

# REACH FOR THE MOON



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Smokey the Groove during a May 23 livestream performance from inside a closed Lost on Main.  
PHOTO BY KEN PORDES

Oregon). After rescheduling some concerts multiple times, Maximov stopped selling shows and holding dates for touring acts. “I don’t think we’re going to have anything until the beginning of next year,” he estimated. “I’ve been doing this for 30 years. I don’t have a back-up plan.”

Of the 15 Butte County venues contacted by the CN&R, 11 of them (mostly bars and restaurants with existing means of earning money) said they could make it without live music or government assistance. Continued existence for the rest is dependent on the return of shows or receiving financial help (two reported being turned down for federal loans and one received a modest Economic Injury Disaster Loan).

More than half of the venues have canceled events indefinitely (with the exception of a handful of brunch/happy hour sets by solo acts physically distant from patrons), and the projected return for the rest is somewhere between this fall and spring/summer of 2021.

“In my head, I don’t see a return to normalcy until this time next year,” said Jake Sprecher, booker for Duffy’s Tavern. He also produces the annual multi-venue Valley Fever music festival, which was slated for April and was forced to postpone until next spring/summer at the earliest.

**What “normal” will look like is hard to determine** at this juncture. No matter when Butte County venues are allowed to reopen, guidelines for physical distancing and crowd control will come with economic and logistical impacts.

“Am I all of a sudden going to have another \$1,000 to \$2,000 in expenses?” Maximov wondered as he penciled out plexiglass barriers and extra staffing for line management coupled with reduced revenue from fewer patrons. “I don’t know what it’s going to cost me to put on a show anymore.”

As for Duffy’s, a bar with limited space to begin with, if the stage area is cleared of tables for a performance, that further limits

seating in a place that’s already been required to increase spacing. “If you don’t have those tables full, you just lost 20 percent of your capacity,” added Sprecher. “All of a sudden the bar is making that much less money.”

For Cummins at Chico State, logistics will be most challenging. “It’s not the theater houses [that are the problem]; it’s the size of the restrooms, and the size of the lobby, and our ability to queue people,” he said. “Just seating the audience socially distanced is probably the easiest thing in the equation.”

There’s also the matter of when the touring bands will return. Not only will many booking be months away, but if venues in major cities like Portland and San Francisco—along the tour routes that feed into Chico—are forced to close down, tours will pass on our little city.

“It really affects a market like Chico,” said Mahina Gannet, manager of the Big Room at Sierra Nevada Brewing Co. “It’s along the way, and it works out really well for a lot of touring artists if those other venues exist. So many iconic venues might have to shut their doors forever, and it’s so heartbreaking to think about.”

“I think the economic impact will be profound,” Cummins said when looking at the bigger picture. “I talk to the restaurateurs downtown and they all know the Chico Performances schedule, because they have to put extra waiters on that night.”

Arts and music venues are a significant source of employment and revenue. The latest report from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis found that “arts and culture contributed \$877.8 billion, or 4.5 percent, to the nation’s gross domestic product in 2017.”

“It’s not just the ticket revenue,” Cummins stressed. “There’s so much more that’s coming back to the community, [including] our way of life, the little bit of beauty by getting to hear a singer-songwriter. There’s just the fact that the arts are transformative. And god, our society needs transformative experiences right now more than any other time.” □