

Superficially, a showcase festival doesn't differ much from your average festival: punters roam from venue to venue to see a bunch of bands perform. Yet, the objective is not the same. A showcase festival's primary goal is to bring new talent to the attention of music professionals, the media, and potential fans. They aim to be a steppingstone for emerging artists. In the best-case scenario, a showcase performance kickstarts a successful career. This promising prospect makes thousands of artists apply for various showcase festivals every year. Punters probably don't pay much attention to the type of festival they're attending; they just want to check out great bands. And rightly so, of course. For artists however, it can make all the difference in the world, so we asked them about the pros and cons of five showcase festivals that feature mainly bands or solo musicians – there are other showcase festivals specifically for DJs and producers of electronic dance music. We love to learn and better ourselves, and therefore we've also included Left of the Dial in our questionnaires. Each band member was free to answer all

Showcase festivals from a punter's perspective

'Don't judge a band by its first song. They probably didn't have time for a proper soundcheck, and the first song is mainly used to get the sound right, so it's usually not very representative of the rest of their set.'

'At showcase festivals, people often want to catch as many bands as possible, so they might leave for the next gig after a few songs. There's a good chance that you can still get in a bit later even if a venue is initially at capacity. If you don't mind missing a few songs, joining a show mid-set is a sensible option.'

'Make an A and B list: include bands you absolutely want to see and alternative options just in case a venue reaches capacity by the time you arrive. Try to plan your schedule around venues that are close to each other.'

'Focus on your top five bands you want to see the most and treat any additional bands as a bonus. If the venues aren't within walking distance, be prepared to miss a show at a more distant location.'

'At most showcase festivals, bands play multiple times. If you really want to see a lot of bands, make sure you know exactly how often each artist is playing and create a new schedule every morning. If you missed a gig one evening, add it to your must-see list for the next day. Yes, it involves a lot of daily planning, but that's half the fun of showcase festivals!'

SHOWCASE SIGNIFICANT STEPPINGSTONE OR POINTLESS INVESTMENT? FESTIVALS

by LOTD

questions anonymously but nevertheless, apparently, no one dared to say anything negative about us, so we're very much aware that this piece gives a somewhat distorted view of showcase festivals in general. But hey if you don't agree you're welcome to start your own magazine!



Performing at a showcase festival will usually result in artists feeling either of two emotions: sheer euphoria or complete frustration. If luck is on your side, you'll play the best show ever to the exact people who can help you further your career, e.g. the talent buyer for a major festival, a representative of a record company, or a journalist who writes a glowing review of your excellent performance. That one show opens all doors, and you'll be one step closer to the glorious career you've always dreamed of.

Unfortunately, there are plenty of examples of artists who experience quite the opposite. Due to technical problems, little to no sound-check time, or crappy equipment, their songs sound awful. Ironically, that doesn't even really matter, because the only ones at the show are a bartender and a volunteer who's just there to check the punters' wristbands. If there had been any, that is. And to make things worse for the disillusioned artists, drowning their sorrow afterwards will cost them a fortune, because hospitality is not on top of the organiser's priority list, and the backstage bar is empty. Travel

PHOTO: Ditz, Left of the Dial 2019 (Tineke Klamer)

and accommodation aren't reimbursed either, so they have spent all their hard-earned cash on an utterly useless show. In other words: you might want to carefully consider whether applying for a showcase festival is really the best option for you at that specific point in your career.

Attending a showcase festival as a punter

You don't have to work in the music industry to attend a showcase festival. At each of the five events covered in this article (there are many more), you'll see plenty of people who have never made a penny from any performing artist anywhere. To a true music fanatic, a showcase festival is obviously a glorious celebration of live music. There are dozens of new bands to discover, and you'll see a year's worth of club shows in just one single evening. One of the

downsides can be the endless queueing and having to despairingly watch music professionals with a pricier wristband skip said queue. Furthermore, dealing with poor sound quality is not a nuisance reserved for artists. Some venues have such a horrible sound system that it is simply impossible to tell whether you're watching the best, or the worst band in the world.

