

LOCAL NEWS PARTNERSHIPS



Festival headliners

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BBC Shared Data Unit, BBC Local News partnerships

shared.dataunit@bbc.co.uk

**The Drum™
Online Media
Awards**
Winner 2020

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What's the story?

Only one in ten headliners at top UK music festivals this year will be women, a new study by the BBC Shared Data Unit indicates.

The findings come despite a national campaign to improve the representation of female and non-binary performers at the summer events over the past five years.

Artists said there was still more to do to change the music industry.

The BBC's Shared Data Unit analysed the headline acts at the top 50 festivals in the UK to have released lineups prior to May.

- Only 13% of performers were found to be a female solo act or all-female band.
- While there was a small proportion of mixed-gender acts and one non-binary performer, all-male bands and solo artists occupied three quarters of the top billings.
- Half of all the festivals in the study had no female headliners on the bill.

US singer Maggie Rogers, whose hits include 'Give a Little' and 'Alaska', said the lack of female representation at festivals continued to be "horrifying" and urged festival directors to be bolder in their choice of headliners.

And Brit Award winner Kate Nash said she was frustrated many continued to argue that it was difficult to book female acts in the top slots.

However, the chief executive of the Association of Independent Festivals (AIF) Paul Reed said it was unfair to blame the lack of balance on festival directors alone.

He said inequalities ran throughout the 'talent pipeline' and had as much to do with booking agents, promoters, music schools and gig operators.

But the study also revealed a possible cause for optimism.

Female and non-binary headliners had a younger average age and had been established for fewer years in the research, partly down to a new breed of young performers such as Billie Eilish and Little Simz beginning to take top billings.

A number of festival organisers also reported achieving a balanced lineup across all of their stages - even if they had predominantly male headliners on the main stage.

The project leader of Keychange, an international campaign formed in 2017 and aimed at achieving a 50/50 gender split at UK festivals by 2022, said its original timescale had been optimistic.

Francine Gorman said: “I think we have to remember that women and gender minorities have had access to far fewer opportunities than their male counterparts over the past however many years. It does take a little bit of time to build artists to the status that they'd be able to take a headline spot at a festival.

“But I think the progress made over the last couple of years is going to pay off.”

What this pack contains:

- **Interviews with artists Maggie Rogers and Kate Nash**
- **Expert comments from the Association of Independent Festivals (AIF) and Keychange as well as the organisers of WOMAD Festival and Strawberries and Creem.**
- **A spreadsheet detailing the headliners of 50 festivals around the UK with locations and responses, if received, from the festival organisers.**
- **Full methodology, background and analysis.**

Background

The debate over gender representation on festival stages began in [2015](#) when the [Crack in the Road blog](#) released a near-empty version of various festival posters once the male artists had been removed.

Among them, Download Festival in Donnington, Leicestershire, was reduced to a single band, All that Remains, on the event's main stage.

In 2017, a Shared Data Unit investigation found that, among 600 headliners to play at the country's biggest 14 festivals over the past 30 years, 80 per cent of the acts were male.

BBC music correspondent Mark Savage said the festival industry in the UK continued to have a “worrying reliance on white, male guitar bands at music festivals,” even though figures from streaming services showed they had suffered a decline in popularity in the 2010s.

That year saw a number of high-profile performers speak out about the scarcity of female acts in the top billings including Florence Welch (Florence and the Machine) and Shirley Manson (Garbage), who called the situation “insane”.

It prompted Festival Republic, the company behind Download and Reading and Leeds Festival to launch its [ReBalance scheme](#).

The three-year project based in Leeds aimed to fund the development of female artists by paying for studio time, travel and accommodation.

The same year also saw the launch of the European Union-funded [Keychange](#) initiative, which asked operators to achieve a 50/50 gender balance in their lineups by 2022 and was signed by more than 300 festival operators in 12 countries.

In 2020, the [F-List](#), a large database of female performers in the UK, was compiled by the former Ivors Academy CEO Vick Bain, who said the resource meant there was "[no excuse](#)" for festival bookers not to achieve the balance by 2022.

But the latest Shared Data Unit study shows that progress has been slower than anticipated.

