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LIFESTYLE | A-HED

The Thrill of the Chase for a \$9 Cyndi Lauper Ticket

Bargain hunters and even devotees wait it out for the right price to see concerts

By [Chris Kornelis](#) [Follow](#) and [Anne Steele](#) [Follow](#)

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Sophie Serrano, left, and her mom, Annie Martinez, waited for prices to fall before snagging last-minute tickets to Taylor Swift's Eras Tour in Miami. PHOTO: SOPHIE SERRANO

Casey McNerthney has never been a Cyndi Lauper buff. For most of his life, he'd change the

radio channel when he heard “Girls Just Want to Have Fun.”

But he is a huge fan of landing concert tickets for cheap—especially for shows in big arenas, stadiums and amphitheaters, where he gets to experience an artist (and throngs of their devotees) for the first time.

So in December, when he noticed \$9 tickets—including fees—to the Seattle stop of Lauper’s farewell tour hours before showtime, he pounced. McNerthney spent the evening showing his true colors in an arena full of fans who knew every song by heart.

He’s had a beautiful day seeing U2 for \$16 and paid \$12 to see a sky full of stars at Coldplay. He’s even ducked out of a Major League Baseball game and a cooking class with his wife early to see famous bands on the cheap.

“You can’t get a cocktail in Seattle or a full meal at Mickey D’s for the price of going” to see a musical great, he said.

McNerthney’s bargain hunting involves keeping a close eye on StubHub, SeatGeek, TickPick and Gametime, apps where brokers and fans resell tickets, as well as Ticketmaster, where prices often fall the day of the show. He is among a crop of cheap-ticket junkies who are often bigger fans of the deals they can score than the artists they’re paying pennies on the dollar to see.

“It doesn’t matter who you’re going to see at a stadium for less than 15 bucks,” he said.

“You’re going to have a good time if you have the right outlook.”



Casey McNerthney at a Garth Brooks concert at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. He purchased a ticket for \$18 after the concert had started, through a resale app. The Uber ride from his hotel was \$20.93. PHOTO: CASEY MCNERTHNEY

Bargains are often the result of ticket brokers trying to unload inventory at the last minute or fans reselling tickets to shows they can no longer attend.

Scalpers make bets on demand for coming shows when scooping up face value tickets en masse, said Randy Nichols, an artist manager who leads the National Independent Talent Organization's ticketing committee. They typically sell some at a steep markup to make a profit. When they overestimate, they risk holding the bag unless they unload unsold tickets.

McNerthney has noticed a cadence: ticket prices often bottom out two or three days before a show, begin to tick back up until the day of, and then plummet once openers take the stage.

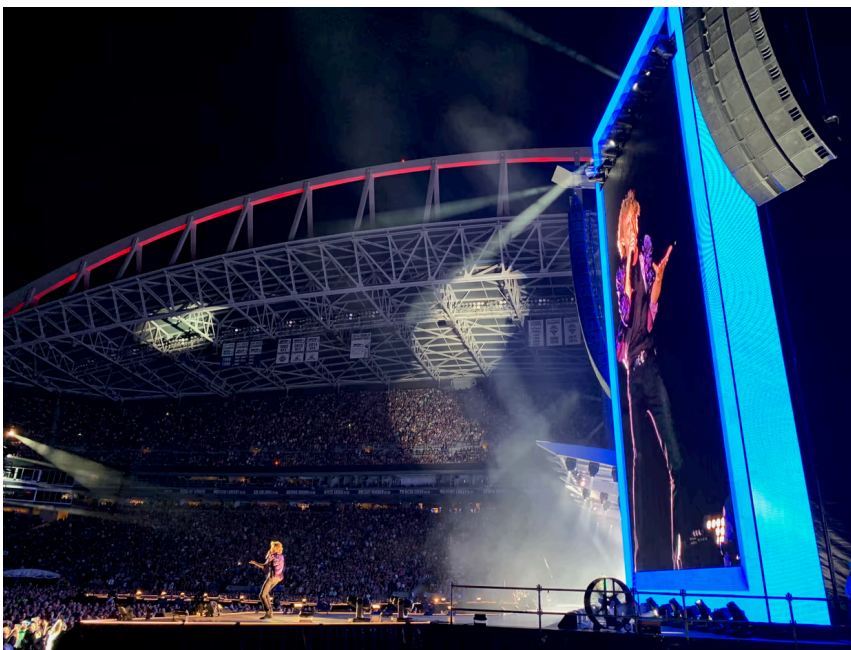
The thrill of nabbing low-cost tickets has grown as prices have increased.