Finally, there is a point to be made about conscious consumerism, and the way musicians are cared for at showcase festivals. Some people may have absolutely no problem wearing clothes made in illegal sweatshops under horrific conditions, others will only wear fair-trade clothing. For the latter group, it could be interesting to take a closer look at the general treatment of artists at showcase festivals. When you're out having a good time, you'd probably feel a whole lot better knowing you're watching a band that's happy, well-fed, and fairly paid. There is no such thing as a fair-trade certification for showcase festivals yet, but maybe the results of our questionnaire might provide some insight. →

Showcase Festival Lingo

Delegates

The term “delegates” generally refers to music industry professionals, but it can also sometimes include regular attendees who are so determined to skip the queue that they purchase an upgrade. At SXSW, these delegates are commonly referred to as “badges” – a term derived from the badges they wear for access to all festival venues.

Hosting partners

At almost all showcase festivals, one or more stages are hosted by other parties. These could include, for example, record labels, media partners, or export offices that showcase the most promising acts from their country. Sometimes hosting partners decide which bands play at their stage, while other times, they are only involved in a promotional capacity.

Hospitality

Hospitality is the term that summarizes how well artists are taken care of. This ranges from drinks in the dressing room to booking hotel rooms.

Artist application

If you want to apply to play at a showcase festival, you'll need to do more than slide into the DMs of a festival's Instagram account. It may seem pretty obvious, but apparently, many bands don't realise they should simply check a festival's website to find out how to qualify for a spot. Sometimes a simple email suffices, while other times, you have to pay a small registration fee before the talent buyer will even start to consider whether your band will be booked.

South by Southwest (SXSW) – Austin, Texas (USA)

For live musicians, SXSW could very well be the biggest showcase festival in the world. For roughly eight days, somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 acts perform during the event in Austin. It varies from young, emerging bands to big (or even bigger) artists who perform on a wide variety of indoor and outdoor stages. These stages are located in all possible types of venues: churches, nightclubs, cafes, theatres, large concert halls and, most of all, numerous outdoor patios. Even the smallest juke joints have a backdoor that leads to a (usually) amazing patio where you can watch bands while enjoying some Texan sunshine.

Attending SXSW

The weather in Texas is usually lovely in March, so it's certainly not an unpleasant experience to stroll around the streets there. And you will have to do a lot of strolling because Austin is a huge city. If you're planning to see a couple of different artists in venues a little further apart, you'll easily walk 12 miles in a day. You can be lucky though; some streets are chock-full of venues and some days all the bands on your wish list play somewhere within walking distance. The biggest disadvantage is that too many shows start on the hour, and overlapping set times will present you with difficult choices: you're inevitably going to miss some gigs. Not to worry, almost every band plays numerous shows at SXSW. Not all gigs may be on the official website though, you'll also have to check out an endless amount of day parties, free events with tons of well-known and lesser-known bands.

SXSW according to Left of the Dial artists:

While performers certainly don't get the royal treatment in Austin, they're generally raving about their time at SXSW. At the very least, they get to meet loads of new people, and even if their days and nights in Austin don't bring them any career opportunities, they still consider it to be a lovely band holiday. A very expensive holiday though. As a non-American artist, you'll get paid zilch, and you'll have to try and find a cheap place to sleep yourself. All you do get is a non-priority wristband that allows you free entrance to all festival venues. Maybe you'll get a free drink after your show and

if you're exceptionally fortunate, you might perform in a venue that offers food, but that's about it. Nearly every European band will only be able to play at SXSW if they get some form of funding, or if they raise money by crowd-funding, or if they manage to book a few extra well-paid gigs in towns elsewhere in Texas.

Eurosonic Noorderslag (ESNS) – Groningen (the Netherlands)

The unofficial New Year's gathering for the Dutch music industry that takes place annually in the north of the Netherlands. For three days you can roam the city to discover new bands, the fourth day is exclusively for Dutch bands, and all shows are then concentrated in one venue. Don't expect to find the latest American hit sensations; the festival welcomes only European acts, which is why it's called Eurosonic. Fortunately, there are a lot of countries in Europe each with a diverse music scene, so fans of all types of genres will get their money's worth in Groningen.

Attending ESNS

ESNS attracts a vast amount of music professionals, and they all wear priority wristbands to skip the queue at venues. And queues are usually long as it's a popular festival, so general admission ticket holders often spend a significant amount of time waiting outside. It's generally quite chilly in the north of the Netherlands in January, so dress appropriately and wear your all-weather winter coat.

