



Hearing-impaired employees working at a bakery run by Uwe Brutzer in the city of Changsha in China's Hunan province. — AFP photos



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Hearing-impaired employees using sign language while working at a bakery run by Uwe Brutzer in Changsha.

German bakery helps deaf Chinese earn their daily bread

The oven's warm glow and aroma of fresh bread signal the morning rush at Bach's Bakery in the central Chinese city of Changsha, but although the baking staff chatter excitedly, you could hear a pin drop. Bach's employs mainly hearing-impaired staff, whose banter over trays of pumpkin bread, Danish sausage rolls and apple turnovers is done entirely in sign language. The operation, owned and operated by German national Uwe Brutzer, provides work opportunities that are often hard to come by for his employees. Despite growing awareness of disabled needs, life remains a challenge for China's hearing impaired, officially estimated at between 20 and 30 million. It's difficult to "make good money and get an education," said Wan Ting, a 28-year-old employed by Bach's since 2017 after a previous unsuccessful stint in advertising design.

"It's hard (to find work) in other places. You need to know someone to be able to find good work. If not, you have few options," added Wan, hearing-impaired since birth and speaking via sign language translated by Brutzer. With their communication challenges, the hearing-impaired are often steered into work requiring skilful use of the hands, said the 50-year-old Brutzer, making the bakery a nice fit. Bach and his wife Dorothee first came to Changsha in 2002 with a German charity to help hearing-impaired children. He took over the bakery in 2011 and has since trained around 20 bakers. Most go on to work in other bakeries, restaurants or hotels. But other aspects of running a business—hiring, working with suppliers, talking to customers—pose major challenges to opening their own bake shops. "Two of our very experienced bakers (have tried), but they both closed their shops later again. It was too much hassle for them," he said.

The bright and compact bakery has had a devoted local



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clientele for years in the city-known more for its peppery Hunan cuisine—despite being hidden in a non-descript residential side alley. Bakery margins are thin, however, and Bach's has struggled, said Brutzer. But things are looking up, despite China's traumatic coronavirus lockdowns earlier this year. Moving to no-touch take-out service during the epidemic kept volumes humming, and Bach's went viral this summer thanks to a spate of feel-good Chinese media coverage. Today, a loud creak from the front door announces a new customer every few minutes and business is up five-fold from last year, said Brutzer. The challenge now is meeting demand. "But that will slow down, I hope, to a good level where we can pay better salaries and people will be happier," he said. — AFP

London's music goes underground to beat lockdown blues

London's hard-hit live entertainment sector is hoping to prove it can resurrect itself from the coronavirus shutdown—and a series of gigs from a maze of tunnels could show the way to do it. "Lockdown Town", which opens on October 2, will see socially distanced performances of American music from the 1920s to 1950s in a network of vaulted venues near Waterloo station. Audiences will have their temperatures checked during staggered arrival times, move from one venue to the next wearing masks, and not stay in one area for more than 15 minutes. The number of spectators has been capped at a maximum of 360 each evening—well below the 500-700 capacity in normal times.

"We have created a really flexible model," "Lockdown Town" director Kerri McLean told AFP, adding ingenuity was key to getting the event on track. "We are just a tiny little piece in a huge puzzle but it does feel that we are giving an opportunity and a boost to these many talented people who haven't had a gig for seven months." Organizers expect to employ more than 300 musicians playing ragtime to rock 'n' roll, with the event described as London's first Covid-safe "immersive experience".

Carpenters, sound engineers and musicians were busy this week preparing the 30,000 square feet (2,800 meters) of space that once served as parking lots before the opening night. The activity is a stark contrast with the scene at most theatres and nightspots in central London, which were shut in



Musicians perform a staged funeral for the 'death' of live music, during a socially-distanced photocall performance for One Night Records' forthcoming 'Lockdown Town' production, on the banks of the River Thames in London. — AFP photos

late March as part of the nationwide coronavirus lockdown. The government has allowed venues to partially reopen but many nightspots, particularly older theatres, remain closed because of strict social distancing rules. One study published in June estimated that theatres and concert venues face a £3-billion (\$3.9-billion, 3.3-billion-euro) shortfall in revenues this year.

'Ghost town'

"It's been horrendous for the creative industry," said McLean of the shutdown. "It has affected every single industry but for the live industry,



the bounce back is really, really tough." The government this week tightened restrictions on socializing because of a surge in coronavirus cases, and imposed local lockdowns across swathes of the country. Under current rules, groups of more than six people from different households are not allowed to mix to curb the close-contact spread of the virus.

Fears of another wider shutdown persist but organizers One Night Records remain optimistic and say they have shifted "lots of tickets", which are priced at £52. Some dates are already sold out. Production manager Joanna Penso said

London, which is normally packed with tourists and revelers, had been transformed into a "ghost town" by the pandemic. But the gigs could be just the tonic the city needs. "The public really want to see something at the moment... I've been craving to go dancing and listen to live music," she said. "It's something that we have all been missing." During the shows, a costumed character with a cane will ensure health and safety regulations are strictly enforced. Penso predicted that would be the biggest challenge "but also that audiences are feeling safe enough to actually enjoy themselves". — AFP

Disgraced Harvey Weinstein loses top royal honor

Queen Elizabeth II has stripped Harvey Weinstein of the royal honor he was awarded before his predatory sex crimes came to light, an official government statement said on Monday. The disgraced Hollywood movie mogul, who is currently serving a 23-year jail term for rape, received the honor in 2004 in recognition of his contribution to the British film industry. But an announcement in The Gazette, the UK official government record, said it had now been withdrawn. "The Queen has directed that the appointment of Harvey Weinstein to be an Honorary Commander of the Civil Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, dated 29 January 2004, shall be cancelled and annulled and that his name shall be erased from the Register of the said Order," it read.

Royal honors can be forfeited in circumstances where Buckingham Palace considers the system has been brought into disrepute. Decisions are approved by the monarch herself. Previous recipients who have had their honors removed



Harvey Weinstein

include Rolf Harris, the Australian-born entertainer and artist who was jailed in 2014 for a string of sexual assaults. He had been given a CBE in 2006 after painting Queen Elizabeth's portrait to mark her 80th birthday. He was also stripped of his Australian honors. Zimbabwe's former president Robert Mugabe lost his honorary knighthood in 2008 because of what the UK government said were "human rights violations" and "disregard" for democracy. — AFP

Palestinian National Museum art show opens in Paris

An exhibition of art donated to the as yet only notional National Museum of Palestine has gone on show in Paris. Works by the first couple of photography, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Martine Franck, as well as the street artist Jef Aerosol are featured in "Colors of the World", which runs at the Arab World Institute (IMA) in the French capital until December 20. Art given to the exiled museum has been held in the IMA's reserves in France since 2015. IMA chief and former French culture minister Jack Lang told AFP that so far the institute has been looking after some 400 works. "It is a Palestinian museum in exile made up of donations from artists from a number of countries which we keep in our reserves," Lang added.

He said he hoped a bricks and mortar Palestine museum "will be built one day in East Jerusalem". Palestine's ambassador to UNESCO, Elias Sanbar, said the project "may seem utopian", but similar museums in exile were set up for South Africa under apartheid and Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship. Alongside the show, the IMA is also staging an exhibition of photos and videos by Arab artists called "Shared Memories" drawn from the vast donation of Lebanese collector Claude Lemand. — AFP