

Aussie/NZ Touring Biz Rebounds With Strong 2022 On Horizon

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SPECIAL

Australia's major tour promoters are looking at a comeback in 2022, even if there is varying opinion as to how buoyant it will be, and which part of the year before boxes are ticked.

"I'm feeling very optimistic, next year is looking significant," says Roger Field, Melbourne-based president, Asia Pacific, at Live Nation.

"We're seeing really positive signs in North America and the UK, particularly after vaccination drives there, which allow for some solid planning."

Most assuring to Field is that 2020 studies that warned Australian crowds were reluctant to return to places of mass gatherings, have not held up.

"That's certainly not a trend we're seeing at the moment," Field emphasizes. "We're seeing fantastic responses to things we're putting on sale."

Field's premise is that locked-in fans reflected on the exhilaration of sharing the live experience,



CALL IT A COMEBACK:
Benee livestreaming
from Spark Arena.

and that the value of live entertainment increased over the past 14 months. LN data shows 83% of fans are keeping tickets for rescheduled shows

and 65% for rescheduled festivals. 95% are likely to attend a show when restrictions are lifted; 64% plan to attend even more live music events.

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Courtesy: Live Nation

"I don't see that demand waning," Field said. Dion Brant, chief operating officer at Frontier Touring, however, forecasts that Australia's closure of international borders may hurt global artists: "It's going to be hard for us to get exemptions based on economic impact to get a major act into the country, or exemptions from the 14-day quarantine."

Quarantining for stadium and arena acts with greater personnel and entourages will be costly, time-consuming, and other music markets are opening up and offering dates without stay-ins.

"I hope common sense prevails and we can announce some tours, even if they're a handful, and even if they're the ones who were announced and then rescheduled," Brant suggests.

"If we can get them in by this summer (2021), and the domestic acts continue to have their moments in the sun and do really good business, we can bring the percentages up... But it won't be full strength until mid-2022."

Brent Eccles of Eccles Entertainment, which topped *Pollstar's* Q1 Promoters chart, says the quarantine issue will be affected by genre. Solo EDM acts and comedians will potentially get a look-in first.

Geoff Jones, chief executive of TEG, reveals Guns N' Roses and KISS on the slate for November. "We thought there'd be a sense of

normality by then. We still think those shows can occur ... if the artist is prepared to quarantine for 14 days. That's the biggest concern about international touring at the moment. The cost that comes with it almost makes touring, in some sense, not cost effective. But we're determined to have a go, and we're hoping that all artists and their crew will be vaccinated."

Jones predicts a huge spike in Australians getting vaccinated. "With that will come confidence in public health officials having more leniency over people coming in from overseas who have been vaccinated as well."

After the March 2020 shut-down, most of the promoters kept staff on reduced hours to prepare for a return, and looked for new options. At TEG, "We lost 97% of our revenue. We took the opportunity to review our operations and we'll come out of COVID a much better company," says Jones. "We engage better as people."

"We also took the strategy of growth by acquiring a variety of companies because we wanted to invest in growth."

Live Nation Australia & New Zealand execs challenged themselves to diversify content. In New Zealand the company tackled everything from a sellout Van Gogh Alive exhibition and the local launch of the promoter's global The Ones To Watch competition, to the interactive Instagram experience Happy Place at its Spark



FIRST COMIC STANDING:
British comic Daniel Sloss
whose HUBRIS Tour
sold 40,460 tickets over
32 shows

Arena in Auckland. The arena was where singer Benee livestreamed the final of eight sellout shows. On the tour, 20% of crowds travelled from the rest of the country.

In Melbourne to bypass indoor crowd limitations, LN set up April Sun, a pop up outdoor venue allowing 4,000 at each of eleven shows.

Frontier Touring expected 2020 to be another of those golden years which sees it routinely chart high in *Pollstar* box office reports.

Troy Edge / Courtesy: Daniel Sloss

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With over 100 events, including half a dozen major tours, stopped in their tracks, it was late founder Michael Gudinski who moved in the space of one weekend to divert staff and resources to TV production.

This included 28 acts on primetime's free-to-air Nine's Music From The Home Front, a livestreaming series The State of Music on the Victorian government's website, and The Set on ABC-TV which showcased 170 acts over two seasons.

These productions didn't necessarily make Frontier's parent company Mushroom Group much money, but Brant says they kept staff busy and put money into the hands of musicians, agents and road crews.

After losing a year's worth of 1,000 bookings, promoter, venue operator and artist manager Century Entertainment turned its venues – including the Enmore, Metro and Factory Theatres – to cabaret-style seating and table drinks delivery to fit in with authorities' social distancing requirements to be among the first in Sydney to reopen.

Head of touring, Tom Downey, says their return has been strong.

"But with snap border closures, slow vaccine roll out and international borders staying closed until middle of next year it's really tricky to see an end to this."

"With little to no roadmap being handed down by state and federal governments, a return to true 100% capacity is unfortunately unknown."

Century Entertainment had a success story with British comic Daniel Sloss whose HUBRIS Tour sold 40,460 tickets over 32 shows in 30 days and grossed near Aus. \$2 million (US \$1.55 million). An outdoor festival set to 50,000 was the biggest in the country.

His London-based manager Marlene Zwickler, whose company MZA co-produced the shows, announced Sloss will return 2022 after runs in the US and UK to honour a handful of shows delayed to sudden border closures. She plans to add some 3,000-cap shows on the East Coast and do 10 days in larger venues in New Zealand.

Sloss filmed his Netflix and HBO specials at the Enmore Theatre. Zwickler explains his large fan base Down Under: "I grew up in Australia. The Aussies love honest hard hitting comedy based in observations and truths and that's pretty much Daniel in a nutshell."

Australians' slow take-up of vaccines so far has meant music venues around the country remain at 50% to 75% capacity – which operators say is financially unfeasible and leads many to predict they won't survive the year – but that is changing. 🌟

CENTURY
EVENTS • VENUES • ARTISTS

Huge congratulations to Daniel Sloss for his massively successful 2021 Australian Hubris tour.


Despite it being cut short by pandemic issues, 40,460 tickets and \$2 million GBO is still an incredible achievement and Century is proud to have produced the biggest indoor tour of any genre since lockdown.

Century is an award-winning, proudly independent Australasian Touring & Management company that also produces a number of Australia's best comedy festivals, owns flagship Sydney venues and represents a dynamic range of comedians, writers and other creative artists from around the globe.

For Touring, Comedy Festival or Venue enquiries, contact
info@centuryentertainment.com.au

CENTURY & MZA PROUDLY PRESENT

DANIEL SLOSS: HUBRIS



THANK YOU to everyone at CENTURY for putting together my incredible 2021 Australian tour. To get to play 32 packed shows in 30 days to over 40,000 folks despite all the Covid challenges is a phenomenal result and you guys are absolutely the best!

Thank you so much and see you in 2022!

xx Daniel