

REBUILDING FOLK

Looking to the future for the professional folk music sector, in a landscape irreversibly altered by the pandemic

Summary report

February 2022



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

BLACK LIVES IN MUSIC



FOREWORD

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FOREWORD

The impact of the pandemic was widespread and devastating for society as a whole. In 2020, **English Folk Expo** recognised that we needed to act immediately and comprehensively to provide direct employment opportunities for the sector during the pandemic, equip people with the new digital skills and outlooks required to work professionally in an altered music landscape, and to consider what the long term and permanent changes were for independent music in a post pandemic world. To this end, all of our work leading up to and during the **Rebuilding Folk** programme was inspired by these requirements. I'm pleased to say that the legacy of **Rebuilding Folk** is strong. We achieved much of what we aspired to, and feel that this work lays a strong foundation for the growth and development of the sector in 2022 and beyond.

Tom Besford

Chief Executive, English Folk Expo



REBUILDING FOLK: THE STATS!

FOLK TALK ACADEMY

350

Individuals signed up to Folk Talk Academy in its 1st 6 months

91%

Said FTA has increased their industry knowledge and understanding

85%

Of FTA webinar attendees rated these as either good or excellent

INDUSTRY SHOWCASING

150

Industry showcase attendees

86%

Rated the artistic quality of the showcases as excellent or good

£86.7k

Of additional spend on showcasing artists at a time when the sector was effectively closed

EFEK PRESENTS...

513

Live stream attendees

339

Live gig attendees

98%

Of audiences rated the artist quality of the events as excellent or good

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

79%

Of industry respondents expect to attend virtual showcasing events in the future

73%

Think they'll be a virtual attendee at industry conferences

90%

Of live gig/stream attendees expect to pay to watch a live streamed/on demand folk gig in the future



FOLK TALK ACADEMY

FOLK TALK ACADEMY

“To be able to access so much information for free is fantastic, and fundamentally important if we want to see the folk musicians of the future thrive.” Artist

Launched in May 2021, English Folk Expo’s Rebuilding Folk programme was designed to test new ideas, open up new pathways and hand musicians and their teams the tools needed to reconstruct this part of the music industry in a post-pandemic world.

Since its launch, 350 individuals from across not just the UK and international folk sector, but also the wider music industry, have signed up to the resource. Analysis¹ suggests that just over half of FTA users (56%) are musicians, and others individuals who work or volunteer in roles across the industry. It also appears that, to date, the resource has been used by everyone from those new to the sector to those who’ve clocked up decades of experience.

Folk Talk Academy has quickly become a respected and valued ‘go to’ industry resource

“...the best one-stop shop for information and expanding your knowledge of the industry.”

Promoter

“A tremendously valuable resource for the whole independent music sector.” Artist

“This is an invaluable resource; it evens the playing field.” Artist

An indication of just how quickly Folk Talk Academy has cemented its place in the industry, one third said that FTA is their primary or ‘go to’ source of industry information, and more than 60% that it’s the industry site they use the most. Close to half – 48% - had used the site more than 6 times between May-December 2021.

Industry professionals appear to venture more widely across the site than artists, but overall 88% had checked out at least one Lecture Theatre webinar and 67% at least one Speakers Corner presentation.

And feedback about the quality of these resources is very positive too, with 85% of webinar attenders and 65% of Speakers Corner users rating these as either good or excellent.



FOLK TALK ACADEMY

Its impact in terms of knowledge and skills development is unequivocal, and bodes well for the future

"FTA is a brilliant! if you wanted to set up a course for young artists and managers to help them develop their industry relevant skills and knowledge, you couldn't do better than simply say 'work your way through all these resources' and you'd have a fantastic curriculum."

Promoter

Folk Talk Academy's impact in terms of knowledge and skills development is unequivocal. 91% said it has increased their industry knowledge and understanding, and 62% that it will help them make better career-related decisions in the future; evidence of both its existing impact and potential for unlocking much wider understanding.

Given the breadth of respondents – from those just entering the industry to those with 10 years+ professional experience, and from musicians to label reps and volunteers – this feedback speaks clearly to how effectively FTA meets the needs of an incredibly wide range of people with different roles in, and connections to, the industry.

