



To my Tupelo Friends and Family,

Tupelo Music Hall is blessed to be operating in a business-friendly town and a state that is carefully handling the Covid-19 pandemic. With a full schedule of Drive-In events and shows this summer, we are literally one of the only concert promoters in the country that is still operating. Although we are currently busy, the music and event industry as a whole is in an anxiety ridden free-fall as promoters, artists, bus drivers, stage hands, engineers, agents, and every other person related to producing events scrambles to find an answer to the question "when will this end?" Because I am in the process of marking all of our October shows "To Be Rescheduled", I thought that it might be a good time to address this.

I've been on a lot of "zoom" calls with venue owners, artists, agents, and other industry professionals over the last few weeks. I've spent an equal amount of time on committee calls and talking to people heading up trade organizations. Tupelo Music Hall is a member of many industry groups that are doing everything they can to get answers but there aren't any definitive answers to be had. Some venues are opening at a very diminished capacity. Others are breaking the rules and opening at capacities not approved thinking that making more money will solve the problem. Depending on the region, the state, and the town, you might hear about venues opening and then closing. I am often asked why, if the State of NH allows us to be open, aren't we keeping our indoor shows? I understand these seem like easy questions to answer but nothing could be further from the truth. It has taken some time and many conversations to get a foggy understanding of where this train is headed and I'm writing to inform you that a pattern is evolving.

The entertainment and event business is unlike any other industry. We aren't purchasing items for resale. We invest in relationships that take years to foster. We can't replace one item with another if stock is low. We sell experiences, not items. Our "stock" consists of artists who perform in large rooms full of fans and, frankly, most of those people (on both sides of the stage) are fearful of getting sick, worried about paying their bills, and concerned about loved ones dealing with the same issues. If we just had an "end date" that we could plan for, things would be a lot different. Instead, we have escalations in infection across the country and more unrest than when venues closed in March, killing people's confidence in attending indoor events for an extended period. Patrons across the country are saying they won't attend shows without a vaccine. Artists are starting to reschedule shows out a year or more. We have industry professionals telling folks they believe our industry won't recover for two years or more. So, you might ask, what needs to happen in order to resume operations?

Three things need to be present for venues to open again. First, we need to be able to safely operate at a capacity that is financially viable. Second, we need to have artists willing to go on the road in tour

busses and play shows. Third, we need to have a big enough population willing to purchase tickets to indoor events. It's a three-legged stool and it will be a while before we have all three legs. Currently, we have none of these legs and even less confidence that we will have any of them any time soon.

So, what does this mean for the future of venues? In order for venues to open, we will need Americans to wear their masks and distance whenever they can. We need Governors to consistently make the right decisions because there is no coordinated federal response for them to rely on. We need to slow the spread, build confidence, and get the public, politicians, and artists comfortable with being in crowds of people. This will take time. And, once we get there, we will need 2-3 months for the remaining people in this industry to build new tours that can route efficiently across the United States to the remaining venues. Because of the extended timeline for infection, we are now faced with a more sobering question: Will there be enough independent venues still open so that artists can tour? NIVA (National Independent Venue Association) reports that 90% of America's venues will permanently close by mid-October if things don't change because these venues are depleting all of their cash refunding tickets, paying their rent and covering other costs such as insurance and equipment payments. Without any money to pay artists, it is being reported that 90% of venues will be forced to close before Winter.

When this all began in March, I recorded a video interview talking about how the industry literally disappeared in a span of 12 hours. I talked about what patrons can do to help keep their favorite venues alive. This protracted situation has put venues in a much more precarious position than they were 4 months ago. Tupelo Music Hall has been lucky to have a great outdoor Drive-In schedule full of shows, employees that want us to succeed, and patrons who strongly support us but we are one of only a few promoters able to pay their bills this summer. Please remember this as we enter the Fall. It is very likely that shows you had rescheduled once or twice will be rescheduled again (and again) as the industry places its bets on when patrons and artists think it will be safe to go inside and the government allows venues to reopen at a capacity that is not only safe but economically possible. And please understand that venues will be doing the absolute best they can after a long, financially destructive period to inform patrons (when they have information to share), pay bills (without any income), and stay relevant during a time when they are closed and fighting for their lives to reopen when this all passes.