

# The Importance of Teaching Tour Management

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## Abstract

Over the past several years, musicians and bands have relied on income generated from live shows and tours to make up for shortfalls from revenue earned from decreasing recording royalties. But the shutdown of the live music industry because of the pandemic cut off a significant income source for musicians who made money primarily from touring. The easing of pandemic restrictions reopened the national and international touring markets, but at the same time increased the traffic for and intensified the competition in those same markets. Soaring fuel costs compounded by political uncertainty in parts of Europe, the mental and physical strain of doing live shows, and a still-skittish public have caused some artists to rethink, reschedule, and even cancel their tours. Touring has always been hard work, even for bands and artists who spend an enormous amount of time on the road. Touring is even harder for musicians and their teams (if they even have them) who have little to no experience planning such an undertaking.

Successful tours do not happen by accident. With some touring budget margins getting thinner and thinner, it's imperative that educators teach entertainment industry students how to plan and execute a tour. Tour managers or musicians planning their own tours oversee many tasks, including creating budgets, preparing spreadsheets and financial reports, planning the route, booking accommodations, marketing, hiring crew members, and preparing itineraries and day sheets. Tour managers also serve as the primary point of contact while an act is on the road. Using case studies from the Australian and United States markets, this talk presents an overview about how to teach touring. Whether it's a weekend-long run of shows or national tour, many of the skills required to plan and undertake such an endeavor have applications in other areas of the music business.

Keywords: music business, tour management, music business education

## United States

Ramapo College of New Jersey - Christopher Reali

Imagine this scenario: You're in a band that's attracting people to shows in your region, and the group's social media following grows every week. One of the band's songs lands on a well-known playlist, and their overall stream counts keeps going up. The band members are getting more-and-more excited about the possibility of moving to the next level; they're itching to break out of their local scene. The drummer says, "We should go on tour!" and everyone agrees. Yes, this is it! There is only one problem: nobody in the band has any idea how to book a tour.

Over the past several years, musicians and bands have relied on income generated from live shows and tours to make up for revenue shortfalls from decreasing recording royalties. But the shutdown of the live music industry because of the pandemic cut off a significant income source for musicians who made money primarily from touring. The easing of pandemic restrictions reopened the national and international touring markets, but at the same time increased the traffic for and intensified the competition in those same markets. Soaring fuel costs compounded by political uncertainty in parts of Europe, the mental and physical strain of doing live shows, increased costs for travel visas, and a still-skittish public have caused some artists to rethink, reschedule, and even cancel their tours.<sup>1</sup> Touring has always been hard work, even for bands and artists who spend an enormous amount of time on the road. Touring is even harder for musicians and their teams (if they even have them) that have little to know experience planning such an undertaking.

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dations, marketing, hiring crew members, and preparing itineraries and day sheets. Tour managers also serve as the primary point of contact while an act is on the road. This paper presents an overview about how to teach touring in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Whether it's a weekend-long run of shows or a national tour, many of the skills required to plan and undertake such an endeavor have applications in other areas of the music business.

At Ramapo College of New Jersey where I teach, there is no class dedicated to teaching touring or tour management. Students learn about these topics spread across several of my courses: one day in a 200-level course, and two days in a 300-level course. The specific duties of a tour manager are covered in another class that addresses numerous aspects of management. All three of these courses, which I teach, are required for music industry majors. But my background as a tour manager informs nearly every aspect of my teaching. For example, in the intro-level Business of Music course, I teach a multi-day unit on personal finances and budgeting. The assignment for this unit has every student track their expenses over a ten day period. It's no secret that musicians are notoriously bad at finance, so this lesson serves multiple purposes: it provides students the opportunity to review their spending habits and to let them see if any changes are needed, which has long-lasting benefits regardless of what career students enter. But for students interested in any aspect related to management, this assignment reminds them that they need to keep their financial house in order if they have aspirations to handle their client's finances.

Tour managers need to possess numerous skills, including the ability to quickly adapt in a fluid situation and expert time management. In another course, I require students to keep track of how they spend their time over a ten-day period. I stress to all my students that my success as a tour manager was rooted in not only in my ability to tell time, but to respect the time I had. With this assignment, my goal is to help students differentiate between what's important that needs to get done, and what's not urgent, and what could either be delegated or eliminated. For every assignment, I require students to write self-reflections about what they learned while doing the work. Raising students' self-awareness is baked into all my courses.

For the one-day overview about touring, students read "Why, When and Where to Tour," in *The Business of Concert Promotion and Touring*.<sup>3</sup> This 2007 source is a bit dated, but the reading concisely addresses a few essential ideas about touring, as the chapter title suggests. I require students in all my classes to answer a discussion forum questions before coming to class. For this particular day, students answer these questions:

1. What are the steps/considerations that take place before planning a tour?;
2. What are the necessary skills to coordinate a tour?;
3. Once a tour is planned, what are some fundamental concerns that all musicians should address before hitting the road?

