

Legendary Broadway Composer Condemns and Defies COVID Restrictions

The creator of *Jesus Christ Superstar* is calling baloney on COVID guidance.

Legendary Broadway composer Andrew Lloyd Webber, the mind behind the music of *Phantom of the Opera*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and *Cats*, says lawmakers aren't "following the science" in regards to Broadway fully reopening after COVID closures. Rules put into effect May 17 allow U.K. theaters to operate at half capacity, but Webber says he will not reopen until theaters can operate at full capacity because less is not considered financially stable.

"I've seen the science from the tests," Webber told the *Daily Telegraph*. "If the government ignores their own science, we have the mother of all legal cases against them. If *Cinderella* couldn't open, we'd go, 'Look, either we go to law about it or you'll have to compensate us.'"

Webber is currently in mounting a production of *Cinderella* at one of his six theaters in the U.K. The production is set to open for previews on June 25. However, Webber says if the lockdown isn't lifted on June 21 as planned, his theater could be in jeopardy.

The music legend suffered much through the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, as did the vast majority of theaters and the arts industry as a whole. Webber told *The Telegraph* he had to remortgage his London home from the shutdown in order to keep his theaters afloat.

He also claimed the authorities could "come to the theatre and arrest us" if he or his performers were in violation of rules.

"We are going to open," he declared, adding that according to the science, theaters are "completely safe."

"The government's own science has told them that buildings are safe," Webber continued. On taking a stand for the arts despite law conflicting with the science, Webber referenced the possibility of a lawsuit: "I'm advised that at that point things could get quite difficult."

"This is the very last thing that anybody wants to do," he said, "but there would become a legal case at that point because it's their science— not ours."

"I would passionately hope that we don't have to, but I think we would have to consider it," he concluded.

Webber has been advocating for the reopening of theaters across both the U.K. and America since November 2020.

"If scientists really are so worried about everything," Webber believes large gatherings—labeled "indoor trial events"—such as the Brit Awards at London's O2 Arena would not have happened and everything would be locked down again for "two weeks" following an event of that size.

He further asserted that these events are proof that "there is no increased risk of transmission of COVID in a theatre."

The composer previously told *The Guardian*: "If we had to close down again, we couldn't survive."

Webber isn't the only one skeptical of the ever-changing COVID-19 guidelines, nor is he the first to be willing to face arrest to stand up for what he believes in.

Rodney Howard-Browne, pastor of The River at Tampa Bay Church was the first pastor to be arrested at the start of the pandemic for continuing to hold church services despite law enforcement orders. He argued then that the church was just as "essential" as hospitals or first responder services. As the

pandemic dragged on, faith leaders around the world continued to face arrest and fines, so they could declare just how essential the church is. They continue to echo this today.

Webber now declares the same is true for the arts industry.
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