

## Everyday English: Talking About Music and Concerts

I just recently came back from a concert. It was my first concert in a long time and my first concert of a **quote-unquote** 'big' artist.

If you're German, you'll know the name “Udo Jürgens.” Udo is a seventy-four year-old solo singer who sings mostly in German. And all of my students think it's funny that I'm a fan of his music. But, **here's the thing**: Udo sings really upbeat, really positive, really *happy* music. It's the kind of music that you hear and you say “Okay, great! I'm ready for the day! I'm going to go out and do things! I'm going to work hard, have a good time!” It And it's, uh, it's one step more. . . more *normal* than party music. It's not that kind of energy, like you get at a party or at a dance club. But. . . It's. . . It's music that makes you want to go out and live, and to experience life at it's fullest.

And also it's music in German and he sings very clearly in German. If you've listened to English singers in order to learn English you probably know how important it is to find a singer who sings clearly because it can be hard to understand what they're saying.

The concert was exciting for me, I'm a big fan of his and I wanted to see him live. And I did. But I don't think I was really ready for the concert experience. I don't know what I expected, but I'll say that, for two tickets, my wife and I paid over a hundred and fifty Euros. Uh, and the concert was in a Dresden **institution** called the “Culture Palace.” It's a GDR-era concert hall.

For that much money we sat in the second balcony and our view was great but we were so far away that he was tiny on the stage. Fortunately, there was a very large screen in the back, like they use sometimes in lecture halls for PowerPoint slides. And, when he was singing, someone somewhere had a camera and you could see his face made gigantically huge on the screen behind him so you could see him. Otherwise it would be like, I don't know, watching a doll.

The concert was great. I loved the atmosphere. I loved being there and feeling how excited everyone else was. I liked the atmosphere. I already said that. And I liked. . . I don't want to say the 'craziness' and I don't want to say 'the atmosphere' again. But there was an energy in the concert—in the concert?—there was an energy in the concert hall that was just **contagious**, and it was fun and. . . Everyone around me was having fun and it makes you have fun, too. And I really enjoyed that.

But I have to say that, for three hundred Euros, I could buy a lot of CDs and play them in my living room. And. . . Maybe I'm a cheapskate, but I think. . . I think I'm glad I went. I *know* I'm glad I went because I don't know how often he'll be touring again. He's seventy-four years old, did I say that? And. . . Also, I think if I didn't go, I would be sitting here now saying I should have gone. “He was in town and I didn't see him. I should have gone.” But I don't think I'll be as quick

to go to concerts in the future. I'll spend more of my money on iTunes and at the music store.

## Vocabulary

**Quote-Unquote:** If you watch American movies, you'll see actors 'hooking' their fingers in the air like quotation marks around what they're saying. It's a signal we use to indicate sarcasm, or that we don't believe a hundred percent that the words mean what they're supposed to mean. When we speak, we use quote-unquote in verbal English to say the same thing. I said Udo was a “Quote-unquote big artist” because he's a much bigger artist than anyone I've ever seen live, but I know that many people don't consider him to be 'big.' So I put the words in quote-unquote 'verbal quotes.'

**Here's the thing:** If you translate this phrase into your own language, it probably doesn't make any sense. And yet, if you talk to many Americans, you'll hear it pretty often. It's a sort of quote-unquote introduction phrase. I mean, the whole point of the phrase is to 'introduce' what comes next as important. Do you think English grammar is difficult to learn? Well, here's the thing: you shouldn't be worrying so much about 'understanding' the grammar. You should be worried more about developing your English feeling.

**Institution:** You might know the word 'institution' in English, meaning an organization of some kind. But, that's not what I mean when I say that the “Culture Palace is a Dresden institution.” What I mean is that it's a landmark, a part of the city, it's impossible to imagine the city without it. The Empire State Building is a New York City institution. And, people can be institutions, too. Barack Obama, for example, seems to already be an American institution.

**Contagious:** Have you ever been sick? Of course you have. When you're very sick, it's possible that your friends will say to you “don't come close to me! I don't want to get sick!” That's because there are some sicknesses that can 'jump' from one person to the next. They're called 'contagious diseases.' Normally, we use the word contagious in connection with sicknesses, but we use it for anything that 'jumps' from one person to the next. There can be contagious ideas, contagious feelings, contagious attitudes! And I think motivation can be contagious, too!