If you're wondering what music professionals look like, come to the corner of the big central square at night. You'll see music industry people of all sorts snacking on the infamous “egg balls”.

ESNS According to Left of the Dial Artists:

Most bands only play once during ESNS, so for them it's more or less a make-or-break situation. Given the large amount of Very Important People present, this can be quite stressful. Previously, artists were pretty much left to their own devices in terms of hospitality, but recently that has changed. Now, they not only get paid for their show, but ESNS also arranges a hot meal and hotel rooms for all band members, but at the artist village, however, they still have to pay for their drinks.

Left: SXSW (David Brendan Hall)
Right: ESNS (Bart Heemskerk)



Right: The Great Escape
(Maisie Peters)



The Great Escape – Brighton (UK)

The Great Escape takes place in the English coastal city of Brighton every May. The festival officially starts on Wednesday, but then there is basically only a conference programme. So, if you're not interested in discussing Brexit, climate change or online marketing, you can easily skip this day. On Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, you can see more than 500 artists playing in venues that are all within a

reasonable walking distance. Naturally, the festival's lineup primarily features British bands, but many artists from other countries travel to Brighton to gain exposure to international agencies.

Attending The Great Escape

For a very reasonable ticket price you can discover a huge number of bands well before they hit your local club. Granted, if you want to see

the headlining artists you will have to do some serious queueing, but why bother? There are so many great bands playing, just go to the next venue, and you'll likely be pleasantly surprised. During the daytime there's a wide variety of free gigs all over town, but if you're already overdosing on live music, just relax at the pier with a beer and enjoy the bright blue sea. →



Left: Reeperbahn Festival (Florian Trykowski) **Right:** Left of the Dial (Marcel Boshuizen)

Showcase Festival Lingo

Coke Blokes

Some showcase festivals are notoriously known for the large number of "coke blokes" they attract: intoxicated music professionals in the back of the room who loudly discuss anything but the music, completely oblivious to the fact that a band is trying hard to play their best show ever. Certainly, not all people who work in the music industry qualify as coke blokes, but those who do can be quite annoying to both the artists and the rest of the crowd.

Unofficial shows

Gigs that are not part of the official programme. Often organised by parties that benefit from more people coming into contact with their bands or their brand, such as booking agencies, magazines, or breweries.

Tour support

For some bands, playing a showcase festival is only an option if they receive additional governmental funding in the form of tour support. Whether touring bands typically receive support varies by country, but if you happen to live in a country that funds artists to perform abroad, sometimes all you need is a little creative accounting to make a showcase festival gig even somewhat lucrative.

Exclusivity

Some festivals demand exclusivity and don't allow artists to do any unofficial shows. Some take it a step further and require artists to sign a contract to ensure they won't perform in the vicinity of that city for one or two months before or after the festival. That makes sense when you pay a headlining band a ton of money to help you sell all your tickets. But it's quite a different story when you pay a band barely enough money to cover travel costs; essentially, that deprives artists of their livelihoods.

The Great Escape According to Left of the Dial Artists:

Punters may speak very highly of The Great Escape, artists not so much. They rarely criticise the low fees that the festival offers to performing artists, though. Instead, the main problem is the lack of hospitality. No food, no drinks — some artists claimed they weren't even offered a small bottle of water while on stage. Depending on the venues they played, some artists complained about poor equipment, sound quality, and the absence of basic necessities like clean towels in the dressing rooms. However, the one major advantage they all mention is that the entire British music industry moves to Brighton during The Great Escape, providing the perfect opportunity to make new contacts.

Reeperbahn Festival – Hamburg (Germany)

The first days of the Reeperbahn Festival, the neighbourhood in which the festival takes place has a very cool, eccentric, yet quite relaxed vibe. By the time Friday arrives, you might feel as if you're in the midst of a permanent hen or stag party while walking down the streets. This is easily forgotten, however, as soon as you enter one of the many cool venues to watch bands play. The festival features a mix of completely unknown talent and some bigger names, a pleasant combination for the less adventurous festivalgoer as well as for the seasoned professional. After watching a dozen new bands, it's a welcome change to attend a show where you can shout along to each and every song.

