

**QUESTION POSTED:** I am a musician in Salt Lake City, UT. A large group of bands has been discussing the whole playing for the door/selling tickets/playing free on a Wed thing that is going on here.

We are going to be having a brain storming meeting in a couple of weeks, so I thought I'd collect some data from other areas to see what musicians in other similar demographic cities are making and expecting to make.

What can a brand new original band expect? What can an experienced and proven original band expect? What can an experienced and proven cover band expect? How is the relationship between the clubs and bands?

Please email me your answers (feel free to post here too, but I might miss some of them and this is important info for us.

Your answers will benefit the musicians in Salt Lake. If there's anything we can do for you - let me know.

### **BOISE RESPONSES:**

#1 Heres what I started doing, specially when there are more than one act on the same bill. It's \$100 to load in, set up and dial in. then it's \$100 per 45 minute set for a four piece band. If they wont agree to that, it's Oh well, find someone else...

#2 Ever heard of the term.."playing for fun"?

#3 In lieu of a paying gig I have played for free. But there is certainly nothing wrong with a paycheck. Are you saying gigs are less fun when you get paid? I am confused by your response. Besides it's a service we musicians provide. Why should we accept less than what they pay their dishwasher? When was the last time you went to a restaurant to see someone busing tables?

#4 This is a great topic to discuss here. We all know there are varying degrees of players that will play from super cheap (and their music reflects it) to those that work hard and get paid well.

Lets break down a gig

- A 4 piece band
- Bring own PA
- 3 hour performance
- paying \$75.00 per hour, \$225 total

If split evenly with no cut for the PA would be 56.25 per artist. Add a minimum of 2 hours for local travel, setup, and teardown for a total of 5 hours of work. This does not count rehearsal time. This equals 11.25 per hour. Now factor "Self-Employment Tax" rate os 13.3% for 2011 as required by Federal Law because most locations are paying by check, and your actual pay ends up being \$9.76 per hour. Neat!

I play in a local cover band (5 to 6 players) and we set a minimum of \$125 per player (PA/lights get a cut) for a 3-hour gig at reasturants or bars. Basically we charge \$800. For weddings and corporate events the pay is usually \$1200 to \$1800 total depending on the details, size, and length of event.

Now, here is the kicker. If any band charges less than "our" numbers, they probably can't provide the quality of product we bring to the stage. For us it is attention to every detail and we put on a show. For many others it is t-shirts, jeans, and Squire guitars. I'm just saying...you are what you represent!

Those asking, "Ever heard of the term.."playing for fun"?, lack insight and should be ignored.

Just my opinion...

#5 I completely agree with your opinion! We are on the same page! We are professional musicians trying to earn a living, just like everyone else. Experience and appearance sets the stage. Performing music is our business!

I am wondering if you have a simple contract drawn up to "clarify the expectations" of the customer? If so, would you share it with me? I have a 4-piece band and I am the one booking the gigs. It seems ludicrous to walk into any performance without one. The world/people have changed so much, that it would make it much more comfortable for both parties if there was a simple written agreement.

#6 WHAT to charge is one thing. You need to get your band in the club first. Then you have to do good enough to keep coming back. Did the club make money that night. Did your band do well. Do you fit the club. Club owners only care about one thing. A lot of bands are calling to get in that club. Only a few will secure that spot. Dont worry about what you make the first time. Think about repeat business. Then set the price. Club owners have all the leverage. They dont care about you. If you like beating your head against the wall till you finally bleed, GO FOR IT . But honestly.

No one really cares about your little band. You should receive \$100 per person Drinks n Food if the club has it. This is standard

#7 If you only get \$50 a night ya better keep your dumb hillbilly ass home. I can get \$100 per man for a band and easily \$150 a night for dj work.

#8 If you are good and people like your music, you will be in demand and will have leverage to get paid. If you have been gigging in bars, clubs, or wherever for a year or more and are still making \$100 per member per night chances are that is the level of your band. Why would a club owner pay you more when another band will come in and play the same songs and have the same number of people in the crowd for the price he is offering. When I first started playing music in this town I was happy to play for 50 or 100 bucks because I was new and didn't have connections and that's what I could get. In the last five years the bands I play in have gotten better and more popular and our connections have grown significantly. Now we don't leave the house unless we can get at least 200 per man and try to get 300 (no, we don't now and have never played local Boise clubs)

Getting good money as a musician takes time, patience, talent, and a willingness to work as hard at booking as you do on your music. If you are not getting paid what you want or think you deserve chances are you are coming up short in one or more of those areas. PS I also have, and still will, play for free if the situation warrants it - for friends, good cause, etc. I just don't very often because this is my job.

