

Folk Music Canada: Tips & Resources for Touring Artists

Sergio Elmir - April 2020

United States of America

→ VISAS/WORK PERMITS

[VISA/Work Permit requirements for the US](#) via Music Export Canada

B1: For showcases, only i.e. gigs with no fees earned. You need a letter from the event organizer and you present that at the border.

P1: For internationally established artists who are “internationally renowned”

P2: For paid shows, if you are a member of an organization that has a P2 program relationship with a US labor organization. Canadians can apply through the Canadian Federation of Musicians to secure this visa. Gig dates must be included and crew as well. Lead time minimum is currently 90 days before entry date (note: subject to change).

P3: For internationally established artists that are “culturally unique or a traditional ethnic, folk, cultural, musical, theatrical, or artistic performance or presentation” and their support staff

O1/O2: For internationally established artists “with extraordinary ability or achievement” and their support staff

→ TAXATION

[via InternationalMusician.org](#)

For withholding purposes, the IRS looks at the recipient of the income, either an individual or a business. An individual may be incorporated as a business and he or she may think that this will prevent withholding in the US. However, if, as an individual, you share in any of the profits of the business, rather than being paid a salary or a set fee, the IRS will consider you an individual for withholding purposes.

There are several exemptions to having 30% of the fee withheld:

1) Tax Treaty Exemptions*:

a) If the performing group is considered a business and has no permanent residence in the US, then the provisions of the applicable tax treaty with the country of residence of the performing group will allow full payment of the fee. [You will need to file form W-8BEN.](#)

b) Individual foreign artists are allowed to earn a certain tax-free sum annually in the US, depending upon the specifics of the tax treaty with the country of residence of the artist. [You will need to file form 8233.](#)

2) Foreign tax-exempt organizations may qualify, if the IRS determines they are tax exempt in America, as well. [You will need form W-8EXP.](#)

3) An individual artist can apply to the IRS for a Central Withholding Agreement (CWA) and the actual tax liability will be determined, not the blanket 30% withholding.

[Central Withholding Agreement via IRS](#)

The IRS Central Withholding Agreement (CWA) program is announcing the release of a new simplified application process for applicants earning less than \$10,000.

A CWA is an agreement entered into by the NRAAE, a designated withholding agent (DWA) and an authorized representative of the IRS. The agreement is for a specific tour or series of events and withholding is based upon the budget provided and net profits estimated. The CWA is not effective unless all parties have signed the agreement. The NRA must be in compliance for all required Federal Income tax returns, payment obligations, and withholding for non-CWA events.

*Canada must file in: US, UK and Australia. Only regions where you can reduce taxation and/or file to recuperate tax paid or withheld taxes.

→ TAXATION TIPS

- Providing a budget allows taxation of net income. Artists must file a tax return yearly, regardless of revenue generation.
- Artists must have tax ID to avoid tax withholding.
- Individual Tax ID Number can be provided in lieu of social security. Only lasts 5 years.
- Venues/promoters in the US must withhold - ensure they have the most up-to-date information to ensure the process is done correctly.
- Filing taxes in the US requires payment to the withholding agent, accountant and presentation of receipts from the tour.
- Agents can provide tax slips for final reporting. Allows less payment on revenue (10%-12% vs 30%) at end of year filing.
- A US tax return will affect Canadian tax filing. US income must be claimed on CAD taxes.

- Try to spend any cash incurred on tour to pay out costs. Avoids exchange rates/fees.
 - Tour expenses should be paid with local currency received while on the road. Avoid depositing foreign currency in Canadian account.
 - If you have to transfer money, use [TRANSFERWISE](#) to pay less fees.
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→ CARNET

Often referred to as a 'passport for freight', the ATA Carnet is used to clear customs in 77 countries avoiding the payment of duties and import taxes on goods that will be re-exported within 12 months. Shipping gear can likely cost less to rent, depending on region. Be careful with shipping batteries. Check all devices - No batteries allowed in cargo!

Gear and merch must be shipped separately. CARNET manifest allows for global shipment and allows multiple entries. A manifest invoice is payment for permanent and temporary imports and is generally used for merch. Best to give value to your promo materials being shipped. Give it a reasonable value to appease border agencies and avoid raising suspicions. If pieces listed on your manifest are lost/stolen etc. You have to pay a tariff as it is assumed the piece was sold. Merchandise manufactured in China and imported into the US is taxed 25%.