Attending Reeperbahn

The mixture of new and familiar names on the lineup makes it easy to attend this festival without too much preliminary work, although this might mean you'll miss out on some emerging acts that are actually quite amazing. And discovering new bands is still the best thing in the world, of course. You can easily walk from

one venue to the other; just keep in mind that there is also a street, surprisingly enough, that's inaccessible to women. If that doesn't bother you, and you have no moral objections to passing by an infinite number of sex clubs, you'll find yourself in a dynamic city with a wide variety of venues. Plus, there are plenty of places for a cheap bite (find a café with a breakfast buffet!), so you don't have to break the bank attending this festival.

Reeperbahn Festival According to Left of the Dial Artists:

In general, Reeperbahn Festival takes quite good care of their artists, and they'll meet some music professionals to network with. Yet, bands are more likely to tell you about the nights they spent in shady bars rather than how their careers took off after performing at this festival.

Left of the Dial – Rotterdam (the Netherlands)

A three-day festival showcasing a cross-section of emerging acts from around the world. The festival shares its dates with Amsterdam Dance Event, which is why it avoids electronic dance acts, but it's open to all other genres. Left of the Dial is always early to the party; approximately three-quarters of the performing artists likely haven't released a record yet, and for many, this festival marks their first international gig. Many of these bands have substantial performance experience in their own countries though, and Left of the Dial often acts as a steppingstone toward a successful European club tour.

Attending Left of the Dial

If you're one of those festivalgoers who'd love to hang out with bands after their show, Left of the Dial could be the perfect festival for you. After their performances, most bands rush to catch the shows of their colleagues, providing festivalgoers with ample opportunities to chat with the artists. Since most venues aren't too large, they tend to reach capacity quickly. Luckily, almost all bands play twice, and there is a free day programme, giving you loads of chances to see your future idols at work.

Left of the Dial according to Left of the Dial artists

Left of the Dial is a relatively new showcase festival, and music professionals are still finding their way to Rotterdam. On the one hand, this means artists almost always get to play to a genuinely interested crowd. On the other hand, the low number of music professionals means fewer career opportunities. That is more than compensated by the way artists are taken care of because Left of the Dial operates under the motto: when bands are happy, so are the punters. Or as one band member put it: 'The incredible hospitality of this festival has spoiled us for the rest of our career.' →



**SXSW according to
Enjoyable Listens**

'2023 was my third SXSW experience. Second in real life, though (2021, pandemic, endless Zoom meetings, live streams, et cetera...)

I've since spoken to a few people who played South By over the past couple of decades, and they reminisced over an era that was more to do with "being discovered" as opposed to networking.

That being said, the electricity you feel from Austin across those 10 days is palpable. Never have I visited a city more committed to live music, brisket and Tex-Mex, but then again, I'm not the world's most travelled man.

My advice to anyone heading over there is (said in the most loving way possible) to quell any ephemeral dreams you might have about being picked up by the right people at the right time, and instead totally immerse yourself in every second of being there. Don't put pressure on yourself, just enjoy cigs with people you vaguely know, whose name they told you, but you can't qui-

te now remember. Find cheap places to drink (happy hour at Club Eternal over the road from the BME, \$15 for a round of 3 Lone Star vs. \$40, you do the math), and bring enough merch to attempt to finance that drinking.

If you spend all your merch earnings on tipping street magicians, who cares? It was worth it for those 5 minutes of pure transcendental bliss, after discovering the street magician had mysteriously converted a deck of cards into a block of glass in the very palm of your hand.

These kinds of festivals, no matter where they are, possess a rare quality. They're genuinely trying to promote the thing you want to do. People are there to be lost in that world, their world, your world - any world. Do as much as you feel comfortable with doing, your body will tell you when it's time to quit.

Admittedly sometimes your body's reaction can be significantly delayed, but the carnival only comes to town a few times a year. Showcase festivals can be taxing. They're a marathon, not a sprint, but if you manage to strike the balance

of wholesome activities (swimming in the sea, or anywhere, looking at the local sights, hitting up trip advisor for the best tacos within a 1-mile radius) versus Dionysian catharsis (anything you probably won't remember), then you might be on to a winner. All of my favourite memories of this type of festival are the hazy conversations with the people I've met. The people I know of. The people I know now but wish I didn't. The people who wish they now didn't know me. The mental Polaroids of something inimitable that'll comfort me for many a year to come. The kind of thing I'll try to explain to my grandkids who will mock their grandfather on the way home in the car.

