

Fair Trade Music Seattle

What it is

- Fair Trade Music Seattle was formed in August 2012 through a large public meeting of musicians.
- It's part of a national effort by the American Federation of Musicians, AFL-CIO to bring together union and non-union club musicians to advocate for fair treatment of musicians.

Why musicians formed Fair Trade Music Seattle

- Musicians often “pay to play” or play for “zero minus expenses” – the venue pays nothing, but musicians must cover their own costs.
- There is often no transparency or accountability – pay may be based on the take at the door or the bar/restaurant, but the venue provides no documentation of income or expenses.
- Everyone else gets paid first, from the dishwasher to the sound tech – the musicians get what's left over, even though they're the draw.
- A lack of enforceable written agreements leads to last-minute changes in pay, sometimes literally after the set is over.
- There's often no place to park when loading and unloading, so that musicians risk parking tickets, pay for expensive parking that takes up most of their pay for the gig or have to lug heavy instruments or equipment long distances.
- Many clubs have poor sound systems run by inexperienced sound techs.
- There's a general lack of communication and common understanding between venue owners and musicians.

What Fair Trade Music Seattle has accomplished

- Working with venue owners and the City of Seattle Office of Film and Music, the Seattle Music Commission and area venue owners, we helped to establish Seattle's first four Musician Loading Zones to facilitate loading and unloading at some of the busiest clubs.
- We've developed templates for musicians' performance agreements (as well as a template for an exploratory email to establish terms) so that venues and musicians can reach quick and reliable agreements. Some venues have adopted the template to provide to musicians.
- We have obtained funding from the Musician's Local, the national Musicians union and the Washington State Labor Council to provide free diagnostic and tune-up services for sound systems in Fair Trade Music venues, or free piano tuning service. Diagnostic visits have been made to several venues, and we have started providing these services.
- We have conducted two successful classes for musicians on how to negotiate and enforce a fair agreement.

- We've established basic Fair Trade Music standards for area clubs to sign on to, and have signed on: 88 Keys Dueling Piano Bar (Pioneer Square), Capitol Cider (Capitol Hill), Egan's Ballard Jam House (Ballard), The Moore (downtown), Nectar Lounge (Fremont), The Neptune (University District), The Paramount (downtown), Pies & Pints (Roosevelt), Re-bar (Denny), Royal Room (Columbia City), SeaMonster (Wallingford), The Showbox (downtown), Showbox SoDo (SoDo), Skylark Café (West Seattle), Sound Check (Lynnwood), Stone Way Café (Fremont), Tula's Restaurant and Jazz Club (Belltown) and Vito's (downtown). In addition, Seattle Theatre Group (STG), owners of The Moore, the Neptune and the Paramount has signed, covering their productions in a wide range of venues. We're waiting to hear back from several additional venues.
- As a result of Fair Trade Music Seattle, musicians have taken up similar projects, including a class for new musicians at Dusty Strings, and some preliminary effort by harpists to assure fair treatment in wedding performances.

What we're planning for 2015

- We expect to have several more venues signed on to the Fair Trade Music pledge within the next few weeks, at which point we'll "go public" and seek community support for the venues that treat musicians fairly.
- In addition to more classes on contracts, we are also planning a class on using social media to promote participants' bands.
- In collaboration with the Seattle Music Commission, we have surveyed musicians on the Musician Loading Zones, both to evaluate the current zones and to determine additional locations which could benefit from a Musician Loading Zone.
- We are exploring unfair "non-compete" clauses in contracts with some local festivals, barring musicians from playing in clubs for a period before and after the festival, and other legislative issues. We are forming a legislative committee to develop an agenda for City, County and State legislation.
- We're building a base of community support with a support pledge signed by Seattle Mayor Ed Murray, all nine Seattle City Councilmembers, County Councilmembers Larry Gossett and Larry Phillips, and Seattle Office of Film + Music Director Kate Becket, as well as musicians, venue owners, promoters, and labor unions and leaders.



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