Methodology

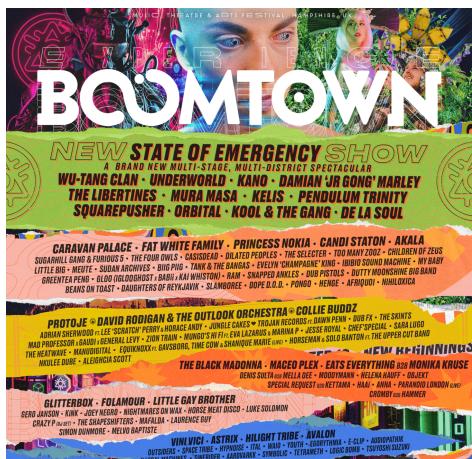
There are 50 festivals in our study.

These were the top 50 popular music festivals in the UK, according to a 2021 [YouGov poll](#). All these festivals had released lineups during or prior to the month of March 2022.

Where a festival lineup had not been released we chose the next available event on the YouGov list. As you can see from the sheet we have compiled, the top ranked festival in our study was Glastonbury Festival at number one in the YouGov list, the lowest was the 40,000 capacity Tramlines at 150.

We also excluded festivals that featured exclusively traditional or classical acts. Key examples here would include The Proms and the National Festival of Wales. Our study aims to discuss the representation of women in popular music and, although gender disparities may exist in classical and traditional forms, logging the individual genders and ages of say a philharmonic orchestra was simply not feasible as part of our study and would have strayed away from our central aim.

Defining the term headliner



There were a number of things to consider when deciding on how best to measure the gender equality of festival headliners.

If you look at the two festival posters here for Boomtown in Winchester and Glastonbury Festival in Somerset, they are very different in style.



Some posters, like Boomtown, define the headline acts for each stage. Others contain just a list of the acts set to play over the course of the weekend with the more well known names at the top - as with Glastonbury on the right here.

With that in mind, we decided to take a literal interpretation of the term to ‘headline’ or to be ‘top of the bill’. By that measure, we logged only the artists in the **biggest fonts** on the posters released. Where a poster was not available we applied the same methodology to the homepages or lineup pages of festival websites. Essentially this study is about the cultural and commercial value of female artists within the festival industry and the prominence those artists are given in the marketing of a festival.

We were also aware that analysing the gender balance among festival headliners would only tell part of a wider story. This is why we sent each of the 50 festival organisers a short survey.

The questions we asked were as follows:

1. Does your festival keep a log of musical artists’ gender?
2. If so, can you provide us with the gender split of performers at your festival in 2022?
3. Does the festival have a broad policy in place aimed at improving the representation of female performers when booking acts? Or, similarly, has the festival signed up to the 50/50 initiative launched by Keychange and the PRS Foundation in 2018, which was aimed at reaching a gender balance in performers by 2022?
4. Do the festival organisers feel more could be done to improve the representation of women at its festival?

The response rate and findings from this exercise are detailed in the What We Found section.

Band membership

Our study only focuses on the permanent members in headline acts and does not include the session musicians who might provide the accompaniment to a solo artist or appear as additional members alongside bands. For solo acts we have logged only the age and gender of the artist. For bands we have presented a mean average of the band’s age.

How to use this pack

[The accompanying spreadsheet](#) with this pack contains three tabs.

All headliners: contains details of every headline act at all 50 festivals in our study including ages, gender, the year the act first released a record and country of origin

The locations of each festival are contained within this tab so you can see which events fall within your patch. For columns P and Q the key is as follows:

M= Male performer

F= Female performer

Mixed= A mix of male and female performers

Mixed (M Maj) = A mixed group of performers that is more than 80% male

Mixed (F Maj) = A mixed group of performers that is more than 80% female

Performer Gender Tally: the breakdown of male, female and non-binary acts at each festival

Responses: responses from the festivals that replied to an additional survey we carried out asking for the gender split across all of the festival's stages.

What we found

Gender splits

There were 200 headline acts in our study

This was made up of 82 solo artists including DJs with guest vocalists.

117 bands including duos and collectives with guest vocalists.

And one orchestra

Out of 200 headline acts at 50 of the biggest festivals in the UK – only 24 (12%) were an all-female band or solo artist.

- 150 (75%) of those acts were either an all-male band (92) or male solo artist (58).
- 25 (12.5%) acts had a mixed lineup of male and female performers.
- One (0.05%) artist identified as non-binary.
- Taking all the acts into account, 27 (13.5%) of the 200 were fronted by a female lead singer.
- In total, 12 (6%) had a mix of male and female lead singers.

