

Aguilera And U2 Postpone Their Tours

By **BEN SISARIO**

Between the time most pop music fans ended their workdays on Monday and clocked in the next morning, two of the summer's biggest tours vanished from the calendar: U2 postponed 16 shows, and Christina Aguilera put off 20.

Cancellations and postponements happen every year. But the loss of two prominent tours prompted a quick response from fans, gossipmongers and even Wall Street analysts. Live Nation, the promoter of both tours, merged with Ticketmaster earlier this year, and as it begins its first summer season as a combined company, it is facing scrutiny from every angle.

For most companies the loss of a tour like U2's would be devastating. Last year the band



Bono's band, U2, and Christina Aguilera have changed their summer plans.

grossed about \$310 million in concert tickets worldwide, according to Live Nation, and industry analysts say that this year it was expected to add at least another \$200 million to that figure. U2's reason for putting off its 16 North American stadium dates until next year is to let Bono recover from emergency back surgery. (It still plans to play 22 shows in Europe, starting Aug. 6.)

Analysts say that Live Nation's size — last year it sold 140 million tickets to 21,000 shows around the world — minimizes the damage that any one tour, no matter how big, could cause.

U2's postponement "is not as material to Live Nation's 2010 results as may seem at first blush,"

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U2 and Christina Aguilera Postpone Their Summer Tours With Live Nation

From First Arts Page

Ben Mogil of Thomas Weisel Partners, an investment consulting firm, wrote in a research opinion on Tuesday. "The real gauge of the health of the concert business is the strength of the 25 to 75 top shows, not the top 10 shows alone."

U2's ties to Live Nation go far beyond tour promotion. Two years ago it signed a 12-year con-

tract that also covers merchandise and other promotions.

It may be too soon to predict accurately how well the overall business will fare this summer, but many in the concert industry have been reading sales disasters into the tea leaves of some of Live Nation's biggest tours.

Ms. Aguilera, who in addition to having Live Nation as her promoter is managed by Irving Azoff, the company's executive

chairman, blamed a busy schedule for putting off her tour, which was supposed to start on July 15 at the Mohegan Sun Arena in Connecticut; she is about to release an album and is also acting in a movie. But some found the timing of her decision suspicious.

"Any time a tour gets postponed four days after it's on sale, you have to wonder whether it's because of less-than-spectacular sales," said Gary Bongiovanni,

editor of the concert industry trade magazine Pollstar.

Ticket sales for the Eagles, Mr. Azoff's most famous client, have also been the subject of speculation. Although the band has historically been one of the industry's biggest earners, it has canceled some dates on its stadium tour this summer. Rolling Stone recently reported that Tom Petty, Lilith, Rihanna and other Live Nation tours have been suf-

fering from weak early sales.

Live Nation declined to comment on the impact of the cancellations or on advance ticket sales for its concerts. Its practice is to report grosses for most of its concerts after they take place.

Arthur Fogel, an executive at Live Nation who has been U2's longtime tour promoter, said the important question was not lost sales in the short term as much as how soon the band can make

up the dates to its fans.

"A postponement of a couple of months in the context of a long-term deal is really insignificant," Mr. Fogel said in a telephone interview on Tuesday. "There's absolutely no doubt in my mind that we'll get these dates slotted back in. It may delay the process by a couple months, but ultimately this is going to end up being the most successful tour in the history of this business."