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PRESS RELEASE

FIRST SPEAKERS FOR ESNS CONFERENCE CONFIRMED

Bella Union, EXIT Festival, FKP Scorpio, K2 Agency, Netzwerk Music Group, Pohoda Festival and WME are part of Europe's largest music conference program in Groningen.

ESNS (Eurosonic Noorderslag) announces the first speakers for its annual music conference, taking place from January 14 to 17, 2026 in Groningen. With EUROPE CALLING as its leitmotif, the 40th edition of ESNS is making a bold statement: instead of spotlighting a single focus country, the conference turns its gaze to Europe. Addressing themes, topics, talks and debates, the program evokes a shared cultural movement.

ESNS will bring together agents, bookers, festivals, clubs, policymakers, media, managers, artists, venues, labels, publishers and all those professionals who provide services to the music industry and invites them to join the dialogue on Europe's role, its cultural identity, and the challenges the music sector faces.

The 2026 ESNS Conference program focuses on topics such as the influence and impact of (generative) AI, global influences and private equity, the freedom of media, bookers and organizers, activism among artists and organizations, the transfer of knowledge with industry veterans and new generations and opportunities for solidarity, unity and cooperation.

The future of a unified European music sector

In its anniversary year, ESNS introduces **House of Europe**, a key program element within Europe Calling. Located at the heart of the ESNS Conference, House of Europe is the place where different cultures meet and collaborate. European music export offices will bring flavour to the programming, showcasing the best from their regions — from local talent to culinary delights and cultural traditions.

With a special focus on labels the ESNS Conference presents **a keynote interview with IMPALA's Executive Chair, Helen Smith**. IMPALA — the organization representing over 6,000 independent music companies across Europe — celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. To mark the occasion, ESNS will not only pay tribute to IMPALA's impact and achievements, but also host a special keynote interview (or fireside chat, as Helen likes to call it) moderated by **Music Week's Ben Homewood**.

When creativity meets control

ESNS also welcomes leading labels to discuss the opportunities in the changing landscape, where acquisitions of independent labels by major companies are reshaping the ecosystem, with **Simon Raymonde (Bella Union)**, **Ellie Rumbold (Partisan Records)** and **Martin Schuhmacher (Netzwerk Music Group)** amongst others.

European Talent Exchange presents an ETE session to highlight the important issue of freedom of

curation and working under government pressure. **Roxana Morar (Radio România Cultural)** will lead the panel discussion alongside **Dusan Kovacevic (Exit Festival)**, **Michal Kaščák (Pohoda Festival)**, and **Koka Gogokhia (Stockton Records)** on the causes and consequences of such restrictions and embracing democracy.

From algorithms to artistry

Artificial Intelligence and tech are on the agenda, since they have a growing impact across the music sector. **Marleen Stikker (Waag)** will talk about next generation internet, its impact on the music industry and its opportunities. Some panels will discuss regulation, European policy and copyright implications, others explore the latest technological tools reshaping the industry, with speakers such as **Gérôme Vanherf (ikii)**, **Jakob Wedstrøm (Amplitude Ventures)**, **Mansoor Rahimat Kahn (Beethoven.ai)**, **Einar Helde (AIMS)**, **Premysl Koudela (Get Moments)**, **Marine Rivollet (2AM)** and **Collette Tibbetts (Joker Deck VC)**.

Legends in live music

Five years after his death the ESNS Conference dives into the legacy of Steve Strange, the eccentric agent behind acts such as Coldplay, Eminem, and Queens of the Stone Age. His long-time colleague **Josh Javor (WME)** will reflect on his legacy. With **Jeps Salfischberger (MOJO Concerts)** as a moderator, **Jim Morewood (K2tours)** and **Natalie Ryan Williams (Luger / Way Out West)** will discuss the lessons learned and what we've perhaps chosen to leave behind from Strange's unique approach to the live music business.

Amongst others, **Barnaby Harrod (Mercury Wheels @ Live Nation)** and **Jan Digneffe (FKP Scorpio Belgium)** address the essence and relevance of music agents.

Mental health and social safety

The ESNS Conference continues to prioritise mental health, social safety, and diversity with the Mental Health Helpdesk being revamped and expanded for the 2026 edition. In addition, workshops hosted by **Joe Hastings (Music Support)**, **Eline van den Audenaere (The Unicorn Mothership)** and **Becky Wixon (Balance the Mix)** will take place, covering important topics such as self-confidence and gender equality.

Other featured speakers taking the stage at ESNS 2026 include:

Joost van Abeelen (MOJO Concerts), Marija Astromskaitė (Music manager of Plié Music), Ronald de Bas (8Ball Music), Leifur Björnsson (Iceland Music), Esmee Bouwmeister (DGTL), Tineke Codron (Square 1 support), Jaël Gradenwitz (Truus Agency), Brian Hetherman (NXNE Music Conference and Festival), Daan Holthuis (013), Stefanie Joosten (singer, performer and voice actor), Arjo Klingens (MOJO concerts), Stanislav Malkikov (Geisha Ninja Samurai & Believe), Lisanne Middag (Crystal Stone Management), Ismail Myrseli (SPICY_SNAIL), Satria Ramadhan (AXEAN Festival), Roger Rutten (The Tribute Agency), Mandy Salem-Aubry (MSA Music Services), Lilian Severin (Pot Music NGO), Noah Smits (Smidswater) and many more.

ESNS26 Tickets

Delegate Passes for ESNS26 are now available at a Late rate at ESNS.nl - Rates will go up soon.

[Purchase a Delegate Pass](#)

ESNS Delegate Passes include:

- Fast-lane access to 250+ showcases
- Full access to the ESNS Conference
- Networking lounges and hospitality options

- Access the ESNS Delegates Database
- Access ESNS Analytics for up-to-date artist data

About ESNS

ESNS is Europe's leading platform showcasing emerging European music talent. Every January, Groningen (NL) hosts the ESNS festival and conference, connecting fresh artists with fans and industry professionals. The final day is dedicated to Noorderslag, the benchmark for Dutch pop music since 1986.

Year-round, ESNS supports new talent through initiatives like the European Talent Exchange and presents major awards including the Music Moves Europe Awards, the European Festival Awards, and the Dutch Popprijs. It partners with key organisations and alliances such as Yourope, EBU, and Green Deal Circular Festivals to foster a diverse, sustainable music scene.

Since 1986, ESNS has helped launch careers of artists like AURORA, Stromae, Christine and the Queens, Fontaines D.C., Sigrid, Altin Gün, The Haunted Youth, The XX, Robyn, Tramhaus, Sam Smith, Hozier, Zaho de Sagazan, Fat Dog, Judeline, Luvcat, Boko Yout, Antony Szmierek, Kingfishr, Sylvie Kreusch, Arp Frique & The Perpetual Singers.

Not for publication:

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Contact ESNS:
[Nikki McNeill](#)

[Press-mail](#)

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