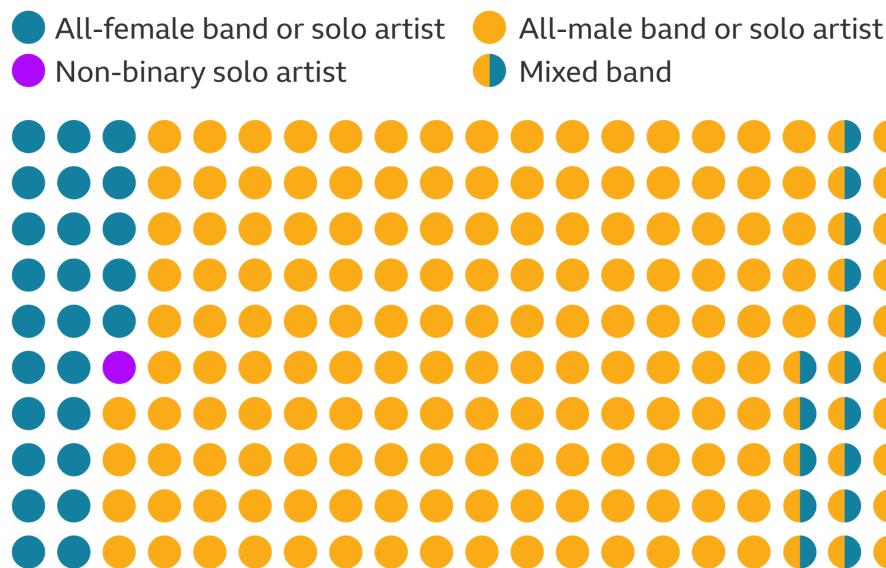
25 of the 50 festivals (50%) in our study had a billing of all-male headline acts.

None had a billing of all-female acts

The dot chart below gives a visual representation of the imbalance at headline level.

Female and non-binary artists are underrepresented as UK festival headliners

Out of 200 headline acts at the biggest UK festivals, only 26 were an all-female band or solo artist.



Note: Based on 50 UK festivals scheduled for 2022

Source: BBC Shared Data Unit

BBC

The top ten ranked festivals (according to the Yougov poll) to have no all-female headliners are listed in the table below.

Although Radio One's Big Weekend, Green Man Festival and Cambridge Folk Festival are included here - all three festivals did manage to achieve a balanced (or a balance within 5%) lineup across all stages. This year, 47% of Green Man's musical line-up will be female, 51% male and 2% non-binary. At Cambridge Folk Festival all of its stages will have at least a 50/50 split of male and female artists - its club tent will feature 73% female artists. Radio One's Big Weekend will see a 50/50 male/female split across all stages.

Festival name	YouGov rank
Isle of Wight Festival	4
Radio 1's Big Weekend	6
Connect	10

Download	12
Creamfields	13
Latitude	14
Parklife	15
Green Man	20
Cambridge Folk Festival	24
British Summer Time	29

Age

The median average age of female solo performers was 34.5

The median age of male solo performers was slightly older at 38

The oldest female solo headliner was Diana Ross at 77. The youngest, Billie Eilish at 20.

The oldest male solo headliner was Paul McCartney at 79. The youngest was Dave at 23.

Kool and the Gang had the highest average age for an all-male band, 67.6. The youngest average age for an all-male band was the Lathums at 21 though, in both cases the ages of all the members could not be verified.

There are only two all-female bands in the study, Sister Sledge and Bananarama whose average ages were 64.7 and 60 consecutively.

Capacity

If you were to take a broad average across all the festivals, all-male performers were not more likely to headline a festival with a bigger capacity than all-female acts.

The median festival capacity headlined by an all-male group was 40,000 and the median festival capacity headlined by an all-female act was also 40,000.

Years established

Female artists - both solo acts and bands - had, on average, been established for fewer years than male artists.

The median number of years established among female performers was 14 compared to 22 years among male performers.

The visualisation below shows how female headliners were more likely to have released their first music in the past two decades.

