

UNION MEMBERSHIP—IS IT WORTH IT?

What value is there in union membership? What are the benefits? Why should I pay union dues when I could work at the same job without paying any dues at all? What do I get in return? What accountability does the union have. These are excellent questions!

The Union advocates for and stands in the shoes of its member musicians in all aspects of professional employment. Through the activities of its officers and members, the Union, among other things, sets minimum wage scales and working conditions, negotiates collective bargaining agreements with employers, provides for the enforcement of agreements with employers, represents both individual musicians and ensembles in wage claims and other disputes with employers, and protects musicians from exploitation in the realm of electronic media technologies. These activities have consistently raised the bar of wages and conditions of employment for all musicians. Without the union's activism, we really couldn't afford to work at the same jobs we enjoy today. Those jobs would pay less money and cost us more with respect to our time and health.

The task of defending the economic viability of professional musicians is an ongoing one. Fortunately, the musicians union is at the ready on an ongoing basis. Our officers are musicians who recognize the many common interests musicians share in their workplace and the effectiveness of addressing those interests collectively. They are skilled negotiators and professional advocates. We also work with some of the best lawyers around when necessary, to protect working musicians from abusive employers. Because everyone contributes, the cost of this zealous representation is significantly less than what it would cost any of us individually.

The value in Union membership is immeasurable. The standards we enjoy in the workplace today were achieved through years of collective bargaining and concerted activity. None of us did it alone, but we all benefit from it. Thus, we are all responsible for sharing the cost.

The Union makes every effort to keep the cost of doing business as low as possible and to use the resources it has prudently and efficiently. Like other labor unions, the musicians Union is required to annually publish an annual statement of financial condition in its newsletter. Professional Musicians of Arizona enjoys a reputation for being among the most fiscally well-managed and transparent state labor organizations in existence today.

The Union also values its members, not for just the financial resources they contribute, but also for the professional support and solidarity they share with each other. When any of us is harmed or threatened with harm, we are all prepared to mobilize in defense of the integrity of our profession and our livelihoods.

Professional Musicians of Arizona, American Federation of Musicians Local 586, has been in existence and active in Arizona since 1912. We're going to be here for you. Please join us. Let us share the value of union membership with you.

This message is based on an article written by attorney and professional violinist Jennifer Garner, a member of the Richardson Symphony Orchestra and Dallas-Fort Worth Professional Musicians Association. It has been edited and revised with permission, for publication by American Federation of Musicians Local 586, Professional Musicians of Arizona.