GIGXCHANGE

ANNUAL REPORT · 2026

A GIGXCHANGE REPORT

State of the Circuit

A count of UK grassroots live music — every gig we can find, every room we know about, and the 287 towns where we cannot see a single night out.

6 August 2026

8,989	2,622	1,270	287
GIGS LISTED	MUSIC VENUES	OPEN MIC NIGHTS	TOWNS GONE DARK

GIGXCHANGE.APP/RATES/REPORTS

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FOREWORD

Everyone counts the closures. Nobody counts what is left.

> This is a census, not a survey and not a forecast. One count of the UK grassroots circuit, taken on 6 August 2026, that anyone can check.

78	30	£95,685	67.9%
VENUES STOPPED LIVE MUSIC	CLOSED FOR GOOD	AVERAGE ANNUAL LOSS ON LIVE	OF LIVE INCOME IS THE BAR

Sector figures: Music Venue Trust Annual Report 2025 (published January 2026), covering the year to July 2025.

WHY WE COUNTED

The closure figures above are well established and hard to argue with. What nobody publishes is the other half of the picture – *what is still standing*. Without it, "the grassroots circuit" is a phrase rather than a thing you can point at, and an industry cannot defend what it cannot describe.

So we counted it, from the directory we already run: every upcoming gig we can find, every room we hold a record for, every open mic that still meets. The number that stopped us was not a closure figure. It was 287 towns that have a grassroots music venue and no gig listed anywhere we can see.

IN THIS REPORT

SECTION ONE

01

The circuit, counted

Every figure on this page was measured directly against our own directory on 6 August 2026. None is modelled, estimated or projected.

8,989 UPCOMING GIGS	**5,946** DIFFERENT ACTS	**2,622** GRASSROOTS ROOMS	**1,270** OPEN MIC NIGHTS

THE ROOMS

MEASURE	COUNT	WHAT IT TELLS YOU
Active venues on record	**2,622**	Across 433 towns and cities
Median capacity	**200**	From 1,559 rooms with a known figure
Rooms with a house PA	**1,413**	Just over half of the circuit
Rooms with an in-house engineer	**231**	Under one room in ten
Recurring open mic nights	**1,270**	Across 185 towns

ANALYSIS The engineer figure is the one venue managers recognise. On most nights, in most rooms, the sound is whoever turned up – which is why "we had a bad night" and "we had a bad mix" are so often the same sentence.

THE GIGS

1,765 IN 28 DAYS	**8,496** PAST GIGS HELD	**2,015** VENUES WITH GIGS	**89** CITIES WITH GIGS

We keep the past ones too – 17,487 dated records in all – which is what shows whether a room programmes regularly or simply had one good month.

The open mic layer is larger than most assume: 1,270 recurring nights in 185 towns – the only genuinely free stage time in the country, and it appears in no official count of anything.

SECTION TWO

02

Where the map goes dark

> 287 towns have a grassroots music venue and no gig listed anywhere we can see. Between them, those towns hold 555 rooms.

287
TOWNS WITH A VENUE, NO LISTED GIG

VS

144
TOWNS WITH BOTH A VENUE AND A GIG

We want to be careful with this one, because it would be easy to turn it into a headline it cannot carry. It does *not* mean 287 towns have no live music. Our listings come from public sources that skew heavily towards ticketed events, so a pub back room running a free Thursday with a chalkboard outside is invisible to them by construction.

That is exactly the point. If a gig is not listed anywhere a person would look, it may as well not be happening – and the venues least likely to be listed are the smallest, the cheapest to get into, and the ones with the least to spend on being found. The infrastructure that makes live music findable stops working at precisely the end of the market that needs it most.

THE SAME PICTURE, FROM THE OTHER SIDE

The Music Venue Trust reports 475 grassroots venues – 59% of the sector – operating with no major promoter activity at all. Our 287 dark towns are what that statistic looks like from outside the building.

ANALYSIS Invisible and closed look identical to a band looking for a stage, and to a punter looking for a Tuesday night out. Fixing visibility will not save a room that has run out of money – but it is the cheapest thing on the list, and nobody is doing it.

