

Lifestyle | Features



US musician Eddie Vedder (right) performs during the taping of the "Vax Live" fundraising concert.



Hugh Evans, CEO of Global Citizen, speaks during the taping of the "Vax Live" fundraising concert.

Not 'out of the woods'

A glittering J-Lo told fans she had been forced to spend Christmas without her mother for the first time due to the pandemic-before bringing the Lopez matriarch onto an elaborate meadow-themed stage for a feelgood singalong of "Sweet Caroline." The Foo Fighters were joined by surprise guest Brian Johnson of AC/DC for a rendition of "Back in Black." "We ain't out of the woods yet... let's work as hard as we can to make sure we can do this" every night, said frontman Dave Grohl.

Organizers said the event had surpassed its fundraising goal need to purchase 10 million vaccine doses for low and middle-income countries, drawing



H.E.R., US singer Gabriella Wilson, is shown on a screen performing.

more than \$53 million in donations from corporations and philanthropists. In pre-taped messages, President Biden said he was "working with leaders around the world to share more vaccines and boost production" while Pope Francis said: "I beg you not to forget the most vulnerable."

Other video messages came from Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan,

French President Emmanuel Macron and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Prince Harry, who took to the large circular stage in the middle of the arena dressed casually in a blue shirt, described online disinformation about vaccines as a "humanitarian crisis" that is "getting worse." The concert will stream on YouTube along with American television

networks ABC and CBS on May 8 at 8:00 pm ET (midnight GMT). It will also air internationally on Brazil's Globo, Colombia's Caracol, SABC in South Africa and MultiChoice in Africa. — AFP

Thousands dance mask-free at UK live gig trial



Fans watch Blossom perform at a live music concert hosted by Festival Republic in Sefton Park in Liverpool, north-west England, where a non-socially-distanced crowd of 5,000 are expected to attend. — AFP

Thousands danced without face coverings at a music festival in northern England as the UK government permitted the country's first post-lockdown gig. A crowd of 5,000 people cheered, danced and sang along to performances from bands including English indie pop act Blossoms at the sold-out event on Sunday at Liverpool's Sefton Park. The festival was part of a pilot project by the UK government called the Events Research Programme (ERP) to test crowd safety at live events ahead of planned lifting of restrictions on June 21.

Hugging a group of friends outside the concert tent, Matt Berry said they were "getting back to doing normal things that normal people do... finally" "I

think it is good to get it all started again to test if it can all work for summer, and if it will all go ahead in the summer as well," said another concert-goer, Freya Begley. The government has previously allowed limited numbers of supporters to attend sports events such as the FA Cup semifinal at Wembley. Researchers are monitoring how well different approaches to social distancing and ventilation work. All those attending the two-day concert had to take lateral flow coronavirus tests before entering the venue and will also have to take another test afterwards.

They have to give their contact details to the state-funded health service so they can be traced if they test positive. The bands performed in a tent.

At the entrance to the venue, audience members had to show QR codes and COVID test results. "There is no reason why anyone should catch anything so I am at ease with everything, I am excited!" said Jess Davis, as she arrived at the gig. The prestigious Brit Awards ceremony on May 11 will also allow 4,000 people to attend London's O2 Arena as long as they have a negative test result. The UK has given more than 34 million people a first vaccine dose and there are currently 1,451 people in hospital with the virus according to the latest government figures. —AFP

UAE award voices 'regret' after German philosopher rejects prize



German philosopher Juergen Habermas

The UAE's Sheikh Zayed Book Award said yesterday it regretted prominent German philosopher Juergen Habermas' decision not to accept its "Cultural Personality of the Year" prize. The 91-year-old had reversed

an earlier decision to accept the one-million-dirham (\$272,000) prize, saying he had been unaware of its links to the government. According to a statement sent to Der Spiegel by his publisher, Suhrkamp, Habermas saw his initial acceptance of the award as "the wrong decision which I am now putting right". "I hadn't informed

myself about the close link between the institution that gives these prizes in Abu Dhabi and the political system there," he added.

