



PRESS RELEASE: 8/11/13

Pere Ubu US Tour To Go Ahead Despite Visa Petition Delays

The visa petition to allow American avant-rock band Pere Ubu to tour in America is, as of this date, still pending. Regardless of the outcome of that process, Pere Ubu will honor its concert dates this fall.

"Fans have bought tickets, flights, hotels, and made plans," Pere Ubu's David Thomas said. "We will not let them down."

The American Federation of Musicians (AFM) is the latest and only remaining obstacle. If the band hands over a "consultation fee" of, at least, \$300, the union will send a letter to the US Customs & Immigration Service (USCIS) objecting or not objecting to the visa petition.

Two British citizens have been in the group for the last four years. To tour in America with those British citizens, Pere Ubu must prove that the band itself, or the individual musicians, are of world class caliber and have a respected international reputation. Pere Ubu provided the USCIS with voluminous documentation spanning its thirty-eight year history that attested to the group's considerable reputation and nearly universal critical acclaim. The application states that the band must also seek a consultation from an appropriate labor organization.

"It's preposterous," Thomas said. "The USCIS note on their website that a negative or even positive response from a union does not affect their decision. Why, then, are we required to pay off the union?"

"I do not recognize the musician union's authority in this matter," said Thomas, a US citizen resident in the United Kingdom. "If Steven Tyler wants some guy from Greater Lower Slobovia to be the guitarist in Aerosmith, then what right does the Government have, through its deputies in the AFM, to comment on the validity of Mr. Tyler's choice? More to the point, musicians in a band like Pere Ubu are not interchangeable - when someone new comes in we have to re-compose the entire repertoire.

"A foreign tool maker wants to work in the US. There are a 100,000 unemployed tool makers in the US, all of whom can do the same job. A union, sensibly, might have a say in the matter. There are a 100,000 unemployed musicians in the US. Not one of them could fill in with a band like Pere Ubu."

It was also noted in the petition that Pere Ubu is a group of mavericks - independent contractors and amateur musicians who have forged an iconoclastic path for nearly forty years. All are co-composers in a group that relies heavily on improvisation. More than twenty-three albums have been released on both major and independent labels, including Mercury, Phonogram, Geffen, Chrysalis, Cooking Vinyl, Rough Trade and Universal.

"The AFM has a role in many areas of the music industry," Mr. Thomas said. "But, as regards Pere Ubu, they are not relevant. We provided the USCIS with all that they asked for but I said,

No, there is no labor organization to consult. 'As well, there is another principle at stake - I will not seek approval from an organization that requires payment for the privilege.'

Mr. Thomas went on to say, "I do not question the Government's duty to guard the country's borders. I just wonder what the AFM, or any other business, has to do with it. I would like to point out that there is only one other country on the planet - a small one - that has any such requirements for musical groups. Pere Ubu used to tour behind the Iron Curtain. 'We came and went freely - not even the East Germans were in any way concerned with the musical nature of our visits. We did once run into a Swiss border guard who told us, 'We don't want your foreign kind of music in our country - we have our own music. 'But he had to let us in anyway.'"

A proposed Congressional bill, recently passed in the Senate, speeds up the visa process for artists, but it hands over more power to arts organizations and the AFM, both already inserted into the US Government's chain of visa approval, to judge the worthiness of artistic and musical expression. The AFM lobbied for the bill's passage.

The Pere Ubu visa petition was submitted in late May. One of the two British musicians involved has previously been granted a visa as a member of Pere Ubu without an AFM consultation.

"Knowing Ubu fans, there will be a spontaneous movement to raise the \$300," Thomas concluded. "Do not do it. Our booking agent volunteered the money. We refused it."