



Out in the cold

Rules enforced by Banquet Records have raised questions about whether fan behaviour before gigs has become too extreme. Gemma Cockrell reports

Concert camping culture has always existed, but in recent years it has grown exponentially. More people than ever are camping ahead of concerts, or queuing for many hours in advance, in order to get to the front row and experience an intimate moment with their favourite artist or band.

Camping was a rare occurrence when Christy Burdett, 21, first began going to gigs in 2016. But now, it has become commonplace, leading her to camp before every show of her favourite artist dodie's UK tour. "Following her whole tour and camping for barrier for each show was the most

exhilarating thing I've done in my whole life. It allowed me to meet her at each venue, and she even started to recognise me in the crowds," she says.

Katherine Rawson, 39, often joins queues as early as two o'clock in the morning with her teenage daughter, armed with a duvet and deckchairs.

"Getting barrier is a huge motivation for my daughter. It's about having less stress," she says. "It allows us to meet people, play cards, and catch up with friends from around the country. It adds to the whole experience of the gig. Sometimes the queue can be more fun than the gig itself."

The benefits are clear, but she

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acknowledges the safety risks, too. The rise in the number of people fainting during gigs is a problem that gained mainstream attention after the Travis Scott *Astroworld* Festival tragedy in 2021, where 2,400 people needed medical attention.

The risks were further scrutinised when promoter Banquet Records announced that camping would be banned before a Louis Tomlinson gig that took place at Pryzm in Kingston in December 2022.

They sent those who ignored this rule to the back of the queue, a decision which Rawson supports: "They made it clear they wouldn't tolerate campers. Rightly so, when the temperatures were expected to reach minus four degrees."

A fan named El, who goes by @ANGELV1BEZ on Twitter, attended the show herself. She

arrived at the venue at in the early hours of the morning.

"Security made a mistake. I was given the wrong wristband, so I was treated as if I had camped overnight," she explains. "It ended up getting dangerous and we got separated from our friends. Security yelled and pushed me around, and I got quite upset."

She supports the rules, but emphasises that Banquet Records would need to improve the administration of the system if they plan to implement it again in the future.

"The campers shouldn't have been there. If a venue is pushing it, you should follow their rules," she says. "But the staff didn't have a hold on anything. In theory the system was good, but they didn't communicate it to the fans well."

Jon Tolley, who runs Banquet Records, told *The Guardian* that he isn't against camping culture, but that the system was implemented to discourage people from camping in the extreme temperatures that were forecasted. "I've seen the camaraderie and I see how fun it is, but there have to be repercussions," he says.



Christy Burdett camped outside every show of singer dodie's UK tour
Image Credit: Christy Burdett

El feels that the increase in the number of fans camping before gigs is a result of the pandemic. "Camping was very limited before, but I think concerts are more in demand now, because of the years that everyone missed during Covid," she says. "It's all become a lot more hectic since then. You want to be at the front where there's more of a celebrity interaction."

Catherine Jordan, 23, has noticed that those who camp before gigs are often the first ones to experience these problems. "Some people have started arriving at gigs up to five days in advance. It's absolute mayhem," she says.

"Five girls fainted before the band even came out," she recalls seeing 5 Seconds of Summer in an arena in Rotterdam last year, after having queued outside the venue all day. "I couldn't help but think that this is the problem with people camping. By the end of the show, over 25 people had fainted."

Isabelle Hunter, 21, is an avid member of fan communities on Twitter and TikTok, and she believes that this desire for interaction with your idols has been fuelled by these platforms.

"You can go viral for posting videos of artists. Recently, The 1975's lead singer Matty Healy has been pulling fans who are at the front onstage, which can lead to them becoming famous online. Obviously, everyone wants this to be them."

Hunter feels that venues should be doing more to prevent camping, just as Banquet Records did, particularly to protect young people.

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Meanwhile, Jordan proposes that artists could help to prevent fans from camping by doing seated-only tours, since this would reduce the competition for standing positions.

"If we continue like this, gigs are going to get more expensive, because venues are having to hire more security," she says. "We need to make changes to make things safer for future gig-goers."

i Tips from our campers

- Do research in advance to make sure the area outside the venue where you will be camping is safe to be in overnight. You could visit the venue in advance, if possible, to check this. If the venue also serves as a nightclub, or it is near main roads, then it may not be safe to camp outside.
- Don't camp in freezing cold temperatures, and make sure to bring blankets and coats.
- Make sure to keep up to date with the venue's social media and follow the guidelines if there are any.
- Consider where the nearest toilets will be, and make sure you know where you can get drinks from to reduce the risks of feeling faint during the show.
- It's a good idea to have a base, such as a nearby hotel room or a car, where you can store your belongings during the day.
- Take portable chargers so your phone doesn't run out of charge.
- Make sure you aren't alone. Remember that there is safety in numbers. Look after one another and make sure everyone is safe. Take a pack of cards so you can play games with others.
- Be respectful of the environment surrounding the venue. Make sure to take all of your belongings with you and put any litter in the bin.