



# ARTHUR

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# FOGEL

## THE WHOLE WORLD'S IN HIS HANDS

INTERVIEW BY PHIL GALLO

**T**he last show **Arthur Fogel** attended prior to the COVID-19 pandemic shut-down was the finale of U2's *Joshua Tree* 30th anniversary tour in Mumbai. It was 12/15/2019, the first time U2 had played India in their 43 years of being together and the 67th—and most likely the last—time they would play their 1987 landmark album in full.

Having committed to be present at every U2 show he could since he started working with the band in 1997, Fogel estimated he was closing in on 700 concerts that night at **Patil Stadium**.

“Years ago, just the thought of playing Mumbai on a massive tour like this was pie in the sky,” recalls Fogel, the executive who has had the greatest impact on global touring over the last 30 years. “It was just one of those moments where you go, ‘You know, the world really has opened up to do real business on a high level.’”

“I remembered having a conversation on the last date of the *PopMart* tour in Johannesburg, South Africa, about how globalization was on the move. That was 1998. It became my obsession.”

For most of his 40 years in concert promotion with **CPI** (short for **Concert Productions International**), **The Next Adventure**, **SFX**, **Clear Channel** and **Live Nation**, Fogel has been at the forefront of global touring, revolutionizing the business as it ventured from regional fiefdoms to worldwide enterprise. Live Nation Entertainment's Chairman of Global Touring and Talent since 2005, Fogel has transitioned from rock drummer to Toronto club manager to selling **Madonna** on a 360 deal with Live Nation and presenting artists such as **David Bowie**, **Sting** and **Beyoncé** around the world.

“I think performing live really is its own art form,” says the Beverly Hills-based Ottawa native. “There are certainly lots of people who make great music and great records that sound great on the radio, but to be an incredible live performer and develop that craft—keep people wanting to come back because it was such a great experience—that's a large part of what sustains careers.”

“I absolutely have had the opportunity to work with some great live performers, and that's probably why I've stayed engaged and



*Fogel with U2's Larry Mullen Jr. and Adam Clayton, manager Paul McGuinness, Bono and The Edge*

excited right through to today.”

Fogel has been associated with some of the biggest global tours during the last 32 years, beginning with **The Rolling Stones'** groundbreaking *Steel Wheels* tour. His résumé includes Madonna's 2008-09 **Sticky & Sweet Tour**, which hit 32 countries and became the highest-grossing tour by a female artist, collecting \$408 million; three Beyoncé solo tours, including a 2016 run of 49 sold-out stadiums that grossed \$256 million; both of **Justin Timberlake's** tours; and every outing by **Lady Gaga** since 2010.

U2's box office since affiliating with

Fogel has hit \$2 billion, with \$736.4 million of it coming from 2009-2011's **360° Tour**, comprising 110 shows in 30 countries

As **Bono** said in the 2013 documentary *Who the F\*\*k Is Arthur Fogel*, “He's clearly the most important person in live music in the world, a unique dude. There's no one like him out there.”

### **How would you define what you do for artists?**

Generally, artists need to have a vision of a show on a particular tour; then it becomes an exercise of processing that idea. Once you've discussed what the tour could look like in terms of venues and different territories, you present some options in terms of a routing layout. A dialogue is taking place, and ultimately you settle on what the artist is comfortable with. Because if you're in for the long play, and you're there to support an artist's long-term career and sustainability, you want to be in a position where you have a clear view of what's down the road so that you don't mess it up in the short term. Of course, I've got to deliver what I say I'm going to deliver—that's #1. Supporting the artist's vision is what it's all about; to work to their agenda and never veer off that.

### **The idea of using a single promoter globally is a concept that's barely 30 years old. What has made it commonplace now?**

When you were talking about a world tour 25 or 30 years ago, it was less than 20 countries. In today's world it's near 70. Globalization has just exploded in the last 15 years. The truth is that there's also been an explosion of new headliner talent that's unbelievable. There's probably a list of 50 artists who are really significant as touring artists who you'd never heard of 10 years ago.

