

# Yearning for a Tour, Roadies Go Online

A weekly Zoom group has been the answer to inactivity because of the pandemic.

By ALEX MARSHALL

LONDON — William Frostman, a lighting supervisor who has toured with the Rolling Stones and Queen, has just spent a whole year at home, the longest time in his decades-long career.

“I just want to wake up on a bus,” Frostman, 60, told dozens of his fellow roadies on a recent Zoom call.

Nostalgic as he was for life on the road, there were a few fears at the back of his mind, he said: Would anyone employ him? How would a vaccine passport work?

There was another big issue, too, Frostman added. He loved seeing his family every day during the pandemic. “Am I going to be mentally ready to wake up on a bus each morning and go, ‘They’re not here?’” he said.

In the Zoom grid onscreen, several roadies nodded in agreement.

In the popular imagination, those skilled crew members who make music tours work are taciturn figures, dressed in all black, who talk about music, but not much else. We don’t think of roadies opening up about their feelings. But the tour managers, sound engineers, lighting technicians and others who call into the Back Lounge support group every Wednesday couldn’t be further from that outdated image.

The group’s members weren’t there to chat about bands, but to check in on each other’s mental health.

A year into the coronavirus pandemic, many are hoping that cultural life will soon restart. Concerts are set to resume in New York next month, albeit with tiny audiences. In England, the government has said entertainment events will be allowed again from May 17, if infection levels are under control.

But for many roadies, who often rely on monthslong world tours to make a living, a return to full-time work feels a long way off.

“My fear is being disappointed again,” said Suzi Green, a veteran tour manager who set up the group, adding that she was concerned restrictions would be reimposed.

Other members had their own worries. Some were scared that they wouldn’t get work when concerts returned. One said she feared if she did find work, she’d go back to unhealthy on-the-road habits, like surviving solely on pizza.

The mental health impact of the pandemic on touring crew members has been widespread. Last November, the Production Services Association and other British organizations representing live events workers surveyed its membership on the issue. Half the 1,700 respondents said they had suffered depression, and nearly 15 percent said they had experienced suicidal thoughts.

Green, who has run tours for musicians including PJ Harvey and James Blake, started the Back Lounge in June after finding herself, “really depressed, in a real state,” she said in a telephone interview.

When events were canceled last March, she felt as if she’d lost her whole identity, she said. “As a lifestyle, you’re away nine, 10



SUZANNE PLUNKETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

months a year,” she said. “It’s your whole life.”

One of Green’s friends, a teacher, told her that they had benefited from attending a professional support group during the pandemic, and she wondered if there was anything out there for people in her own line of work. She did a search online and found Backline, a Brooklyn-based nonprofit group that promotes mental health in the music industry.

An online meeting that she attended organized by Backline Care was “a lifesaver,” she said. So Green decided to create something similar for British and European music crews who would find it difficult to join the U.S. meetings because of the time difference.

The first Back Lounge, named after the area at the rear of a tour bus where staff members chill out after shows, took place one Wednesday last June, at 6 p.m. It has been running at the same time every week since, attracting attendees ranging from industry veterans who run stadium shows, to up-and-coming tour managers who drive small bands around Europe.

Green has brought in guests including therapists and personal trainers, but the fo-

cus is always on the roadies talking about what’s on their minds, Green said.

“I didn’t know I needed it, but I needed it,” Frostman, the lighting supervisor, said later in a telephone interview, adding that he has been working as a mail carrier to make ends meet. “It’s nice being on a call where people understand you.”

Simon Schofield, 52, who is usually in charge of film and graphics displays on major tours, said the Back Lounge had helped him deal with a host of emotions during the pandemic. There was a point last year, he said, when he couldn’t listen to the radio because he’d hear “every single band I’d toured with, and it’d be a bombardment of reminding of what my life used to be like.”

As well as attending the Back Lounge, he said, he has been having therapy and taking antidepressants, but the group has been helpful, too. “It’s such a weight off your mind, off your soul, to know other people are feeling and suffering the way you are,” he said.

Schofield said: “Our industry is terrible when it comes to mental illness. You don’t talk about it until it’s too late, and we need to be more compassionate.”

Nathalie Candell, 29, a tour manager who



VIA DEBBIE TAYLOR (TOP LEFT), ROB GWIN (TOP RIGHT), VIA WILLIAM FROSTMAN (ABOVE)

Clockwise from left: Suzi Green, a tour manager, in Britain; Debbie Taylor at the Forum in Inglewood, Calif.; Nathalie Candell backstage in Oslo; William Frostman, part of a lighting crew in London.

regularly attends the Back Lounge, said she hoped the group would continue to meet once the industry got back on the road. “We need to look at what we put people through on tour,” she said. Some crew members, including herself, had boasted about working 19-hour days, she added, and that clearly was not healthy.

