

2021

## Industry Profile: Tour Manager, Lisa Policaro

Elizabeth Shearrow  
*University of the Pacific*

Elizabeth Shearrow (Class of 2023) is pursuing a Music Industry Studies degree with an interest in Tour Management.

This article was written as part of the curriculum for the Bachelor of Music in Music Management and the Bachelor of Science in Music Industry Studies at University of the Pacific. Each student conducted research based on his or her own areas of interest and study.

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### Recommended Citation

Shearrow, Elizabeth (2021) "Industry Profile: Tour Manager, Lisa Policaro," *Backstage Pass*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/backstage-pass/vol4/iss1/3>

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## Industry Profile: Tour Manager, Lisa Policaro

By Elizabeth Shearrow



*Lisa Policaro is a Tour Manager from Long Island, New York with over 20 years of experience in the music business. She has worked in numerous areas of the industry from interning for Columbia Records to working her way up to being Tour*

*Manager. In this interview, Lisa talks with Elizabeth Shearrow ('23) about how she got her start in the business, what qualities students need to have to become a Tour Manager, and how COVID-19 has impacted her career. [Photo by Anthony Giordano of Lisa with Janet Jackson]*

### **How did you get your start?**

I always had a love for the arts, I remember being a young kid watching MTV, my sisters would look at me thinking, “Look at this kid, she's not even watching cartoons, she’s watching MTV!” So, as I said, I always had a love for the arts, specifically music, and I wanted to have a career I was passionate about because if you love what you’re doing it doesn’t feel like work. You’ll accept the hard parts, but then you’ll be reminded of why you chose to do this. It’s a hard business to get into. I didn’t have any connections to anybody in the business, my dad is a landscaper, my mom is a homemaker, both old school Italian born and raised in Calabria, Italy. When I was 16 there used to be a record store up the street from where I lived and I would beg

them to let me work there, and they finally hired me. Then, the closest venue to me is Jones Beach Amphitheater, which is a Live Nation venue. I started working there as an usher during the summer since it's seasonal. When the summers were over, I would work for Nassau Coliseum and Madison Square Garden.

While I was doing that I was still working at the record store, a pizzeria, and interning at a private recording studio two or three towns away. I was going hard with work and all these jobs, and I remember one day at Jones Beach Amphitheater I had to work a Nickelodeon show



with my friend Sean Earley, who was the backstage production assistant at the time. [Photo of Jones Beach Amphitheater] Nickelodeon had set up one of those bouncy house castles in the

promenade and I met Sean. He and I were assigned to put on Nickelodeon colored jumpsuits and run the bounce house for the day. I looked at him like, “Oh-my-god! This is not what I signed up for,” to which Sean agreed. Eventually Sean looked at me and said, “Lisa, let’s go, you’re not doing this anymore. Do you have a car? I need another runner.” I said, “Absolutely!” So after that I started working backstage as a runner. During this time I attended Nassau Community College and was taking studio recording and music business classes for a certificate you would complete in a year. It actually took me two years to finish this one-year certificate because during that time I actually went on tour. By the time I had gotten the certificate, I was overqualified as an Intern. I had done so many shows for the past couple of years, getting

backstage knowledge, I already had a taste of the business. I absorbed everything I could like a sponge.

My last requirement to earn the certificate was to intern for a major record label. I went to Sony to intern for a semester and ended up being asked to stay on for a year in the A&R department. This was around the time Ricky Martin and the Latin scene were blowing up. Mind you, I'm still working for Live Nation as a runner, and the pizzeria, *and* taking classes at Nassau. Now, one day, I'm 19 years old, I completed my Columbia Records/Sony internship with Darrale Jones and Rich Nice, and I'm watching MTV. They had a show called TRL, Total Request Live, an artist would come to MTV Studios and fans would fill the studio and the streets of Times Square. Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs (hereafter referred to as "Puff") is on there, live, and his office was across the street from MTV's studio. Puff walked the MTV camera crew across the street and into his office to film. I thought to myself, "I'm going to fax over my resume right now!" Twenty minutes later I got a phone call from someone in HR asking me to come over the next day for an interview. I had that much experience already. I remember that I went in, had an interview with HR, and they said they would like me as an intern in the A&R Administration department run by Kimberly Lumpkin (currently the CEO of [Bloom Entertainment](#)). I interned with her for a couple of months, maybe a year, doing billing, publishing, publishing splits, etc. They're not around much today, but remember CDs, and how there were jacket inserts with credits, lyrics, and thank yous? I transcribed all of those. As I said, I just absorbed everything I could.

