

Big Thief cancel Israel concerts following backlash

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The indie rock band Big Thief has canceled two concerts in Israel that were scheduled to take place in July. Palestinians had urged the band to embrace the BDS movement and cancel the shows.

The move comes less than a week after the band put out a statement defending their decision to play in Tel Aviv, where bassist Max Oleartchik grew up and currently lives. “We are well aware of the cultural aspect of the BDS movement and the desperate reality of the Palestinian people,” it read. “In terms of where we fit into the boycott, we don’t claim to know where the moral high ground lies and we want to remain open to other people’s perspectives and to love beyond disagreement. We understand the inherently political nature of playing there as well as the implications. Our intention is not to diminish the values of those who support the boycott or to turn a blind eye to those suffering. We are striving to be in the spirit of learning.”

A new statement posted to social media explains the band’s change of heart.

“Since announcing these shows in Israel we have been in constant dialogue with friends, family, BDS supporters, allies, Palestinians, and Israeli citizens who are committed to the fight for justice for Palestinians,” it reads. “It has been the only thing on our minds and in our hearts.”

“Our intent in wanting to play the shows in Tel Aviv, where Max was born, raised, and currently lives stemmed from a simple belief that music can heal,” it continues. “We now recognize that the shows we had booked do not honor that sentiment.”

Big Thief’s decision was celebrated by human rights organizations on social media. “We salute Big Thief’s courage and their willingness to listen to the oppressed,” said the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) in a statement. Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) tweeted, “BDS Victory!..CJPME would like to thank Big Thief for acknowledging the cultural boycott and showing respect to the Palestinian people.”

The Barby, the Israeli concert venue Big Thief was scheduled to perform at, attacked the band in a social media post, calling them “a bunch of miserable spineless musicians who are afraid of their own shadow,” They also referred to BDS as “Nazi fear boycotts” and wished Big Thief “all the evil in the world.”

Big Thief played Tel Aviv in 2017 and was scheduled to return in 2020 before the COVID pandemic.

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