#9 OOOoo... aren't you special. You are one of the main reasons it hard for good musician to get decent pay now a days. \$100 per man for a band used to be nothing till you came alone MR. DJ! If you were half as smart as the dumb ass hillbilly you would know you are killing your own market. Oh... maybe that's it, you're not a real musician. But you sure can que those tracks and move those sliders. You ROCK!

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#10 Hey, Keyboard player for Boise funk band DangerBeard here. Promotion is very lacking in our valley. We have one good local promoter who does a great job advertising shows and getting a lot of people to show up. The problem is that he can only do so many shows at select venues, and he is independent in the sense that he is not directly associated with any particular bar or club. I'm not exactly sure how, but he is the only one I know of that can get a decent amount of money out of the owners for original local bands. A great night would be anywhere from 300-500 \$ for an original 4-5 piece band. We have played about 10 shows around town of original material, and the most we have made so far has been 150\$ for 2 sets, plus 4 drink tickets a piece for the 5 of us. We have made as little as 60\$ for one set, but that particular bar went under for a lot of good reasons. It's tough to get a good paying gig in Boise because none of the owners/managers promote anyone other than out of town acts, usually with just a bunch of crappy no-color photocopied posters only found in their windows. I assume the main reason they promote out of town bands is because they're afraid of losing money on a prior agreement, and they can't trick the band in to promoting the show for them because they're not actually in town. THIS IS A BIG PART OF IT- As musicians we spend our time practicing, learning and writing new songs, and rehearsing for seamless performance's, not to mention the sacrifices the average person has to make with their money and time just to play in a band. We work day jobs and invest what little money we make back in to our craft. So when an owner/manager wants you to promote your own show; this is a bad sign. We should not have to make posters, flyer's, or spend our time distributing them. We should not have to give away tickets. All these things are the promoters job, and when he/she doesn't even advertise for their own club/bar, it says a lot about that person and that business they represent (no good lazy bastards!). ONCE AGAIN- THIS IS A BIG PROBLEM. If promoters don't even try to get people to see local acts, we all suffer, because not only could local bands make money but the bars and clubs could too, on weeknights, without paying the bill of an out of town act. As local bands, we also compete with the all too common DJ, who is cheap to pay (one person) and easy to set up, and seems to require no promotion at all because no one has heard of them anyways. LAST BUT STILL IMPORTANT- Part of the reason we are getting paid so bad is lack of promotion, but it also comes down to the fact that the owners/managers don't feel the need to spend their time to promote a show when the same regulars go there to drink every night anyways. This is partly due to the bad economy, compounded with the fact that Boise is a sleepy town and most people think there is nothing to do here, so they drink. Bar and club owners know this, and they count on it. They can't see the potential in throwing successful shows because they don't have to, and they still make money. Why spend their time and money when they can do nothing and still get business. I suggest people drink at home for this very reason. They can't see the forest for the trees here, but it wasn't always this bad. Our drummer said his cover band 2 years ago made 500 to 700 \$ a night for 2 sets, and sometimes there were only 10 people in the bar tops. The same bars still make the same money, they just got greedier. Good luck to you, don't sell yourselves short, and don't expect too much without a little bit of a fight. It seems one thing these cut-throats respect is calling them on thier shit, asking for more, and sometimes just saying no. If you are going to play for nothing you mine as well have fun and play a show outside in a park or on top of a parking garage; better than letting them think they can get you for cheap. You have the upper hand. You have the leverage; their whole trick is making you think you don't, so at the end of the night you're thanking them, instead of them thanking you. Load in - 100\$ for any band 2 sets (2 hours)- 300-500\$ for covers, 500-1000\$ for originals. This is how it was 10 years ago and this is (at least) how it should be now. Hope this helps, Peace and good luck- Elijah

#11 Things need to change and it usually happens from the bottom up, so we should be among the first to see results if any. I hate saying this too because there are ethical/political/moral stances on the issue, but it has potential and I think it needs to be said; performing musicians UNION. I know it seems like wishful thinking, but we are so much stronger and effective as a group. Power in numbers, but only if we stick together. It only takes one band to low ball the rest of us before it all falls apart and back to the way it is now. We never had a Union in Idaho, but a band named SpindleBomb did exactly this around 99-2000, undercut everybody leaving things in a downward spiral. Now its hard to get 500 or even 300 \$, and every musician and band I have talked to in town hate their f\*\*\*ing guts, even though they are not around anymore and haven't been for years. Even just a city wide Union could be beneficial, and should not be overlooked. The smaller the city, the easier this might be, although it seems like musicians of all genres are pretty smart and friendly

people. Who knows, a musicians union in a big city could end up being a group of the smartest, most creative, most talented, competent decision making people in the history of America, with other professions and professionals looking towards us for their own model of justice and fairness in their field. This isn't about communist sharing or equality, and it's not about strongest survive capitalism, it's about raising the standards and taking care of each other to make things better for all of us. I'd rather make decent money knowing others are too, rather than get paid great knowing others are suffering, or not at all while a few get all the gigs. I know music and love is greater than fleeting money and fame, and I believe most artists and musicians would agree, especially given the opportunity to ensure a living/decent wage for their brothers and sisters in the performing arts, just by joining together. Maybe a little wishful, but possible with a little organization, and imagine the possible camaraderie between artists of all styles and genres. I don't see why cover bands can't play with original bands, or why a reggae band can't open for a metal band. The potential is so huge, I would not be surprised to hear of conspiracy amongst owners just to keep a union from happening, seriously!

