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Fight 'Pay to Play'

How the 169 Bar Rips Off Musicians

by [Marisa Friedman](#)

This August, trumpet player and Local 802 member Shane Endsley played at the 169 Bar in Chinatown — a popular local bar nicknamed the "Bloody Bucket" because it was notorious for numerous brawls in the 1950's and 60's.

After only three songs, the owner decided that he didn't like Endsley's musical style and turned on the house music.

"We were totally insulted and embarrassed," Endsley told Allegro.

In addition, because his group failed to bring 10 additional people with them, they were not paid.

Endsley wrote to the bar's owner, Charles Hanson, saying: "We thought [the booker] knew something about the music we do and was making a genuine invitation."

"I play music for a living," Endsley said. "And when I come across a situation that is exploitive and abusive of musicians, I try and react to it instead of just taking it."

Club owner Charles Hanson replied with a sarcastic e-mail that said, in part, "Good luck with finding your Nirvana — that mystical venue where you can be adored, drink for free and get paid for playing anything you want regardless of whether anyone actually came to see you."

The 169 Bar is contacting people through MySpace. A musician or group might receive a generic message from a booker requesting a performance. However, when musician Jen Shyu replied to the e-mail, the booker sent yet another generic response. Shyu told Allegro, "It was a bad sign to me."

Commenting on the door policy, Shyu said, "They are using the musicians to bring people to their establishment and are not even paying them properly."

Bands are only paid if they bring at least 10 people to see them, regardless of how many people are at the bar.

When a Local 802 organizer visited the 169 Bar in late August, she was not charged the \$10 cover. There were roughly 40 or so customers there, but it appeared that the majority of the bands did not bring in the required 10 people, meaning they were not paid — even though there were at least 40 people there.

There were also 11 bands booked that night. If each band was to be paid, there would have to be 110 people there to see the bands, and the 169 Bar only has a capacity of about 70 people.

So four bands are technically shortchanged from the start — and this doesn't take into account the people that are not there to see a particular band.

STOP PAYING TO PLAY

Regardless of an individual musician's experience playing at the 169 Bar, its door policy is a symptom of a growing epidemic in the city.

New York is slowly becoming a "pay to play" city where musicians are, in effect, being asked to subsidize rising rents.

Unless we take a stand now, it will not be very long before bars will no longer have live music because the musicians themselves will not be able to afford to live in New York, let alone play here.

We need to push bars to treat musicians properly and give them a fair percentage of the entire door — not just the people they can bring with them.

Local 802 urges its members not to patronize or perform for the 169 Bar.

For more information, or if you have any additional information about the 169 Bar, contact Marisa Friedman at mfriedman@local802afm.org or (212) 245-4802, ext. 130.

This story originally appeared in the October 2007 issue of Allegro, the newspaper of the New York City musicians' union (Local 802, American Federation of Musicians). You may reprint it as long as you credit the original source and author. See www.Local802AFM.org for more information.