

OTAS INSIGHT · TB-002

When the visa does not arrive: US work visas and late show cancellations

Operational

Tactical

Strategic

By OTAS Insights · Published by OTAS Live Ltd · United States (US federal rules)

Correct as of 20 October 2026

A US show can be lost if work visas are not issued in time, even after months of work. Performers and crew need an approved petition from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and then a visa from a US embassy or consulate, and either stage can run late [8][15]. Plan back from the show date, include every crew member, and agree a go or no-go date and who pays before anyone books.

Key takeaways

- **What happened:** two Los Angeles concerts set for 22 and 23 October 2026 were cancelled on 20 October because the US visas needed could not be obtained, after more than six months of preparation [1][2].
- **Crew count too:** lighting and sound technicians and other support staff need their own petitions [9][10].
- **Timing:** for O petitions, USCIS says file no more than 1 year and at least 45 days before the work starts [8].
- **No ESTA work:** employment is not permitted on the Visa Waiver Program [16].
- **Do this now:** list every person travelling, build a back-plan from the show date and write a go or no-go date into the contract.

What happened

On 19 October 2026, the official website of the Umamusume: Pretty Derby game franchise said the US visas for its Los Angeles world tour concerts, planned for 22 and 23 October, had not yet been approved. The organisers said they had been working with lawyers and promoters in the US on the visas "since over six months ago" [1]. On 20 October 2026 they cancelled both shows because the visas needed could not be obtained, and said refunds were planned [2]. Anime News Network and ORICON NEWS reported it early [6][7].

The organisers have not said why the visas were not approved. EPGN does not speculate, and nothing here suggests anyone did anything wrong. The lessons below apply to any event professional working at a US event.

How US work visas work

US work visas for performers and crew run in two stages [15]:

- **Petition.** A US employer or agent files Form I-129 with USCIS, with evidence such as a consultation letter, contracts and an itinerary [8][9].
- **Visa.** Once USCIS approves the petition, each person applies at a US embassy or consulate, usually with an interview [15]. In the UK, you book where you live, and appointments at the US Embassy in London are limited [18][19].

The Department of State says a petition approval does not guarantee a visa. It also says not to make final travel plans or buy tickets until you have one [15].

The main categories for live events are O-1 (extraordinary ability) and O-2 (people who assist an O-1 performer), P-1B (members of internationally recognised entertainment groups) and P-3 (culturally unique programmes) [8][9][11].

Crew need their own petitions

USCIS says people who assist but are not on stage, "such as lighting or sound technicians", need a separate petition as essential support [10]. Its examples of P-1 support personnel include front office personnel, camera operators, lighting technicians and stage personnel [9]. A performer's approval does not cover the touring crew.

Where the time goes

- **Filing window.** For O petitions, USCIS says the petition cannot be filed more than 1 year before the work, and should be filed at least 45 days before it to avoid delays [8].
- **Premium processing.** For a fee, USCIS guarantees action on these petitions within 15 business days. That action can be a request for more evidence, which stops the clock and restarts it when you reply [12].
- **Interviews.** Wait times vary by place and season, and some applications need extra administrative processing after the interview [15].
- **Paperwork changes.** From 9 November 2026, USCIS will accept only the 09/09/26 edition of Form I-129 [13].
- **Fees.** The Department of State shows a \$205 non-refundable application fee [15]. US law also sets a visa integrity fee of at least \$250 at visa issue [17]. We could not confirm whether it was being collected on 20 October 2026.

ESTA is not a work permit

UK citizens usually visit the US on an ESTA under the Visa Waiver Program. The Department of State lists employment as not permitted under it [16]. The FCDO warns that travelling on an ESTA when ineligible can lead to detention and deportation [19].

What to do

Operational: performers and crew

- Never travel to work in the US on an ESTA [16].
- Check your passport has at least six months left beyond your stay, unless exempt [15].
- Book your visa interview as soon as the petition is approved [18].
- Do not book non-refundable personal travel until your visa is issued [15].

Tactical: production and tour managers

- List every person working in the US, with their role and visa category. Include crew [9][10].
- Back-plan from the first show: evidence, filing, USCIS decision, interviews, then a buffer. Treat 45 days as a minimum, not a target [8].
- Budget for premium processing where dates are tight [12].

- Track each person's status every week, and keep travel bookings flexible until visas are issued [15].

Strategic: promoters, organisers and directors

- Agree who files and pays for each petition.
- Write a go or no-go date into the contract, and what happens if it is missed.
- Agree who bears travel, crew, venue and refund costs if visas fail.
- Check in writing whether your insurance covers a failure to obtain visas. Do not assume it does.

Action box

Level	Do this
Operational	Do not work on an ESTA. Check your passport, book your interview early and keep personal travel flexible until the visa is issued.
Tactical	List every performer and crew member, back-plan from the show date, budget for premium processing and track status weekly.
Strategic	Contract for who files and pays, a go or no-go date and who bears the costs if visas fail. Check your insurance in writing.

Frequently asked questions

Can UK crew work at a US event on an ESTA?

No. The Visa Waiver Program does not permit employment [16]. Crew need the right work visa.

Do crew need their own visa petition?

Yes. USCIS says support staff such as lighting and sound technicians need a separate petition [10]. O-2 support staff each need their own Form I-129 [8].

How early should a US work visa petition be filed?

For O petitions, USCIS says no more than 1 year and at least 45 days before the work starts [8]. Each person then still needs a visa interview [15].

Does premium processing guarantee the visa in time?

No. It guarantees USCIS action on the petition within 15 business days, which can be a request for more evidence. It does not cover the embassy stage [12].

Why were the Los Angeles shows cancelled?

The organisers said the US visas needed could not be obtained [2]. They have not said why.



What we don't know yet

Why these visas were not approved, current processing times, whether the visa integrity fee is being collected, and whether typical insurance covers visa failures. The full report sets these out, with the back-plan, contract points and a crew briefing card:

Full report (PDF): <https://otas.live/insights/us-work-visas-late-show-cancellations/us-work-visas-late-show-cancellations-full-report.pdf>

This article is general information, not legal or immigration advice. US rules, processing times and fees can change without notice. Check the official sources below and take advice from a qualified immigration adviser before acting.

Interest: OTAS Live Ltd, which publishes EPGN, sells event operations services.

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Work with OTAS

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[Request a call with OTAS to discuss how we can help](#)

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