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The Need For NITO: Q's With National Independent Talent Organization's Frank Riley, Nadia Prescher and Stormy Shepherd

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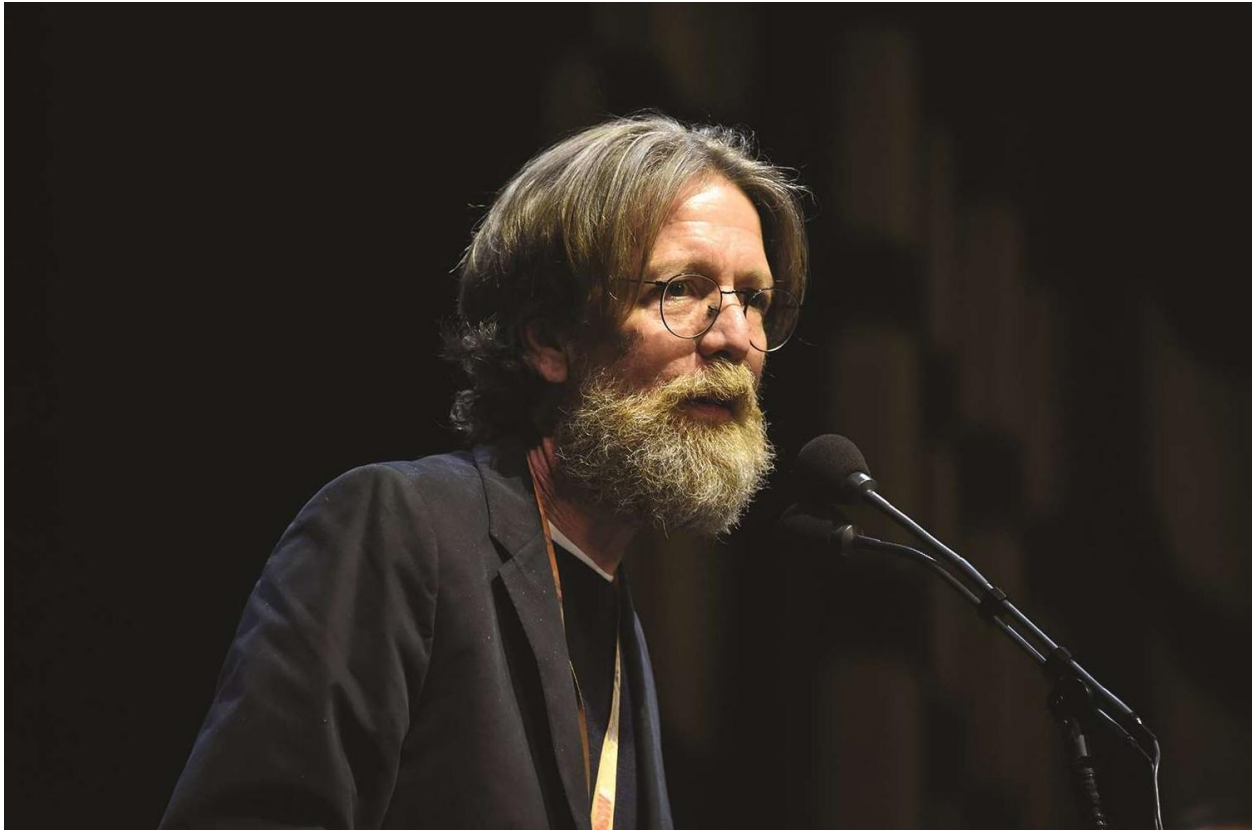


Stormy Shepherd

Leave Home Booking While the live entertainment business has made strides in recent weeks, with announcements of prominent livestreams, drive-in tours, virtual tours and other high-profile performances, independent talent agencies operate with the expectation of dozens of full tours taking place every spring and summer to keep the lights on, employees paid and artists compensated and making a living from their live business.

Enter the National Independent Talent Organization, a group of the industry's leading independent talent agencies, which in less than two weeks since forming totals at least 58 agencies representing everyone from Robert Plant to Rancid.

The group started somewhat by accident, with a loose organization of 14 members sharing information and noticing parallels with NIVA, which made it clear "it was necessary for us to move forward and have our voice heard in the halls of congress as well," High Road Touring's Frank Riley says.



Frank Riley *High Road Touring*

Pollstar: Everyone in the live business is hurting now, and agencies especially so.

Nadia Prescher: The difference between what our small businesses and other small businesses are dealing with is for the past two and a half months we've had absolutely no revenue while we continue to have these fixed expenses, because we believe in our companies. We're owned and operated businesses – Stormy owns hers, Frank owns his, I own mine and so on – and the reality is even though some of these public spaces are starting to open, we're not going to be able to open concerts at the level that is necessary for most of our artists to break even, let alone make money, and it's become more and more clear that the recovery is going to be very delayed.

What are NITO's lobbying goals?

Stormy Shepherd: We are supporting the RESTART Act, which is meant to benefit small businesses that have no incoming revenue, which likewise applies to our artists. We're looking at the Small Business Protection Act, the Keeping The Lights On Act – we're really looking at where we have commonalities with some of the other industries, especially those in the live music industry, where we can have similar benefits that will help our business survive until there is income, which generally for us won't resume until artists can [perform] in venues at full capacity. Our commissions don't come in until after a tour takes place, so it's an extended period of time, so some of these [measures] are important for us to support going forward and a lot of them are applicable to the artists.

Prescher: These are all bipartisan bills and we're thrilled to get behind measures that can speak to everyone regardless of political affiliation. Our businesses have been shuttered so we're getting behind measures that are sharing commonalities with other shuttered businesses that perhaps other relief didn't cover. Many aspects of the original PPP rollout didn't support our independent agencies and manager companies the way that it did for others. There's one more act we're getting behind which is the Employee Retention Credit.

Riley: When we're allowed to go back in business we have viable businesses that employ a lot of people. What we're trying to do is consolidate the largest number possible to present the best scenario we can to Congress to highlight the things that will help us get through this time and get back to our viable businesses. We're just looking to get back to the place to get back to work and provide the same service we have for many, many years.



Nadia Prescher Co-Founder of

Madison House

There's strength in numbers, with your combined members booking more than 40,000 concerts in 2019, moving 12.5 million tickets and \$500 million in ticket sales grossed.

Prescher: That was such a big standout, the significant economic impact our small, self-funded businesses had. It was very surprising when we started pulling all the numbers how grand the financial impact is on all of the different types of organizations who rely on our work daily. With us being self-funded, we don't have corporations to rely on for support.

While artists, venues, crew and staff rely on you bringing talent on the road, you too rely on the venues, such as the NIVA members, as well.

Shepherd: We have to be concerned about these small venues. These are not just stepping stones for us, for most of us this is where our artists live and thrive. There's a

real importance to joining efforts with some of these other groups – there's an independent promoters association, too – we all have to support each other to come out on the other side, and make sure it's safe for our artists and their fans to come back together.

What happens after COVID-19?

Prescher: It's very important to the founding members that – while focused on certain crises right now, both financial and social – this organization is planning to continue for a very long time, to be a place holder for people who want to have somewhere to go, to be part of a community of like-minded self-starters.