The average ticket price for the top 100 tours in North America rose to \$136.45 this year, nearly double from a decade ago, according to Pollstar. Prices on resale sites for high-demand shows go much higher.

But there can be deals for those who can stand to wait.

Tickets to see Bruce Springsteen in Philadelphia sold on SeatGeek for about \$8 over the summer, while Santana and Counting Crows fans could see them perform together near Seattle for \$4. Concertgoers could watch REO Speedwagon play with Train near Los Angeles for \$2. There were \$1 tickets to see The National in New Hampshire in September and \$5 tickets to see Vampire Weekend at Madison Square Garden in October.

Rock-bottom prices aren't necessarily an indication of an unsuccessful show. Springsteen, for example, had one of the top five highest-grossing world tours of 2024. The average price of a ticket sold on SeatGeek for Lauper's recent Seattle show was \$148.



A view from McNerthney's seat at a Rolling Stones concert in 2019. PHOTO: CASEY MCNERTHNEY

Krieg Jamieson, another bargain hunter, didn't know the Foo Fighters were playing in Seattle when he woke up on Sunday, Aug. 18, but by 6:30 p.m. he was headed for the show, the owner of a ticket for which he'd paid \$13, after fees. The seats were up on the third deck, but he wandered down to the floor and found empty seats.

Jamieson relishes the opportunity to be surrounded by thousands of people enjoying the same performance. He says he tends to have more fun at lower-cost shows than concerts where he pays full price.

Tips for scoring last-minute steals have proliferated on X and TikTok, with influencers posting about gaming scalpers by waiting for prices to drop on resale sites.

McNerthney honed his deal-spotting skills over time. In 2019, he and his now-wife were taking a cooking class the night the Rolling Stones were in town. Halfway through making veggie burgers, he checked on prices and found a pair of tickets close to the stage for \$102.

Still wearing his apron, he told her they'd have to finish up: they were going to see the Stones and the show had already started. After the show, he found ticket stubs on the floor: face value, they would have spent more than \$800.

That same year, he left an Atlanta Braves game before the start of the sixth inning after finding a \$12 seat to see The Who across town. The Lyft ride there was more expensive than his ticket.

Still, the hunt can be fraught. Those seeking cheap buys must be willing to miss a show if prices don't come down. And for some shows, bargain is a relative term.

When Taylor Swift performed in Miami Oct. 19, Sophie Serrano headed to the stadium with her mom, ticketless, at 3:30 p.m. Sporting a blue mini dress and matching cowgirl boots, the 28-year-old was betting ticket prices on StubHub—which at the time cost thousands of dollars—would fall.

Annie Martinez and her daughter Sophie Serrano waited to buy Taylor Swift tickets until after the show had started.

PHOTO: SOPHIE SERRANO

The mother-daughter duo camped in the parking lot, shaking up espresso martinis at 4:30 p.m. while they waited. An hour-and-a-half later, prices for the worst seats—practically behind the stage—started to drop below \$1,000. Around 6:30 p.m., opener Gracie Abrams took the stage, but prices held steady.

At 7:45, a pair of primo floor tickets popped up and Serrano snagged them—for \$1,500 each. The transfer from the seller took another 15 minutes, and by the time Serrano and her mother were sprinting into the stadium, Swift had finished her first “era” of songs.

Serrano was elated that her gambit worked, but doesn’t plan to join the ticket deal-chasing crowd again any time soon.

“Taylor is the only person I would go to those lengths to see,” she said.

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Videos

