

Music & politics

Local 802 members weigh in on *Occupy Wall Street* and also the question of political activism in general...

I WAS SO GLAD that Local 802 joined the protestors at Occupy Wall Street on Oct. 5. In the name of cutting budgets, collective bargaining and unions in general have come under enormous attack from big business and government. There are few unions left. It was great to see so many people from other unions at the march.

Jobs for musicians are scarce as hen's teeth. We are part of the 99 percent the Occupy Wall Street group represents. Our voices are not being heard. We are not represented by the legislature nor the courts and there are fewer and fewer media opportunities for opposing corporate views. The last option available is to be in the street.

It was heartening to see every age group and ethnicity at the march. I was only sorry that at the end of the march we did not all sit down in solidarity. It would have been incredible to see a non-violent protest of such size. What would the police (who also belong to a union) have done with the 10,000 people who marched if they had all sat in the street and refused to move?

I was thrilled to go with Local 802 and wish I could do more. As I heard several people say: it is our responsibility as American citizens to shift away from the goal of profit to a goal of environmental stewardship and a sustainable work ethic.

Michele Smith

I BELIEVE THAT MUSICIANS and politicians are natural enemies. Music is a source of power that politicians cannot access, and politicians fear and resent power that they can't co-opt. That being said, I still would rather see some people holding power than others, and I will use music to help achieve that vision whenever I can.

I don't generally discuss my politics with the audience from the bandstand. Unless the gig is a political benefit, or

MUSICIANS' VOICE

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something happens in the room that I need to address, I don't think it's fertile ground for proselytizing.

I express my political beliefs through music by the benefits I choose to play. I won't cross a picket line to do a gig. I've never sought out jingle work because I find many of the products objectionable that I would be helping to sell. I wouldn't do a jingle for the Republican Party.

When I run the gig, the songs I choose (and the musicians I call) reflect my beliefs, but the connection may not be directly apparent to the casual observer. I like an ecumenical bandstand when it's possible to achieve that. I won't ever hire someone who doesn't fit the gig musically. I won't sacrifice the quality of the gig for political correctness either. But I do make an effort to bring together people from different backgrounds who I think will sound great together, will enjoy each other as people, and wouldn't otherwise meet.

A diverse bandstand makes a powerful visual statement, but it doesn't get in people's faces the way that lecturing or haranguing can. When the music's great too, that speaks even louder.

Andy Bassford

I T WAS HEARTENING to see our union and so many others marching in support of Occupy Wall Street on Oct. 5. The large-scale assault on the labor movement, which became so visible earlier this year in Wisconsin and elsewhere, and which has as its goal the destruction of the power of working people and of the organized support of politicians who sometimes think of their interests, is a significant part of what this protest movement is protesting. There may have been a time when a single union could stand alone against the forces that opposed its members' interests; but no more. If the labor movement and the middle class are going to survive in the U. S., it will take much more collaboration on this scale.

Of the many inspired signs I saw at the rally, my favorite was "The Only Thing Too Big to Fail Is Democracy." This, sadly, is the very thing we're in danger of losing.

Pat Hackbarth

POLITICS AND RELIGION are two topics we are advised to avoid discussing in the workplace and in social gatherings. One reason for steering clear of these subjects is that the risk of alienation far outweighs any feel-good benefit one may derive from promoting a strongly held political or religious belief. Besides, conversion of somebody who takes a different view is seldom accomplished.

This is one of the contexts about which I have questioned various Local 802 Executive Board decisions over the years when they chose to involve Local 802's good name in issues of national politics that were in no way related to the music business. When the Occupy Wall Street protests started in Local 802's own backyard, I wondered if the Executive Board would be able to resist the temptation to involve Local 802 in this particular political movement.

Unfortunately, the disappointing answer was revealed by the union's press release of Oct. 4, announcing that the Local 802 Executive Board had unanimously voted "to support and participate in the Occupy Wall Street Community-Labor March on Wednesday, October 5."

Live-music campaigns like those currently being conducted by the Local 802 administration are positive campaigns that will hopefully garner support from our audiences and from the individual and corporate patrons and benefactors that are listed in the many programs at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. I would argue that our public affiliation with the Occupy Wall Street movement – a movement over whose actions Local 802 has absolutely no control – risks alienating many of these same audiences, patrons and benefactors. The Executive Board should never risk compromising Local 802's public image, especially regarding a national political issue to which Local 802 has so little to contribute.

Larry Rawdon

I'M EXTREMELY HAPPY that Local 802 endorsed the Oct. 5 march to support Occupy Wall Street. I'm glad that the union acknowledges the broad reach this action stands for. We are all affected by the greed of Wall Street. And by standing with the people who initiated this statement, we are saying, as a union of musicians, we bring the reality of our lives, the needs we have as musicians to earn a living and support our art – which has been crippled by the downturn in our economy.

Occupy Wall Street is important to musicians and important to all Americans because it has created a voice, a space for everyone to feel entitled to speak our truths and feel heard and supported by a like-minded humanity.

We're all back in the streets again,



Local 802 members, officers, staff and supporters marched as part of Occupy Wall Street on Oct. 5. The union's Executive Board unanimously endorsed the event.

marching together, for the best of what each of us has to offer in our lives, the lives of our loved ones, and the lives of our country and the world. We are the change we've been waiting for!

