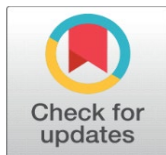
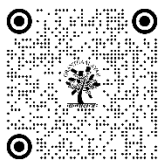


PROBLEMS OF LIVE MUSIC CONCERTS: A STUDY OF NORTH EAST INDIA

Samidha Vedabala ¹ , Dibya Jyoti Baraily ²

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Music, Sikkim University, Sikkim, India

² Research Scholar, Department of Music, Sikkim University, Sikkim, India



Received 30 May 2023

Accepted 22 August 2023

Published 24 August 2023

Corresponding Author

Samidha Vedabala, svedabala@cus.ac.in

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.504](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.504)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2023 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

The findings reveal several key challenges encountered in organizing and executing live music concerts in North-East India. Limited sponsorship opportunities' and 'disappointing government funding' emerge as significant hurdles for concert organizers. The study also uncovers a preference for artists from mainland India over local talent, attributed to their consistent preparation and higher performance standards. Moreover, the study highlights the lack of equipped auditoriums and the need to import amplification equipment, leading to increased costs for organizers. This study employs a qualitative approach to explore the problems faced by live music concerts in North East India. The research had qualitative interviews with concert organizers, performers, and attendees. The research further underscores the impact of weather conditions on outdoor concerts, as the region experiences frequent rain. It emphasizes the importance of having contingency plans and backup venues to ensure uninterrupted performances. Additionally, the study reveals the limited culture of purchasing concert tickets among the local population, requiring tailored ticket distribution strategies. These findings shed light on the complexities of organizing successful live music concerts in North East India and provide insights for concert organizers, policymakers, and local artists. The research calls for enhanced support, improved infrastructure, and a stronger platform for local talent to thrive in the vibrant music scene of the region.

Keywords: Live Music Concerts, North East India, Challenges, Concert Organization

1. INTRODUCTION

A concert is a live music performance that takes place in front of an audience. It can feature a solo performer, known as a recital, or a musical ensemble such as an orchestra, choir, or band. Concerts can be held in various locations, ranging from intimate private residences and small nightclubs to dedicated concert halls, amphitheatres, parks, and even large multipurpose arenas and stadiums. During indoor concerts in larger venues, often referred to as arena or amphitheater concerts, musicians typically perform on a raised stage, although sometimes a designated area on the floor can be used instead. Professional audio equipment is commonly used to ensure optimal sound quality and provide live event accompaniment. In the past, concerts were the primary means of experiencing live

music before the advent of recorded music. Today, professional tour promoters handle the logistical aspects of organizing large performances or concert tours, including arranging musicians, selecting venues, managing equipment, and overseeing ticket sales to accommodate the audience. The nature of a concert can vary depending on factors such as the musical genre, individual performers, and the venue itself. Regardless of the genre, concerts can encompass a wide range of styles, moods, and sound levels. Musicians and bands often dress, style their hair, and behave in a manner that reflects their specific music and stage persona. Regular attendees of a particular venue may develop a distinct style that characterizes the concert scene there. Concerts offer a unique and immersive experience for both musicians and audiences alike, providing an opportunity to witness live performances, connect with artists, and enjoy the shared energy and excitement of a live music event [Toelle & Sloboda \(2021\)](#).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Music concerts hold a crucial place in urban culture as they bring together musicians and audiences for a unique live performance experience that involves vocals and various musical instruments. The economic impact of concerts is significant as it fosters musical creativity, cultural vibrancy, and talent development. Over the past decade, there has been growing attention in academia and policy circles regarding the connection between live music and concrete music planning. This increased focus is evident through the rising number of music reports and analytical methods. However, it is worth noting that these reports often overlook music events that take place outside traditional venues, such as festivals, pop-up concerts, street concerts, and live music in pubs [Van der Hoeven & Hitters \(2019\)](#). These alternative music settings play an important role in the overall music ecosystem and deserve more attention in research and planning discussions. In the field of musicology, the study of jazz, rock, and popular music is relatively new compared to the long-standing tradition of classical musicology, which spans 150 years [Kajanova \(2013\)](#). The exploration of these diverse genres can enrich our understanding of music as a whole and provide valuable insights into the cultural and historical contexts of contemporary music.