One recent Wednesday, the Back Lounge was back in session, to discuss the theme of “being left behind.”

Some of the roadies said they feared that the music industry had moved on without them or that their contacts had moved into new lines of work. “The fear of being left behind is very real,” said Debbie Taylor, who manages the crew for Guns N’ Roses world tours. “It’s something I have nightmares about.”

The tone was serious, but then Keith Wood, a stadium tour manager, brightened the mood.

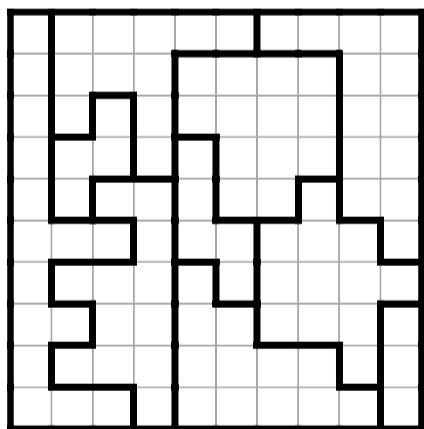
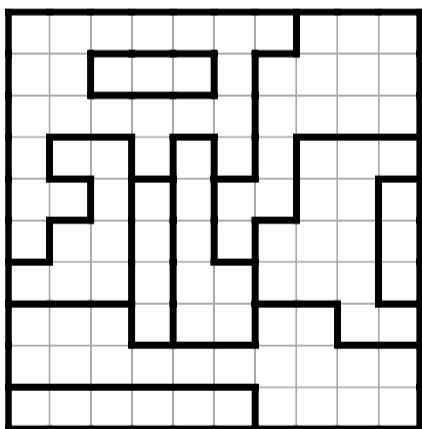
“I’ll tell you a story about being left behind,” Wood said, before launching into a tale about the time one of Suzanne Vega’s tour buses drove off without him at a truck stop in Nebraska. That was before cell-phones, he said, and he only made it to the tour’s next stop with the help of a friendly local pilot.

Everyone laughed, and, for a moment, their worries were relieved. But then came the longing for the road.

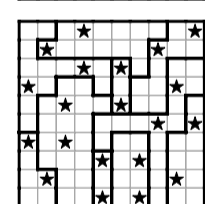
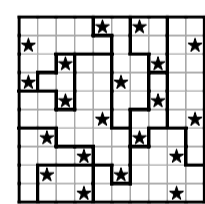
“I miss being on a bus so much,” Taylor said.

“You and me both,” Frostman added.

## Two Not Touch



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES



Put two stars in each row, column and region of the grid. No two stars may touch, not even diagonally.

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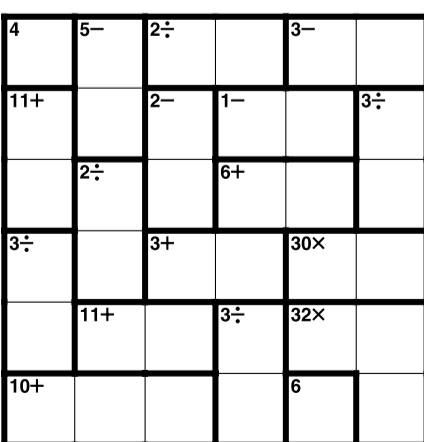
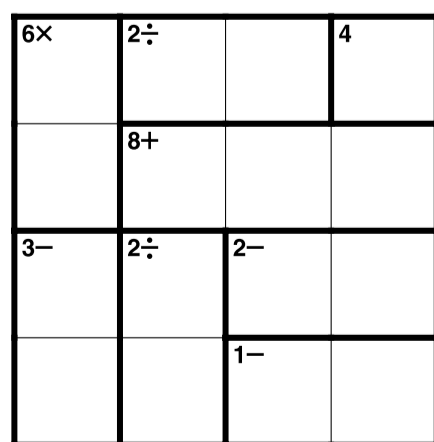
## Cryptogram

TGUTPTV AOIMRAI, XPR OIJWIEWL T LWJOMW ER AOSE GRTEH  
RJWU HPRTAH, OH EPW RIAC KUWHOLWIE ER WTUI T KTEWIE.