Janet Lawson

MUSICIANS SHOULD BE judicious in publicly supporting political causes that do not directly deal with the arts. Have the supporters of Occupy Wall Street, for example, considered that financial institutions are among the largest sources of private support for orchestras and arts institutions? Or that we rely on high-wage earners to purchase the expensive Broadway tickets and orchestra subscriptions that fund our incomes? As an individual who creates jobs for myself and other musicians, I frown at how we continually antagonize allies in the private sector who help make our music careers possible.

Todd F. Sullivan

I WAS HAPPY THAT Local 802 marched with other unions supporting Occupy Wall Street on Oct. 5. Many of us share the protesters' outrage at the damage that big corporations have been allowed to inflict on our whole society. But as union members we have a unique perspective on the regulation of corporate greed. We often work with employers who are focused only on the bottom line and will do pretty much anything to come out ahead. But union contracts protect our jobs, our rights, and

our financial security. Unions exemplify the healthy functioning of a society in which entrepreneurs are free enough to get rich while contracts and government regulation ensure everyone's safety and welfare. Occupy Wall Street provides much-needed energy and focus on issues of fairness and protection. We should keep making the point that unions are part of the solution because we fight for these issues every day.

Evan Johnson

I WAS HAPPY TO see Local 802 endorse the Occupy Wall Street march on Oct. 5, and I was proud to march with 802 and with all the other unions marching that day. I thought it was important to support the union that has helped me through some tough times, but also to see for myself exactly what is going on down there.

What I found was not what we see in the mainstream media. The people marching that day represented many professions and walks of life, and a large spectrum of political opinions.

But the thing that really seemed to tie it all together is a general sentiment that appears to be sweeping the globe. Far too much wealth and power is concentrated in far too few hands. We have billionaire politicians telling us that we have to tighten our belts while giving themselves huge tax breaks and spending ever more money on foreign wars and a Defense Department budget bloated beyond belief.

People have had it with the nonsense spewing out of their TV sets, and it's

about time that the powers that be here and around the world are forced to acknowledge this and do something about it.

Rich Messbauer

FOR ME, THE question isn't "Why should we support Occupy Wall Street," but rather: "How can we not support Occupy Wall Street?"

One of the things I like most about this movement is that the participants describe themselves not as a "Right versus Left" movement, but as an "Up versus Down" movement. In other words, they do not ally themselves with any particular political party. Rather, it's the 1 Percent versus the 99 Percent. And unions are part of the 99 percent.

Martin Luther King said it beautifully: "The labor movement was the principal force that transformed misery and despair into hope and progress. Out of its bold struggles, economic and social reform gave birth to unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, government relief for the destitute and, above all, new wage levels that meant not mere survival but a tolerable life. *The captains of industry did not lead this transformation; they resisted it until they were overcome.*" (emphasis mine)

I invite not only musicians but everyone to read the "Declaration of the Occupation of New York City," written by the people behind Occupy Wall Street. Why base your opinion solely on the media, pundits and hearsay? Wouldn't it be better to go to the source and make your own judgments? Here's where it's posted: <http://bit.ly/OWS999>

Lisa Laskowich

I BECAME INTERESTED IN the Occupy Wall Street movement during its first week, after reading online about the corporate media blackout. I walked down to Zuccotti Park to see if for myself, but I felt like a spectator, not a participant. When Local 802 announced that the union would be supporting the Oct. 5 protest and planned to march in solidarity with protesters – along with several other unions – it opened a way for all of us to get involved.

From my perspective, the point of Occupy Wall Street is to build a large coalition of Americans who are keenly aware that a very tiny group of extremely powerful people in government, finance and corporate management have been deliberately rigging the system in their favor

for many decades. They've been so successful that they've become super-rich and keep getting richer and more powerful, while essentially destroying the entire world economy and much of the middle class. This leaves tens of millions of Americans unemployed or underemployed, uninsured, homeless and thrown into poverty.

Many of the rallying points of the Occupy Wall Street general assembly – fairness and equality in the workplace and in government, rights of employees to negotiate for better pay and safer working conditions, access to health care – are precisely the goals of our union, and are of critical importance to all of us.

I have created a blog called "Musicians Solidarity with Occupy Wall Street." I welcome any ideas, comments and articles from other members! Here's the address: <http://musicians4ows.wordpress.com>

Steve Holloway

Feedback on Juilliard story
HAVING JUST GRADUATED recently from a – gasp! – state school, I don't know if I am even qualified or allowed to write a letter to the editor of Allegro, but I will try. Unless you are planning a feature with my picture and those of my fellow graduates on life after Stony Brook, I expect an apology from our magazine. I am assuming that most of your members did not attend Juilliard, either. What does this say about my union that even you give the upper hand to Juilliard alumni in your October 2011 issue? I assume from reading your interviews with Juilliard graduates that Local 802 cherishes the institution of Juilliard over the other music schools in the city, state and world.

I am a tough, freelancing musician who has made his way in the city without the favors that Juilliard brings. I am proud of what I learned from the University of Central Arkansas, the University of North Texas and SUNY Stony Brook from some of the finest teachers in the country (some of whom also teach at Juilliard). The union didn't even have any presence at Stony Brook, except for the copies of International Musician that I left in the student lounge.

This article was shortsighted in a profound way and shows an enormous lack of understanding of who composes the union.

Gregory Briggler