THE ARITHMETIC

02

TOWNS WHERE WE HOLD A VENUE RECORD	COUNT	SHARE OF THOSE TOWNS
With at least one gig listed	**144**	33%
With no gig listed anywhere we can see	**287**	67%
Venues sitting inside those dark towns	**555**	21% of all rooms

> "Live events and festivals in rural areas tend to carry more economic agency than in the city."
>
> Simon McKerrell, Glasgow Caledonian University. *Beyond the State: Music in the Rural Creative Economy* (Scottish Universities Press, 2026). Open access, doi.org/10.62637/cej75v68

McKerrell's point is the one our count cannot make on its own: the value of a rural gig is not a smaller version of an urban one. His study is Scottish and ethnographic, ours is a UK-wide count, and that difference in scope is exactly why they sit well together. A dark town is not a quieter city. The same missing gig costs it more.

That is why this section counts towns and not only venues. A city that loses a room still has dozens within a bus ride, and the loss is absorbed. A town with one venue and nothing listed has no fallback at all – and the 555 rooms sitting inside our 287 dark towns are overwhelmingly that second kind of room. Counting venues alone would have hidden every one of them inside a national total that looks healthy.

SECTION THREE

03

Nobody publishes a price

> 96.3% of upcoming grassroots gigs publish no price at all. Only 331 of 8,989 say what it costs to walk in.

96.3%	30.5%
NO PRICE PUBLISHED	HAVE A TICKET LINK OF ANY KIND

A MISSING PRICE IS NOT A FREE GIG

Of all 8,989 upcoming listings, only **74** explicitly record free entry. Everything else is simply unknown. Treating "no price" as "free" would have turned that unknown into a cheerful and completely false headline – and the unknown is itself the finding.

It matters more than it sounds. A punter deciding between a known £15 arena support slot and an unknown quantity down the road will pick the one they can price. An artist with no idea what comparable rooms pay cannot negotiate. And a venue with no reference point either overpays or underpays, and learns nothing from having done it.

It is also why we publish the GX Index – open data on what UK gigs actually pay, free, monthly, with a DOI so it can be cited properly. A market without published prices is not a market; it is a series of private conversations in which the least experienced person loses.

ANALYSIS Pricing opacity is not a grassroots failing so much as a grassroots symptom. Rooms that cannot commit to a door price a month out are rooms whose margins do not survive being wrong.

WHAT 8,989 LISTINGS ACTUALLY TELL YOU

OF ALL UPCOMING LISTINGS	COUNT	SHARE
Publish a price of any kind	**331**	3.7%
Explicitly recorded as free entry	**74**	0.8%
Carry a ticket link	**2,740**	30.5%
Say nothing about cost at all	**8,658**	96.3%

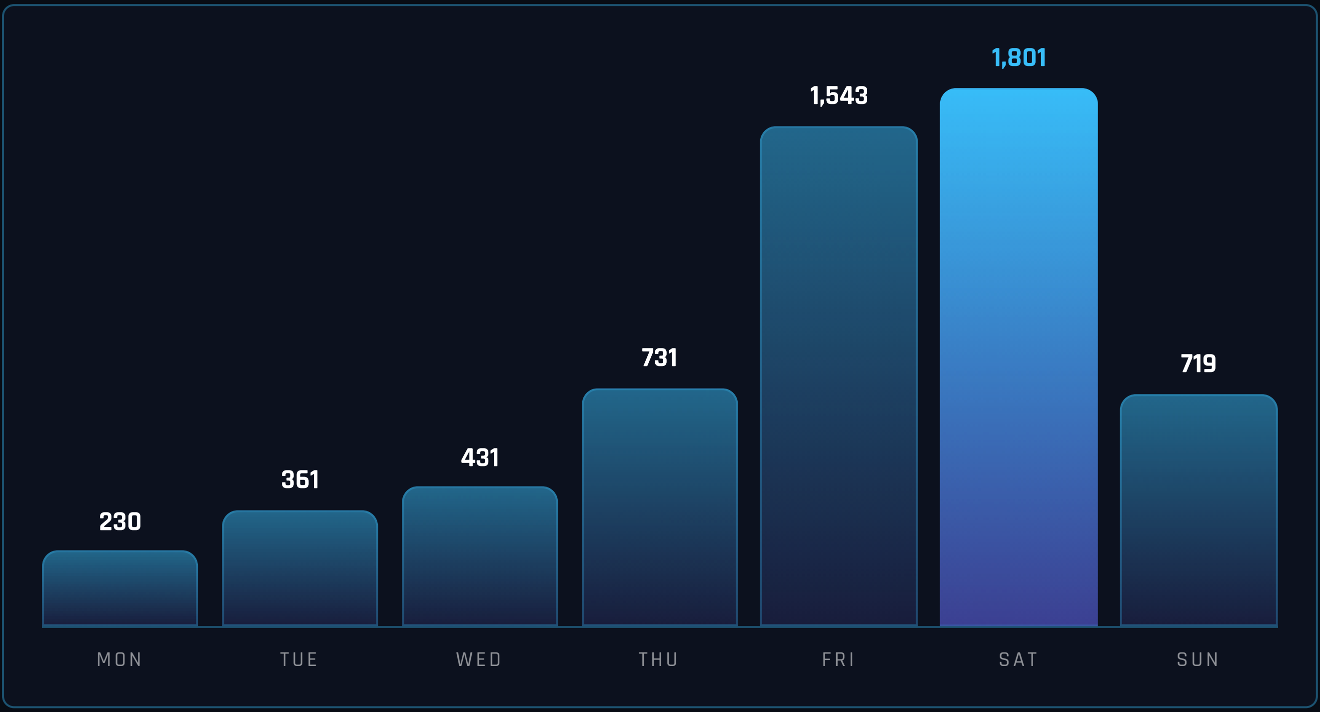
The gap between the 30.5% with a ticket link and the 3.7% with a published price is its own small story: plenty of rooms will send you to a ticketing page, but far fewer will tell you what is waiting there.