At one point Puff basically stole me from Kim and wanted me to work directly in his office. I planned his world tour. I worked alongside Shawn Prez, who also works in the radio promo department for [Bad Boy Entertainment](#). They asked Shawn Prez to be Puff's Tour

Manager. We worked as a team putting together the tour. In addition, we were asked to be the special guest on the N\*Sync tour for the last few weeks of their run, before we went on for the rest of the year doing Puff's solo dates. N\*Sync was amazing, they were very accommodating to us during our time on their tour. Another person instrumental to my growth was Richard Channer, who was Britney Spears' Tour Manager at the time. He is a tour genius to whom I feel forever indebted. A lot of the credit for my touring knowledge comes from Richard. Puff had done some dates with Britney, and Puff's manager, Phil Robinson, had met and brought Richard in to work with Shawn and I. Richard has been in the business forever, dating all the way back to New Kids On The Block and is amazing at his job. He is like family to me.

Touring is very grueling, it's extremely hard on your body, but once you get through the first week you develop a rhythm, for me it takes about four days. You'll get used to the no sleep, the best sleep on tour is on the bus, not on the planes, that's my personal opinion. Richard, Shawn, and I organized everything from hotels, busses, crew, dancers, choreographers, rehearsal space, wardrobe...there's *a lot*. I helped with everything I could. One example would be the artist's rider, which is something written into the contract with everything the artist requests and needs from staging technicalities to dressing rooms. As part of my duties, I was responsible for setting up Puff's dressing room in every city. When the segment with N\*Sync finished and we continued for the rest of the year doing the solo dates with Puff, I got experience performing every job from Tour Assistant, Tour Coordinator, Production Assistant, Production Coordinator, Assistant Tour Manager...etc. I basically did it all.

When that tour finished, I had gone home, and I got a call from someone in Puff's office asking for my help in training a new person they were flying in to be the new personal assistant

for Puff. In those first two weeks the kid ended up being fired and I took his place. Puff plays a major role in the knowledge I have along with Kim Lumpkin, Shawn Prez, and Richard Channer. I thank Kim Lumpkin first and foremost, because without her needing an intern, I wouldn't have gotten a foot in the door at Bad Boy. Puff is the most intelligent man I have ever met, and he's very business savvy. He's brilliant and knows exactly what he's doing, I wish people would give him the benefit of the doubt. Without him, I wouldn't be as thick-skinned as I am today. Working at Bad Boy, every day was a challenge, I made my mistakes, but I also learned from them. When you're a personal assistant, you have to learn someone you've never met before, but in this case, I had worked for him for so long that I already knew him. In this role, I was travelling the world, doing everything from movie premiers for *Bad Boys 2* to being in Cape Town, South Africa as a 20-year-old with Nelson Mandela, Oprah Winfrey, and many other celebrities for a positive cause, World Aids Day, when every other kid my age would probably be at a Frat party doing whatever you do in college. I didn't have that, I learned everything from being with Puff and that team. Being out on tour and learning from Puff is something you could never learn in a classroom. As a result, normality to me is being on the road, in hotels and airports, backstage at venues, things like that.

After finishing the year on tour and working as Puff's personal assistant, I randomly got a call for a position to go out on tour with Britney Spears. I really wanted to go on tour again, but during this time I was still Puff's personal assistant. When I told Puff that I was going to leave, he was pretty upset, but I told him thank you for teaching me everything I needed because without that I wouldn't have met Richard Channer and Shawn Prez. After working with Puff, any request you ask of me that seems impossible is possible. There's no such thing as the word "can't," and my work ethic revolves around that to this day. When I come home from tour I still

work with Sean Earley and I still do shows at Jones Beach and other local venues between tours, because when you get off tour, being in one city for even two days feels so long and you want to get back to the road again.