Behr, Brennan, and Cloonan have examined the weaknesses of live music and the economic challenges faced by performers and organizers. They highlight the importance of infrastructure for live concerts and emphasize the cultural value of live music in various settings, from pubs to open spaces. Their research concludes that while large-scale arena projects often receive public investment due to their positive impact on local businesses, supporting smaller venues for live events also has long-term effects as it nurtures talent that eventually fills larger spaces [Behr et al. \(2016\)](#). In a separate study, Tim and Dubber theorize about online Jazz fandom activities related to live music and present experimental work conducted with jazz promoters and musicians. They explore how live music is situated within the activities of fandom and aim to maximize the dissemination of modular material while encouraging jazz fans to share and promote online content. Specifically, Tim and Dubber focus on the lead-up to a final event where live music activities culminate in a one-off performance lasting an hour or less. They emphasize the artists' characters and their journey through the development of music, including meeting collaborators, learning to work together, composing, developing, rehearsing, and finally performing the songs. These narratives form the basis of their study [Wall & Dubber \(2010\)](#).

Recent developments in media production processes, social media, and participatory content creation have brought about a more nuanced and complex understanding. This has raised new questions regarding narrative, professionalism, and agency, which researchers aim to explore in their upcoming experimental work [Dubber \(2011\)](#). In their paper, Wall and Dubber analyze the characteristics of the contemporary music consumer, considering both live performances and pre-recorded music across various popular genres. Through empirical analysis and employing a bivariate specification, they profile both the typical and frequent music consumer. By examining the demand for music in its dual role as a supplier of live concerts and pre-recorded music, they gain insights into the evolving institutional landscape and recent changes in audience presence [Montoro-Pons & Cuadrado-García \(2011\)](#). The rising property market has posed a threat to artists, musicians, and individuals working in the cultural industries, making it increasingly challenging to find affordable housing and performance spaces. In Sydney, this issue has been compounded by a decline in live music concerts, partly due to alternative revenue streams for publicans, such as trivia nights, slot machines, and karaoke. Even popular music clusters have recognized the unique requirements and advantages of supporting the local Australian live music industries. Additionally, there has been a noticeable shift towards a more festival-like atmosphere, altering the traditional rock pub experience.

Live music performers and organizers face various challenges, including the acceleration of concert prices, income concentration among performers, copyright protection, ranking systems, the secondary ticket market, and technological advancements [Connolly & Krueger \(2006\)](#). Behr, Brennan, and Cloonan have examined the distinctions between intrinsic and instrumental arts policies. They emphasize that discussions about the value of art remain abstract unless one actually experiences it. The value attached to art goes beyond economic considerations. While venues and policymakers must consider the economics of the situation to ensure sustainability, it is crucial to continue offering transcendent experiences that audiences desire. This can attract commercial patronage, government support, or a combination of both. The research findings strongly indicate that connecting with art is a fundamental aspect of human experience, enriching even the most mundane aspects of life. Policies that disregard this are unlikely to benefit venues like the Queen's Hall or any other stakeholders [Behr et al. \(2016\)](#).

The above literature pointed out some key elements and aspects commonly associated with live music concerts:

- **Venue and Stage Setup:** Concerts can take place in various venues, such as stadiums, arenas, theaters, clubs, or outdoor spaces. The stage is set up with lighting equipment, sound systems, and visual effects to enhance the performance and create an engaging atmosphere.
- **Performers:** Live concerts feature talented musicians or bands who perform their music in front of the audience. These performers may include singers, instrumentalists, bands, or orchestras. They bring their unique style and energy to the stage, connecting with the audience through their music.
- **Live Instrumentation:** The musicians play their instruments live, creating a dynamic and authentic sound. This can include guitars, drums, keyboards, brass, or woodwind instruments, and more, depending on the genre and style of music being performed. The live instrumentation adds an element of spontaneity and excitement to the concert.