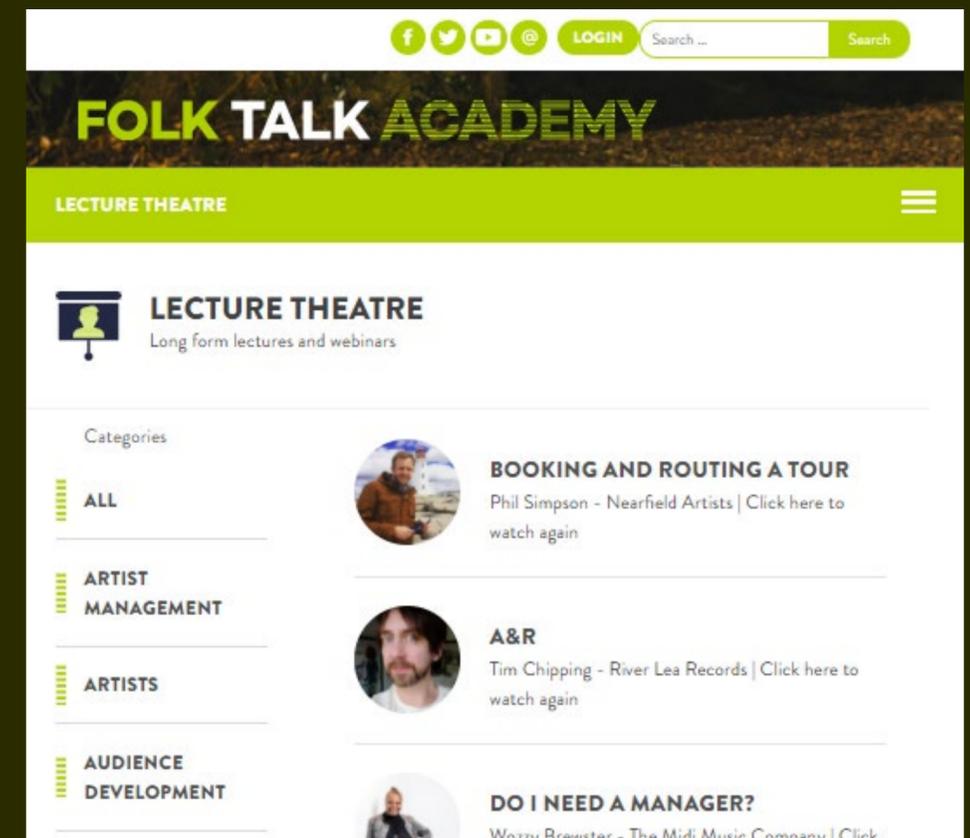
A place for a community to congregate, share and support each other

"As a freelancer working in grassroots music, Folk Talk Academy has provided valuable information and also a source of connection to the wider music community during a very challenging and isolating time."

Promoter and agent

At a time of crisis, Folk Talk Academy also nurtured a sense of community, provided opportunities to congregate, debate and share, and - through doing so – improved users' mental health and wellbeing.

¹ Analysis is based on feedback from 70 individuals who took part in a '6 month in' FTA survey in December 2021.



A photograph of a music rehearsal space. The room has wood-paneled walls and large windows with dark curtains. In the foreground, there is a keyboard on a wooden stand, a person in a red cap, and various pieces of equipment like tripods and bags. A semi-transparent green rectangle is overlaid in the center, containing the text "INDUSTRY SHOWCASE SERIES" in white, all-caps font. The background shows a band of people playing instruments like a bass and drums.

INDUSTRY SHOWCASE SERIES

INDUSTRY SHOWCASE SERIES

"It was a warm and friendly environment, and felt more like a community than 'an industry showcase' (which is a good thing)."

Live gig attender

"A lovely way to showcase talent and bring people together even when they're apart!"

Artist

Introduction

Across the series, over 9 out of 10 live attenders and live stream viewers appear to have rated the artistic quality as either excellent or good. The news was also positive in terms of ticket prices, with 94% of live attenders and 88% of live stream attenders rating these in the same way.

Overwhelmingly positive feedback from a discerning industry audience

Analysis ² suggests that promoters made up one third of attenders, agents another third, with the remainder of attenders having a range of roles across the industry.

Of these, 86% rated the artistic quality of the showcases as excellent or good, while 79% said the same about the quality of the artist interviews that formed part of the showcases.

There was positive feedback about video quality and the accessibility of the digital platform too, with 91% rating the former as excellent or good, and 78% saying the same about the platform's accessibility.



A key discovery tool, unlocking close to £87k of artist bookings during the pandemic

Feedback points clearly to the impact the series had in terms of discovery and unlocking additional income sources for English folk artists and their teams.

Over 6 out of 10 respondents told us that through the series they'd caught artists they'd never see perform live before.

In total, we estimate that this pandemic series unlocked a total spend on showcasing artists by attenders of £86,760 ³.

² Analysis is based on an evaluation survey, completed by 45 respondents across October – November 2021.

³ This extrapolated figure is based on an average spend of £4820 by each respondent who indicated they attended the showcase series because they were looking for artists to book, and relates to spend between November 2021 and October 2023.

A blurred background of a stage performance with warm stage lights and a camera monitor in the foreground. The text "ENGLISH FOLK EXPO PRESENTS" is centered on a yellow-green rectangular overlay.

ENGLISH FOLK EXPO PRESENTS

ENGLISH FOLK EXPO PRESENTS

"The whole event was superb ... I was looking for another word but cannot express it better." Live gig attender

"It felt very intimate and friendly, exciting and was best thing we've done for months." Live gig attender

English Folk Expo Presents was a series of 15 concerts that took place as live gigs and live streams between April – August 2021, as part of the wider Rebuilding Folk programme. Across the series, the live events in the series attracted a total audience of 339, while the live streams attracted 513 viewers.