That's about it from me, but if you do go to SXSW, don't touch White Claw.

Claw is the law, and the law will leave you sore.'



TIME PERIOD
FOUNDED IN
ATTENDEES
PROFESSIONALS
DAYS
ACTS/SLOTS
DELEGATES TICKETS
GENERAL ADMISSION
DAY TICKETS
STAGES

FESTIVAL INFO

	SXSW AUSTIN (USA)	ESNS GRONINGEN (NL)	THE GREAT ESCAPE BRIGHTON (UK)	REEPERBAHN HAMBURG (GER)	LEFT OF THE DIAL ROTTERDAM (NL)
	March	January	May	September	October
	1987	1996	2006	2006	2018
	134.537 (including online)	40.000	20.000	41.000	12.000
	42.000 (including film and interactive professionals)	4.000	2.500	4.300	200
	8	4	4	4	3
	1.504	350 - only EU	500	400	200
	+/- \$800	+/- €400	+/- £200	+/- €345	€ 90
	\$120 - Austiners only	+/- €250	+/- £100	+/- €145	€ 50
	not available	yes: +/- €60	yes: +/- £50	yes: +/- €65	not available
	75	50	35	70	17

Ticket prices depend on the time of purchase, other numbers are based on public data from 2022. The fees mentioned are average fees of the bands surveyed that have played at one or more of these festivals.

Some showcase festivals also feature renowned artists, and they will undoubtedly be well cared for and paid a decent fee. For upcoming artists who are yet to become world-famous, it's a different story. Left of the Dial pays an average of €300 in artist fees, and hotel rooms are arranged for all foreign bands. In addition, artists are well-fed and have access to their own artist café with an all-night open bar.

ESNS pays around €500 per performance and now also offers overnight stays for artists. The Great Escape pays approximately £150 per time slot and does not assist with sleeping arrangements or meals. Reeperbahn Festival doesn't offer accommodation, but you will receive a decent meal, and the average performance fee is around €200.

As an artist, you're worst off at SXSW. In contrast to the other mentioned festivals, artists are required to pay an application fee for consideration. Depending on the date, this fee ranges from \$35 to \$55. Not very artist-friendly, however, very lucrative for the festival as about 7,000 artists sign up annually. Even though the US musicians' union demanded equitable fees of \$750 per artist in early 2023, SXSW has established standard fees of \$350 for a band and \$150 for a solo artist. But remember, that only applies to American artists... →

PHOTO: Maurice van Os



Joe & The Shitboys

'Eurosonic has only been online for us, so it doesn't really count. The Great Escape was very easy to navigate for us as you always know where you are, because you can use the ocean and the hill to orient yourself. There was a lot of casual interaction between us and the delegates wherever we went, but it was a tough time getting into shows. At Left of the Dial, we never had a problem getting into shows, but we had no idea who the delegates were, and didn't have any interaction with industry people - except for the always lovely Rotown people. Yet, our Left of the Dial performance is no doubt why we've been back in the Netherlands five times since. We played The Great Escape later in our career and made a lot of really important connections there. Both of these festivals had amazing crowds, but The Great Escape has almost too many delegates taking notes in the crowd, and that's where it can get a little bit boring at times. At Reeperbahn it seemed to be an issue that we didn't speak German, because not everybody knew how to point us in the right direction. It easy to get lost in Hamburg. Great crowds and great people working the venue though, but we had no idea who the delegates were.'



The Great Escape – Adam Ryan

'In November we do an event called The First 50, which is the live launch of our first announcement, before the submissions are opened. And that's just because we need to sort of keep control of that first announcement. There's a lot of people that feed into The Great Escape, so, we need to make sure that they have a foothold as early as possible. We take over eight venues in East London and do a showcase of the first 50 artists and that gets announced in September. I start booking that end of July, start of August. The whole point of that is it's the tastemaker list. It's 50 artists that we want to showcase and that we are confident are going to break. That first announcement is solely selected by me. You can't apply to get into that really. I select those artists by having loads of meetings with agents, managers, labels and obviously the promotions team that work under Live Nation. And venues as well, I talk to a lot of independent venues and promoters. It's not just UK artists. We need to make sure that we have a good starting point for all our export part-

