

# Why Are Concert Ticket Prices So High?

## Fans Angry Over Soaring Ticket Prices

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A ticket to a Rolling Stones concert cost about \$8 in 1969. Today, it can cost you up to \$350 to get into a Stones show.

Prices of concert tickets are rising faster and higher than those for movies, theater ¶ even sporting events. But rock 'n' roll is supposed to be the anti-establishment art form, and maybe that's why so many fans feel aggravated that rock ¶ once for the masses ¶ is now often for only the rich.

"I'm like an old rock 'n' roller and I can't go see them," said 47-year-old Steve Rex.

Outside a recent Rolling Stones concert in New York City, devoted Stones fan named Avi was desperate to get into the show. But he was shocked at the \$350 price tag. "It's ridiculous; it's insane ¶ \$350 to see anybody, I don't know, I wouldn't pay it."

Even if he could afford it, he says he wouldn't want to give his money to what he imagines is some corporate pickpocket standing between the box office and the Stones. "I assume there's some guy standing on top of the buildings here on a big leather chair that's getting all the money," Avi said.

Who ¶ s to Blame?

So who is getting all the money? Why are ticket prices so high? Some people say it's the rock stars just being greedy. Others blame a massive media conglomerate called Clear Channel Communications.

Even huge stars like Grammy Award winner Dave Matthews say they're troubled by what Clear Channel is doing to the music business.

"A big company like Clear Channel has every opportunity to sort of take over every edge of the business," Matthews said.

And that's exactly what some people say Clear Channel is doing.

Clear Channel is No. 1 in radio station ownership, the concert promotion industry, and ownership of concert arenas.

Since Clear Channel started buying up the industry, the average concert ticket price has risen by one-third. The sharp increase was so alarming, it triggered a Senate investigation last month.

Rocker Don Henley testified about Clear Channel before the Senate committee.

"I come at my own peril & This unprecedented control by the conglomerates is hurting the music business and the culture," Henley told Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz.

Just days after the hearings and the bad press that came with them, Clear Channel canceled a planned interview with 20/20. Instead, the company issued a statement, in which it points a finger right back at the rock moguls.

"It is high attendance, not high ticket prices that benefit Clear Channel & More than 100 percent of the ticket price increase in 2002 went to the artists," the company said in its statement.

Is Online Downloading the Culprit?

So who's telling the truth?

Miles Copeland, owner of Ark 21 Records and former manager of Sting, admits that Sting and other artists have a lot of control over ticket prices. If they seem greedy, Copeland says, it's because they're being ripped off every day ¶ not by Clear Channel, but by their fans.

"Five years, 10 years, 15 years ago & every time you wanted music, you'd go to a record store and you'd have to fork out money to buy records. Well nowadays they say it's just OK to steal," Copeland said.

Steal online, that is. Apparently, many of us simply cannot resist the temptation of downloading music from the Internet. But all that free music is not without a price.

"The public ought to realize as they're complaining about ticket prices, that they're forcing ticket prices up because stealing music from the artists eliminates that source of income.

Recording artists like Sting used to make the majority of their money from just that: recording. Now, they're making 62 percent of their income from touring. "So now the only source of income is tickets," Copeland said, "and basically the public will have to pay the price of that."

The Stones ↑ Get What They Need ↓ & and Want

It's a big price. Bands like The Who that came of age in the 1960s have left all that peace, love, and flower power behind. Now, mega acts like the Stones, with pyrotechnics and large stage shows, have grown into big corporations with payrolls and overhead.

"It's a big fat cow, the entertainment industry, and sometimes it's shameless," says Matthews, who was born in the '60s.

Matthews is also having his pocket picked by downloading fans. But he says theft online can't begin to explain the huge price tag attached to the ticket prices of the rock 'n' roll idols he grew up with. "There's an obscenity when you get 200 bucks a ticket," he said.

Even Matthews' ticket prices have gone up ¶ but only a little ¶ to \$40 for any seat in the house. And he still makes enough money to be one of last year's top money making tours. "If it costs you 25 bucks, or 30 bucks to put on a show for each person and you charge 40 bucks, that seems like a reasonable profit," Matthews said.

We asked Stones tour manager Michael Cohl why Mick Jagger and his boys aren't satisfied with 40 bucks a head. Cohl said it's simply a matter of money. "If they wanted to play for free, wouldn't they just go down to the pub in London and play for free anytime they want? & They would like to make money too."

Cohl said the Stones want to make money for their hard work, just like everyone else. But the Stones live like royalty when they're offstage, renting out entire hotels where a single room can go for as much as \$4,000 a night.

So, aren't the fans are paying for this lush life? "No," Cohl said, "the Rolling Stones are paying for it. If the fans buy the tickets we get reimbursed."

If the sky is the limit in ticket prices, the Stones have no reason to stop until they hit the ceiling. Even with ticket prices of up to \$350, they sell out every night.

## Top Dollar for Nosebleed Seats

Gary Bongiovanni, editor in chief of the concert magazine Pollstar, says another way the big acts gouge concertgoers is by charging top dollar for seats at the very back of the arena.

A back-of-the-stadium seat at a Elton John/ Billy Joel concert could run you \$85, and you'd need binoculars to see the piano men. For a \$250 ticket to a Paul McCartney show, you'd get a seat off to the side and a couple hundred feet away.

So have some musicians forgotten the fans who put them where they are? Rocker Lenny Kravitz says yes. "I can't sing 'Let Love Rule' and then, you know, charge people, you know, 500 bucks to get in. It's not what it's about," he said.

But some industry insiders says that it's not just about the love. Pollstar's Bongiovanni says younger bands playing today know that their fan base can't afford the ticket prices that a Paul McCartney fan can. So, because they can get away with it, legends like McCartney, the Stones, Cher, and Billy Joel and Elton John put together the four top-grossing tours in 2002 ¶ with a combined draw of \$330 million.

As long as people are willing to pay huge sums to see the rockers of yesteryear, prices will keep going up.

So, let's get back to Avi, the diehard Rolling Stones fan who couldn't afford the \$350 price tag to get in. After spending hours out in the cold, he got lucky. "I just got a free ticket. I swear to God!"

Sometimes you get more than what you need ¶ you get what you want.

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