Right before the Britney tour was about to start, she unfortunately blew out her knee and the tour had to be cancelled. The next week, I got a call from a representative of Mary J. Blige to join their tour as a production assistant. Over the years, I have done so many tours, I have worked with just about everybody. It doesn't matter who the artist is, so long as you treat me with respect and the same way you would like to be treated. I am at a point in my career where I do not care who you are as long as you are respectful to me. I've already been through it all, at this point you can't do anything to hurt me.

**Who are some of the most memorable artists you have worked with?**

Everyone I have worked with is special in their own ways, but out of everyone I have worked with, two artists come to mind. Demi Lovato and Andra Day. After many artists and tours, I worked on Demi's *Unbroken* world tour, which was a great tour, as the Assistant Tour Manager and was in charge of wardrobe. We were in a meeting one day, me and a bunch of other staff, she didn't know me yet at the time, so I introduced myself and we were just talking casually. I looked at Demi differently, she was so kind. I'll never forget one of the days I was with Demi and she was having a bad day, she was very sick. Remember, touring is very grueling on your body and she just wanted to be left alone at the hotel and stay in bed all day. Still, she's such a trooper, she was not going to give up and let her fans down, so she got up on stage that night and performed like she was completely fine. As soon as the house lights dimmed and you could hear the screams, the only thing that mattered to her was nailing the performance. When

the lights go out and you hear the fans scream, you know you are part of the reason for those 10,000 smiles every night. It gives me chills and reminds me why I chose this job.

Andra Day, who is managed by Josh White, is someone that I view as a superwoman. She is so special and different, and on a totally different level of natural talent, attitude, intellect, mindfulness, and kindness. Part of me feels as if the world has not been paying attention to her enough just yet, and when they finally get the opportunity to see her live, they are guaranteed to be impressed with her natural vocal ability.

### **What qualities do you need to have to become a Tour Manager?**

Start by being flexible, organized, and thick-skinned, don't be overly sensitive, don't ever let them see you sweat, and you need to get used to not being home or with family and friends for a very long time. You have to make a lot of sacrifices in your life. You have to choose between this or that, and I chose that. Touring came first and everything else took a backseat, and my family understood that. There're two major things in my life that taught me who my real friends are: my first tour and COVID. During my first tour, I had to deal with a lot of jealousy. To me, jealousy is the ugliest trait. I would prefer anything over others being jealous or vindictive because someone else wants to be in your position. As a result, I lost some friends after that, and I didn't mind it. The second thing that taught me who my real friends were was the pandemic. After a while I noticed who would call me and who wouldn't, so these days I have a smaller group of my real friends who always keep in touch.

### **Could you go into the nuts and bolts of being out on tour?**



One important part of being a Tour Manager is getting to know everyone on the tour and



exactly what they do. Every technician, every front of house staff, everyone. Also, keep in mind to always treat people with kindness because everyone is going through something privately. To me, tour managing is the easiest in the States.

When you get to working overseas, there's a lot more obstacles and challenges. Then, it depends on the team and the number of

staff you have, because of the visa processing. Visas are my least favorite thing and they are very tedious. Say you have a staff of 200 people, that's 200 visas you're in charge of! For example, Australia has a nearly 20-page application. [*Photos: Lisa in Australia with koalas and in front of Sydney Opera House*] The U.K., not so much, but that country can still be difficult to get



into. Everywhere else seems fine. Canada can be super easy, but occasionally problems can come up. That's because each country does background checks and if someone on your tour has something bad on their record, it's up to that country's discretion if they're going to let that person in or not. You have to make



sure you cross your t's and dot your i's on the paperwork, advance with the promoters, etc.

