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ENTERTAINMENT

Concert tours struggling this summer

Britney out, Lollapalooza canceled, tickets not bought

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CHICAGO, Illinois (AP) -- When it comes to concert tours, the good times are not rolling this summer.

Major acts like Britney Spears, Marc Anthony and Christina Aguilera, as well as large-scale festivals like Lollapalooza, all pulled the plug on their tours before they even started.

In some cases personal problems, like Spears' knee injury, were to blame. Anthony said he called off his tour to focus on production of his next album. Industry insiders, however, point to a much bigger issue: falling ticket sales.

"People aren't buying tickets," said Gary Bongiovanni, editor in chief of Pollstar, the concert industry trade magazine. "For whatever reason, ticket sales dried up around the middle of April -- it was widespread across the industry."

According to a Pollstar analysis of the top 50 shows through June, gross revenues were up 11 percent to \$753.5 million, but ticket sales were down 2 percent to 12.8 million, with ticket prices up almost 13 percent.

The average price of a ticket shot up from \$26.05 in 1995 to \$50.35 last year, according to Pollstar.

"Ticket prices have gone crazy -- very, very, very high, and nobody knows how to change that tide," said veteran concert booker Jonny Podell.

"When I was kid, I didn't have to make a big commitment to go to concerts," he said. "My children don't have the same



Britney Spears canceled her tour after suffering a knee injury.

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discretionary income that I have. When they're excited about a show ... and they hear a \$300 price, they get very unexcited."

'Hard to organize'

Donald Law, chairman and co-CEO of Clear Channel Entertainment's music division, which owns or operates 135 venues in North America, admitted that prices are high.

"We have provided \$10 and \$20 tickets to many of our amphitheater shows in many of our markets over the last couple of years and we do this in an effort to make tickets accessible for fans," he said.

Tom Gray, whose band Gomez was on the Lollapalooza bill, said he had a feeling the tour might not go off.

"The sheer size of Lollapalooza was really too mammoth to pull off," he said from his home in England. "Kids are likely to wait until the last minute (to buy tickets). It makes it hard to organize these money spinners where you have to count on advance sales to pull it off. It's just a shame really."

And when an artist cancels, the fans aren't the only ones who suffer. Supporting talent on the bill can feel the ripple effect, too.

Sixteen-year-old Canadian newcomer Skye Sweetnam was set to open for Spears. Her debut album is scheduled for a September release on Capitol Records, and the tour could have served as a launching pad for her burgeoning career.

Now, as Sweetnam puts it, she'll have to scramble to pull together a media tour and perform small acoustic shows to get the word out.

"It was kind of disappointing (when Britney hurt her knee) because we had this whole media hype behind the tour. It would have worked really well for a lead up for my album," Sweetnam said.

Some positive signs



One tour that's doing well is the Sting-Annie Lennox show.

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Not all tours are doing poorly. Madonna, with a top ticket price of \$300, is selling out nearly every show. Bongiovanni points out that Sting's co-headlining tour with Annie Lennox is selling well in most markets, and the Vans Warped tour, celebrating its 10th anniversary, continues to attract hordes of young fans who love punk music and skateboarding.

The Warped Tour offers tickets for around \$25 to see upwards of 50 bands at one show.

Promoters took note of the low ticket prices and have followed suit, albeit temporarily. Clear Channel Entertainment

recently offered a one-day discount, selling lawn tickets at their Northern California outdoor amphitheatres for any show at \$20 apiece, parking and fees included.

"They sold about 50,000 to 60,000 tickets in one day," Bongiovanni said. "Was it a good move? In the short term, yes. But in the long term it trains your audience to anticipate deals at the last minute and not buy tickets in advance."

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