If shipping by air, give enough time for airlines to process shipments. 5-6 hours to get gear in/out. If crossing the border with gear, your van and/or trailer is processed as a commercial import. You must provide the driver's name, license, passport, license plate, etc. Provided with a barcode to ease crossing via port of entry. TIP (Temporary Import Bond) is for larger value imports.

A commercial invoice can be created at the border. Not the best idea but it works. Best to follow rule of the law versus word of border agents.

Best resource for support on logistics and administration of shipping/travelling with gear is Canadian based company [Global Motion](#).

→ ROUTING

Beyond playing the major festival circuit, artists often have to supplement their tour routing with performances in clubs/bars and "house shows".

An agent is always ideal to help facilitate this work, however, it's not impossible to book your own tour.

Research. Outreach. Follow-Up.

→ [Venues to play in the USA via musicnomad.com](#)

House Show resources:

[Concerts in Your Home](#)

[Home Ditty](#)

[House Concerts \(dot\) com](#)

[Home Routes \(Canadian\)](#)

→ CONFERENCES and MARKETS

One of the major ways to get attention, build a team and start developing markets is through showcasing and networking at conferences and music markets. Below you'll find a list of some events that could provide some opportunities.

[APAP + GlobalFest](#) - January

[NAMM](#) - February

[Folk Alliance International](#) - February

[Pollstar Live](#) - February

[Country Radio Seminar](#) - February

[Millenium Music Conference & Showcase](#) - February

[Durango Songwriters Expo](#) - February

[Worldwide Radio Summit](#) - February

[SXSW](#) - March

[New Colossus Festival](#) - March

[ASCAP Experience](#) - April

[Launch Music Conference](#) - April/May

[SERFA](#) - May

[A2IM Indie Week](#) - June

[East Coast Music Conference](#) - June

[Summer NAMM](#) - July

[Indie Entertainment Summit](#) - August

[Music Biz Nashville](#) - August

[Americana Music Festival & Conference](#) - September

[SyncSummit LA](#) - December

→ TIPS for Touring the US Market

- Use metrics to gauge impact in territories. Social media and streaming platforms can provide insight on where you should play.
- Ensure you continue relationships in touring markets - don't just play once!
- Online branding to create traction. PR looks for artists with footholds in markets and a direction/strategy. Narratives are important to help develop pitches. Generally best to tour during an active album cycle or when you have new content to support your touring efforts, ie. new video, new songs, new ep, etc.

- Don't discount smaller bands to support touring + social media push. Local draw is vital to the success of your shows.
 - Audience building is an ongoing process. No sense in trying to build an audience for the short term in support of touring/showcase opportunities.
 - Promoters can often provide local media lists to facilitate PR work. If you can afford a publicist, it can help - but it won't guarantee media attention.
 - Touring is facilitated via dense population numbers. Good to do a combo of primary, secondary and tertiary markets. November-December are terrible times to tour. Tour with purpose, showcase with purpose. University/College towns are a good way of supporting routing. Resource: [National Association for Campus Activities](#).
 - Agent to book one show a month (or every 45 days) to be able to access year-long P2.
 - Long term planning and strategy to take advantage of showcase opportunities to build audiences.
 - Canadian Federation of Musicians is the cheapest method for visa application.
 - Many of the requirements requested by CFM/AFM is more so what the union wants to see and not so much US immigration requirements.
 - Union approved contracts are not required by US immigration. 45 days is arbitrary. You can push back. You can use agent itinerary as proof of activity. You can use a public relations company letter to show that the 'client' (artist) can be used as proof of activity. US immigration just wants proof of professional and legitimate work.
 - Once you have a P2 visa, you're legally allowed to enter the US, no questions asked about changes to travel/tour itinerary.
 - Local 1000 Union represents North American touring musicians.
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MEXICO

→ VISAS/WORK PERMITS

Officially, for presentations in venues or festivals not organized by governments, performers should have a visa for remunerated work inside the territory.

Here's the Mexican Foreign Ministry webpage. You can normally request the visa online, via:

<https://www.gob.mx/tramites/ficha/visa-de-visitante-con-permiso-para-realizar-actividades-remuneradas/SRE268>

The Canadian Trade Commissioner Office for Mexico gives the recommendation to rely on the local organizers, they normally send bulk requests or might have requested a special permit for their festival.

Whenever artists go to Mexico to perform for a festival sponsored by the Federal or Municipal government they don't require a visa even if they are paid for this presentation.