- **Crowd Interaction:** A live concert is a two-way experience, with the performers interacting with the audience and vice versa. Artists often engage the crowd through spoken banter, encouraging them to sing along, clap, or dance. This interaction creates a sense of connection and shared energy between the performers and the audience.
- **Visual Effects and Stage Presence:** Live concerts often incorporate visual effects, including lighting displays, video projections, and stage designs, to enhance the visual impact of the performance. The artists' stage presence, including their movements, gestures, and overall charisma, adds to the excitement and entertainment value of the concert.
- **Atmosphere and Energy:** Concerts are known for their electric atmosphere, with the combination of live music, enthusiastic audience participation, and the collective energy in the venue. The shared experience of enjoying music together creates a unique and memorable atmosphere that can be both uplifting and transformative.

Whether it's a small intimate show or a large-scale stadium performance, live music concerts provide a platform for artists to showcase their talent, connect with fans, and create an unforgettable experience for everyone involved.

3. PROBLEM OF THE RESEARCH

Organizing live music concerts in North-East India faces numerous challenges. The research aims to explore and address the obstacles that hinder the successful execution of such concerts, including limited sponsorship opportunities, disappointing government funding, preference for mainland Indian artists over local talent, inadequate infrastructure, and the impact of weather conditions on outdoor events. By investigating these issues and proposing collaborative solutions, the research seeks to enhance the music scene in North-East India and ensure the preservation of its unique cultural identity through live music performances.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The Research has the following objectives:

- 1) To identify the key challenges faced by concert organizers, performers, and attendees in organizing and executing live music concerts in North-East India.
- 2) To evaluate the collaborative approach that involves performers, organizers, and government agencies to address the identified challenges in North-East India.

5. METHODOLOGY

The current study is an exploratory study that focuses on the issues surrounding live music concerts in North East India. The states that were included in the study were Assam, Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Manipur. The study used mixed methods with a combination of quantitative and qualitative in the analysis and interpretations. It also adopted methodological triangulation. A combination of primary and secondary data were used in the investigation. Primary data collection, or information obtained directly from sources, was done using online surveys and field research methods. While secondary sources were gathered

from a variety of places, including libraries, online resources, and published literature including books, journal articles, and unpublished research work, etc.

- **Data Collection**

Data was collected through online questionnaires, personal interviews and focused group discussion with the musicians from different genres.

- **Online Questionnaire**

The study is forced to rely on online data collecting because of the lockdown brought on by the COVID

19 epidemic. With the use of 15 probing questions that were both open-ended and closed-ended, a structured questionnaire was created. The survey was created using Google Form, and the link was shared with well known musicians and organizers of the area. There were 89 respondents in all, 83% (N=74) of whom responded to all the questions, and 10% (N=09), who only responded to the closed-ended questions. Only seven per cent of respondents (N=06) responded to both open-ended and closed-ended questions.

- **Interviews**

Out of all the different interview techniques, the study's primary data were gathered using a semi-structured interview schedule with both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions were used to assess the respondents' socioeconomic status and musical profile (including age, genres of music they perform, employment, etc.). To comprehend their experiences at the music events they perform at, an in depth interview was necessary before the open-ended questions could be answered. Qualitative information was gathered through the in-depth interview in the form of stories, experiences, and case studies. Group discussions and occasionally casual conversations with the musicians and music event organizers were held in order to better understand the challenges surrounding the organization of music events and the role of the government. Most interviews are conducted through video conference calls using Google Meet or Skype. Audio calls were also used occasionally.

- **Focused Group discussion**

Three focused group discussions for the study took place in Gangtok and Darjeeling. In Darjeeling because the researcher visited a few musicians from Shillong and Nagaland in a local concert. The debate included five to eight musicians (some of whom also organize concerts) and organizers. Being a performer himself, the researchers have many more informal discussions about the various components of music concerts after concerts or during rehearsals.