Female headliners are more likely to have released their first music in recent years

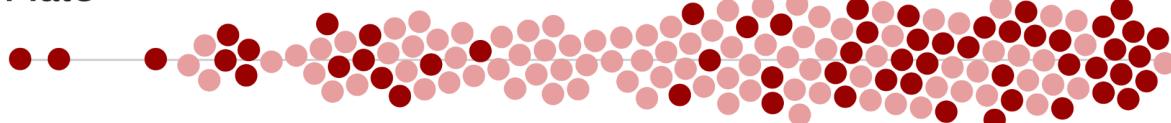
Headlining acts and the year of their first music release

- Solo artist
- Band or orchestra

Female



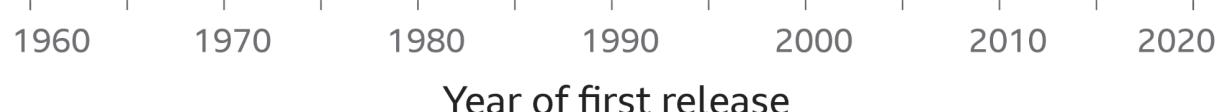
Male



Non-binary



Mixed



Note: Based on 50 UK festivals scheduled for 2022

Source: BBC Shared Data Unit

BBC

Full Lineups.

Each of the 50 festival organisers were asked to provide a full breakdown of the balance of performers across all stages. The response rate was low. Only 10 out of the 50 contacted festivals responded. The BBC, which did respond, runs two festivals in the study - 6 Music Festival and Radio One's Big Weekend. The press office issued a response covering the Big Weekend event but not 6 Music Festival, as it had already taken place.

Festival Republic, which runs Reading and Leeds Festival, Wireless Festival, Latitude Festival, Wilderness Festival and Download Festival, all of which are in our study, did not issue a single response for either of its festivals despite repeated requests via email and phone to Festival Republic and its parent company Live Nation.

Seven out of the 10 festivals to respond claimed to have achieved a balanced lineup within 5%, which can be summarised in the table below.

Festival name	Response in full	Did festival achieve at least 50% female and non-binary performers?
Africa Oye	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1a_a_P_legx3-sdnB3sCZ5ysWWhsRH-wPhnmEka0UMSs/edit?usp=sharing	No
Cambridge Folk Festival	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1c8gKCejQT5ilNLGJtLNYgYgpl4YZQn_umiutlhFvbCs/edit?usp=sharing	Yes
Camp Bestival	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wx_EtxCXiWu0s2q-RN8T71dIANhc7UNbtAbF0k74mRc/edit?usp=sharing	Did not answer this question
Cheltenham Jazz Festival	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GP_bx3IXJ4O43YLoxxEUDljCRwqEeA490W-Zg9v5Ynl/edit?usp=sharing	Yes

End of the Road Festival	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1e8lofaT2hDNQyYSTnv5lvoKfY3rSxWi5-AAIjhTJaA/edit?usp=sharing	Yes
Green Man	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PM35WBiplRjK3N_Owbv5hftmZtwnSX0kJCdASEs_TFKQ/edit?usp=sharing	Within 5%
How the Lights Gets In	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1K6ZQ_CYlqJ7XjzXRECI2LDI348qqXHPfmXuj-BNUJHQ/edit?usp=sharing	Yes
Radio One's Big Weekend	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KKSYjkGvnCXR4oQiiyEEU13kn7g351q7160p2brzpFc/edit?usp=sharing	Yes
Solfest	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rEyzLkyRmoJ3OWiz9s5tRJoPOLp8ZbBrxIUG3PC_iJc/edit?usp=sharing	No
WOMAD	https://docs.google.com/document/d/117M-k3Uk6Mq1w58pO6SMhwaNHnQz2xEwcdUwKG0lydl/edit?usp=sharing	Yes

Interviews and expert comment

Maggie Rogers

Maggie Rogers is a Grammy award-nominated American singer-songwriter who rose to fame when her song Alaska was championed by multi-platinum selling artist Pharrell Williams. She is set to appear at Latitude Festival this summer.

What do you think of our findings generally?

A. It's not surprising to say the least, but it's definitely disappointing. That's my initial reaction, I am completely unsurprised.



Q. You're coming over this summer to perform at Latitude Festival – when you look at the Latitude poster, you see at the top of that, in the biggest writing, three male artists or all male bands and then just beneath that in slightly smaller writing is your name, next to Little Simz.

I just wonder when that's so common, how does that make artists like yourself feel?

A. "What I come to music for, ultimately, as a fan and as an artist, is for community, to feel part of something, and I think community functions at its best when it feels inclusive and you want to see a version of your festival line ups that are as beautifully diverse as we are as a society."