A thumbs up across the board for artistic quality, ticket prices and booking processes

Across the series, over 9 out of 10 live attenders and live stream viewers appear to have rated the artistic quality as either excellent or good. The news was also positive in terms of ticket prices, with 94% of live attenders and 88% of live stream attenders rating these in the same way.

Live streamers were a discerning bunch, ready and willing to pay for quality content

Analysis ⁴ suggests that live stream audiences were bigger folk fans than those attending the live gigs; the former were twice as likely as live attenders to have described themselves as big folk music fans. They were also more likely to have heard about – and engaged with – the Official Folk Album Chart, and to be aware of EFX's involvement in producing it.

They also had 'form' as virtual gig goers, with only 1% having not watched any other live streamed/on demand folk gigs. Given this 'form', it's all the more impressive – and testament to EFX's high production values - that 91% rated the quality of video work as excellent or good.

Encouragingly, their appetite for paid for folk content appears stronger than that for free content; 97% have paid to watch streamed/on demand folk gigs in the past year, and 69% watched for free. Findings here echo other 2021 research studies, which also reported a willingness amongst music fans to pay for live streamed gigs, because of a desire to support organisers, share experiences and discover new artists.

Live attenders very positive about their live experience generally

Against a backdrop of months of venues being closed, with many having lost team members during that period, it's very positive that 92% of respondents rated the venue they attended as either excellent or good.

And given the ongoing uncertainty surrounding Covid 19, it's reassuring for EFX that nearly 9 out of 10 said they felt the same way about Covid security at the venue they attended.

As a national series, it appears to have been effective in terms of increasing awareness of EFX

As a primarily sector-facing organisation, English Folk Expo doesn't have that much of a profile amongst public audiences. Analysis of series audiences confirms how effective the series was in raising EFX's public profile; 55% of attenders/viewers appear to have discovered EFX for the first time as a result of the series, with live streams in particular proving to be really effective in terms of awareness raising.

⁴ Analysis is based on a series of post-gig surveys completed by 208 live stream attenders and 56 live audience members.

A young woman with long dark hair, wearing a light green patterned blouse and a checkered skirt, is playing a violin. To her right, a young man with dark curly hair, wearing a plaid shirt and a colorful patterned strap, is playing a guitar. A semi-transparent green rectangular overlay is positioned in the center of the image, containing the text "LOOKING TO THE FUTURE" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a brick wall and foliage.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

"If we don't 'have' to travel and meet in person then I think we all have to give very careful consideration to the enhanced live experience."

Sector development agency rep

In terms of how artists and others working in the sector expect to engage with industry events in the future, the future looks hybrid. While there's a preference still for meeting in person, there's also an expectation and willingness to engage virtually too.

Analysis ⁵ suggests that 79% of those who attended at least one EFEx industry showcase expect they'll have to attend other virtual showcasing events in the future, and 73% that their future also includes virtual attendance at industry conferences.

"Online helps environmentally as well as being Covid safe. Trick is to make them events where people can participate, rather than watch passively."

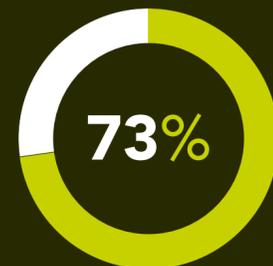
Promoter

Amongst these respondents, there's a loud call for EFEx to continue its digital programme

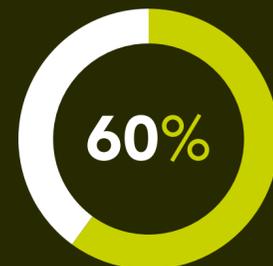
Against this backdrop, there's a loud call from these industry professionals for EFEx to continue its digital programme. Here, key feedback includes:



Want to see the Folk Talk Academy webinar series continue



Want EFEx to continue its virtual showcase events



Want to see EFEx to include a virtual conference in its programme

Virtual gig-going is here to stay, and the majority expect to pay for live streamed gigs

"We love live music, but with streaming, we can see many more bands than we would otherwise be able to see, either because they're too far away, or because there isn't enough time to travel...I certainly hope that live streamed music continues to be a thing after this ends."

Live stream attender

Meanwhile, amongst public audiences, the verdict is that virtual gig-going is here to stay; 58% of live stream attenders said their future plans include live streamed/on demand gigs, as did 42% of live audience members.

Encouragingly, it appears that most audience members expect to pay for live streamed gigs in the future; 98% have paid to watch such a folk gig in the past year and 90% expected to do this again in the future.

Again, our findings here echo those from other studies previously mentioned, which indicate that live streamed/on demand gigs are set to become a permanent solution for audiences beyond the immediate pandemic period.

⁵ Analysis is based on responses from the industry showcase survey, completed by 45 respondents across October – November 2021.



ENGLISH FOLK EXPO

If you would like to keep up-to-date with all of our work and be informed of artist and industry opportunities and upcoming events, sign up to our mailing list [HERE](#).

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