### **What's your sense of global touring in a post-COVID world?**

I've always been an optimist about our business. If you think back to 10, 12 years ago, the economy was in terrible shape. People were thinking the business was over. But the business has a way of regenerating artists and audience.

As it relates to COVID, it may be slow or look slightly different, and the logistics will be slightly different, but I think it will end up being generally the same experience for fans and artists. There may be the need to be



PHOTO: K MAZUR/WIREIMAGE





PHOTO: JOSHUA BLANCHARD/GETTY IMAGES FOR EPIC

*Michael Rapino, Fogel and Guy Oseary attend the premiere of Madonna and Steven Klein's film, secretprojectrevolution, in 2013; with Lady Gaga*

**“THE GREAT ONES TAKE THEIR ARTISTRY TO ANOTHER PLACE IN CONCERT. I’VE ALWAYS BEEN ATTRACTED TO THE SPECTACLE AND HOW GREAT ARTISTS PRESENT THEMSELVES IN A SETTING. THE GREAT ONES ABSOLUTELY FIND THAT BALANCE BETWEEN THE SHOW, THE SPECTACLE AND GREAT SONGS. THAT’S THE MAGIC TO ME.”**

more nimble, more flexible, more adaptable, but if that’s all we have to deal with, then we deal with it and then make it work.

There’s no question, 2022 and ’23 are going to be gangbusters. It’s the pent-up demand, but also the pent-up earnest desire to get out there and work. It’s not just the financial part of it, which is certainly a factor for some, but they’re artists—they perform live, and it’s like a memory muscle they’ve gotta use.

**You have a unique career trajectory. You finished college, played drums in bands and then got into tour managing and club management. It seems like you got a great education prior to producing a concert.**

When I realized that the business side was my path, the decisions were relatively easy. When I got the opportunity to start at CPI

in the ’80s, I jumped at it because it was certainly the logical step in building a career. I started as a booker but became a jack of all trades in clubs and theaters, small venues with developing acts. Then it progressed from there.

**How did your background as a drummer/band member affect the way you did business?**

Being a musician basically gave me an understanding of the sensitivities of being on the other side of the equation. That was an important factor, one of the layers of understanding how the business runs and how it should be approached. As I got into the promoting world and had the opportunity to see so many different artists perform and at different-size venues, it became like a snowball going down a hill for me. It just became more and more interesting and exciting.



*Fogel stands in for Sting in this shot with The Police's Andy Summers and Stewart Copeland.*

CPI was Michael Cohl's company, which, of course, became famous for producing the first global tour, The Rolling Stones' *Steel Wheels* outing in 1989. At that point, you'd been there for about seven years and president since 1987. What were the roots of that idea?

Canada is a pretty small country. The conversations we had were, "If you really want to build a business and build out your expertise, you have to go outside of Canada. What's that model? What is it that can spearhead that move outside of Canada?" Those conversations were when the light bulb went off.

**What was your role on the *Steel Wheels* tour?**

To figure out how it might work, which was incredibly daunting yet exciting and challenging.

**One of the first artists to take note of the logic behind the single promoter idea was David Bowie. You started a 25-year relationship with him in 1990, producing every tour from the stadium shows of *Sound + Vision* to theaters, arenas and clubs. What's the lasting effect of his unique approach to touring?**

Bowie was a fascinating, brilliant artist. He went through very different sorts of moments throughout his career and made no apologies. It was all about what he was doing currently and where's the right place to present that moment of his musical career.

I've always tried to be very strategic. I've always tried to be in tune with the recommendations that I make to an artist or their managers in terms of what they should do and how they should do it. For me, it's always been part of the exercise.

**You're associated with large arena and stadium shows that are as visually stimulating as they are musical. You've promoted multiple tours for Madonna, Lady Gaga, U2, Justin Timberlake, Beyoncé. Is there something that unifies these artists?**

The great ones take their artistry to another place in concert. I've always been attracted to the spectacle and how great artists present themselves in a setting. The great ones absolutely find that balance between the show, the spectacle and great songs. That's the magic to me.

