



# Napa Music Industry: Musicians Are Not Vendors....

Commentary By Dalton J. Piercey Original Publication 10-14-2022

Recently I have been involved in a conversation with some of the proponents whom are working for changes in the Downtown Entertainment District. When I discovered that there was a group I wanted to participate in at least one of their group meeting's. I was denied the opportunity.

The reasoning behind the denial was based on the classification that Musicians are Vendors. To whom made such classification is unknown. I do know that the discussion and change in planning involves Entertainment, Venues, Amplified Sound and Volume Levels (decibels). So these elements are major concerns for Professional Musicians working in the Napa Music Industry.

The concept for forming this planning group was that stake holders were those individuals that these elements would affect their businesses with positive change. Which that is true. It is a good change they are working for. However the problem that I bring into focus is the classification of Musicians as vendors a term used by the group and City Of Napa planning to exclude musicians as non-stake holders barring their attendance to working meetings. I suggest that is an error in description.

As an individual who grew up in our Napa community and became a musician here, I began performing music at O'Sullivan's when I was nineteen. And I have been in the tossing and turning Napa music scene for many years. I have kept track of all of the legislation by the City and the County in concern for the profession of music.

I was a part of the experience when Napa City Administration shut down the majority of music operating venues in town. We came to the edge of no music when Downtown was found to be dark from Main to Pearl, then dark all the way to School Street for ten or more years. So I have knowledge, experience and most importantly the history of the music ups and downs in our Napa Town. What I know and understand can benefit others.

Many years ago I can remember discussing the music landscape with individuals involved in the downtown music affairs and business. In general they remarked that their perspective of music and musicians in downtown was a hokey pokey music scene. And that political atmosphere did effectively work for them in contracting cheap acts. Get my point?

Unfortunately the many years of narrow minded views for musicians in our community has culturalized a perspective about and for Napa musicians. And again unfortunately through my experience of creating, organizing and producing the music in Veterans Park I was exposed to that political insanity. So the cultural perspective was proved to me and others to be bonafide.

Further, most recently I was attempting to break some ice with a City Council Member on this subject when objectively the conversation was changed to my making the council member late for a musical jam session. I concluded in my own thoughts that the council member had a more narrow and minified perspective of music and musicians more than I did. Which proposes I ask the question; is there more individuals that think this way?

During the beginning of the Music Concerts in Veterans Park and into the season, my professional association (not a union), The Napa Musicians Performance Guild sought to join the Downtown Merchants Association.

At one point in the quiry we were told we could join the DTMA if we obtained a mail box address in Downtown. We did so and returned to the DTMA meeting in positive character to announce our accomplishment requesting to join once more. We were denied membership. One merchant member inquired with the board as to why? The answer was that we could not join because now we needed a store front with a downtown address in which we conducted business.

So our concerts in Veterans Park were not considered to be a place where we conducted business? Soon after we discovered that there were two individuals at that merchants meeting whom had businesses that were outside of downtown. And yet they were members of the DTMA. Vendors providing transportation.

So here are some definition's of the term vendor. A person or company offering something for sale, especially a trader in the street. Such as a Italian ice cream vendor. A person or company whose principal product lines are office supplies and equipment. A legal definition here, the seller especially of property. While the term vendor is a very clean explanation for the selling of wares I just can't see it that way for musicians. Why so you say?

Because musicians are Artist's. There is a cultural blindness in our community. I found that many individuals I have talked with about musicians they see us as people whom play insturments as a pastime and a hobby. An event in mid age where we are never too late to re-ignite that high school band. Some see musicians as individuals that are present just personally for them. Then the music act becomes a Jute Box and the audience constantly pumps the quarters in the slot.