"And when that doesn't happen, when the line ups reiterate imbalances that exist in gender and race and class - which are all so deeply intersectional – it's not surprising in any way, but it's not ideal."

"The music industry has been largely run and dominated by male acts since the beginning of time and I can tell you - and I'm sure that every female act can tell you - a story of growing up and walking into a guitar shop and just having your dreams crushed."

"I think that we have made a lot of progress. I see so many young female producers who are coming up or people who are playing guitar or playing drums or just getting to be a part of the scene but it's interesting in a post-me-too era because this imbalance is something we've had so much conversation about but still in the music industry three out of every one hundred people are women in the music industry which is just a horrifying number, and it gets even worse when you look behind the board at mixers or engineers or people who are producing music."

"I wish I had a more hopeful thing to say. I don't know what the solution is. You're asking me how it makes me feel - it feels awful, of course it feels awful."

"I also understand the nature of booking festivals, you need artists at a certain echelon to be able to headline but in the same breath it's all of the internal systems, they're all interconnected."

Q. What do you say to those people who don't see what the problem is, who might say it doesn't matter what gender an artist is and that this is just supply and demand and that festival promoters need to sell tickets and they feel like the best chance of doing so is booking male artists – what do you say to that?

A. "I just don't think it's that simple. People that feel that way probably feel really well represented on those stages so they probably feel really included.

"What I said at the beginning is that this is about community, it's about making people feel welcome and it's about having an experience where we come together with music to be able to connect to each other.

"Music is really just the medium, it's a way to have a common conversation with the people around you. I think that ultimately music does remind us that we have more in common than we might think.

"Even though we might have different political parties we both know what it's like to feel happy or sad or heartbroken or hopeful and I think in order for us to have that central space you have to have representation."

Q. You very humbly said a moment ago, Maggie, that you don't have the solutions but I just wonder if you've got any kind of ideas as to how more progress can be made. We have seen some artists like the 1975 suggest that they won't play festivals that aren't doing enough. Would you urge other male bands, other male artists to consider doing the same perhaps?

A. "It is always inspiring to see male artists be allies, actively. I'm a big 1975 fan, I saw that thing that you're talking about and I thought that was great but I don't know that I know what the solution is.

"It is such a deeply embedded societal problem that comes from years of systemic patriarchal blah, I don't know that I can sit here and say if only the promoter would choose different artists because the other reality is that I want to be booked as a headliner because I deserve to be there or because my music is great or because my business has grown in a certain way, I don't want to be booked because I'm a woman either.

"These issues are not black and white but there's a tendency for us to talk about them in those contexts and I think the reality is they are deep systematic issues that are just really complicated."

Q. With all that in mind, if this were a conversation you were having with a promoter, with a festival organiser, what would your message be to festival organisers here in the UK, looking at our figures, what would you want to say to them?

A. "I would just ask, to create an environment that feels inclusive for all people and to really think what it means to go outside your comfort zone to maybe include someone whose world

you don't know anything about. That's just compassion, that feels like a baseline ask at this point."

Q. When it comes to festival organisers they obviously have a lot of power and a lot of influence, they can decide whose names are in the big writing, perhaps they actually have more responsibility than most when it comes to that, they are in a position to actually change perceptions?

A. "I think that anyone in any position of power has a sense of responsibility that comes with that and I'm not hesitant to put that responsibility on festival bookers, but again it's not just on festival bookers it's on label heads, it's on music teachers, it's on everybody.

"These things are deeply interconnected. For women to be able to come to a position of headlining that's not just about a festival promoter, that's also about access to education, it's about access to healthcare, it's about race, class, gender abuse.

"These things are all deeply fundamentally intersectional. Yes I think festival promoters can always do more and I think it's complicated."

Kate Nash



Kate Nash is a musician and actress who rose to fame when her single Foundations reached number two in the UK charts in 2007. She won the Brit Award for best British female solo artist in 2008 and has since released four studio albums. Kate recently starred in the hit Netflix comedy Glow and is currently touring in Europe.

Q: What do you think of the findings broadly?

A: "They make me really annoyed - I feel I've got very little patience for this issue now because we've been pointing it out and highlighting it for so many years.

"We are going through the potential overturning of Roe vs Wade in America; Arizona is trying to ban condoms. I feel there's so much stuff that's going on that's scary, that is extreme sexism and could potentially put us back years - could we just support women in music? It's actually not that hard.

