# Midge Ure reflects on Live Aid’s legacy and challenges of replicating its impact today



Sitting in the royal box at London's Wembley Stadium, Midge Ure reflects on the enduring legacy of the Live Aid concerts nearly four decades after their inception. “We created a monster,” he stated, “and it had to happen.” His remarks signal the profound impact of the events held on 13 July 1985, which comprised concerts in both London and Philadelphia, featuring performances from iconic acts including U2, Queen, and David Bowie. These concerts have now taken the form of a stage musical titled *Just for One Day*, which is set to transfer to London’s West End in May after short runs at the Old Vic and in Toronto.

Ure expressed his belief that a concert of Live Aid's magnitude could not be replicated in today's world due to the pervasive influence of social media. He noted concerns regarding audience attention spans, stating, “Have [audiences] got the attention span? I’m not sure.”

Originally conceived to raise funds for famine relief in Ethiopia, Live Aid emerged from a period of intense naivety and rock-star bravado among its organisers. “We hadn’t figured out just what a task this was going to be,” Ure recounted. The impetus for the concert followed the success of Band Aid’s *Do They Know It’s Christmas?* single, written by Ure and Bob Geldof, which inadvertently revealed logistical challenges complicating the distribution of funds.

Ure explained that the concert was initially designed to address a specific issue: “There was a trucking cartel in situ in Ethiopia that all the aid agencies were using and had to pay for... We wanted to break the cartel by buying a fleet of trucks, but we didn’t have the money to do it. So Live Aid was born.”

Interestingly, the legacy of earlier charitable efforts influenced their planning. George Harrison’s 1971 *Concert for Bangladesh* served as a cautionary tale where substantial funds became entangled in bureaucratic difficulties. “The first advice we were given was from George,” Ure revealed, highlighting Harrison's caution: “Don’t do what we did. Don’t spend any of the money. No overheads.”

In line with Harrison's advice, frugality became a guiding principle for the Band Aid Charitable Trust, which has never had an office, operates with volunteer trustees, and forbids expenses. The trust continues to receive funds from various sources, including licensing, streaming royalties, and donations, with a total of £150 million raised over the years. Ure noted, “We have people leaving money to us in their wills. Our job as trustees is to generate as much money as we possibly can for the cause.”

However, the social context surrounding Live Aid has become more complex, especially when examined through contemporary lenses. The lyrics of Band Aid, particularly Bono's line “tonight thank God it’s them instead of you,” have prompted criticism of “white saviourhood.” Additionally, African artists such as Fuse ODG have suggested that such initiatives may perpetuate a narrow view of an entire continent. In response, Ure defended the intentions behind the song-writing: “We wrote it in an afternoon as a simple pop song and it’s not there to be analysed. It was there to do something. Was it done with good intent? Yes, it was. Did it make a difference? Yes, it did.”

Both Ure and Geldof reflected on the shift in media culture since 1985, with Ure expressing that the spectacle of a concert broadcast dedicated to a single cause could not thrive today in the saturated media landscape. Geldof echoed these sentiments during the musical’s launch, questioning whether people possess the emotional bandwidth to focus on new crises amidst widespread global suffering. “They’re so exhausted with the horror of Gaza and the terror of Ukraine and the American political situation that it’s hard to draw attention to those who through no fault of their own are dying right now,” he said.

Ure's observations on the current state of media and concert culture highlighted a stark contrast to the unifying experience of Live Aid, suggesting that contemporary attention could be fractured. “I think Charlie Brooker will be writing the next Black Mirror [about this],” he joked, envisioning a scenario where audience members capture fleeting moments on their screens, undermining the essence of live performance.

The forthcoming staging of *Just for One Day* aims to encapsulate this historical moment, grappling with its significance in a world that has dramatically changed since 1985. As both Ure and Geldof contend with evolving narratives surrounding the event, the musical offers a chance to revisit a landmark in charitable efforts while considering its legacy in the present day.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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