Say you're scheduled for a 10-month tour, you'll be hired before those 10 months start because you need to advance with every promoter for every show of the tour, and speak with the production manager of every venue. Go over every question they have, the rider, the load in and

load out times, how many stage hands are needed, some venues have a curfew. A curfew is the minute there can't be any more sound or else you'll be charged an extremely high fee per minute, it can be thousands and thousands of dollars, or some can pull the plug, which I've seen done before at a major venue. In every city you'll need to hire local help who are called stage hands. Depending on the size of your set, for an elaborate tour, where there are a lot of moving parts, it can take eight hours to build everything and get it ready to go. Staff is fed breakfast in the morning, lunch in the afternoon, and dinner according to the day sheet, times vary depending on the circumstances.

Now, anything and everything can happen to throw you off your game. The artist can add or remove a song, an emergency can come up, the list is endless. That's why you need to be flexible. You can never be fully prepared, but you need to run with whatever happens. If you need help, don't be afraid to ask. If you do not know something, ask. You're taking tons of staff away from their families and if you mess something up, you're wasting their time. Tours can become a well-oiled machine once you are in a rhythm. Though nothing is ever perfect, I personally strive for perfection, as taught to me by Puff. Every day is a 26-hour work day. As a personal assistant, I always went to sleep after the artist and woke up before the artist. As a Tour Manager you never really get a day off, all days off you're still advancing and planning for something that comes up. For all staff that travel you will need airline mileage numbers, what seats they prefer on a flight, emergency contact information, allergy information . . . I remember on one tour when the drummer hurt his foot on a show day and was rushed to the hospital. He made it back in time to do the show and he performed like nothing ever happened. Super professional, he's still out there working to this day, shoutout to drummer, Mike Reid.

### **How many people are on an arena-level tour?**

It depends on the budget and how elaborate the show is. Someone I knew was out on the Katy Perry tour a couple years ago. Her Tour Manager was kind enough to leave tickets at will call for my niece and I, and it was produced like a Broadway show. There was so much going on, props and all. The more elaborate the set, the more staff you're going to need. When there's more complex elements, such as stages that move, you'll need a bigger crew. I've done a tour that had 15-16 staff -- to a tour that had over 60 staff. The artist's age and longevity can play a role in how complex the production will be, too. It all varies. For example, I've worked for a legendary duo, and on that tour they used minimal production. It was basically the lighting, with extra lighting added in one or two major cities, the two gentlemen, and their band behind them. No elaborate set. They got right on stage, did their thing, and got right off. That tour was one of my favorites. I miss that tour and team every day.

### **What does your daily schedule look like on tour?**

You wake up, you go according to the schedule that's sent out called the day sheet, usually you go over to the venue a couple hours before soundcheck, not super early in the morning like you'd think. I'll use Demi's tour as an example. Demi's Tour Manager, Richard Channer, and I would be in constant contact because I oversaw wardrobe as well, because of the quick wardrobe changes. A couple weeks into the tour, Demi officially hired me as her personal assistant. The tour management team would probably wake up, have breakfast at the hotel, then come over to the venue a couple hours before soundcheck and do a walkthrough of the venue. Once soundcheck is over some may stick around or some may head back to the hotel according to the artist's movement, usually they stay at the venue. There's a tour management office at

every venue, as requested per the rider, which you are working out of for the day. There, you are usually advancing an upcoming show or dealing with the day itself.

Depending on the tour, the Tour Manager will probably be in charge of the “A party,” which is the artist, and “B party,” the band and dancers. Then there's the crew which the Production Manager will handle. It's what each Tour Manager decides, everyone varies. Sometimes the artist will arrive and the Tour Manager will be with them. Other times, the Tour Manager comes first, so when the artist arrives, they can meet them at the backstage ramp and walk them straight to their dressing room. Sometimes you're travelling with the artist on a tour bus and you wake up at the venue. It varies. Basically the majority of your day is at the venue, most people will tell you all they see are the inside and backstage of venues, hotels, and airports unless you have the opportunity to do something special. You also have to take into consideration the number of busses you need depending on the number of staff there are, who's going on what bus, everything, like I said, varies depending on the Tour Manager.