ners. That could mean we need to make sure that we have a New Zealand artist in there, or an Australian, Canadian, Swiss or all the other touch points that The Great Escape has. It can be quite political I guess in some respects, but it's always enjoyable, because you're looking for the best new music, and it means that your focus is broader. If I'd just put on bands that I like, the announcement wouldn't be very good. We also make sure that we get a genre split and enough representation by simply making sure we have enough LGBTQ+, or a male to female split. That's why I don't open up applications. It's our first announcement, it's 50 acts. And we need to make sure that it's as rounded as possible whilst also remaining as hot and as relevant as possible.

I think we get maybe 10,000 to 14,000 applications a year. They are a great starting point for us to get a bit more insight into the act. Say we talk to the export office in Ireland, we'll have a list of all the Irish artists that have applied, and we can go through it and see who would be good to invite. Maybe it's too early for some,



Top left: The Great Escape (Hinako Omori) **Top right:** The Great Escape (James Marriot) **Bottom left:** The Great Escape (VF) **Bottom right:** The Great Escape (Hak Baker)



Olowski

Mickey: 'I feel like Reeperbahn, Eurosonic, and SXSW are very similar festivals in many ways. They feel very corporate and very showcase-y, and mainly made for the industry. It always feels like you need to have a big team behind you already to actually get something out of these festivals. There are many, many artists playing and getting industry people to come see you is very hard as a DIY band. Another thing they share in common is that each night/venue lineup is often not very well curated. Sometimes it's a country-based lineup (e.g., Poland or Sweden or wherever bands are from), and other times is just a bit random, which is never great for the vibes. Also, at Reeperbahn because they put us with other bands that were very quiet, we had many technical problems because the venue and the sound engineer weren't equipped for a loud setup and it was frankly one of the worst gigs we've ever played, ha-ha. Despite being close to a scam scheme, I think SXSW is the one we've got the most out of. We managed to find a very good American booking agent which was one of our first goals. Generally, we had a great time there, but that's definitely not thanks to the festival organisation, and all the best gigs ended up being the unofficial ones. We all think Left of the Dial is one of the best festivals we have played in Europe. Very well curated lineup, amazing treatment for the bands, great venues and gear, and a great crowd of both real people and some industry as well. We just love it!'

maybe some have changed managers and they would be better off to go next year. When an artist is in a country that's really far away, I may not know how many tickets they're worth or what's happening in their local areas. We would speak to the export office in those countries to have them provide us with some feedback. It's just all about talking and sharing, isn't it? Sitting down and listening to every band that applies, I'm not too sure that'd be the best use of time. So, we take segments of it and then work through it that way.

Applications aren't the only source to get onto the festival, if we listen to something and think it's really good then we will just invite it. I think anybody who says they're relying solely on applications when booking an event is probably lying to you. Like, realistically I think you have to be proactive in what you're booking, right? You can't just sit and wait for people to apply. But you would hope that when you're being proactive and you're going out to look for bands and artists, that they're already in your database so that you can refer back to it. If you

want to get on the festival, I would also look at the stage hosts from previous years and reach out to them. If you know DIY Magazine, then try to get in touch with them. If you know your agent has a stage, try to reach out to them to put you forward. It's all about trying to get a personal contact.' →

Aha, everybody loves Left of the Dial, really surprising...



ESNS – Robert Meijerink

'ESNS is a conference and festival with a focus on European music. The music programme is established through applications. From May 1st to September 1st, artists can apply, and the talent buyers compile the programme from these applications. In recent years, we have consistently received around 4,000 applications from Europe, including the Netherlands. The number of slots available from Wednesday to Saturday is approximately 300. We are not necessarily interested in artists who have already performed extensively; our focus is on artists who are in the early stages of their careers. ESNS aims to present not only the current state of affairs but also to ensure diversity in genres and styles.

ESNS talent buyers conduct extensive research and maintain close relationships with music professionals from almost all countries in Europe. We also collaborate with music export offices to receive advice on each territory. European public broadcasters (our media partners) make specific suggestions for Eurosonic. Additionally, each year, we have a focus country, and in 2024, it will be Poland. Attendees can expect to see more Polish acts than ever.

