The untold side of concerts and live music

By COOPER WOODWARD
Sports Editor

If you've ever been to a concert, you know they are nothing short of a spectacle. From LED screens the size of buildings to lighting rigs that seemingly defy the laws of physics and stages fit for the music royalty who perform on them, there really isn't any experience quite like a concert.

But before any note is sung and any string is strung, there is an army of people setting up every last thing that accompanies the show and tearing it down once the night is over. Those who get to work on that staff are called "roadies."

Many people think that being a roadie is one of the most glamorous jobs in the world. You get to travel the world, work with world-famous musicians and put on these same spectacles that draw people in to begin with.

What audiences don't see from roadies is the sacrifices they make to help make these shows happen, and how many feel neglected by an industry they've given their life to.

And it doesn't affect just them.

Being a roadie means you are on the road nearly all the time, without a home base and your family. If you're single and in your 20s, that may hold as much weight. However, for those who are married or have children, it creates a new layer of challenges that neither the roadie nor their family is ready for.

This tour life, the author of the essay "The Raw Truth About Touring and Mental Health," put it best: "At its core, touring is chronic displacement. You're always somewhere else."

Touring for long enough means the people you tour with become your family. They become the people you rely on when you're running on empty. But when everyone on the team is also running on empty, nobody gets better.

That strain isn't just limited to the mental side of things, but physically as well.

Concert equipment is heavy. The average lighting rig weighs anywhere from 1,200 to 3,200 pounds before it gets into the air. A sound system is even heavier, weighing anywhere from 800 pounds in local theaters to over 5,500 pounds in stadiums. Even with multiple people and equipment to help get it airborne, lifting that weight multiple times a week, often with little sleep, takes a serious strain on your body or even leads to much worse.

Scott Johnson and Tony Herily, touring technicians with the British rock band Radiohead, learned that the hard way.

In June 2012, an hour before doors were supposed to open for their show in Downsview Park, Toronto, a section of the designed stage collapsed. Johnson was struck by a falling video monitor and died instantly. Herily was able to escape with his life, suffering a shattered ankle and multiple severe back injuries.Unfortunately, cases like these aren't uncommon.

People are constantly risking their mental and physical well-being for the sake of putting on shows. As a result, workers are being pulled out of a business they've put blood, sweat and tears into. Paul and Courtney Klimson, co-founders of "The Roadie Clinic," followed this trend; being pulled off the risks just became too much.

Paul was a former sound engineer for artists including Justin Timberlake and Kelly Clarkson, while also being the lead engineer for various late-night comedy shows. But once the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the industry came to a screeching halt. Once the world began to reopen, Paul went on one major tour before he and Courtney decided to retire from roadie life.

"It was out of safety," Courtney said in an interview with content creator MicTheSnare.

It's the unfortunate reality of live shows in 2026. Roadie culture is taking qualified engineers and stagehands off the road, only for them to be replaced out of necessity by people with less education and less experience, leading to an overall poorer experience at live shows.

However, people like Paul and Courtney are working to change that culture, providing support to those who still call the road their home. They've started platforms such as RoadieDocRx, a 24/7 telemedicine website designed specifically for roadies. They have also started CrewPeeps, a support group designed to bring families of roadies together as they navigate hard times.

Paul and Courtney's work with The Roadie Clinic is a great start to what the future can look like for those who make countless sacrifices to create an environment to enjoy live music. One where they aren't treated as cattle, but rather as dignified workers who are entitled to some sense of normalcy in a lifestyle that's the furthest thing from it.

While their efforts got the ball rolling, they can't be the only ones pushing for more healthcare for roadies. If something doesn't change on a large scale, live music as we know it will never be the same.

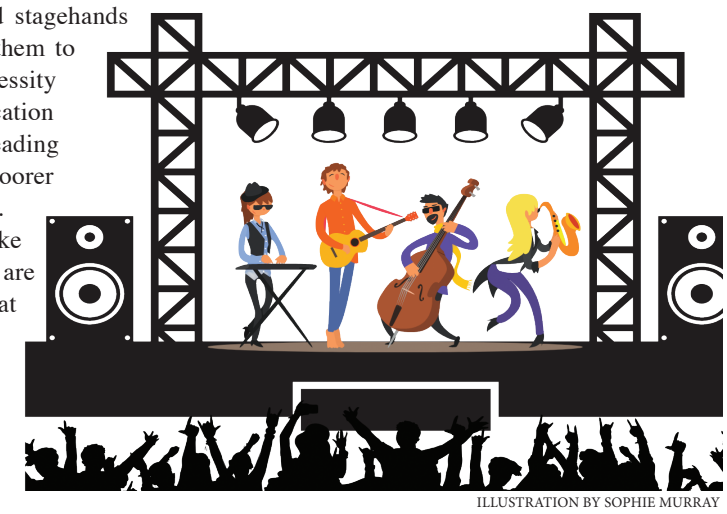

ILLUSTRATION BY SOPHIE MURRAY

Why 'Obsession' and 'Backrooms' were bigger than you thought

By JUSTIN LENDA
Contributing Writer

Recently, an advertisement ran for the new "Insidious" movie, "Insidious: Out of the Further." "Insidious" is a long-running horror movie franchise that has grossed more than $800 million worldwide and has received critical acclaim. And yet, while watching the film's advertisement, there was one part that struck me as odd: "From Blumhouse Atomic Monster, who brought you "Obsession" and "Backrooms.""