SECTION FOUR

04

The shape of the week

Where the circuit's live music actually falls, across the 90 days from 6 August 2026. 5,816 dated gigs, by day of week.



ANALYSIS Saturday carries 1,801 gigs. Monday carries 230 – under a sixth of it. Friday and Saturday together hold 57% of everything.

That lopsidedness is the grassroots economy in one chart. Rooms compete for the same two nights and go quiet for the other five, while the rent, the licence and the staff run seven days a week. It is also why midweek programming is where the sector's remaining upside sits: the audience is not busy, the acts are not booked, and the room is already paid for.

The counter-argument is fair – Tuesday audiences are thinner, and a promoter who cannot fill a Saturday will not magically fill a Tuesday. But the 1,270 open mic nights we count are overwhelmingly midweek, and they fill rooms every week of the year on nothing but word of mouth. Somebody has already proved the midweek audience exists.

WHY THIS CHART IS THE ONE TO STEAL

If you are making the case for grassroots support – to a council, a landlord, a licensing committee – this is the chart that lands. It shows a sector with a fixed weekly cost base and a two-day revenue window, which is the whole argument in a single picture. It is CC BY 4.0; take it.

SECTION FIVE

05

What the closures cost

Our own count says nothing about money – we can see listings, not accounts. For that, the authority is the Music Venue Trust, whose annual report is the sector's audited picture of what a grassroots room actually earns and loses.

SECTOR MEASURE, YEAR TO JULY 2025	FIGURE	NOTE
Venues that stopped putting on live music	**78**	30 closed for good
Average annual loss on live music	**£95,685**	Per venue, per year
Average capacity	**316**	Average attendance 122
Average ticket price	**£11.56**	Across all grassroots events
Share of live income that is not ticket money	**67.9%**	It is the bar
Artists paid per event	**8.6**	The circuit is a payroll

ANALYSIS Average capacity 316, average attendance 122. Rooms are running at roughly 39% full – and because 67.9% of live income comes from the bar, the question a venue is really asking when it books an act is not "will this sell tickets", it is "will this fill the room".

TWO RESPONSES WORTH KNOWING ABOUT

The GBP 1 grassroots ticket levy puts a pound from arena and stadium tickets back into the grassroots end. Voluntary so far, and take-up has been uneven.

The Liveline Fund takes a different approach: Funded from Coldplay's 2025 UK stadium tour, via Music Venue Trust with Save Our Scene and the Association of Independent Promoters. Its flagship strand underwrites up to 80% of approved losses on a show.

Both address the same thing our own data keeps pointing at – the downside of a quiet night lands entirely on the room.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR A FEE

Run the arithmetic a venue runs. 122 people through the door at £11.56 is about £1,410 on the door, before the promoter, the sound and the acts – and with 8.6 artists paid per event on average, that is not a fee pot, it is a rounding error. The money that pays the band is the bar, which is why "will they bring people" outranks "are they good" in almost every booking conversation on this circuit.

