

## The Stiff Upper Lip | or, The Show Must Go On?

by Gerhard Seidl



One of the reasons for my deep love of Britain is its vibrant music scene. In the 80's and 90's I enjoyed many memorable nights in small clubs, and big open-air festivals, all over the island. Every summer, during my student years, I worked hard as a postman in Salzburg and then spent a month travelling across the UK. Entrance fees were a couple of Pounds - as musicians could still earn money selling records. My home town Salzburg had, at that time, only offered the classical sounds of Herbert von Karajan - no real music clubs and no interesting international concerts to please the heartbeat of the younger generation. In the UK it was refreshing to have so much choice, and one could enjoy many of the young bands in small clubs. The artists we celebrated then became big names and famous over the years.

One of the festivals I visited was the Reading Festival, the world's oldest popular music festival, in existence since 1961 and still going strong. Only once, in 1984 and 1985, was it effectively banned by the Conservative-run local council, designating the festival site for development and refusing the use of any other local property. Fortunately, this type of government intervention is unthinkable today, as festivals are recognized as big business.

The other night I discovered on Youtube a clip about Reading Festival 2021 and of course I was immediately interested. Liam Gallagher, notorious singer of the legendary Brit-pop band Oasis, played in front of tens of thousands of people. No one wore masks and there was no social distancing.

Despite the questions raised with no apparent Covid precautions amongst concert goers, it was great to see that the 49-year-old Gallagher still put on an amazing show; full of energy. He has lost none of his appeal over the last 30 years and remains young at heart, like many in our Austro-British Society.

### **So live Rock n' Roll is back ?**

And is there a collective mission to shake off the pandemic blues, throw caution to the wind and simply feel normal ? The festival with 100,000 capacity was totally sold out but it did follow many guidelines: such as mandatory health questionnaires and attendance only with vaccination or testing.

At the same time; in Austria, big festivals were mostly banned, with only a very few allowed to happen. Those given permits had restrictive limits on attendance numbers & permitted no camping (which is an integral experience in any decent festival). This of course destroys the economic model for people staging these events, and unfortunately many organisers see little value in the concerts going ahead, if the return on investment cannot be assured.

Now the floor opens for a heated debate to pick up. Do they not have more infections and deaths in UK vs. Austria ? Is this not all reckless risk-taking and it's better to stay safe at home ? Or, why not move on and allow people to enjoy life, as nobody is forced to go to a music festival anyway? Attendance is a freedom of choice. Young people meet privately regardless, if there are no public options to spend a good night out.

On 5th April 2020 the Queen reminded the nation "that the attributes of self-discipline, of quiet good-humoured resolve and of fellow-feeling still characterise this country." Stiff upper lip or simply remaining resolute and calm in the face of adversity, versus never ending panic and government telling you how to live your life ?

One further indication of our national differences is the OECD trust in government index (<https://data.oecd.org/gga/trust-in-government.htm>). UK is at the bottom end of the spectrum, whilst Austria is closer to the top with 62.6% of its population trusting government choices.

The pandemic frustrates us all and we are tired of experts contradicting themselves every day. Looking at all the happy faces watching and singing together at Reading Festival I think it was worth all the risks.

The three days ended with the biblical Oasis song 'Live Forever' dedicated to the late Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts. No better way to end a brilliant, late August, British summer night than with '...We're gonna live forever...".

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dW7ALxFBk8c> Live Forever, Liam Gallagher, at the Reading Festival 2021

The Austro-British Society is looking forward to your views and comments!

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#### *About the author*



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