Also there's the family relative thing and that too is labeled a hobby. The musicians in the band you see are the superstars of the next open mic and so on, etc. Many a local musician will bathe in the adoring supporters giving them a star identity in our little music fishbowl. Local popularity is wonderful and many of a local musician will vie for that crown. Even I did so through the years but things changed for me in college and as well my adventures outside of Napa Town. I came to a higher perception and view of musicians and music art. We are the same as visual creators of Art. Though our tools are instrument's, stage and performance techniques.

Here I reveal the difference between myself the local guitar carrying bar hopping gigging troubadour and the change to a professional musician. It is through the Art of Performance Techniques For The Musicians Stage. From that experience I learned of skills and traditions in the art of music performance. Also I have been blessed over the years since my childhood days to have musicians that I have known tell me the sacred beliefs and traditions for our creed, musicians.

The Performance Techniques I speak of were offered at Sonoma State University by instructor Warren Kahn. Warren was accepted at Juilliard New York at the age of fourteen. A prodigy virtuoso classical concert pianist. Warren learned those technics and skills at Juilliard. Then instructing students at SSU. He discussed an interesting experience from 1963 when a chair was bought into the class for an observer. The sign on the chair said Barry Gordy. So you may conclude that the Motown acts learned of the techniques to bring their performance to a greater and more sophisticated level of performance on the Musicians Stage. The swishing of the Supreme's flared slacks just didn't happen. It was mean't to be that way for example.

This is why the majority of music acts during the 1960's and forward evolved such a high mark of performance excellence. For there was a concept, theme and idea behind what would provide a musical and visual perception to the audience. And the elements intertwined to foster a developed pathway of interaction with the audience. Elvis in Vegas ring a bell?

Should you desire to learn these skills and techniques: Get other musicians together and I will do a workshop. Then as musicians locally we will begin to glue together a level of communication and structure for which we can all hold in common. Please consider it? That is the common thread we need.

I have been around concerts since the age of eleven. Sweeping floors. At twelve I swept floors and helped with the chair racks. At thirteen I wrapped cables and chords and wiped down audio gear. At fourteen I was a stagehand and worked under the Monitor Guy. The monitors for the PA for the bands that were performing. As I was exposed to touring musicians and stage crews, I was told

and impressed by many traditions and sayings. During the late sixties and the early seventies. You may know these's or you may not know them. When working concerts, we work for the Spirit Of The Concert. The Stage is Scared. A light is left on the stage through the night to invite those whom performed on the stage to return and do so again. As musicians we honor the stage in spirit for the many musicians through human time that performed for all sorts and types of audiences. Many musicians may have of the past as well found themselves strumming Joy and Happines and/or displeasing King's, Queens, Lords with Ladies and Barbarians too. Possibly, losing personal limbs and such as well.

Where ever we stand and perform that area is our stage. We come forward to present our thoughts, idea's, words and melodies to those who would listen. We quietly search for that individual while we are performing whom is having a difficult time. With that in mind we have prayer and hope that our music performance will reach them and touch them in such away it makes their life and their time better. We find that with a spiritual element in our hearts and minds our music will call upon Cecilia The Goddess of Music and she will come and embrace us in performance giving our music blessings and good tidings. With this we know that we have done the best we could to deliver music to humanity. For music is medicine for the human soul.

As musicians we accept that when we stand on stage and represent ourselves as musicians we represent all musicians. Knowing and understanding millions of individuals see all that we do and all that we say in actions, melody and music.

Now given all that, I have just offered how can we be defined under the legal definition of the term "vendor"? The legal definition here again, "the seller especially of property." Well you could say the selling of CD's is property. But what created that CD? Musical ART. Further, I have offered the flow of artistic comments in spiritual form. Philisophical form, also with Traditions having historical lineage to the art of performance. And then there is the obvious, hard work to create the art of playing an insturment. And finally the creation of the sound that makes a sound contributing to a song. Combined with other songs that deliver medicine to the human soul. I have to tell it like it is friends. Our dominant culture here in Napa made a characrization of musicians that is shallow. And in the process violates our Human and civil rights.

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