- **Participants**

Purposive sampling strategies were used, taking into account the nature of the investigation. The practice of purposeful sampling aids in locating and choosing individuals or groups of individuals who have expertise or experience with phenomena of interest. The artists/performers in the sample came from a variety of musical genres, including folk, popular, classical, etc. It is important to note that the audience members' opinions were not taken into account in the current study, which solely involved the artist and event organizers. In accordance with research ethics, the respondents were contacted in advance, told of the study's goals, and given the opportunity to provide consent for an interview.

Data Analysis: Data from the focused group discussion and also the interview were both coded and analyzed in various ways. Out of the narrative analysis and also the described facts, the conclusions were reached.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Organizing a successful concert requires significant effort and involves numerous elements and individuals. Adequate planning is essential to prevent any obstacles. While live music performances often encounter challenges for both musicians and organizers, the role of organizers is crucial for the event's success. Some issues are common to all live concerts, while others are specific to hilltop venues. The fundamental prerequisite for hosting a concert in the hills is securing funding or sponsorship. In the case of hilltop concerts, three parties are involved in making them possible. In the hilly regions of north-east India, it is common for private organizations to host musical performances, with a few exceptions. As tourism plays a significant role in the local economy, private venues, including hotels, regularly organize music events. However, most of these performances take place indoors, such as in bars and pubs. Nevertheless, there are also live performances organized by private companies, firms, private banks, and affluent city residents. Additionally, religious institutions like temples host live music events known as Bhajans and Puranas, with the latter typically lasting five to six days or even longer. Gospel music performances are also hosted in the city's churches. Organizing live music events requires a substantial budget, and sponsorship and ticket sales are typically the primary sources of funding. Sponsors in the regional live music ecosystem include smaller businesses, promoters, venues, and festivals. The information gathered from the study's participants, who provided their informed opinions, supports the fact that private organizers are responsible for the majority of performances, followed by individuals and government groups. There are various components that are important for making profit out of a concert. Those includes

- 1) **Selection of artist:** The performer is undoubtedly the heart of a concert, as people attend primarily to experience the artistry of the performing artist. Therefore, selecting the right performer for a concert that aims to generate revenue requires careful consideration. Sponsors also have a vested interest in this choice.
- 2) **Selection of genre:** In the hill regions, popular music takes precedence when it comes to live performances. As previously mentioned, rock and pop groups enjoy great popularity among the audience. On the other hand, local traditional/folk music and other forms of art music have a lesser following compared to mainstream music. The frequency of performances featuring Indian classical music, semi-classical music, or Western classical music is relatively low. However, there have been occasional instances where a small number of promoters have organized ghazal concerts in the past, featuring renowned artists like Pankaj Udhas. These concerts have proven to be highly successful, as the artist's name itself becomes a brand that attracts a substantial audience and generates significant revenue for the promoters. Therefore, making the right choice of artists and genres is crucial for the success of a musical concert.
- 3) **Stage/venue arrangement:** Organizing live performances requires a specific setting and setup, and the lack of well-equipped auditoriums poses a significant challenge. Building large auditoriums is difficult due to the limited space and challenging geographic locations in the hills. As a result, venues are often unable to accommodate a large audience. Another obstacle faced by concert organizers is the high cost of purchasing amplification equipment, which needs to be sourced from distant locations like Kolkata

and Delhi since they are not readily available in local markets. Moreover, compared to other Indian cities, the relatively smaller population in the hills makes it challenging to attract a sizable audience. Furthermore, concert organizers participating in the study have highlighted the scarcity of technicians proficient in managing concert amplification equipment. It is necessary for local organizers to hire technicians for major concerts, adding to their responsibilities and expenses.

