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The Music Industry's 'Certain Shade of Green'

by Sarah Lipman

Filed under: Community, Green living, Musical Instruments

Since the 1960s, musicians have been catalysts for social change and activism. When it comes to the environment, however, the music industry been slow to take charge. Now, with Al Gore's eco-conscious Live Earth concert series just days away, the industry is climbing aboard its green tour bus, fueled, naturally, by one of their own: Willie Nelson's biodiesel.

The redheaded stranger is in good company. These days, an increasing number of artists like John Mayer, The Fray, Bon Jovi and Incubus, are working with environmental organizations such as Reverb, Heal the Bay and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) to take new initiatives to revamp and "green" their concerts both on and offstage.

Why should they bother? As a whole, the music industry contributes 150,000 tons of carbon emissions annually through tour buses alone, according to Wren Aigaki-Lander of MusicMatters, a greening marketing agency that helps touring artists make eco-friendly choices while on the road. A single stadium show can contribute 500 to 1,000 tons of CO2 emissions, not including fan transportation, and then there's the garbage. A typical mid-size venue can go through 470,000 plastic cups, 200,000 napkins and 600 light bulbs each year, not to mention the 24,000 plastic bags that will hold it all. Turning this around is the focus of a new

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generation of musicians and promoters. "The music industry has a huge potential for social and environmental change," says Lander.

Touring Takes a Green Turn

This year, Incubus, a five-piece alternative rock band based in California, joined up with Sustainable Minded Artists Recording and Touring program run by MusicMatters. "We're doing what we feel like we should be doing as responsible human beings to coexist more successfully with our planet," frontman Brandon Boyd says of the band's upcoming summer tour. Boyd notes the massive 15- to 30-year-old audience the band reaches with their numerous multi-platinum albums and while on tour. "We've been blessed to have millions of wonderful ears that come and pay attention to what we're doing," he says, adding, "It seems appropriate to teach within this opportunity as well."

This year, Incubus' plans include serving organic food backstage, offering fans organic cotton T-shirts, printing posters and flyers on 100-percent post-consumer recycled paper with soy ink and working with venues to increase recycling. In addition, the band will fuel their tour buses with clean-burning biodiesel and reduce idling at venues. Lander notes that by switching to B100 or B99, the highest blends of vegetable-based biodiesel and petroleum, carbon emissions can be reduced by 78 percent. Bon Jovi and John Mayer are taking similar steps in their tours.

Playing the Green Guitar

Dave Welsh, the guitarist for piano-pop band The Fray, just got a new guitar—from 1966. "The good thing about the music business is that old or vintage instruments are always cooler than new ones," says Welsh. "Everyone's in the mindset of recycling instruments." Incubus band members also prefer instruments "of the vintage persuasion," says Boyd.

In addition to using vintage guitars, artists are looking for new ways to make their instruments even more eco-friendly, says Lauren Sullivan, co-founder of Reverb, a non-profit that provides environmental information at concert venues. "We do fun things too, like have the guitar techs collect guitar strings, and we send them out to be made into jewelry," Sullivan explains.

On the industry's side, instrument manufacturers are beginning to recognize the need for environmental reforms, as their prized tropical hardwoods disappear because of demand and deforestation. Gibson has long made a Rainforest Alliance-certified version of its signature Les Paul, and C. F. Martin employs wood from well-managed forests in its Sustainable Wood series. Dave Maize Acoustic Guitars employs reclaimed wood for guitars, played by Phil Lesh of The Grateful Dead among others, and Sullivan's husband, Adam Gardner, the guitarist and vocalist for the alternative rock band Guster, is currently working with musical instrument manufacturer First Act to create a customized "green guitar" that utilizes Forest Stewardship Council-certified woods and low-VOC finishes.

Record Labels Tune In

Touring artists and guitar manufacturers aren't the only ones in the music industry taking action. Major labels have invested in greener efforts of their own, including reducing waste, purchasing carbon offsets and, most significantly, replacing CD packaging with more eco-sound materials. With 1.8 billion CDs sold worldwide every year and 615 million in the U.S. alone, there's a lot of product to green.

As a first step, Warner Music Group (WGM) switched their paper inserts and board CD packaging to 30 percent post-consumer recycled paper, with the remaining content certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, executive vice president/chief operating officer of WGM's Weacorp Mike Jbara says. They are also exploring opportunities to advance eco-conscious CD packaging, as more than one billion jewel cases are produced each year in North America. Currently, jewel cases are made of either polystyrene or polypropylene, says Darby Hoover, a senior resource specialist at the NRDC. Neither of these petroleum-based plastics can be recycled easily, but WGM is considering jewel cases made from compostable biobased plastics derived from agricultural residues. "The proper focus is to eliminate the wrong plastic," Jbara says.

For the Eco-Friendly Fan

If you're a fan looking to make changes of your own, there are plenty of ways to help while enjoying your favorite band's performance:

- Ask venues to recycle and reusable utensils and begin recycling programs
- Carpool, ride a bikes or take public transportation to events. See our [Road Trips Tips](#) card for more ideas if planning longer drives to music events.
- Buy organic cotton or hemp t-shirts where available
- Take the message home with you and pass it on to your friends.

For more information, see
Reverb, www.reverbrock.org
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