This very-brief touring summary also addresses the main reasons to go on tour: to promote new material, to make money, to build the fan base, or a combination of all three. Most of this particular day in class focuses on "Touring and the Indie Artist," so I divide the lesson into numerous parts: I first discuss preproduction (is the band/act actually ready to perform?) and finances. I often ask my students how much money are they willing to lose on their first tour? The second topic is the "art" of booking shows: finding the "smaller" rooms in an area to increase the potential for higher turnout or the reasons why an act might play just outside the "big" markets, for example. Third, I talk about actually being on tour and the importance of having reliable transportation, instrument insurance, sticking to a budget, advancing shows, and getting resourceful about accommodations.<sup>4</sup> Finally, this lesson concludes with addressing what to do and expect at the actual show, such as arriving on time; have merch to sell and hang out before and after the show to meet with fans; and perform a good show even if the room is empty.

In my advanced music business class, I spend two days on touring. Students read chapters written by Ari Herstand, and Stephen Marcone and David Philp.<sup>5</sup> For the first day, I typically talk about my time on the road working as an instrument technician and tour manager, and then review some of the ideas discussed the previous semester. The second day is focused on routing the tour, essential contract provisions, and the technical and hospitality riders. I provide students itineraries from my time on the road and map out one summer tour I was on where we traversed thirty states in thirty-four days. My goal for these two days is to remind students that touring is very hard work and that it's part of a process connected to other areas of a band/artist's career.

The signature assignment for my Advanced Business of Music course is having the students create an itinerary for a seven-day, at least six-show tour. The goal for the assignment is to have students simulate the numerous responsibilities that often fall on the tour manager. I give very specific parameters for the students to work, such as imposing a fifty-mile radius clause; no multiple dates at the same venue; the itinerary must include at least three actual venues with phone numbers, addresses, and website information; the venues have capacity limits and they must match the band's style of music; students have to include the dis-

tances between each gig, as well as figure out the cost of gas for the tour. I repeatedly have students comment on how long this project took them, even though they didn't have to actually contact a single venue.

I address the specific roles of tour management in a separate class. For this day, the students read "Finalizing the Production" in *The Business of Concert Promotion & Touring*, a chapter that provides a breakdown of the personnel who typically work on mid-to-large-scale tours.<sup>6</sup> I review some terms common to touring such as "advance the show," "settlement," "per diem," and the differences between "sound check" and "line check." Even though I worked as a tour manager, this particular lesson seems more effective when somebody else tells my students about how hard it is to shepherd musicians around the country in a twelve-passenger van. David Scheid, tour manager for Girl Talk and others, described his job like this, "Your boss is hiring you to tell them what to do." I often use this phrase when describing other aspects of management. But the single most effective tool for teaching tour management that I've found has been showing my students a twenty-minute documentary about a day in the life of Charlie Caruso, tour manager for Can't Swim, a New Jersey-based band.<sup>7</sup> What I particularly like about this documentary is that it reveals the demanding role of being a tour manager, and it quickly dispels the glamor of being on the road, especially considering the level Can't Swim was at at that time.

## Conclusion

Teaching tour management is essential because it provides students with practical skills and knowledge to better equip them to navigate the complexities of the music industry. Tour management involves planning and executing all aspects of a live performance, including booking venues, managing budgets, coordinating travel arrangements, and handling logistics on the road. This complex and multifaceted process requires an understanding of the music industry, strong organizational skills, and the ability to think creatively and adapt to changing circumstances. These skills are transferable to other areas of the music industry, such as event management and artist management.

Touring is a vital part of the music industry ecosystem, and one of the most important sources of income for musicians. Learning the skills required to be a tour manager will help our students become better collaborators and more valuable members of any team they join. As educators, we have a responsibility to prepare our students for the realities of the music business, and teaching tour management is important for any musician or future manager who wants to build a successful career in the music industry.

## Australia

### Australian College of the Arts (Collarts) - Katy Richards

Touring serves as a significant source of income for an artist as well as an opportunity to connect with fans and make new ones. Recognizing the importance of touring as an income stream, the tour management class at Collarts is a core unit studied by Entertainment Management students and an elective for other students within the Entertainment faculty. The course aims to equip students with a basic understanding of the various aspects of touring including planning the touring route, venue selection, travel, logistics, budgets, and production requirements.

Over the course of twelve weeks students learn about a different component of touring each week and then apply that knowledge to their evolving tour plan of their chosen artist. By the end of the course students complete a thorough tour plan that they are assessed on. The criteria for the tour plan is to develop a mock tour of Australia for an artist of their choice. The touring act must have at least four performing members, play at a minimum of 1,000-capacity venues and go to at least five states in the tour itinerary.