**How do you pitch an artist/manager if they have yet to embrace a global tour with a single promoter?**

It's not for everybody, but it can be valuable in many different ways. I overheard the great longtime manager of U2, Paul McGuinness, having a conversation with somebody who was poo-pooing the concept of the global tour. Paul's answer back was "Really smart managers and artists understand how to make the big machine work for them as best as possible."

So you can sit there and look at it as a big, bad machine, or you can figure out exactly how to make that big, bad machine work for you and ultimately reap tremendous benefits. The assets, particularly in today's world, that a company like Live Nation has to deploy on behalf of and in support of an artist are pretty dramatic. And that can work, whether it's a triple-A superstar or a developing artist who really needs that push globally to continue to develop.



Concert promotion had always sort of been like us and them, right? We basically threw that out the window, and the reset was "OK, we're partners." So every cent that gets spent, whether it's on a truck to move your equipment or a newspaper ad or whatever the hell it is, it's all of our costs. And hopefully we share the profit.

It was such a new reality. There was a lot of resistance and a lot of animosity toward us because we were breaking out of the system. When I look back, it was absolutely the right thing to do. It evolved over the years into changing what the system is in today's world.

# “A GENERAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE ENTIRE SCOPE OF THE BUSINESS IS WHAT I’LL CALL THE SECRET SAUCE. FOR ME PERSONALLY, IT’S ONE OF THE REASONS WHY I’VE MAINTAINED SUCH LONGSTANDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE ARTISTS THAT I WORK WITH.”

A general understanding of the entire scope of the business is what I’ll call the secret sauce. For me personally, it’s one of the reasons why I’ve maintained such longstanding relationships with the artists that I work with.

**You’re known as the man who talked Madonna into doing a 360 deal with Live Nation and elevated the career of Justin Timberlake as a solo artist. Then there’s Gaga, who was just blossoming when you set up her first major tour in 2010. What did you see in her?**

She was exploding as a pop star, certainly in North America and Europe. Then, other things in her career started happening—the film, the **Tony Bennett** record—that showed a different side of her. You’re talking about somebody with such incredible pure talent. It was a bit of a process, and sometimes you forget that someone is moving from just starting out to becoming a global superstar. In today’s world, sometimes it takes three or four tours to get there, but that’s OK. Certainly in her case, it has continued on an upward trajectory, and she’s now a universal phenomenon.

**You’ve worked with Sting since 2004, and you also oversaw The Police reunion tour, which pulled in an amazing \$362 million and helped earn you *Pollstar* Promoter of the Year honors in 2007. Was that about a passion for the music, a chance to make money or both?**

It was something I never thought was going to happen. And it was pretty special, because I don’t think most of the audience thought it was gonna happen either. There was this sense of exhilaration as they went around the world—from out of left field you deliver something to fans that they never thought they were going to get to experience.

There are definitely the cynical ones who

say it’s just for the money, and I’m sure part of it is the money, but they never had that shot before. **Andy Summer** told me the gross from playing two sold-out shows at **Wrigley Field** was bigger than the gross from their entire final tour. The economics of the business from when I started are unfathomable.

**Speaking of where you started, Canada has honored you with the Order of Canada in 2018, a year after you were inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame. Michael Rapino is Canadian, as are plenty of execs at Live Nation. Is there a unique mindset that comes from not being from the States?**

I know it’s going to sound self-serving, but Michael’s a brilliant CEO and leader. His company’s mission is a good one, and he’s been incredibly supportive of me. There are so many Canadians I know who have branched out beyond Canada into the business world. There’s something about coming from Canada and the limitations there. It really was a driver to try and succeed globally. For a bunch of us, it’s worked out pretty great. It was definitely the DNA or something.

**Then again, not too many Canadian executives—nor concert promoters—have had documentaries made on them. Have things changed in the eight years since *Who the F\*\*k Is Arthur Fogel* was released?**

A few Uber drivers and some waiters have said, “Hey, aren’t you that guy?” The funniest story was in Japan. I was with U2, and there’s a little reception after the show. A well-known Japanese artist whose name is escaping me comes up to me and points his finger. He goes, “Fuck you, Arthur Fogel.” And I’m looking at him in disbelief. Then the light bulb goes on. He’s mocking me, and I was like, “Yeah, OK. You’re right.” ■