Otherwise, rules are murky and reaching out to the [Canadian Trade Commissioners office in Mexico City](#) for guidance is also recommended.

→ TAXATION

Artist fees are subject to 25% withholding - retained by the organizer of the concert or event. Sometimes it's easier for performers to sign a deal with a local representative that can sort this out for them - the downside being the withholding fee goes up to 35%. The concert or festival organizer should advise artists of the appropriate process and can recommend a local representative.

Information to this effect can be found, via:

http://omawww.sat.gob.mx/english/Paginas/ingresos_actividades_publicos.aspx

Again, it's recommended artists reach out to the [Canadian Trade Commissioners office in Mexico City](#) for guidance.

→ CARGO/SHIPPING (Merch & Instruments)

Currently, Canadian artists are not subject to the same freight and cargo restrictions set for the United States of America. Meaning, Canadian artists do not have to provide documentation on any instruments, merchandise or any other cargo being imported into Mexico. It's one of the major reasons why so many Canadian artists are looking at Mexico as a viable touring market.

→ CONFERENCES & MARKETS

Even though Mexico is considered one of the largest music markets in Latin America, they only have one active music market, [FIMPRro in Guadalajara](#). Usually held in the Spring (2020 dates have been moved to the Fall), FIMPro hosts a series of talks, speed meetings, networking sessions and showcases. CIMA has an annual trade mission and presence at FIMPro and provides an entry-point to this music market.

A newer conference and marketplace, based out of Mexico City is [Music Expo](#), which is being held for the first time in July (TBD) 2020.

→ TOURING

Touring Mexico comes with its share of challenges. Major organizations such as Live Nation have entered the market in the usual aggressive nature - purchasing controlling stake of Mexico's biggest presenter [OCESA](#) - in order to dominate the major venues and festivals; Mexico's urban sprawl and resulting population spillover into small, medium and large live markets, helps facilitate very active tour routing across the region for local, national and international touring artists.

Mexican festivals appear several times in Pollstar's top festivals of the world list, including [Electric Daisy Carnival](#), [Corona Capital Festival](#), [Pa'l Norte Festival](#), [Vive Latino](#) and the [Corona Heaven & Hell festival](#).

It's important to recognize that Mexico's universities are major players in bringing in international talent to Mexico through cultural exchanges. The University of Guadalajara, for example, [hosts a weekly music series](#) that hosts artists from around the world.

The strongest advice that can be provided here is to follow your streaming numbers. Mexico City has been considered to be one of the streaming capitals in the world. Artists that know how to analyze their streaming data and how to invest marketing money to expand in the cities that reflect some audience share, can capitalize on a hungry music market such as Mexico.

COLOMBIA

→ VISAS

The Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a tool to determine the type of visa you will need depending on your nationality, the type of passport you hold and the purpose of your trip; the tool is available in: https://www.cancilleria.gov.co/en/procedures_services/visa/requirements

For information on costs and means of payments:

https://www.cancilleria.gov.co/en/procedures_services/visa/costs-means-payment-service-offices

FAQ about applying to a Colombian visa:

https://www.cancilleria.gov.co/en/procedures_services/visa/abc

Submit your application by completing an online form:

<https://tramitesmre.cancilleria.gov.co/tramites/enlinea/solicitarVisa.xhtml>

For any further questions you can send an email to visas.autorizaciones@cancilleria.gov.co

→ TAXATION

Information on sales tax, withholding tax and other incentives for creative industries in Colombia, including an incentive to lower withholding tax for foreign performers in Colombia from 33% to 8%: <https://www.economianaranja.gov.co/apoyos-incentivos-financiamiento.html>

Tax convention between Canada and Colombia: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/programs/tax-policy/tax-treaties/country/colombia-convention-2008.html>

→ CONFERENCES & MARKETS

Music conferences such as the [Bogota Music Market](#) (BoMM) in Bogota and [Circulart](#) in Medellin are the major veteran music showcasing and export driven conferences - both drawing thousands of international buyers and other delegates. Both conferences have outgrown their domestic gaze and have begun to develop more international import/export strategies to increase opportunities for all delegates attending the conferences.

But at the same time, several smaller showcase/music markets are starting to pop up across the country and over the islands of Colombia which features a rich diversity of musical styles, native to Colombia.