The Sheikh Zayed Book Award, named after the UAE's founding father, hands out gold medals and cash prizes totaling some \$1.9 million each year. It had declared Habermas "Cultural Personality of the Year" on April 30 "in recognition of a long career that extends for more than half a century", according to a statement. "The Sheikh Zayed Book Award expresses its regret for Mr Jurgen Habermas' decision to retract his acceptance of the award but respects it," it said in another statement yesterday. "The award embodies the values of tolerance, knowledge and creativity while building bridges between cultures, and will continue to fulfill this mission." —AFP

Napoleon in Russia: Invader turned icon

In the early 19th century, the French-speaking Russian nobility admired French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, seen then as an unparalleled political and military strategist. But when his army invaded Russia in 1812, residents of Moscow preferred to torch their capital and leave it in ruins rather than surrender it to the hated Corsican general.

Two hundred years after his death in exile on the remote Atlantic island of St Helena, an anniversary marked tomorrow, Russians' views have since shifted again. "We admire his rise from rags to riches and his death as a martyr," Viktor Bezotnosny, a historian and specialist of the Napoleonic wars told AFP.

During the Soviet period, the Bolsheviks glorified Napoleon as a revolutionary akin to Lenin, and while that image of him changed after the Soviet collapse, his popularity in some circles remained. For Vladimir Presnov, director of a museum on the sweeping fields at Borodino, the site of a decisive battle that saw some 70,000 soldiers perish in a single day, "even the most patriotic Russians no longer see Napoleon primarily as an invader". Meet three Russians who have all formed an intense interest in the French emperor:

The re-enactor

In white uniform, black boots, blue epaulettes and helmet, Mikhail Shmaevich closely resembles a Napoleonic colonel. Playing the role of a rifle corps colonel, he is among a group of history enthusiasts, who reenact French Grand Army battles. "Vive l'Empereur! Vive la France!" the actors on horseback shouted at a reenactment in February, after the remains of more than 100 Napoleonic soldiers were reburied in eastern Russia.

There are some 2,500 re-enactors in Russia, whose five annual performances attract tens of thousands of spectators to watch battles like Borodino played out. For Shmaevich, who as president of an equestrian club is an excellent rider, Napoleon is a "genius" who was ahead of his time. He says Russia's defeat of Napoleon saw it become a dominant country in Europe and spurred reforms culminating in the end of serfdom in 1861. "It's thanks to him that Russia became a great European power, modernized its

industry and its political system," Shmaevich told AFP.

The collector

The walls of Alexander Vikhrov's large apartment in Moscow are lined with paintings depicting Napoleon's military exploits and cabinets filled with miniature busts and memorabilia featuring the French emperor. "Napoleon is the first person in history to become an object of worship even in the countries he invaded," says Vikhrov, the owner of one of the largest private collections dedicated to Napoleon. Since making a small fortune in the economically chaotic years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Vikhrov has made a hobby of hunting down Napoleon paraphernalia. Among his prized items is a fragment of the bed in which the Emperor died and a medallion with a lock of Napoleon's hair bought for Å4,000 (\$4,808).

"Who knows, one day this hair could be used to create a Napoleon clone," Vikhrov says, laughing. Napoleon, he says, is a "contradictory character, prone to tyranny towards the end of his reign but above all a great man whom France is trying to put in the shadows."



Maria Lyudko, a singing instructor at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory and a descendant of one of Napoleon's 2,000 soldiers who remained in Russia. — AFP

The descendant

Maria Lyudko, a voice instructor at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory, is proud to be a descendant of one of Napoleon's 2,000 soldiers who remained in Russia after the French army retreated. She says her grandfather stayed in Lida in what is now Belarus, worked as a private tutor and married his student. Lyudko added that she only knows her grandfather's surname: Vigoureux.

At the height of political repression under Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, having a French name was dangerous and her family changed it. But now Lyudko is considering changing it back again. "It is to this Napoleonic soldier that I owe my sense of morale, initiative and responsibility, and also my appreciation of food, humor and resourcefulness," Lyudko said, laughing. The man ultimately in command of the army her grandfather fought in was, a "real hero, intelligent, ambitious, both pragmatic and romantic," she said. "France should be proud of its superhero." — AFP



Napoleon memorabilia collector Alexander Vikhrov attends an interview at his apartment in Moscow. — AFP photos