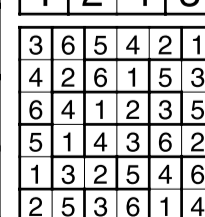
PUZZLE BY BEN BASS

YESTERDAY’S ANSWER Locate, lose

## KenKen



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES



Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

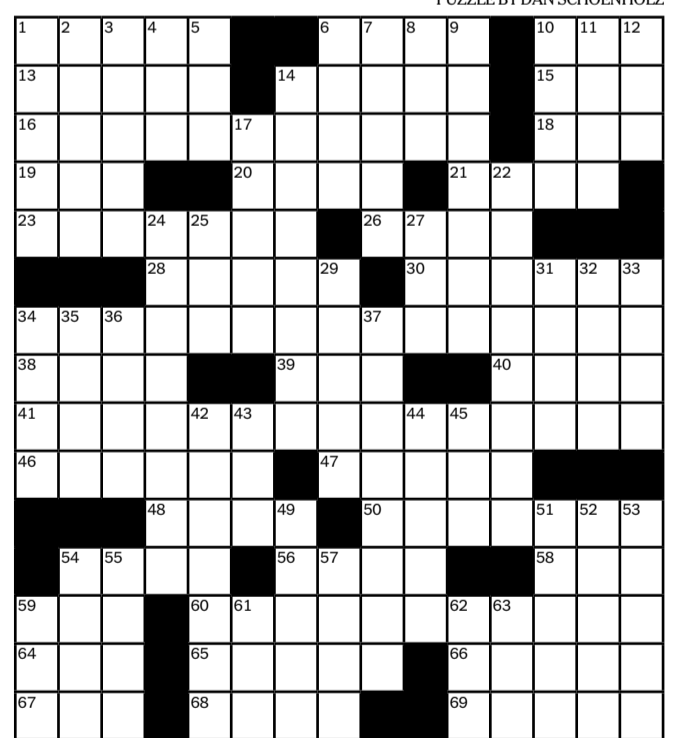
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## Crossword Edited by Will Shortz

PUZZLE BY DAN SCHOENHOLZ

- ACROSS**
- 1 Letter-shaped girder
  - 6 Prejudice
  - 10 Male delivery
  - 13 Starts hearts, say
  - 14 Tiny fly
  - 15 Copy
  - 16 Job interview for a wannabe tax collector?
  - 18 Certain Dominican
  - 19 What’s mined to keep?
  - 20 Setting depicted in the Sistine Chapel
  - 21 10:1, e.g.
  - 23 \_\_\_ X
  - 26 Teri of “Tootsie”
  - 28 “Bless you” preceder
  - 30 Place to get some “me time”
  - 34 What the surfing enthusiast has?
  - 38 “Movin’ \_\_\_”
  - 39 Preceder of “TV” on cable TV
  - 40 Brand of cornstarch
  - 41 Name for a huge marathon?
  - 46 On the wrong path
  - 47 Go halvesies on
- DOWN**
- 48 Too cute, on the Thames
  - 50 Hangs tight
  - 54 Compact \_\_\_
  - 56 Story that goes on and on ... and on
  - 58 She might give you her coat
  - 59 Spout (off)
  - 60 Unwelcome sight on a bill ... or a clue to 16-, 34- and 41-Across
  - 64 \_\_\_ dye (chemical coloring)
  - 65 Is rifle (with)
  - 66 Who might say “Take me to your leader”
  - 67 Kind of bulb, in brief
  - 68 Basket shot from behind the arc, in hoops slang
  - 69 Singer Cyrus



3/23/21

- ACROSS**
- 5 East Lansing school, in brief
  - 6 Quick snack
  - 7 Naming
  - 8 “Give it \_\_\_”
  - 9 Married women, in Oaxaca
  - 10 Green Day or Black Sabbath
  - 11 Magnum \_\_\_
  - 12 Kyoto dough
  - 14 The 15th or so
  - 17 Home to Jawaharlal Nehru University
  - 22 Cures, in a way
  - 24 Alternatives to garages
  - 25 Neurotic condition, for short
  - 27 \_\_\_-compliant
  - 29 Nasty sorts
- DOWN**
- 31 Assistant who asks “What can I help you with?”
  - 32 Comic strip that’s the source of the line “We have met the enemy and he is us”
  - 33 Soon, poetically
  - 34 When doubled, a Pacific paradise
  - 35 Albatross
  - 36 Rosemary Clooney, to George Clooney
  - 37 Does a service station job
  - 42 Farrah of the original “Charlie’s Angels”
  - 43 Actor Sheridan who co-starred in “Ready Player One”
  - 44 Hipbone-related
  - 45 Like candles before singing “Happy Birthday”
  - 49 Cosmetician Lauder
  - 51 Rising sea levels, e.g.
  - 52 “Wow, you shouldn’t have ...”
  - 53 Itty-bitty
  - 54 Go out briefly?
  - 55 It can carry a tune
  - 57 One side in a college football rivalry since 1890
  - 59 Bud
  - 61 Child of the ‘70s, e.g.
  - 62 Showboater
  - 63 Woman’s nickname that drops “-son”

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE



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