→ TOURING

The Colombian Chamber of Commerce reported in 2017 that there were 1,765 music companies registered in the capital city of Bogota;

Of those 1,765, 980 of those companies are focused to the live sector - over 55%.

Since the music market is centralized to the capital -the live market in Bogota alone can sustain the majority of music companies -reflecting a very strong live market across Colombia.

The centralized international touring circuit in Bogota reflects a big piece but the rest of the piece is quite diverse - representing domestic tour routes of some spectacular, homegrown Colombia tradition and fusions.

We can thank government intervention for strengthening the live music sector, through heavy investment in developing the sector's infrastructure.

Tax incentives for cultural producers, elimination of red tape and encouraging outdoor festivals such as [Rock Al Parque](#) to exist (and remain free to the public) are all initiatives that have helped boost Colombia's profile on the international music market - encouraging more foreign investment into the creative sector. This has fueled the development of extensions of Rock al Parque - including [Hip Hop al Parque](#) and [Jazz al Parque](#). This in turn encourages and fuels other private festivals to exist, such as [Estereo Picnic](#) and [Festival AltaVoz](#).

UNITED KINGDOM

→ VISAS/WORK PERMITS

Canadian musicians have to apply for a Tier 5 CoS UK Work permit to perform in the UK.

The [Tier 5 Certificate of Sponsorship](#) (CoS) is a UK temporary work permit. It is required for musicians and their crew who are performing in the UK, whether paid or unpaid (such as a showcase). Permits can be used for multiple entries and can be issued for a 3 month period. Band and crew all require this permit to work in the UK. Any stays in the UK longer than 3 months require a Visa prior to entry (which is a different process than the Tier 5 CoS permit).

More information regarding the application process and fees can be found via [MusicExportCanada.ca](#) (pdf)

→ TAXATION

Canadian Artists will be subject to upwards of a 20% withholding tax of performance revenue, you are able to file a UK tax return to have it returned, or show the amount as taxes paid on your Canadian tax return. Ask your agent or sponsor for further information.

For more information about taxation, see the [UK government official website](#).

→ CONFERENCES and MARKETS

[AmericanaFest UK](#) - January

[AIM Connected](#) - March

[AMP London](#) - March

[Sound City \(Liverpool\)](#) - May

[The Great Escape](#) - May

[Pivotal Music Conference](#) - September

[Brighton Music Conference](#) - September

[Off The Record Festival](#) - TBD

[BBC Introducing Live](#) - October/November

→ TIPS for Touring the UK Market

- Not all artists should tour the UK. Do it if it makes sense. Do the math.
 - The UK still has a strong media base. Foreign press coverage helps band presence back home.
 - Try releasing a track via UK PR/label and watch traction. It shouldn't cost that much money to release a single in the UK. Good quotes to take to digital distro (Spotify UK?) to show how well the artist has been accepted. UK is a singles driven market. Create some interest in media to attract a good promoter in the UK.
 - Traditional UK agents outsource to national promoters in each particular region.
 - Find a band in the UK that might be comparable to use as a model. Reach out to that band to develop a relationship and touring opportunities.
 - Realistically artists should be looking for a break-even tour. Manage expectations.
 - September-November best time for showcases/pitches for Summer festival. Build touring around showcase opportunities.
 - Factor in travel days between cities. Try to find spaces around booked dates to develop more tour opportunities. Tour manager = 220 pounds/day + expenses.
 - Thursday has become the key live music night in the UK.
 - Project 12-18 months in advance for tour planning. 3 months lead time for media pitches.
 - Utilize your time in regions to see venues, meet promoters/bookers, local radio/media, etc. These meetings can help develop future touring opportunities.
 - Bristol, Lincoln, Middlesbrough, Glasgow = growing markets. Might be cheaper for travel. Agents can advise on best markets for bands.
 - Access FB network to find groups of promoters that work within a particular genre.
 - Check Foreign Entertainers Unit for necessary forms to process tax waivers in the UK. Necessary over 6,000 pounds.
 - In the UK the standard voltage is 230 V and the frequency is 50 Hz.
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FRANCE

→ VISAS/WORK PERMITS

Canadian musicians have to apply for a permit to perform in France.

All musicians and crew will require a Temporary Work Permit known as an APT ([Autorisation Provisoire de Travail](#)) to perform in France. If you are staying longer than three months you are required to secure a visa.

