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WEEKEND



the college music festival:

// BY LILY SCHECKNER

When the Coachella music festival was founded in 1999, it cost attendees $50 per day. It was a festival option for music purists — a place where one could enjoy the best bands of a generation. The festival even intentionally resisted corporate sponsorships. It was home to iconic moments, like the call for the Bush administration to be tried for war crimes in 2007. I imagine music lovers crammed in mini vans on their road trips to the valley, chanting — in Nicole Kidman-esque voices — "We come to this place for magic."

I have never been to Coachella, and I'm sure I would jump at it if given the tickets. But from what I've seen online, the festival has transformed a lot since its early origins. It has become less of a music festival, in many ways, and more of a status symbol. General admission tickets start at around $600, not including fees for camping and parking, but many influencers attend via sponsorships from brands while still paying thousands of dollars so stylists can construct their outfits. Seas of these influencers stand stock-still and hold their cellphones up to capture videos of Sabrina Carpenter. Corporate sponsorships have become the quintessential emblem of Coachella, with elaborate brand houses like Rhode's and Starbucks' scattered across the festival grounds.

Music, for me, has always been one of the most influential methods of forging genuine connection. It keeps me close with my mom. At Yale, I've stayed up until 3 a.m. talking about music with my friends. I've also been known to say, unironically, that one of the most romantic things you can do is share wired earbuds with someone. All of this to say, I believe music is a universal language.

The more I think about it, the more I worry that events like Coachella are the antithesis of that sentiment. In a world where nearly every arena has become divided by wealth, it deeply saddens me that music — one of many industries historically barricaded from wealth and influence — is losing one of its most important, initially democratizing events to the breeding ground of exclusivity. The amount of content I've seen about the actual performances at Coachella is ridiculously paltry next to the mass videos on styling outfits, staying in luxury hotels and taking Instagram photos — all under the label of some brightly-colored, carbonated drink brand.

Now, with Spring Fling coming up, I hope that Yale students take this opportunity to enjoy a music experience without feeling those pressures. It's a rare opportunity for students to attend a festival with headliner artists like Zara Larsson, Sheck Wes or Ken Carson without having to spend hundreds of dollars on tickets. College music festivals like Spring Fling might be the last remnants of the affordable music festival — a microcosm of what Yale, in its quest for affordability, hopes to be for its undergraduates. Even though some pregames on Saturday are charging overhead prices, anywhere from $4 with not-so-well-kept secret discount codes to $45 for the desperate Luther-lover, there is still a free way to experience Spring Fling. And what would Yale, in all its hopes for democratic equity, be without a thinly yet opaquely veiled barrier to some further, more exclusive, possibly more fun and definitely more expensive opportunity?

Still, while we all excitedly contemplate our outfits and the amazing pictures we will inevitably take, I sense that everyone is still most excited about the experience itself, something both universal and specific to Yale. As we crowd onto Old Campus on Saturday, I believe that, at the very least, we'll put down our phones — and umbrellas — and dance.

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the last real Coachella?

