

Chris Rickert: Make music, Madison — and make musicians some money

JUNE 18, 2013 6:00 AM • CHRIS RICKERT | WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL | CRICKERT@MADISON.COM | 608-252-6198

I know at least one performer will be getting paid for working Friday during the citywide music festival known as Make Music Madison.

While other, more experienced local musicians are expected to donate their time and talents to this free, inaugural event, a certain 9-year-old drummer who also happens to practice in my basement was able to negotiate — OK, was bribed with — the promise of an ice cream sundae.

His performance of “Solo No. 4” from “Alfred’s Drum Method, Book 1” will occur outside the East Side church where he and his family are members. The drummer and his promoter — er, father — have yet to come to terms on a contract for a gig planned earlier in the day at Wirth Court Park, but payments under consideration include more ice cream or a package of Pokemon cards.

I guess it’s not surprising that the ones getting paid Friday for working Make Music Madison are more likely to be reluctant, first-year music students with bribe-delivering dads than a diverse set of talented Madison musicians.

Madison — despite its talent pool and strong public support for local music — can’t expect to be completely immune to the effects of a music industry driven more by profit than by art. We’ve got great, interesting, format-busting nonprofit radio stations such as WORT and WSUM, for example, but they are still far outnumbered by corporate-owned stations playing songs you’ve heard a million times and could probably hear another million times just about anywhere in the country.

There is something simple you can do to fight the power of the Britney Spearses, three-figure ticket prices, arena shows and Top 40 radio stations of the world, though. You can toss a little more than applause the way of the seasoned musicians who play Make Music Madison.

“We have no objection to musicians putting out a hat,” Beth Mastin, the event’s coordinator, said when I asked her if musicians would be able to take a busking approach to Friday’s performances around the city. “We look forward to growing Make Music Madison as an event that benefits community and musicians of all skill levels.”

Singer-songwriter Margo Tiedt told me she’s not planning to solicit donations Friday when she plays at the Goodman Community Center, where her day job as facility use manager means she’s organizing the same concert she’s playing in.

But “if anybody wanted to, they could,” she said. Other bands scheduled to appear include Paris Blues and Whiskey Doll.

Mastin said Make Music Madison was about “doing community-building by creating the context for neighbors to come together and enjoy a midsummer get-together.”

Community-building is one of those highfalutin Madisonesque ideals, much like public art and promoting home-grown talent.

Highfalutin shouldn’t necessarily mean free, though.

Working musicians who’ve put much of their lives into their craft need to get paid somehow — lest some day we wake up and the home-grown talent sharing its art with the community is gone.

Chris Rickert



Chris Rickert is the metro columnist for the Wisconsin State Journal, where he's got his laser-like perspective trained (mostly) on all things Madison. He is especially engaged by blatant hypocrisy, hot partisan rhetoric, class warfare and ice cream.

[Read more from this columnist](#)

Follow [@ChrisRickertWSJ](#)