More information regarding the application process and fees can be found via [MusicExportCanada.ca](#) (pdf)

→ TAXATION

France and Canada have a tax treaty but you will be required to provide proof that each person performing or working at the concert is paying taxes in Canada to avoid having your performance fees taxed. In France the taxes on artist fees are a combination of Social Security and Retirement taxes (griss). The promoter will need a Certificate of Coverage document from the Canada Revenue Agency for each Canadian working or performing at the concert. If the artist is Quebec based, the promoter will require a Certificat d'assujettissement proving they are a "fiscal resident" of Quebec. The promoter will require the form 1 month prior to the concert. Without this form the promoter will have to withhold taxes on your fees.

[See article 17 in the Canada-France Tax Treaty.](#)

→ CONFERENCES and MARKETS

France hosts one of the major music conferences and markets in the world. [Midem](#) happens every June and hosts thousands of international music industry leaders for several days worth of discussion regarding the evolving music industry and major trends. This is a major marketplace for discovery, networking and developing international ties in the global music industry.

[MaMa Festival and Conference](#) which happens in October is a more live music driven event that also provides showcase opportunities that aims for 50% French and 50% International performers.

→ TIPS for Touring the French Market

- France is the 7th biggest economy in the world. Tourism is 10% of the GDP. Music industry: 240K jobs, 3.3% revenue increase, 50% of population attend festivals/concerts per year. 100 music festivals/year.
 - 15% (12 million+) population in Paris.
 - Other key cities: Lyon, Nantes, Marseille, Lille, Rennes, Bordeaux.
 - Music sales 256 million Euros (+3.3% 2017); Digital sales 153 million Euros (+16.2%), Streaming 137 million Euros (+23.2%); Physical sales 92 million Euros (-12.9%).
 - Streaming #1 Spotify, #2 Deezer, #3 Apple Music.
 - Market is more open for International Artists.
 - 40% of radio play much be French language content. Smart to adapt music to French language. Wise to create a French collaboration with a France focused artist. Open to Spanish language content.
 - Ideally you're working with a French based team to develop business opportunities.
 - In the EU, artists must get a tax certificate to show the tax amount paid. Foreign tax becomes tax credit in Canada, only to the extent to the tax paid if that revenue was made in Canada.
 - In France the standard voltage is 230 V and the frequency is 50 Hz.
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GERMANY

→ VISAS/WORK PERMITS

Canadian musicians do not have to apply for a visa for stays up to 90 days.

No permits are required for Canadian musicians and crew who will be temporarily working in Germany for no more than 90 days.

→ TAXATION

Canadian artists earning more than 250 Euro for a single performance will be subject to a 15% withholding tax, a 5.5% solidarity tax (on artist tax) and a 5.2% social insurance tax. The taxes are calculated based on total gross performance revenue, not your merchandise revenue. Individual musicians earning less than 250 Euro each for a concert only have to pay the 5.2% social insurance tax. Corporate entities will expect to pay 15% artist tax, a 5.5% solidarity tax (on artist tax) plus 5.2% social security insurance tax per show, regardless of the amount of income.

More information regarding taxation in Germany can be found via [MusicExportCanada.ca](https://www.musicexportcanada.ca) (pdf)

→ CONFERENCES and MARKETS

[Avant Première – Music and Media Market](#) - February

[Musikmesse](#) - April

[Soundtrack Cologne](#) - April

[Jazzahead](#) - April

[c/o pop Convention](#) - April

[Making Vinyl](#) - TBD

[Pop-Kultur](#) - August

[Reeperbahn Festival](#) - September

→ TIPS for Touring the German Market

- Media can be challenging without having a small team in place at home working pitches. Dedicated PR company in the region, as well as a great promoter, to build a proper tour. 6 month lead time to begin talking PR strategy.
- Look at smaller markets, University towns, don't discredit house concerts.
- Best to hire radio trackers in Germany. There is no centralized radio.

- Media gives less focus to online/digital only releases. Regional specific releases help gain more media support.
 - Culture departments dominate the smaller local live markets.
 - Major cities are a more competitive market due to large amounts of live/club/party events on a daily basis.
 - Villages on weekends have higher fees. Berlin is tougher to gain larger fees.
 - June to September is very difficult for touring. March to May is a high period of touring. Avoid November - very competitive.
 - In the EU, artists must get a tax certificate to show the tax amount paid. Foreign tax becomes tax credit in Canada, only to the extent to the tax paid if that revenue was made in Canada.
 - In Germany the standard voltage is 230 V and the frequency is 50 Hz.
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