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Norwegian Festivals and a Music Economy in Transition: The art of balancing ambitions, expectations and limitations¹

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Introduction

Somewhere around 10.30 p.m., July 3rd, 2002, David Bowie enters the stage at Odderøya, Kristiansand to perform at the *Quart-Festival* as the headlining act of that year. The atmosphere was electric as 12,000 fans (sold out) welcome the biggest act yet to visit Norway's biggest music festival. Bowie himself, wearing a loosened bow tie and a black and white suit, walks calmly to the front of the stage, takes a bow at his audience and opens what is considered a legendary concert in Kristiansand with 'Life on Mars'. A long-time volunteer at the *Quart-Festival*, I was in that audience and, although not a devoted Bowie fan, I was deeply fascinated by his appearance. I remember his presence; the calm and the control Bowie exercised from when he entered the stage until he left. I remember the line of songs that I knew by heart – songs that have been canonised years ago. I also remember noticing the difference in appearance from Bowie and the number of 'soon-to-be-stars' and 'could-have-been-stars', struggling to attain momentum and attention on stage. Here was a star – a true legend.

Both prior to, but mostly after David Bowie's concert at the *Quart-Festival* in 2002, there was a vivid discussion among Norwegian festival managers and journalists on whether it was at all sustainable for festivals to give artist fees as big as that rumoured to be the case with David Bowie. There were concerns on whether a sacred line had been broken with regards to the size of his fee, as well as claims that Mr Bowie was considered a 'stadium-artist' and hence whether such artists were at all economically sustainable to present in Norwegian festival programmes. There was a concern to whether at all Norwegian festivals had the capacity to present artists on this level.

Remarkably absent in the discussions of 2002, were any concerns related to 'the other artists', the names underneath the headlining acts; new audience behaviour;