

It's a Hard Knock Life! How can we make management and booking careers more sustainable for (new) professionals?

Moderator: Lynn Dewitte

Speakers: Zahra Elder, Cédric Daelman, Lobke Aelbrecht & Michael Wolteche

Goal: Talking about booking and management agencies in the ecosystem

Introduction

Good to have attention for it, because it all is work behind the scenes but important stakeholder in the scene, and making things possible for artists and the ecosystem in general.

The ecosystem is developing a lot, so it affects also managers and bookers.

It is about sharing the love and interest with other people and programmers. Try to force people to think in another way and not only to love or book what they already know.

Building a sustainable and long time network is important end essential.

As a Wallonian booking agency it is more difficult to get gigs in Flanders, and for that is important to engage Flemish bookers in a Wallonian agency.

One of the goals of Lobke / Nest is to make it better for the whole different sector, not for a specific artist or venue. Maybe naïve but feels like the right thing to do. It is about talent developing, for exemple Aviation trajet for mid careers. She wants to make herself 'missable', and that these artist go along with the input they got. Zwermssessies: workshops for musicians (How building a fanbase?), bringing them together and peer to peer learning. Helping venues with residencies when they don't have the time to support the artist. Nest wants to help them both to give sth more.

What has changed last years?

Politics

Geopolitical change that has local effects, economical crisis, new Belgian politics (new tax since 2026, not electric vehicles tour > additional tax (25%) on all expenses for that tour. Also immigration rules that are changing have an impact on the scene if you work with international musicians.

Audience

The behavior of the audience, given the overload of possible activities. It has become much harder to engage people and to build up an audience for your artist and venue. Challenge to keep attracting new people. Making (good) music is not enough anymore, you also need to think about storytelling, branding, networking. And all is going very fast.

Desire to bigger and well known names.

Financially

Cuts of funding (national and international).

Production cost that increase heavily.

You need to invest and take risk without knowing if there will be enough return.

That whole dynamic makes it harder for all stakeholders to do it on a sustainable way.

Headliners earn big money, but others in the scene are often underpaid.

Programming

Community and collectives become more important, also in curating festivals for example.

A lot of music bars have disappeared > less opportunities for artists

How to choose the artist to work with?

The live energy is important to work with a band or musician. A connection with the project is necessary.

First steps already taken, first booking realized, build an own network already? After that the agent / booker can add extra's from their experience. It is an exchange between both that gets it successful. Need to be mutual respect.

The financial impact or potential.

Artist should be unique and talented.

Attention to gender.

Do we need to take into account what the impact is of algorithms?

How can we make it more (financially) sustainable?

It is challenging, if you need to realize your income from it. Many people in the scene combine it with another paid job(s).

More organizations become hybrid and combine a lot of things to keep it realistic.

Most of the people are dedicated and don't expect to make a lot of money.

Grants / subsidy for the government often is necessary to keep it going.

It has to do a lot of loving and fighting for music!

Staying to invest in the headliners for tomorrow. Focus on the local talent and highlight the talent we have here.

All panel members are engaged to keep doing this for several more years.

What kind of support is needed? more support for export? more training/mentoring?

We need to share more information and knowledge with others in the scene. Create network and community and try to change the system a little bit.

Technology and tools (software / platform) that can be shared.

The network, finding the right people is important.