4) Promotion/advertisement: The audience holds utmost importance in any event, and the concert producer bears the responsibility for their satisfaction [King \(2009\)](#). While a concert promoter oversees every aspect of the show, it is crucial to emphasize the expansion of the concert or event's promotional reach. In today's landscape, a concert promoter must be equally proactive both online and offline to attract the largest possible audience. A music performance can be promoted in a variety of ways.

- Sending Emails
- Press Release
- Connecting with the Radio
- Social Media promotion
- Flyers and posters
- Staging the personal appearance etc.

5) Ticketing: Selling tickets to the performance or concert is a direct method of generating income. However, in the study region, there are few scheduled concerts where tickets can be purchased. Unlike other Indian cities, the research participants' observations indicate that people in the hills are not accustomed to buying concert tickets. Moreover, considering the location of the concert and the local population, it is unrealistic to expect significant financial gains from ticket sales alone [Westgate \(2020\)](#). Many of the artists involved in the study admitted that they have never performed at an event where ticket sales were a component, although they have performed outside of the hills. Due to these factors, specific ticket distribution techniques, such as in-person or online sales, need to be carefully planned, as they may require hiring staff or incurring additional expenses.

6.1. DIFFICULTIES IN MUSIC CONCERTS

1) Financial Constraints: Insufficient sponsorship is a significant challenge faced in the hills when it comes to organizing concerts. Concert organizers must put in extensive effort to secure funding [Holt \(2010\)](#). Among the various aspects of concert planning, one of the most challenging tasks is to stay within the allocated budget and avoid overspending, as it directly impacts the event's profitability [O'Reilly et al. \(2014\)](#). Many concert planners agree that their primary hurdle is maintaining a strict budget. Poor budgeting or unforeseen cost escalations during the planning stage often led to overspending. This includes all financial aspects, such as artist selection, venue setup, promotional efforts, and ticketing. Efforts must be made to carefully manage expenses throughout the entire planning process to ensure a financially successful concert.

2) No Special Music Organizer: The majority of music concerts, even when sponsored by other organizers, are primarily organized by musicians themselves. According to the study's respondents, there is a limited

presence of skilled music organizers in the city. Musicians often take on the responsibility of concert planning either as a group or independently. However, their lack of expertise in commercial and concert planning can directly impact the overall success of the performance. Organizers who are not musicians may struggle with managing expenses and fulfilling other requirements related to musical arrangements.

Regarding costs, they typically include personnel expenses, venue rents, equipment costs, and band fees. In some cases, musicians have noted instances where the individuals operating the microphone or amplifier lacked competence. The concert's host and anchor also faced difficulties in correctly pronouncing names and musical terminology, as highlighted by one of the interviewees Mr. Deepak.

- 3) **Space constraints:** Considering audience accessibility, the majority of musical performances take place in metropolitan environments. The little towns perched on the hills face unique issues, including:
 - **Lack of parking space:** A major parking space shortage exists in most of the cities of north-east India. Strict driving regulations in cities make it difficult to load and unload equipment and instruments for audiences.
 - **Cost of the Venue:** All concert venues, with the exception of government ones, are expensive. There are still no new options available because fewer locations are available.
 - **Ecological Principle:** Music events have some negative effects, including loud music, harming the local flora and fauna, big crowds that cause waste and litter, and power supply challenges that are related to the performance venues in the hills. It included authorization for a concert from the various bodies.
- 4) **Bad Weather:** When organizing a concert in an outdoor setting, there is always a risk of inclement weather, particularly in the hills where rain is frequent. However, even indoor concerts can be affected by limited audience accessibility due to adverse weather conditions. Since it is impossible to accurately predict or control the weather, it is advisable to be cautious and have a contingency plan in place. This includes identifying a backup location that allows for last-minute reservations and is in close proximity to the original venue. Having a nearby indoor venue readily available can facilitate a swift switch from an outdoor setting if the need arises. This proactive approach helps to ensure the smooth execution of the concert despite unpredictable weather conditions.
- 5) **Lack of government support:** According to the study, the level of government funding for concerts is generally underwhelming. Except for a few regular performances organized by the government's department of culture, the majority of concerts in the area are privately organized events. Very few concerts aim to be government-sponsored revenue-generating events. Consequently, aspects such as aggressive publicity and promotion, careful artist selection, and effective ticket management are not given high priority. While government-organized concerts may provide traditional and local artists with more stage time compared to private events, the issue of lower pay for performers still persists.