**I noticed you worked in Hong Kong doing Artist Relations, what was that like?**



Hong Kong was for just one show, a festival, which a team of us were brought in for. [DragonLand stage photo] My friend, Richard Channer, had brought me and about seven other crew members in and we went out there for 10 days to work on the DragonLand Festival. Each person in artist relations was assigned an artist because we had multiple artists from all around the world. Black Eyed Peas was the headliner. We were each one artist's contact for organizing, bringing them in, booking their hotels and

flights, getting them to and from the venue on time, and hiring translators, if necessary. (Editor's Note: The DragonLand Music Festival was a 2017 international music festival featuring top EDM and pop artists.)

**What have you been doing to keep yourself busy during COVID-19? How has it changed your work?**

COVID-19 drastically changed my life over the past year. I was scheduled to go on tour with an artist and fly out to Los Angeles for rehearsals, and I remember I got the phone call that the tour, which was a major tour, was cancelled. That tour was going to be about 10 months, with a couple breaks here and there, worldwide. So I'm like "Okay, boom." I put my bags down and thought, "I'm not going anywhere."

COVID really changed my life because I had to find a different way to keep working. During the pandemic, I've had to pivot--so my co-management partner, Jim Carroccio, owner of Alta Music, and I really started moving forward with the artist we are working with named [Haley Gold](#). Her first single came out on [her Soundcloud](#) on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021! It's called "Knock Yourself Out." She's a great writer, she writes everything herself, so I'm looking forward to what happens next. I'm glad I had this project going.

I'm also looking forward to a 2022 world tour with another artist, but of course, that will depend on health and safety issues, and a lot of other factors. So, the pandemic really has affected everybody. Keep in mind that if you can't sell at least 75% of an arena for an arena tour, you're not going to make any money. The future for touring all depends on the artist, the budget, and the control of the virus, it's crazy.

**Finally, if you could give a piece of advice to current students interested in becoming a Tour Manager, what would it be?**

Honestly, it's all about working your way up. For me and my experience, I just worked and worked, got little or no sleep, and tried to stay as positive as possible. If I could go back to my 20-year-old self, I would tell her to keep quiet, listen, and ask questions. Touring lacks stability, so save your money! Do not be afraid to ask questions. That is big. If you do not know something, just ask. Most people fake it 'til they make it, I didn't do that. If I'm unaware of something, or how something is going to work, I just ask. Don't be embarrassed.

You'll also have to learn from your mistakes, they will happen, but do not ever give up. I wouldn't have thought 20 years ago that I'd still be here. I remember one day when I was coming home from the Sony internship at Columbia Records and I had to help transcribe Mark Anthony lyrics for the album jacket, then on the train home I thought, "Man, I wonder where I'll be 5-10 years from now?"

One of the first Single releases I was ever a part of was "It's Over Now" by the group 112. I was heavily involved. I remember being in the car on the way to the train station going into New York City and hearing that single on the radio. At that moment, I understood what it's like for an artist to hear their song on the radio for the very first time. So, for advice, go intern. Go to a major label, if you can. Everything will come full circle if you stay positive. You'll have some good days and definitely some bad days. Some people are going to be nice and some people are not. Remember that it's tough, take care of yourself, and take care of your body. Remember that everybody makes mistakes from time to time. No one is perfect.

**Author's Note:** Lisa made a point of acknowledging the following people as being instrumental in her career development: Sean Earley, Kim Lumpkin, Sean “Puff Daddy” Combs, Shawn Prez, Richard Channer, Josh White, Jim Carroccio, Darrale Jones, Daryl Pearsall, Raf Pagan, Earl Gabbidon, Derik Henry, Rich Nice, Melissa Victor, Sean “Sully” Sullivan, Terry Santiel, Steven Fatone, Harold Jones, Joy Burrell, Lynette Mayo, Princess Stephanie, Scottie Baldwin, Rick Rosabella, Harve Pierre, Jesper Luth, Anthony Giordano, Demi Lovato, Dallas Lovato, Andra Day, and to any others that were missed. Finally, thanks to her family for their continuous understanding and support and Felicia Culotta for her enduring friendship.