"I've spoken to festival bookers about Keychange- and certain ones have refused to sign up because they want to do it in their own way. That's just a bit rubbish, the music industry needs to unite.I don't think everyone doing it in their own way is working.

"I've been told audiences don't want to see women - that's just not true. I've had festival bookers tell me it's really hard to get female acts - but there are a lot harder things out there - it's hard being an artist. I'm frustrated. At this moment in history when women are being really affected by politics you need to stand by them or support them."

Q: What would you say to a festival booker in the UK that says there is a limited pool of female artists to choose from?

A: "They say you are not a festival headliner until you become a festival headliner. It's a chicken or the egg thing. If you've never been a headliner, how are you going to become one? Is it always going to be the Foo Fighters?"

"I've had someone say to me before that you have to give these opportunities for bands to become a headliner you have to give them a chance to do it - maybe at the smaller festivals first.

"Festivals can be some of the best experiences as a performer and as an audience member. We need engagement, we need a response and we all need to do this together. I'm sick of us saying we are trying to fight to be on a lineup."

Q: The company Festival Republic had a number of predominantly male headlined festivals in our study. The company did not respond to any of our attempts to contact them for comment. How does that make you feel?

A: "It doesn't surprise me at all. I don't think there are any consequences in the music industry. We are an unregulated industry. It's very typical of a music industry response.

"Silence is just safer isn't it? Don't say anything and it'll go away. If you get involved there will be a quote, it'll go on on Twitter and it'll get blown up - if you say nothing you are safer, you are protected."

Francine Gorman

Francine Gorman is the project manager for the Keychange, a European Union funded project set up in 2017 to improve the diversity of female and non-binary performers at festivals. Its original remit was to achieve a 50/50 performer gender split at festivals signed to its pledge by 2022. The aims of the project have since broadened and it now seeks to establish better female

and non-binary talent progression across the whole music industry. Its funding is set to continue beyond 2022.

Q: What do you think of our findings broadly and do they tell us there is still very much work to be done in achieving gender equality among festival performers?



A: "I think that there is still a lot of work to be done, I think we have to remember that women and gender minorities have had access to far fewer opportunities than their male counterparts over the past however many years, and therefore it does take a little bit of time to build artists to the status that they'd be able to take a headline spot at a festival. But I think the progress that has been made over the last couple of years is going to pay off."

"We are going to start seeing a lot more women and gender minority headliners across stages in the future. And what is important though, is that festivals are acting now. If they have those headliners available now we need to be putting them on stage, and we need to be giving those acts the opportunity to become role models to developing artists."

Q: Many of the people we have spoken to have talked about how the music industry as a whole needs to change before we start seeing more non-male headliners on festival stages: what are your thoughts?

A: "Absolutely it's so important that this conversation around gender representation is had at every single level of the music industry. So we're not even just talking about festivals here we're talking about record labels, looking at the gender balance of acts that they're signing; booking agents, looking at the gender balance of their rosters; broadcasters, looking at the artists that they're playlisting and that the hosts that are on the shows picking the music."

"It's a conversation that has to be had every single twist and turn of the music industry to make sure that everybody has equal access at all points, so the male artists aren't being given preference in any situation and that there's no unconscious bias towards male artists over women and gender minority artists when they're in these development stages."

"We have to build the infrastructure throughout the music industry to make sure that we're developing the artists to take those slots and we do still have quite a lot of work to do in that space."

Q: What has Keychange been doing to redress the balance since 2017?

A: "In 2017 we launched a key change pledge which was very much aimed towards festivals and encouraging them to book at least 50% women and gender minority artists to their stages. This wasn't necessarily just about headliners - we were asking them to look at their full lineups and make sure that on every stage and at every point women were given the opportunities to perform.

"Quite quickly after launching the pledge we got a lot of feedback from the music industry that it needed to be a wider consideration and that we couldn't just focus on one point, we need to make this framework that we created available to the music industry as a whole, so that orchestras can be looking at the gender balance of their players, so that music schools are looking at their admission rates and if there's anything that they can do to encourage more young women to start signing up to educational courses and going into further education as musicians.

"So we opened up the Keychange pledge to invite any music organisation around the world to pledge to achieve at least 50% women and gender minority representation.

"Going back to festivals we're very much looking at the artists performing on stages, but this can also apply to the sound technicians, the security and the booking teams."