7. CONCLUSION

Despite these obstacles, it is evident that music is an inseparable part of the region's natural serenity and cultural fabric of the North-Eastern states. The melodic strains and rhythmic beats intertwine harmoniously with the breathtaking landscapes, making music an essential element of the North-Eastern way of life. Amidst the identified challenges of limited sponsorship opportunities, disappointing government funding, and a preference for mainland Indian artists, there lies an opportunity for a sensible and collaborative approach among performers, organizers, and the government. Collaboration among stakeholders can lead to a better understanding of the cultural significance of music in North-East India. The performers, with their rich musical heritage, can actively engage with organizers and local communities to create awareness about the importance of preserving and promoting the region's unique musical traditions. Through such collaborations, sponsors may recognize the value of investing in the cultural wealth of the North-East, leading to increased financial support for live music concerts. Such collaboration can pave the way for policy changes that favor the local music scene. By voicing their concerns collectively, performers and organizers can advocate for enhanced government funding and improved infrastructure for concert venues. Furthermore, the collaborative approach can foster a sense of ownership and pride among the local population regarding their musical heritage. By engaging with the community, organizers can design tailored ticket distribution strategies and encourage a stronger culture of purchasing concert tickets. Local residents, feeling connected to the events, are more likely to support and attend live music concerts, contributing to the financial sustainability of such endeavors.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Behr, A., Brennan, M., & Cloonan, M. (2016). Cultural Value and Cultural Policy Some Evidence from the World of Live Music. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 22(3), 403–418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2014.987668>.
- Connolly, M., & Krueger, A. B. (2006). Chapter 20 Rockonomics : The Economics of Popular Music. In *the Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*, 1, 667–719. Elsevier. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0676\(06\)01020-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0676(06)01020-9).
- Dubber, A. (2011). Monkey on the Roof : Researching Creative Practice, Music Consumption, Social Change and the Online Environment. *Creative Industries Journal*, 4(1), 19–31. https://doi.org/10.1386/cij.4.1.19_1.
- Holt, F. (2010). The Economy of Live Music in the Digital Age. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 13(2), 243–261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549409352277>.
- Kajanova, Y. (2013). Rock, Pop, Jazz in Contemporary Musicological Studies. *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 44, 343–359. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23594803>.

- King, M. (2009). *Music Marketing : Press, Promotion, Distribution, and Retail*. Hal Leonard Corporation.
- Montoro-Pons, J. D., & Cuadrado-García, M. (2011). Live and Pre Recorded Popular Music Consumption. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 35(1), 19–48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10824-010-9130-2>.
- O'Reilly, D., Gretchen, L., and Krzysztof, K. (2014). Marketing Live Music." *Coughing and Clapping : Investigating Audience Experience*. Edited by Karen Burland and Stephanie E. Pitts. London : Ashgate, 7-19.
- Toelle, J., & Sloboda, J. A. (2021). The Audience as an Artist ? The Audience'S Experience Of Participatory Music. *Musicae Scientiae*, 25(1), 67-91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1029864919844804>.
- Van der Hoeven, A., & Hitters, E. (2019). The Social and Cultural Values of Live Music : Sustaining Urban Live Music Ecologies. *Cities*, 90, 263–271. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2019.02.015>.
- Wall, T., & Dubber, A. (2010). Experimenting with Fandom, Live Music, and the Internet : Applying Insights from Music Fan Culture to New Media Production. *Journal of New Music Research*, 39(2), 159–169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09298215.2010.489645>.
- Westgate, C. J. (2020). Popular Music Fans and the Value of Concert Tickets. *Popular Music and Society* 43(1), 57-77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2019.1601152>.