Regarding the lineup, we are searching for as many talented artists as possible who want to present themselves to music professionals, including booking agents, talent buyers from music venues and festivals, as well as agents, managers, label scouts, publishers, and journalists. The most important criterion is that a band can perform well live and understands the value of a show at ESNS, so they actively seek to gain something from it. In other words, a band must be well-prepared for ESNS, ensuring that their performance is solid enough to impress all professionals, media representatives, and music lovers in attendance. Ideally, ESNS should mark an important step in an artist's career, resulting in tangible outcomes such as more bookings, increased media attention, and a broader audience reach.'



Top left: Gallus (Kirsten Heskamp) **Bottom left:** Left of the Dial (Marcel Boshuizen) **top right:** Bands on a Boat (Mink Steekelenburg)

Gallus

'Showcase festivals are always important events because you never know who's going to be there, and if you're lucky you might end up with a few new gigs. However, SXSW was less about business and more about the whole experience of being in the United States for a week as a band. At Eurosonic, they arranged for a car to pick us up from the artist village and drive us to the venue. That was the closest we've ever felt to being proper rock stars. The Great Escape is less hospitable towards bands, but basically the entire British music industry is there, which makes it an important place to play. One of the things we loved most about The Great Escape and Left of the Dial is you get to hang out with so many other bands. Bands from Scotland that we're already friends with, but we've also met loads of new people who you usually don't get a chance to hang out with. If we had to give some advice to new artists playing their first showcase festival, it would be to be friendly. Nobody want to work with dickheads; it really pays off to be nice.'





Left of the Dial – Stephan Maaskant

'Booking for Left of the Dial truly is a year-round process. Bands and artists can apply at any time through the website. In the first few years, I intentionally waited as long as the rest of the team would allow me to confirm the very last few names. Mainly because you don't want to miss any momentum, and there's always the feeling that something amazing could still be added to the lineup. However, our ticketholders do appreciate having the timetable in a timely manner. Furthermore, it's more beneficial for artists to be booked at an earlier stage, creating a longer time span for promotion through our various outlets in coordination with their own releases, allowing the audience to become familiar with the artists sooner.

Where you're from or the genre of music you play is of little relevance; everyone has a chance to receive an invitation. Festival attendees have demonstrated an extensive appreciation for various music genres, so we aim to offer them a wide range. However, finding the right musical balance is important. Sometimes, a band that inquires is indeed amazing but may not receive an invitation if their sound is already well represented in the confirmed lineup. Fortunately, there's always the next year's edition to consider them for.

Many of the acts that play Left of the Dial,

reach out afterwards to recommend other acts. That's especially helpful with bands from abroad. They often participate in numerous festivals, or bump into other bands in the studio, and have a far better scope of what's happening locally. We greatly benefit from these recommendations. Mostly all artists who have performed at the festival have been elated about its hospitality together with the enthusiasm of the punters. Them spreading the good word generated excitement among other acts who look forward to playing at the festival, making our job much easier over the years.

With around 250 slots to fill over three days, most acts get the opportunity to perform twice. We've experienced a yearly exponential increase in applications, and for each slot, we have the daunting task of considering up to ten acts. You don't necessarily need a manager, a famous label, or a big agency backing you to be invited to Left of the Dial. However, we appreciate it when bands take the time to carefully read through the application guidelines on our website and provide the requested information. With the volume of submissions we receive, it's essential to streamline the process. Ultimately though, what matters most is the music. If you're offering outstanding tunes, even if they're just unpolished recordings you created in your bedroom, you have a chance of receiving an invitation.' 📸



The Goa Express SXSW

'Make sure you save some money because the city is crazy expensive, try, if possible, get a hotel or Airbnb with a kitchen and head to the Walmart to grab ingredients to cook with.'

The Great Escape

'No rider, so make sure you sell plenty of T-Shirts and buy some cheap beers.'

Reeperbahn Festival

'Both food and rider provided on the day you play, try find a hotel near the venue you're playing because the traffic is horrific in the center.'

Left of the Dial

'Our first international show as a band, the most important showcase for young bands. Looks after bands like royalty and gives you the opportunity for exposure all across Europe. Our favorite!'