It is also the argument for publishing what rooms actually pay. A venue guessing at a fee and an artist guessing at a rate are the same failure twice, and both are cheap to fix.

SECTION SIX

06

What we are doing about it

All of it free. Most of it needs no account. This is the part we can actually control.

/GIGS/DIRECTORY/

The gig directory

Every upcoming grassroots gig we can find, deduplicated and refreshed continuously.

8,989 gigs across 89 cities

/GIGS/VENUES

The venue directory

Capacity, PA, backline and booking contacts for grassroots rooms, re-verified nightly.

2,622 venues across 433 towns

/GIGS/OPEN-MIC-FINDER

The open mic finder

Recurring open mic nights – the free stage time that starts most careers.

1,270 nights across 185 towns

/WHATS-ON

What's On

A national view of what is on this week, and a free weekly email of gigs near you.

Free, one-click unsubscribe, address never sold

/RATES

The GX Index

Open data on what UK gigs actually pay, published monthly with a DOI.

Free to read, CC BY 4.0, on Zenodo, HuggingFace and Kaggle

/HOW-IT-WORKS

Direct booking

Artists and venues book each other directly. No agency commission in the middle.

Free to join and to book

WHAT WE ARE NOT CLAIMING

We are not going to fix venue economics from here. Ticket levies, business rates, licensing and planning law are for people with far more clout than us, and anyone telling a venue that a website will save it is selling something. What a directory can do is narrower and duller: make the circuit *findable*, make booking direct and free of commission, and publish what we know rather than sitting on it because it is an asset.

That is the whole of our contribution, and we would rather be honest about its size than dress it up. If this report is useful, it is useful because the numbers in it are checkable – not because we wrote them.

> **THE SINGLE MOST USEFUL THING A READER CAN DO**
>
> Go to a gig at a small room this month, and buy a drink while you are there – 67.9% of a venue's live income is the bar, so the round matters as much as the ticket. Everything else on this page is us trying to make that easier to do.

SECTION SEVEN

07

Method, limits and licence

HOW IT WAS MEASURED

Every GigXchange figure was measured directly against our production database on **6 August 2026** and is fixed at that date. This report does not re-query itself, deliberately – a document whose numbers move is not one you can cite. The next edition will restate all of them, and any that moved will be visible.

> **THE RULE THIS REPORT LIVES BY**
>
> We say what we observed, and we say what we cannot see. An absence of data is never converted into a finding – a gig with no price recorded is a gig with no price recorded, not a free gig. Where a figure is missing, this report says so and explains what the gap does and does not prove.

WHAT IT CANNOT TELL YOU

- **Unticketed gigs are under-counted, probably heavily.** Our listings come from public sources and from venues, promoters and artists who list with us. All of those skew towards ticketed events.
- **Our venue records are the rooms we know about**, re-verified nightly – not a register of every room in Britain. No such register exists.
- **A gig missing from our data is missing, not cancelled.** Where this report says "we cannot see", that is exactly and only what it means.
- **Capacity and PA figures cover the rooms that publish them** (1,559 of 2,622 for capacity). The median is of those, not of the sector.

SOURCES

Sector figures on closures and venue economics: Music Venue Trust Annual Report 2025 (published January 2026). On the rural picture: Simon McKerrell, *Beyond the State: Music in the Rural Creative Economy* (Scottish Universities Press, 2026), open access, doi.org/10.62637/cej75v68. All GigXchange figures: our own directory, captured 6 August 2026. The live version of this report, with every source linked, is at gigxchange.app/rates/reports/state-of-the-circuit-2026.

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GIGXCHANGE
THE UK'S PEER-TO-PEER LIVE MUSIC MARKETPLACE
The easiest way to help is to show up.
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THE EASIEST WAY TO HELP

Show up.

Every figure in this report describes the same problem from a different angle: the rooms are there, and nobody can find them. The fix starts with one person going out on a Tuesday.

GIGXCHANGE.APP/WHATS-ON

Scan the code, or go to the address above, and put your email in. Once a week we send what is on near you – nothing else. Free, no account needed, one-click unsubscribe, and we never sell or share the address.