anything I ask you, please just tell me and we can turn the tape recorder off for a minute or we can stop the interview—you are under no obligation to answer anything. I'd like to talk to you about two things: first, the ways in which you generally think about performing, and then your experiences performing in venues that are owned, operated, or in some way directly affiliated with Live Nation or other corporate promotion agencies.

I'd like to begin with a regular performance for you...

Could you tell me about performing?

1. How do you feel when you are on stage in front of people?
2. How do you think about your shows? What purposes do they have for you?
3. How is performing different from the other areas of your career as a musician?
4. What do you like most about it? Least? Have these things changed over time?
5. What's the best show you've performed? Worst?

How do you assemble your performance?

1. What types of things are important for you in your own performance?
2. Who is responsible for arranging everything? Is that the best way for you to do it? Does it have any drawbacks?
3. Have you ever had anyone tell you that you couldn't use or have provided to you specific elements of your show? Who denied these things? What reason did they provide? Were you OK with that?

4. What are some of the challenges in keeping an audience and yourself both happy?

Cool. Now let's talk about your experiences with Live Nation;

When was the last time you performed in a Live Nation (or otherwise corporate-owned) venue?

1. What was that show like?
2. At what point were you aware of who owned the venue?
3. Was there anything about that/those experiences that, if you didn't know who owned the venue, would have suggested to you that you were going to be performing in a corporate-owned venue?
4. When did you first learn about Live Nation's corporate practices?

Tell me a little bit about the differences you notice between performing in a Live Nation/Corporate owned venue and one not owned by an out-of-town business?

1. Do/how does the organization and promotion of the show differ?
2. Do/how does your interactions with venue staff differ?
3. Do/how does the audience differ? The audience experience?
4. How does your compensation at Live Nation venues differ from your compensation at other venues?
5. How does it feel being on stage at a corporate-owned venue?
6. Do you have a preference between the two types of venues?
7. What is the best part about being in a Live Nation-owned venue? Worst?

So it seems to me that Live Nation has had a negative effect on live music. They make it less profitable and more difficult for independent musicians to play at the venues their venues, and overall, that is a bad thing for musicians like you. Do you think that is accurate?

Well, I'd like to thank you very much for your time. I have asked most of the questions that I had for you today. Would you like to share any additional information with me before we wrap up?

What have I left out?

Appendix B:

To do this kind of analysis would require, among other things, gathering quantitative data—such as wide numerical disparities between the number of female performers/performers of color selling lots of records and the number of female performers/performers of color who play shows at Live Nation venues—that does not yet exist. Moreover, a researcher would have to acquire similar data indicating that the independent competitors have vastly different, more enlightened business practice—in other words, the researcher would have to gather data that indicates that non-corporate venues and promoters tend to put on higher ratios of shows with female or non-white performers than do corporate promoters and venues. This kind of analysis would probably be among the necessary first steps to proving that Live Nation has had an overall sexist or racist effect on the live music landscape. Acquiring and analyzing data like this would be a massive undertaking, one that enormously trumps the scale and ideology of this project and one that requires an overhaul of the work here. Ultimately, this type of analysis would demand an entirely different and more specific research question like, “Does Live Nation make it more difficult for female musicians/musicians of color to succeed in contemporary popular live music,” an interesting question to be sure but one I am explicitly not addressing here.

Appendix C:

Chapter 1:

“Y’all enjoy the show...” is a reference to Sound Tribe Sector 9 (STS9) bassist David Murphy, who introduces band’s performances with the phrase.

Chapter 2:

“Don’t get it twisted” is the name of a song by 2pac.

“Great Release” is the name of a song by LCD Soundsystem.

“Come Together, Right Now” is from the Rolling Stones song “Come Together.”

“Chaos Theory” is the name of a song by Telepath.

Chapter 3:

The Blueprint is the name of an album by Jay-Z.

“Some Things Last a Long Time” is the name of a song by Beach House.

“That 80’s High” is from the Cool Kids song “80’s High”

“’96 Gon’ Be That Year” is from the Outkast song “Elevators (Me and You)”

“Yeah That’s the Jump Off” is regularly-used phrase in hip hop music, but the reference I had in mind was from the Super Chron Flight Brothers song “Bob Hope.”

“Something in the Way of Things” is the name of a song by the Roots.

Chapter 4:

“You Can Get it if You Really Want” is the name of a song by Jimmy Cliff.

“Disseshowedo” is the name of a song by Souls of Mischief.

“Put One Up for My Crew” is from the Aesop Rock song “NY Electric”

“Live and Direct” has many popular music references, but the one I had in mind is from the Ween album “All Request Live”

“Baraka” is the name of a song by STS9 (and is my favorite song).

“If It Ain’t Rough, It Ain’t Right” is the name of a song by Pete Rock and CL Smooth.

“Industry Rule #4080” is from A Tribe Called Quest song “Check The Rhime”

Chapter 5:

You Think It’s Like This But Really It’s Like This is the name of an album by Mirah

“Can it Be All So Simple” is the name of a song by Wu-Tang Clan.

“Safe From Harm” is the name of a song by Massive Attack.

“The Bass Tone is Merlin, Where You At?” is from the Aesop Rock song “Save Yourself.”

“Outtasite (Out of Mind)” is the name of a song by Wilco.

Chapter 6:

“The End is No End” is the name of a song by The Strokes.

“Its Coming Back Around Again” is from the Rage Against the Machine song “People of the Sun.”

Heralds of Change is the production duo of Mike Slott and Hudson Mohawke.

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