Why would a movie series as large as "Insidious" need to mention these two indie horror movies in its promotional trailer?

"Obsession" and "Backrooms" are two low-budget horror movies released earlier this year, and both quickly exploded in popularity. "Obsession," against its $750,000 budget, has grossed over $500 million worldwide, with "Backrooms" not far behind at more than $350 million. These movies were anomalies in their success, and the key to discovering why is in their subversion of both typical horror tropes and directorial similarities.

The movies' were successful due to their portrayal of objectively evil yet relatable protagonists and because they were directed by younger men affected by the disillusionment in our media today.

"Obsession," directed by filmmaker and actor Curry Barker, centers around the loss of autonomy. The movie follows Bear, a young hopeless romantic, who makes a wish that his unrequited love, Nikki, would love him "more than anything in the world." This causes Nikki's will to be forcefully altered (though this is not a possession movie, Barker has noted), leading to internal conflicts between Nikki and her other half.

Part of Nikki loves Bear uncontrollably, but that part does not embody Nikki's personality or character, but rather what Bear wished her to be. Bear begins to regret his wish but decides that her loss of autonomy is okay for his own gain. As the film progresses, the audience grows to condemn Bear, realizing he was never in love with Nikki, but rather the idea of having her.

"Backrooms," directed by Kane Parsons, follows Clark, the struggling owner of a furniture store, when he discovers another world that lies beneath his store. On the surface, Clark is a troubled man: his wife recently kicked him out of his house for returning home inebriated. Clark speaks to his therapist, Mary, about what he has been going through, and Mary enacts a roleplay to help Clark work through his feelings. Some time after that, he discovers the "Backrooms" in the basement of his store.

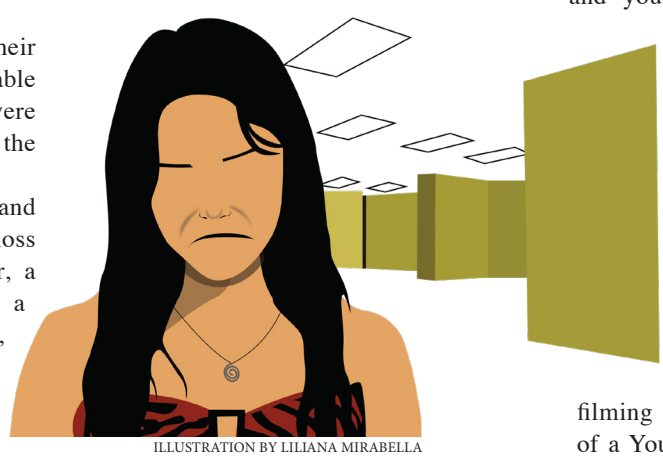

ILLUSTRATION BY LILIANA MIRABELLA

This labyrinth represents Clark's psyche; he feels trapped by the weight of the world and his obligations to his wife. Eventually, Clark retreats permanently to the Backrooms, believing himself to be unable to change and simply seeking affirmation in his actions and opinions towards his wife. Similar to "Obsession," one grows to dislike Clark as well, as they discover his tendency to hurt those closest to him and his refusal to change.

These two films do not rely on jump scares or psychological thrills to cause their fear; they simply make you fear the human. The two films create realistic characters, Bear and Clark, whose stories you follow and who are uniquely human. Bear's desire for something more and Clark's need for validation are traits most people tend to possess, but when in excess, they can be destructive, as is the case in the films.

"Insidious" tells a story, but it is a 16 year old story. It is a story that teenagers and young adults today fail to resonate with. The realism in Barker and Parsons' worlds comes from their disillusioned young adult characters who, when given the slightest bit of hope to latch onto, take all they can and leave everyone else out to dry.

During the filming of "Obsession," Barker was 26 years old. He was working on a tight budget and had mostly cast his own friends in roles. Before filming the movie, Barker was a member of a YouTube channel that posted comedy sketches. Parsons, at the time of directing "Backrooms," was 20 years old. Before this, he was releasing shorter films on YouTube about the Backrooms. The commonalities between these two directors made their movies successful: they both appealed to a disillusioned, younger audience.

Many films as of late have attempted to appeal to younger audiences, but none are as able to capture that like those produced by members of that generation. Both Parsons and Barker created worlds filled with believable, flawed and deeply human young adults. As horror movies, "Obsession" and "Backrooms" are, on the whole, unremarkable; they have their moments to scare and their plot twists, but what they lacked in fear they made up for in a lasting impact.

For the next few years, horror movies will try to recreate the fanfare that these two movies had, which is why "Insidious" felt the need to share its producer's association with them. However, no film will truly be able to recreate the obsession that came with "Obsession" or the way you felt truly lost in the "Backrooms," due to their unique circumstances thematically and directionally.

"Obsession" and "Backrooms" have made a lasting impact on the effect of horror movies for the foreseeable future, much more than anyone has considered thus far, and I am anxious to see the next movies that can create the same mob mentality as these two did.

legacy, then his second was for his parents and the little boy from Northern Ireland who never stopped dreaming big.