Q: Is there a feeling in the music industry that a male headliner is more marketable in some way?

A: "There does seem to be some myth flying around the live music industry that this is a thing and that women artists don't sell tickets, but I'm yet to see any evidence to support this.

"In fact, the evidence that I have seen is quite the contrary, it's that if you have a gender diverse lineup then you're opening up your pool of audience to be attractive to the other 50% of the population, which might have felt pushed away or put off somewhat by a fully male lineup so I don't agree that there is any argument to men selling more tickets than women."

Q: Do you think particular genres of music have more of a way to go to improve gender diversity than others?

A: "Yes absolutely and this is something that we really try to engage with with key change because, obviously, if you look at a genre like metal - it's incredibly male dominated whereas there are some incredible metal musicians that are non-male making music and would like to access the same festival bills."

Paula Henderson

Head Programmer, WOMAD Festival



WOMAD Festival, held every year in Malmesbury, was the only event in our research to have more female and non-binary headliners than males. The festival has been running since 1980 and has a focus on world music and arts.

Q: Some of the festival organisers we spoke to have said that achieving a balanced lineup is still challenging given the available pool of artists around festival season. Is this something you have found?

A: "I actually don't find it challenging and I think WOMAD works internationally in a very different sector. And so, because we're about celebrating music and culture we're not defined by the kind of market-driven decision making.

"So, this year we have Angelique Kidjo as one of our headliners: she is the best of the best in terms of her genre of music.

"I don't have to struggle to find that artist to play so I don't agree, but that said, our kind of demographic is maybe different to many other festivals."

Q: Is there a legacy issue then among festival organisers where many feel the need to have a longstanding male guitar act topping their bill?

A: "I think there are definitely festivals that seem stuck with that idea, but then we are just incredibly lucky that we do have the world at our fingertips.

"In terms of what we are programming, it is kind of our brief to look far wider, whereas if I was trying to programme an event that was very much featuring on Western rock I would probably struggle far more.

"In many ways I will openly look for artists that are slightly different for what people are used to seeing."

Q: What do you think of our findings broadly - do they sadden you?

"I'm afraid they do sadden me because I think there are so many fantastic artists not being represented or presented in the way they should be, because they're not hitting a commercial value.

"There are very few independent festivals on the scene and so when you have a big sponsor behind you, they may have an input. I think that's the wrong way forward.

"In terms of people who buy a festival ticket, you're signing up to the whole thing.

"The headliners are not the reason people buy the tickets. I mean, people buy tickets for Glastonbury without ever seeing the lineup. It's sold out and no one sees it.

"I think, is more important that you turn around and embrace that and use that in order to ensure that there is a much more balanced program. No one is going to say 'I'm not going to go to Glastonbury because three of their four headliners are female'."

Chris Jammer
CEO, Strawberries & Creem



Strawberries & Creem is a festival held in Cambridgeshire since 2014. This year, 60% of its artists are female or non-binary and it is a leading campaigner for the Safe Space Campaign which aims to prevent sexual harassment in the music industry.

Q. Some of the festival organisers that we've spoken to said achieving a balanced line up is still a challenge given the available pool of artists around festival season. Is this something you've found?

A. "I don't think that we have found that there isn't an available pool of artists, I think we've managed to achieve a 60% female and non-binary line-up this year and that was just a case of being open with our bookings and making sure that that was a priority for us and I think the rest followed from there."

Q. Why did you decide to go down the route of having a mainly female line up?

A. "We decided to go down the route of having a mainly female line up a couple of years ago.

"In 2019 we had a female led line-up and then in 2021 we had a 50:50 line up but I think a lot of that was spurred on by seeing a lot of line ups that were male dominated and thinking that this shouldn't be the norm and trying to put our best foot forward - and also credit went to Keychange and Girls I Rate who put forward the pledge to get a 50:50 gender balance which all festivals are trying to achieve this year."

Q. Why do you think other festivals do struggle? Do you have any idea why they might think there's more cache in male-led guitar bands?

A. "I think a lot of festivals struggle potentially by just going with what they know and not really wanting to deviate from their norm.

"I think there's a lot of proven ticket sellers in this industry and in the times of economic downturn and covid a lot of people wanted to go with the safe option but I think that just isn't the way to operate it."

Q. Do you think the obstacles that women and non-binary artists face are lower down in the music eco-system and do you have any ideas about how they might be combatted?