The benefit of setting such parameters to the assessment is that there are sufficient ticket sales to allow a budget for travel, touring crew, production, and freight. Setting a minimum number of performers increases the number of people on the tour and adds to the complexity of the production. Touring to five states in Australia challenges the students to consider the logistics of moving people and freight around a vast country that would include either crossing the desert to Western Australia or the ocean to Tasmania.

The hypothetical approach extends beyond the mock tour into some of the intricacies of the tour plan. For instance, production riders are quite complex and it is unrealistic for students with little knowledge of production to know the exact requirements for their artist's tour. Therefore, students are provided with a range of examples before completing their own hypothetical rider for their artist. The rider is assessed not for the accuracy of its contents, which is also beyond the teacher's knowledge, but rather for the inclusion of key rider elements such as audio, backline, lighting, and consumables. Students are also provided with additional resources such as budget templates, tour budget examples, daysheet templates and access to stage plot generators. These resources, along with the hypothetical approach and the emphasis on understanding the components of touring, allow students to create a professionally presented tour plan without the pressure of absolute accuracy.

By planning a tour of their favorite artist, students have

an instant interest in the class and are motivated to know more about how their chosen artist would tour. They begin the class with a basic understanding of what types of venues the artist would play, the performers on stage, and a fair idea of a tour schedule. This gives them a foundation before embarking on the more complex elements of tour planning such as travel, budgets, and production. While the hypothetical approach has its limitations, such as the exclusion of how to book shows or low budget touring, in-class scenario exercises have been introduced to address these shortcomings. These exercises require students to cut the budget due to poor ticket sales, forcing them to reconsider crew roles, production priorities, alternative touring routes, and venues.

At the end of the twelve weeks, students present a well formulated tour plan for their artist that includes a tour itinerary, flights, accommodation, ground transport, crew list, budget, production and hospitality rider, security brief, and day sheets. They complete a tour plan in the same format as any tour plan would be presented in the real world. For instance, they must use Excel or Google Sheets to present information such as flights, accommodation, and budgets. The students therefore develop practical soft skills such as the ability to think logistically as well as hard skills such as competency in Excel and stage plot generator software.

Student feedback indicates that the hypothetical approach adds an element of enjoyment to the learning process as they research the touring life of an artist of their own choice. All the while students appreciate the practical skills they develop and their real-world relevance. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that students have successfully utilized their tour plans to secure internships or paid employment with festivals, promoters, and management companies, highlighting how the course prepares students to enter the live music sector.

It is important to teach tour management to performers and Music Business students as touring is a significant income stream for artists. By engaging students in the development of a mock tour plan for their favorite artist, the course fosters practical skills and a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in organizing a tour. The progressive structure of the twelve-week course, where students learn about different components of touring each week and integrate them into their evolving tour plan, allows a practice-based approach to their learning.

## Endnotes

1. See Rufus Sivaroshan, "Price Hike for Touring Visas is a Bad Idea Coming at the Worst Time," *Hypebot*, March 8, 2023, <https://www.hypebot.com/hypebot/2023/03/price-hike-for-touring-visas-is-a-bad-idea-coming-at-the-worst-time.html>; Bruce Houghton, "More Musicians Are Canceling or Rethinking Tours," *Hypebot*, November 9, 2022, <https://www.hypebot.com/hypebot/2022/11/more-musicians-are-canceling-or-rethinking-tours-here-are-6-reasons-why.html>; Bruce Houghton, "Santogold [sic] Says Performing Live is Now 'Unsustainable,' Cancels US Tour," *Hypebot*, September 27, 2022, <https://www.hypebot.com/hypebot/2022/09/santogold-says-performing-live-is-now-unsustainable-cancels-us-tour.html>.
2. This paper was originally presented jointly by Chris Reali and Katy Richards at the 2023 MEIEA Summit. Katy's summary appears in this article immediately following Chris' summary.
3. Ray D. Waddell, Rich Barnet, and Jake Berry, "Why, When, and Where to Tour," in *The Business of Concert Promotion and Touring: A Practical Guide to Creating, Selling, Organizing, and Staging Concerts* (New York: Billboard Books, 2007), 41. There are actually very few book-length resources dedicated to teaching touring and tour management.
4. See Randy Chertkow and Jason Feehan, "Avoiding Hotels: How to Save Money While Touring," *Disc Makers Blog*, June 15, 2022, <https://blog.discmakers.com/2022/06/avoiding-hotels-how-to-save-money-while-touring/>.
5. Ari Herstand, "Touring," in *How to Make It in the New Music Business: Practical Tips on Building a Loyal Following and Making a Living as a Musician*, 3rd ed. (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2023), 351; Steve Marcone and Dave Philp, "Touring" in *Managing Your Band: A Guide to Artist Management*, 7th ed. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2021), 155.
6. Waddell, Barnet, and Berry, "Finalizing the Production" in *The Business of Concert Promotion and Touring*, 87.
7. Andy Kamen, "A Day in the Life of an Indie Tour Manager," *YouTube*, accessed July 3, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTc9dSn9aZo>.



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