



Future of Music Coalition on

Traveling with Instruments

FMC FACT SHEET

Security clampdowns since 2001 have made traveling by air or across international borders with instruments much more difficult, complicated, and frustrating. The following are some guidelines and suggestions to get you and your instrument where you need to go.

For American artists touring internationally

Canada is often the first international stop for American musicians. In order to work in Canada, you must obtain a Temporary Employment Authorization (IMM-1102) by applying through the American Federation of Musicians' Canadian office. The Canadian government administrative fee is \$150CAD for a single musician or \$450 for a band of 2 to 14 players. Technical personnel also need apply for an IMM-1102. The IMM-1102 allows for multiple entries into Canada over the course of a single tour; check with the AFM Canadian office for more details.

Currently, you only need a government-issued photo ID (such as a driver's license) and a document such as a birth certificate to enter Canada by car or boat (though you do need a passport to travel by air). However, as of June 1, 2009, anyone coming into the US by either air, land or sea—including US citizens returning from Canada or any other nation—must carry a passport anyway.

Detailing visa and other requirements to work in other nations is beyond the scope of this fact sheet. Ask the venues/presenters you're working with for their experiences in working with other American artists; another suggestion is to call the embassy or consulate of the nation to which you are planning to travel. You can also check the individual country fact sheets at the US State Department's website for general information about each nation.

For foreign artists traveling to the US

The process of securing a visa to travel to the US for the purpose of touring and performing has become more daunting, arduous and expensive than ever. In addition, immigration policy and procedures continue to change frequently.

Most foreign musicians travel to the US on either O or P category visas. Nearly all visa applicants (including artists) must attend in-person consular interviews and return to that consular post to pick up the visas themselves. The process must be undertaken regardless of how many times an artist has previously visited the US, the cost of such trips, or how remote a US consular post might be from their home city or even home nation. As of late 2004, all applicants for US visas must also undergo biometric finger scanning.

The basic visa fee for a nonimmigrant worker is currently \$320 (until mid-2007, it was \$190). The US Customs and Immigration Service (USCIS) charges a \$1000 "premium processing fee" to rush this process and deliver a response within 15 days; however, those well-versed in this area strongly urge



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petitioners to still work as far ahead as possible, as a “response” is not at all the same as an approval. In recent years, there have been well-publicized cases in which artists have adhered to the USCIS’ rigorous procedures and deadlines and still missed their US tours because their visa applications were not approved before their tour dates. As of mid-2007, applications for O and P visas may be filed a year in advance of the proposed date of entry to the US.

In addition, USCIS agents’ unfamiliarity with the performing arts and band popularity have complicated or even ended the visa obtainment process. For example, the USCIS has asked world-renowned singers to prove that the Metropolitan Opera is an important venue, denied individual band members visas because they have been deemed by the USCIS to be “inessential” to their group, and questioned whether the band has not been “internationally recognized” for a “sustained and substantial” amount of time to be deemed worthy of visas. This has stopped many US tours and performances in the past few years, including those for Lily Allen, M.I.A, Klaxons and Holly Golightly.

We have the opportunity to tour the US. How do we navigate our way through the visa red tape?

The specifics of this procedure are far too complicated and dependent on too many variables to summarize here. You will undoubtedly require advice and assistance from those who have been down this path before; your best bet is to contact an immigration attorney that specializing in handling artists. (Also, keep in mind that the petitioner cannot be the foreign artist himself or herself.)

The League of American Orchestras and the Association of Arts Presenters (AAP) have created a truly excellent and frequently updated website, www.artistsfromabroad.org. This site should, at the very least, illustrate the potential hurdles you may face while familiarizing you with some of the myriad acronyms and forms associated with visa obtainments.

What if we’re just coming from Canada?

Currently, Canadian artists are subject to similar visa requirements as musicians coming from further abroad, even if it’s for just one show. For example, a band entering the US for a tour must apply for a visa, which can take a lot of time, and will likely include application forms, letters from your label, booking agent, venues you’re playing, as well as copies of all passports. Given the complexity and fluid nature of the regulations, we urge you to seek the advice of experts – such as the AFM or an immigrant/visa specialist – that can help you navigate the process.

Resources for US musicians touring internationally

AFM Touring, Travel, Theatre, Booking & Immigration

<http://www.afm.org/departments/touring-travel-theatre-booking-immigration>

AFM Local 1000: Crossing the Border to Canada

<http://www.local1000.org/members/visa-assistance>



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US State Department: Traveling Abroad

<http://www.travel.state.gov/>

Resources on visas to the US

Artists from Abroad—a Complete Guide to Immigration and Tax Requirements for Foreign Guest Artists

<http://artistsfromabroad.org/>

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