



MAKE MUSIC MADISON

Make Music Madison: A field day for music



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On Friday, free music will be all over Madison.

Well, not exactly free.

City taxpayers put up \$25,000 for the inaugural year of Make Music Madison, a full day of live, ticket-free, outdoor performances all over town.

During the nearly 14-hour festival, 210 local acts will perform in 110 spots, from parks and porches to beaches, cafes and a parked train car.

From hip-hop to indie rock, cabaret to gospel, the day is meant to be a celebration of music-making at all levels.

But not everyone is dancing for joy. Musicians will not be paid for Make Music Madison, and that has left many feeling torn: Who doesn't want more music? Yet should skilled artists give it away for free?

"I do welcome the controversy about it, because I think it could be really good for our city to debate compensation for artists," said Catherine Capellaro, a member of the popular disco band VO5.

VO5 members deliberated long and hard before volunteering their talents for Make Music Madison, she said. In the end, the band decided to perform its rollicking act at Bear Mound Park in the Vilas Neighborhood.

"I would not like musicians in general to make a practice of playing for free — although I do think that there are some important exceptions," said Capellaro, noting that VO5 has performed at political protests without expecting to get paid.

With Make Music Madison, she said, "I felt like this event was kind of an extra-special chance for Madison to identify itself with all the talented musicians that we have in the city."

Inspired by Paris, New York

Close to 500 cities around the world celebrate the Summer Solstice with a music festival, a concept first launched by the French government in Paris in 1982.

Known as Fete de la Musique, “It started small, and it grew,” said Michael Rothschild, a retired UW professor who has been spearheading Make Music Madison for a year with a growing corps of volunteers.

“In Paris, it’s a day of musical anarchy. You can’t get a hotel room. It goes from about 9 in the morning till about 5 the next morning,” he said. “There’s just music all over.”

For Madison, the day is meant to be creative: Forward Marching Band, for example, will float down the Yahara River as it plays on a pontoon boat, landing in Tenney Park for a concert. Donated pianos will sit outside four city fire stations from 4 to 8 p.m. with the idea that anyone passing by can stop and play a tune.

“Mass Appeal” events featuring drumming, fiddling and harmonica will offer anyone a chance to join in. (A brand-new harmonica and a free lesson go to the first 100 people who show up at the 6 p.m. Mass Appeal at 30 on the Square.)

“The idea of this is that wherever you go on June 21, you’ll stumble across music,” Rothschild said.

Rothschild — who spent 25 years on the marketing faculty at the Wisconsin School of Business at UW-Madison and was a founding partner of the Hiebing Group advertising agency — volunteered at the first Make Music New York, which is run by his nephew. Since 2007, Make Music events have spread to 17 North American cities. Of those, Madison will have the third-largest number of shows this year, leading cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Miami and Denver.

“I was smitten when I saw this in New York,” Rothschild said. “It’s just such a natural for Madison.”

The festival has strong backing from Mayor Paul Soglin, who in his last budget also unsuccessfully proposed \$50,000 to produce a video to promote Madison’s music scene.

Make Music Madison “is going to provide some fun for the one day,” Soglin said. “But the larger idea is to provide people access to performances they might not normally see or hear, and in turn create greater activity throughout the year.”

\$25K raises eyebrows

Of the \$25,000 allotted for Make Music Madison, \$5,000 has been set aside by the city for unforeseen costs.

The rest is primarily going to pay the salary for the project’s one paid employee, Beth Mastin, event insurance and printing and media costs, Rothschild said.

Some longtime proponents of the Madison music scene were taken aback at the city’s financial participation.

“I just think there are more creative ways than to give someone \$25,000 and to say, ‘Here you go, do something that you saw somewhere else and make it work,’” said Darwin Sampson, owner of the Downtown music club The Frequency.

“The payment of musicians is a big deal for me,” said Sampson, who would prefer the city’s money be spent on rehearsal space for artists or on hiring local bands for events such as Freakfest.

For Biff Blumfmgagng of the Gomers, one of Madison’s best-known and longest running professional bands, “I think it’s the age-old problem that artists are not really acknowledged or paid well in their own community,” even if they achieve financial success elsewhere.

The Gomers agreed to play at noon outside the Wisconsin Historical Museum as part of Make Music Madison.

“To me it feels like Madison wants to do something awesome — and I want to do awesome things for Madison, too,” Blumfmgagng said. “But why aren’t musicians in the budget?”

By contrast, the four-day Fete de Marquette, a fundraiser for the Wil-Mar Neighborhood Center, spent \$66,000 on regional and national talent last year, said Wil-Mar executive director Gary Kallas. The annual Willy Street Fair spends between \$15,000 and \$20,000 on talent, he said.

The city budgeted \$5,000 this year for the free Dane Dances that feature live music at Monona Terrace on Fridays in August. That’s up from \$1,000 in 2012 and \$2,000 annually from 2007 to 2011.

City support has been minimal for the volunteer-run Madison Area Music Awards, which in its 10 years has raised \$50,000 for music education, said MAMAs founder Rick Tvedt.

Make Music Madison has no charitable goal, he noted.

“I have no problem at all with the concept or them wanting to do it,” Tvedt said of the festival. “What really irritated me is that the city gave them \$25,000. They’d might as well stick a pin in my balloon.”

Creating a ‘wall of music’

Make Music Madison’s long-term aim is simply to create a joyous, citywide “wall of music,” Rothschild said.

“Most of our musicians are not professionals. They want a place to play. So, you rehearse all the time — and here’s a chance for you to play for your friends. And you can hook up with a very neat venue and try something special,” he said.

Michael Fenchel, executive director of the tech start-up center 100 State, volunteered to create Make Music Madison’s matchmaking software, which allowed performers and venues to find each other. Both host and musicians had to agree that the location was a good fit.

“One of the things we were concerned about early on was, what if a Nazi rock band wants to play in front of a synagogue?” Rothschild said.

That kind of concern didn't materialize, and today the event's website at makemusicmadison.org features an interactive map with the location of every performance.

Music is sortable by genre, location and time of day performed.

Six other large cities are now using the Madison-created platform, said Fenchel (who will be performing in a jam band during Make Music Madison).

If the citywide festival really takes off, compensation for musicians "should be something we talk about" in future years, said VO5's Capellaro.

For now, "I love the aspect of 'everybody can make music,'" she said. "I love that there's no audition process. I love the inclusive aspect of it. And they make it sound really fun — it'll be so fun to bike around that night and hear a bunch of different kinds of

music."

If you go

What: Make Music Madison, a free, one-day citywide celebration of music.

When: 7:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday, June 21

Where: More than 100 spots all over Madison. See the interactive map online at makemusicmadison.org for performers, times and locations.

Volunteer: Volunteers are still needed for Friday's event. Sign up at makemusicmadison.org