#12 I've been playing live for 25 years. Both in cover, and all original bands. The way I've always seen things happen is; sometimes, in the beginning, a band plays for free- just to get their name out there and to get some feet in some doors. (I don't remember ever having to play that game more than 4 or 5 times.) Once a band starts getting a name for themselves and drawing a regular crowd, money starts changing hands. I've only ever played for the door if the band I was in was pretty new. But we'd also beat the streets for 2-3 weeks handing out quarter sheet flyers about the show to drum up a crowd. Eventually, playing for the door and a guaranteed 200 from the bar can be pretty lucrative.

If at all possible, get your own guy at the door taking money. The bar should have to have a bouncer at the door, but there should be no problem having your own person taking and changing money if it's all supposed to be yours, anyway. You just have to come prepared with your own money to make change with.

Other than that, negotiate. You'll never get what a band is worth considering the practice time, fuel, drum heads/ sticks, guitar strings, etc... It'll never happen, so pick a good figure to present to an owner/ manager. Something that gets everyone 50-60 bucks a night. If the band is good, people will show. Once a crowd follows a band, they spend money where the band is. Venue owners can't not pay, or they lose money to the guy across the street. Same goes for bands one might be opening for.

In 3-4 months, my new (cover) band will be hitting the stage. We'll play 4, 45-50 min. sets. For that, I'll be getting 250 a night to split five ways, on top of a \$125 bar tab. I'll end up using my bar tab to schmooze. Buy beers for the people that came to the show. After 3 shows in any bar, I can expect a bigger crowd, so I can expect more money for playing. (Most cities I've played in have an unspoken pay cap, but even those can be broken if the band is good enough.)

I hope I've helped answer your question. I guess, in a nut shell, I've never been paid the first time on stage with any band. There's no real scale that I've ever heard of. I've always been shown that, as a band, you gotta work you ass off for nothing but the love of playing, and the rest falls into place if it's meant to be.

## PHOENIX RESPONSES

#1 Great question. My husband and I are seasoned musicians from the East Coast. My husband has toured and still does. I am mainly a singer who was classically trained.

We are doing a local cover/tribute band and the scene here has to be just about the worst in the country. Not just from my perspective, but from many, many others. I know of musicians who have left town because of how bad it is.

So-called "promoters" want the band to promote. Well, if I wanted to be a promoter I would not have been a musician. We think all musicians should protest, however, that is not likely going to happen any time soon. Things have surely changed over the years in the music world.

The promoter from our show this past Saturday actually told me, point blank, it does NOT matter how good you are, it matters how many people you can bring. Times surely have changed.

I'm just telling you what I know and giving my opinion. I hope things are not as bad in Salt Lake. And, of course, I wish you the best of luck.

#1a Oh geez. It's so disappointing to hear that this is becoming the "norm" in other places.

My husband, Roger (our drummer), and myself say the same thing: that clubs need their own following. Yes, we promote our shows to our own fan base and friends. But to hand me tickets and ask me to sell them! That's crazy. And all the friends I have that may buy for one show, what are the chances they'll do it again? Not to mention, I wouldn't expect them to either.

You are so correct. The band wages are the same. The clubs want bands/live music BUT they don't want to pay. Period. We are like "dirt" to them.

One other thing I am seeing here a lot lately are postings on craigslist of clubs/bars doing "open mic" nights. So, now it seems they are doing that so they have free music and don't have to pay or worry about it at all!

Truthfully, I don't know where to begin to change it. I hear people complain left and right, but no one knows what to do. When you mention "protesting" by standing up for yourself, they want no part of it.

#2

## **DENVER RESPONSES**

#1 What the market will bear! Orig music \$0

## **CINCINNATI RESPONSE**

Around here local bars/clubs really only want cover bands. And if you're in a cover band, you'd better be at the top of your game. Original bands with their own music don't get much recognition even if they're good. The top paying venue is Jefferson Hall located at Newport on the Levee. It's right across from Cincinnati in Kentucky. They top out anywhere from \$1000-\$1500 on a Friday or Saturday night. They expect "GREAT" covers which range anywhere from Journey to Bon Jovi. Hope this helps.