NEWS LESSON

When Did Live Music Become a Luxury?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What makes a concert worth saving up for?
2. Would you rather sit close once or go to several cheaper gigs?
3. Can watching a live performance on a screen still feel special?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**algorithmic**	☐	A	a change that makes something less fair or accurate
2	**distortion**	☐	B	arranged in different levels, for example of price
3	**catch-all**	☐	C	the chance for many people to see or hear you
4	**mark-ups**	☐	D	a worried feeling that something is not right
5	**tiered**	☐	E	amounts added to a price to make a profit
6	**obliged**	☐	F	controlled by a computer process that follows set rules
7	**exposure**	☐	G	forced by a rule or duty to do something
8	**unease**	☐	H	covering many different things in one general way

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Tickets to see the biggest artists now cost hundreds of pounds. Why have prices climbed so far, and who is being priced out?

1 In an age of almost limitless recorded music, seeing an artist in person has become harder to afford for many fans. You join the online queue and wait for tickets to appear. Then the clock starts: is one evening worth this much of your monthly income? Stadium tours are still snapped up, but their success conceals a growing unease about who can participate in live music.

2 The economics are undeniably complicated. Ambitious concerts employ large production teams and involve transport, insurance, security, equipment and venue costs that have risen in recent years. Artists also work in an industry reshaped by streaming, where global exposure rarely brings the revenue that record sales once did. Ticket income therefore matters more, although the balance between artist earnings and touring costs differs widely. Those costs end up, one way or another, in the price the person in the queue pays.

3 The controversy surrounding Oasis's reunion ticket sales illustrates how consumer trust can unravel. Fans who had expected one price for standing admission found that cheaper tickets had sold out, leaving more expensive tickets available under a tiered pricing system. An investigation by Britain's Competition and Markets Authority concluded that Ticketmaster had not communicated key information adequately. It secured undertakings requiring clearer advance warnings about ticket tiers, better price information in queues and more accurate descriptions of ticket benefits.

4 Crucially, the authority did not establish that Oasis tickets were subject to real-time algorithmic price fluctuations. That distinction matters because the phrase "dynamic pricing" has become a catch-all explanation for almost any disappointing ticket sale. The underlying concern, however, remains the same: customers should understand what they are buying and how much it may cost before investing hours in the process. Transparency is not the same thing as affordability, but its absence makes an expensive purchase feel like a trick.

5 The secondary market creates another layer of distortion. Scarce tickets may be advertised at enormous mark-ups, while additional fees further eat away at the sense that advertised prices reflect what customers will actually pay. Demand is reinforced by the fear of missing a culturally significant occasion. Hesitation becomes expensive, and reflection a luxury in itself. A concert is no longer simply a performance; it is also content to share, a memory to display and, for some fans, proof of belonging to a community.

6 Defenders of high prices argue that no performer is obliged to sell below what audiences are willing to pay. Critics counter that an industry built around shared cultural experience risks becoming increasingly divided by income. Neither argument removes the pressure on independent venues, where musicians develop and audiences can encounter live music without shouldering substantial expense. The question is not whether major artists deserve to be paid. It is whether a market that celebrates music's ability to unite people is comfortable turning attendance into a privilege reserved for those who can afford it.

Sources: The Arizona State Press and LBC. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The authority's findings suggest that the Oasis sale's difficulties came from poor communication rather than algorithmic pricing. T F NG
2. The writer says the Oasis sale proved that dynamic pricing was used. T F NG
3. The writer believes clearer pricing information would make concerts affordable. T F NG
4. The authority ordered Ticketmaster to refund fans who bought tiered tickets. T F NG
5. Independent venues face pressure whichever side of the pricing argument is accepted. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

aversion	conceals	exemption	fluctuations	privilege	reinforced	shouldering	unravel

1. Years of goodwill can _____ in a single afternoon if customers feel misled.
2. The polished brochure _____ the fact that most of the budget goes on fees.
3. Her decision to leave early only _____ the impression that the festival was badly organised.
4. Share prices and ticket prices alike are prone to sudden _____ .
5. Once a mass pastime, opera has become, for some, a _____ of the wealthy.
6. Few households can go on _____ the whole cost of a stadium night out on a single wage.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The way the tiers were presented left many fans feeling _____ about what they were paying for. (CERTAIN)
2. Campaigners want greater _____ about how fees are calculated. (TRANSPARENT)
3. The _____ of the ticket tiers led some fans to misjudge the final price. (COMPLEX)
4. Demand for resale tickets is notoriously _____ . (PREDICT)
5. Critics describe hidden fees as _____ because they hide the real cost. (LEAD)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At this level, pairs are often fixed and slightly formal: an adjective that fits only certain nouns, or a verb that suits only certain objects.

hefty	impose	inflate	mounting	raise	slender	sparse

1. A _____ booking fee can turn a reasonable ticket into an unaffordable one.
2. Regulators can _____ sanctions on firms that mislead their customers.
3. Some commentators _____ concerns that live music is turning into a rich person's pastime.
4. The queue system put fans under _____ pressure to decide quickly.
5. Resale sites can _____ prices far beyond face value.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What would make concert tickets feel fairly priced?
2. Should the best view always go to whoever can pay most?
3. Which part of a concert would you miss most if you stayed home?

9 Role-play: is the ticket worth it?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the friend who wants to go

Your favourite singer is on tour and tickets are very expensive. You want to buy two. Explain why it matters to you. Ask your friend to come, and answer their worries.

Student B · the friend who is not sure

You like the singer, but the ticket, the travel and a hotel cost a lot. Ask questions about the total price. Suggest another plan, then decide together.

Useful phrases

I'd love to go, but it's a lot of money.
It's a once in a lifetime chance.
How much would it cost in total?
We could save up for it.
What about a smaller gig instead?
I think it's worth it, don't you?

Afterwards, tell the class: did you buy the tickets, and was it a fair decision?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 F · 2 A · 3 H · 4 E · 5 B · 6 G · 7 C · 8 D

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 F · 4 NG · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 unravel · 2 conceals · 3 reinforced · 4 fluctuations · 5 privilege · 6 shouldering

6 Word forms

1 uncertain · 2 transparency · 3 complexity · 4 unpredictable · 5 misleading

7 Language focus

1 hefty · 2 impose · 3 raise · 4 mounting · 5 inflate

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