



Associated Musicians of Greater New York

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Local 802 AFM and the Jazz Community Kick Off the Justice for Jazz Artists! Campaign at Judson Memorial Church

On Tuesday, September 29, 2009, The Associated Musicians of Greater New York, Local 802 AFM and members of the New York City Jazz community will launch "Justice for Jazz Artists!", a campaign addressing the plight of New York City's Jazz musicians, who receive no benefits from the clubs they perform in. A rally and press conference kicks off the event at Judson Memorial Church, 55 Washington Square South (West 4th Street) at 2:00 pm.

The world's greatest jazz musicians live and work in New York City. However, many are forced to retire with no income to fall back on in their later years. Some are forced to go on public assistance. The mission of "Justice for Jazz Artists!" is to persuade New York City's Jazz club owners to provide pension benefits to Jazz musicians who perform in their venues.

Since 2006, the Justice for Jazz Artists! campaign has attempted repeatedly to engage New York City's Jazz clubs in constructive dialogue to secure retirement benefits for the Jazz musicians they employ. Some have agreed to meet with Local 802. Most however, have been unresponsive.

In 2007, Local 802 in partnership with some club owners, successfully lobbied the State Legislature to forgive the sales tax on tickets for Jazz club. That was done in order to allow the sums formerly collected as admission sales tax to go toward Jazz musicians' benefits especially for retirement, at no cost to the clubs. However, since the law's passage, no club has volunteered to make any pension fund contributions.

"I don't think to be a Jazz musician you should have to swear an oath of poverty", says Sean Lyons, tenor saxophonist and Jazz recording artist. John Cusick, President of Metropolitan Washington DC Federation of Musicians, Local 161-710, says "Club owners need to act responsibly and realize that paying pension on musicians is not only the right thing to do, but helps perpetuate the art form which keeps them in business. I urge New York club owners to do the right thing and take pride in raising the bar for the treatment of Jazz musicians everywhere."

After the rally, there will be a march to the clubs to deliver a petition bearing signatures of nearly 2000 professional musicians, urging the clubs to use the forgiven tax dollars for its original intent: to provide pension benefits to their Jazz musicians.

Justice for Jazz Artists! enjoys the support of the New York City Central Labor Council, New School Jazz Department Faculty Committee, Jazz Foundation of America, former Mayor David Dinkins and over twenty elected officials, including William C. Thompson, David Yassky and Speaker Christine Quinn.

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