A. "This is definitely an industry-wide issue.

"These gender imbalances are across everything from songwriters to women in senior positions and it's a deeper rooted problem but with festivals being a microcosm of the general, wider economic landscape, we have got a responsibility to really try and put our best foot forward and make a change there."

Q. How do you go about deciding which acts you'll try and book?

A. "So we have quite an interesting booking system at Strawberries and Creem, we all as a team put our ideas together on paper and try and build a line up around that.

"We have headliners that we try and go for first – this year for instance we had three female headliners – and then try and build the line-up around that.

"You never get your initial dream line-up that you plan for at the beginning but it's all a balancing act and making everything sit in harmony with each other, so it does take a long while."

Q. In terms of the line up you've got this year, who are you most excited about?

A. "I'm most excited about seeing Tems perform, and also Ella-Mae who is dropping her long-awaited album in a couple of weeks time.

"And obviously Lil' Wayne is headlining the weekend and it's his first time back in the UK for 14 years."

Paul Reed, CEO of the Association of Independent Festivals (AIF)

The Association of Independent Festivals is a trade body representing 93 festival organisers across the UK. Its members run events with capacities ranging from 500 to 80,000 people. An independent festival is considered as an event that is not affiliated with a major trans-national company such as Live Nation.

Q: Do our findings surprise you? That 75% of festival headliners are still male?

A: "I think some progress has been made and you know I am aware of members such as Standon Calling and Strawberries and Creem Festival who have achieved gender balance lineups.

"But there is clearly more work to be done.

"If this is an issue with festivals as you've outlined, then I think, by definition, it's an issue with the wider music industry ecosystem and the talent pipeline. You may define this as local venues, record labels or publishers that have seen so many artists pass through. Before reaching even their first festival opinions, and so do you feel you know festivals can be somewhat of an easy target for this, because they are annual events and they do publish their entire lineups very visually on a poster.

"I do think we perhaps need to zoom out and scrutinise what's been done in other parts of the pipeline alongside festivals."

Q: If you are a festival organiser - what kind of challenges are you faced with in trying to get a balanced lineup?

"Obviously festival organisers have a certain pool of artists to book and artists that have passed through that pipeline, that ecosystem long before they reach festivals. So I do think this is a systemic issue really.

"For example, we put out a demographic survey to which 65% of our membership responded. When they were asked 'with which gender do you identify'? Just over 49 per cent said female. So there are clearly plenty of people identifying as female who are organising and promoting festivals.

"I think part of the challenge is that some are operating in quite niche genres. You could have a female organising team with a predominantly male lineup due to the talent pool available in that particular year.

"There is certainly more awareness around this issue since Keychange launched but it is also quite a nuanced issue. All of our member have an awareness of Keychange and have access to the database of female artists that the F-list put together."

How do festival organisers interact with pools of artists?

"It very much depends on the event because some smaller grassroots festivals can have quite a focus on emerging talent.

"But I would say, typically if you are looking at headliners and higher up the bill, there is already a system around those artists in terms of booking the festival, so they will most likely have booking agents and management.

"They will have played the grassroots venue circuit, they'll possibly have a label or publisher, radio play, all of this infrastructure around them prior to getting to the point. The majority of our members do work with agents.

"The higher up someone is on the lineup the larger their team are likely to be."

Are there certain types of music or genres where more work needs to be done to bring talent to the fore?

"I wouldn't want to say, as a blanket statement, a particular genre was male dominated.

"But let's say you are organising a 10,000 capacity math-rock festival, it is a niche audience, it is a niche group of artists even globally.

"You know your audience is probably going to travel internationally, because there might not be many festivals in that genre.

"By definition, there is a limited pool of artists that you can book in any given year really - and then it's down to the availability of those artists. I do think the more niche you get perhaps, the more challenging it is."

Q: But would you say more has to be done to get female performers to the stage where they are considered a headliner - even within those niche genres?

"Yes definitely and I'd say really we'd welcome more scrutiny around the entire ecosystem and pipeline, because if it's an issue in festivals, then it is a systemic issue. A festival lineup is ultimately a kind of product of that ecosystem."

Q: Would you say the Keychange scheme has been broadly successful?

"I think unquestionably in terms of focusing minds on this issue and creating a discussion around it.

"Having a kind of quota around booking at the outset and working towards an incremental change I'd say is a good thing.

"Things keep changing and the F-list is a really valuable resource."