

We need to talk about Primavera Sound. A cornerstone of Barcelona's cultural identity, the organisers 'dazzled' us this year promising the most epic, inclusive lineup ever to mark 20 years 2 years late in 2022. Instead, ticket-holders to the original 2020 festival, who are no longer allowed refunds, lost two major headliners from the original lineup they paid for: the multi-Grammy winning Doja Cat and arguably the biggest name in Latin music, Bad Bunny. The first weekend of Primavera's most expensive festival in history sold out in the first hours as the organisers' effective if cynical marketing to the UK enabled those much larger salaries to line their coffers a year in advance. Creating FOMO (the fear of missing out), the universal affliction of the social media age, a year in advance in the middle of a pandemic in a country with low wages is incredibly cruel, and that's by the city's *own* festival.

Primavera Sound has evolved since it's early inception at various venues in Barcelona showcasing mainly rock and alternative music and there's no problem with that, things change. I know that over the last decade people have begrudged the inclusion of more pop, trap, electronic, and even reggaeton acts but this is merely a matter of taste and those fans are welcome to migrate to Vida Festival and Cruilla, while PS mimics elements of Sonar like an uncool uncle. It wanted to get bigger and it did, smashing previous attendance in 2019 with 220,000 people. The issue isn't with the gradual evolution of this Barcelona behemoth over a steady 15-20 years but in fact the accelerated change of the last few. I was at the 2019 addition and as a seasoned attendee I was bewildered by what I saw. Although the entrance areas of the festival had expanded in the last few years to include horrible high street store chains, by 2019 the scales had tipped just enough for you to feel the corporate atmosphere everywhere. We were greeted by Pull & Bear boutiques, a huge Mango store standing by the 'Mango' stage, bright orange Aperol Spritz tents which gave the sanitised feeling of a regatta attended by bankers rather than a music festival. And finally, an area dedicated to taking your IG selfies with provided hashtags like any great corporate event, oh sorry, I mean alternative festival. Seeing a multi-screen display of the Hollywood sign was just surreal, Barcelona is cool, we're by the sea, Forum is an awesome venue and we're being bombarded with features that say 'European Coachella', why can't we just be Barcelona? Primavera Sound had been creeping with changes over the years, extending VIP areas to run the entire length of the main stage blocking normal punters from seeing the sea, because how dare we? But this time my companion and I said we couldn't block it all out anymore and just enjoy the music. It was a bittersweet festival, the acts were amazing but the atmosphere was lacking and we felt that all the crude extras had finally destroyed it's spirit and we were a bit perplexed as to why it was so Americanised and channeling an Instagram co-working office and a green juice feel.

Turns out our hunch was right, there really was something different about PS 2019. When we got home we had a look online and it turns out that in 2018 The Yucaipa Companies, an American private equity firm, bought a 29% stake in Primavera Sound and it's various spin off brands. Billionaire owner Ron Burkle of The Yucaipa Companies is a majority owner of Soho House, so that explains why the attempts to look creative, cool, and 'trending' just seem like a sanitised coworking place where they brought some acts to amuse the professionals on their MacBooks. One of PS's directors, Gabriel Ruiz, describes in various interviews how this sort of investment was needed to meet the needs of this expansive festival as it is apparently being squeezed by smaller cheaper festivals and larger giants above. I understand the need to make a profit, but Primavera Sound is not entitled to

exponential growth so that it eclipses its own city like it has now. It has had to draw in foreign corporate investment to continue and now has to market to a foreign audience.

Let's take a look at the change from this moment to now. Before 2019 PS would release early bird tickets before the lineup every year and they were always under the 200€ mark. In fact, a mere 5 years ago in 2016 the full festival ticket was 195€ and that was only the final tickets in May, as they had been sold at 185€ from January lineup announcement to May, and between 145€ and 175€ from June to November. It had been the same process for 2017 through to 2019, the last time we had the festival, with the highest priced ticket at 215€ after the lineup was announced. What's more, if you were a resident you could visit the store in person to purchase a discounted ticket.

Now let's contrast this with this year. Although it is a more complicated festival due to there being people who have tickets for the cancelled 2020 version, the extension of a second weekend means 'new' tickets could be sold in the same way. Instead we have no early bird system allowing people who love the festival to join at a lower price as they always have and no staggered system as the lineup, recycled from the past 5 years, was released before tickets. What's more, not only is there no resident discount, but the minute the Primavera machine started its ticket release campaign in May the Catalan language disappeared from its IG infographics and tweets as it moved on from the locally promoted Nits del Forum to the internationally promoted Primavera Sound. If PS cared about Barcelona it would keep marketing in 3x languages allowing an early cheaper release to residents before bigger spenders beyond these borders get a whiff of the festival. Instead they directed their festival at the international market first, and if you wanna go, you better just keep up. The cheapest festival ticket is now 245€ for one weekend which is a 40% increase in 5 years, however if you want to experience the full festival in its entirety that will set you back an eye-watering 450€ which, at half a monthly salary, is of course not for anyone in this city. We then have various VIP tickets at 850€ and assorted 'travel packs' offered; it's all rather Fyre Fest.

Glastonbury, arguably one of the greatest festivals in the world, sold its 2020 full festival ticket at £265 which is extremely reasonable considering UK wages, so how can PS justify 245€ considering Barcelona's wages? And again, in a pandemic. This is what tourism does, it distorts the market because what is reasonable to a UK audience is extremely expensive for a local one.

I commented on one or two of Primavera Sound's multiple English-only posts highlighting the exclusion by price of local residents, and was 'schooled' by a British ticket-holder who told me that 450€ for the largest festival ever works out at a reasonable daily price. PS repeating acts multiple times a week to justify its inflated ticket price whilst giving us a whole nothing extra is genius for marketing but you know what we would prefer? One weekend, capped attendance, priority to residents, and closer to 200€ not 250€, oh and not sold a year in advance so that people could actually have the time and budget to make a decision.

The noise generated by Primavera Sound's lineup announcement and ticket release was surreal. On Twitter I could see UK based journos excitedly asking their followers if they were going this year. It seemed everyone in London was going, my brother messaged to say he and all his friends had bought tickets and wanted to know whether I would be going. Unfortunately I'm distracted trying to make my rent *this* summer. Another friend in Dublin

said that he knew 15 people who had bought tickets but as I scrolled through my feed and flicked through IG stories all the noise was from abroad, from my friends back home, and British influencers and media personalities. In the end a mate from Brussels said they would probably buy one, just in case... as in "just in case I don't want to miss out". So people abroad can buy PS tickets as a 'security' against FOMO or as one of many possibilities for how they want to spend their summer, and people here can't even access them.

I would describe the disregard Primavera Sound has shown the local population as staggering. They released the tickets a year early, forcing people to pay up and commit now or watch the opportunity pass by as our Northern European neighbours with larger disposable incomes snap up the tickets. This has created feelings of exclusion in a pandemic as Primavera Sound rolls out the red carpet over the heads of the local population making it obvious that Barcelona is the location, but residents aren't invited. I find the lack of a local backlash interesting but unsurprising. It's much easier to target the young quiris on your streets who traditionally soak up most turismophobia rather than direct anger at an ex-Indie turned Americanised corporate brand that uses Catala cynically enough in it's marketing to still be claimed as a local darling.