

Robin Rimbaud, Composer – Written evidence (FTS0049)

The Reality of Brexit to Musicians

Now, let me warn you in advance. This is a post that is written in anger and sheer exasperation, and to be honest, partly with a broken heart. It's a response to a situation that creatives are left in here in the United Kingdom, especially musicians, whose careers very much depend on the flow of movement. It's about the challenge and reality of Brexit to musicians.

Today an invitation arrived, to perform a live show in the North West of Spain, for an enticing sounding music festival with my electronic modular synth set-up, at the end of 2021. I work independently. I don't use agents to book shows, nor have a manager to add grease to the wheels, so to speak. Like countless other musicians I need to take care of all these things myself.

I excitedly pencilled in the date on the calendar, conscious that Covid might mean that the dates could potentially change, but feeling once again thrilled at the thought of returning to the real world, meeting new people and sharing my work with those who want to experience it.

And then reality struck me in the face, like a door slamming shut. Just a few months ago I could respond to invitations speedily. Flights and hotels could be booked and I could be in Spain, Germany, France, Italy or almost anywhere, flights permitting, within days. 2021 presents a dramatically different scenario.

Applying for a Work Visa

Now I need a work visa for the trip. According to the [Consulate](#), applicants who will perform/work in Spain for a period no longer than 5 consecutive days or 20 performance days (rehearsals are not taken into account) require a C-type EET visa, which costs a rather eye-watering £409! One agency responded with an offer to help, who are 'visa specialists to the entertainment industry,' but whose clientele features the likes of Beyoncé, Madonna and Arctic Monkeys. And, as much as I would be overjoyed to consider my name featured alongside theirs, I think the costs of such services are far beyond my means. And, anyhow, they never even answered my enquiry!

No matter, I would still need to complete the [Spain Business Visa Application](#) form. I need to provide passport photos no older than 3 months, a work certificate from the promoter which mentions my position, salary, and date of starting the 'post,' and a letter of invitation written in Spanish, in which it states the business relation that justifies my trip. I need Spanish Travel Health Insurance, covering any incident or unforeseen illness with a minimum of 30.000€, that may occur in Spain and any other Schengen country. I need to prove that I have enough money to support myself while in Spain, providing bank account statements, or, as in my case, a letter from the promoter to confirm they are financing my trip, which they need to accompany with bank statements from their own account, and my hotel booking.

After which, I then need to travel to London for a Visa interview. Easier said than done. I live 50 minutes outside of the city on an extremely expensive train line which I just checked costs £103 return. So, that's another day lost to administration, and a loss of potential earnings, whilst my fingerprints are taken and facial scanning captured. It's worth noting that these interviews can only take place in Edinburgh, Manchester or London too, so for many people it's going to be a challenge to get there too.

And now the Carnet

Whilst waiting for the results of the Visa application I can apply for a **carnet** to accompany the equipment I travel with. This is to be 'used primarily for goods being temporarily exported for display at trade fairs or exhibitions, and for professional equipment and samples.' Here I need to spend time detailing every single piece of equipment, with serial numbers, weight of each item and country of origin, which in terms of electronics could be challenging depending on the individual parts. It shows that the equipment I take with me to the EU, then returns back to the UK and I've not sold anything on. The carnet comes in at a bargain £360 too! And lasts for just one year.

For myself, I also frequently travel with different equipment, for different shows and events, so have been advised to literally add all the equipment I own, to ensure it's all covered in the future. Just to consider how long this might take causes more anxiety. I also buy new equipment every now and then, but this would mean I could not bring it for a performance, as I would need to apply for an entirely new carnet again. And, every now and then, I'm gifted a little piece of equipment on a trip, so not clear how to bring that back without issues, as clearly it could not appear on the carnet. Unless I was travelling in the DMC DeLorean vehicle with a flux capacitor, that is.

The carnet will be stamped at every border crossing, and it's quite likely that at some point a customs officer will require me to display everything I have brought with me to cross-reference it with the paperwork. Now, consider that I often travel in on the day itself for a performance, and how much extra time will now need to be factored in as a precautionary measure, in case I'm held up at customs.

For a little light comic relief, it's worth sharing the example carnet on the official site, that proudly displays that they will travel with 10 x RCA to Phono connectors at £20,000, £150,000 for video screens and a £2000 BASF battery charger. Did they shop in notoriously expensive Harrods for their electronic goods? In my experience RCA phono connectors generally cost less than £10 at most, yet are seemingly more valuable than an Emerald and Diamond bracelet!

And let's not forget the taxes

And don't forget your double taxation forms, which are essential ingredients for any international show. These forms need to be stamped by the UK tax authorities to ensure that you don't get taxed at source in the EU country you are working in, and then again on the same income in the UK. Even though it's 2021, these can only be applied for online and can take up to three months to

arrive in the post, with no guarantee they will be with you before you need them on departure.

And perhaps I will take some CDs and vinyl records to sell? Well, I'll need to somehow settle all the taxes on these in the country itself and have my EORI number at hand for the goods.

When you earn less than you did 34 years ago

I've been working independently for 25+ years. The majority of my income has been from the EU, working with choreographers, film makers, artists, theatre companies, live performance and much more, but now I'm left in a rather compromising and harrowing situation. And I'm far from alone in this position. To add stress to this situation, as an independent artist I was encouraged to set up a limited company, but in so doing have not qualified for any government support or furlough in the last year. So, whilst I repeatedly hear talk of people never have had so much cash in their pockets, simply because they can't go on holiday, eat out in restaurants and so on, I'm currently earning less than I did in my first job when I left university back in 1987.

I'm cautious about falling into the murky rabbit hole of complaining about Brexit and all the negative energy that entails. Today, I'm simply trying to highlight the challenges for one person trying to work in Spain for just one day. As simple as that. Don't forget, this Spanish admin adventure would need to be repeated for each of the EU countries I need to work in too. And don't forget this affects all EU artists now visiting to perform in the UK.

It's worth mentioning that some years ago I was offered a show at the prestigious UCLA in the USA, with a fee I'm not accustomed to – (cue the drum roll) – \$10,000. However, by the time I'd factored in the visa costs with an agency (since the show date was fast approaching), the cost for a lawyer to expedite this application, the flights, the hotel, rehearsals, and all other additional costs, I suddenly realised I was probably going to lose money on the show, and had to cancel it, much to the chagrin of the promoter. And right now, with Covid devouring so much of our culture, venues and promoters have much smaller budgets to work with.

I've just worked out that this single show in Spain will personally cost me £728, BEFORE I'm paid for the show, money I need to advance from earnings I don't have. And given our fragile Covid climate, where do I stand should the show be postponed or cancelled, as the visa has a limited term on it.

It's been argued that these costs should be met by the promoters in question, absolutely so, but historically I've always been left to organise visas to the USA or Russia by myself, here in the UK. This also suggests that promoters have grand budgets, able to absorb such costs, but that erases all the possibilities for new exploratory music, nurturing fresh young artists who are just starting out, as it's clear that a promoter would not wish to book such an act with such additional costs now.

These new rules mean that Brexit has essentially inhibited and stopped this flow of performance, and exchange of ideas and talents, and significantly hit income for so many. Artists still needs to pay for a carnet, no matter. Given that fees for

small venues are frequently less than €200 per artist, it's obvious that this would mean none of them could ever play these shows.

At present, it's most likely that I will also have to sadly decline this invitation, and others in the future too. The fee for this show would sadly in itself would be wiped out by the financial costs and weight of bureaucracy. I love music. I love performing, and most of all I love the people and the world that inhabits it. It was nice while it lasted.

February 2021