

## What I learned as President of the Calgary Musicians Association

I first joined the AFM as a student in the fall of 1989 for a short time at the encouragement of long-time member John Reid, who used me as his sub during a run of "Nonsense" at Stage West. It was my first professional gig as a union member and it was both exciting and daunting to make my first forays into the greater music community. I was only in the local for a few months during the run of the show but rejoined full-time in 1991 when I returned to Calgary after a year of living in France. It is hard to believe it has been 20 years now and when I look back at the impact the AFM and its members have had on my life, I am very grateful that I have been a part of this historic and vital arts organization. As I look forward to my next challenge, I thought I would outline a few of the things that I learned during my time as an officer of local 547. It was a steep learning curve through my time on the executive but I had help from many former officers and members who shared their knowledge, opinion and experience whenever I needed it. It taught me a lot about the history and importance of the AFM in the greater music community and how it supports all musicians regardless of whether or not they are AFM members. In many ways the past 6 years have been some of the most challenging for both the CMA and the AFM. The changes in technology in many ways have been as dramatic as the introduction of "talkies" in the 1920s when over 20,000 musicians lost their jobs performing in movie theatres. The economic downturn in 2008 and continued pressures on entertainment budgets have affected everyone significantly. The CMA was well positioned to weather the storm but we have had to be creative with our approach to CBA negotiation, administration of work dues, development of a new website and our day to day operations to continue to serve our members as best we can. Below, I have included a kind of top ten list of the things I learned about and appreciated during my time on the Executive Board. It is just a sampling from my personal perspective but it does remind me how important it is to support the AFM and here in Calgary continue to work as leaders of innovation in the Federation.

Have a safe holiday gigging season and I wish you all the best in 2012.

Keep on playin'

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### TOP TEN LIST

- 1) DEDICATION: I have met the most dedicated and inspiring people within the membership of the AFM. Across the country and federation, I have been amazed at the hard-working musicians who also dedicate their time and passion to supporting all musicians through their locals.
- 2) FAIR WAGE: Playing music is both an honour and privilege but fair compensation for professionals is a continual struggle for most all musicians. Setting standards through the tariff is only one small step, as it is up to each member individually to make careful choices when negotiating gigs. We all want to play our music but it is equally important to learn the business of music and develop good strategies to negotiate your contracts fairly for both the presenter and all musicians involved.
- 3) CBA's: CBC, CPO, Stampede, CityTV, Calgary Folk Fest, etc. The proactive negotiation with our key musical partners has been a very important and vital part of supporting live music opportunities for our members and allowing agreed wages and working conditions to be enforced.

4) PENSION, PENSION & PENSION: I have learned how important and valuable the pension can be especially for Canadian members. This defined benefit plan is one of the best ways for musicians to plan for their future and every musician should take advantage of this unique and well managed program.

5) INSURANCE: Medical, Dental, travel, instrument, liability (<http://www.cfmusicians.org/services/insurance-packages>).

6) NETWORK: The network the AFM offers to members overall is amazing but for me as an officer of the local, the Canadian Conference has been an incredible wealth of knowledge. Working with the delegates regularly over the past 4 years has been invaluable in bringing both new ideas to the local but also working in coordination on national and international issues that affect our membership.

7) ADVOCACY: You may not know but the AFM & CFM are involved with and coordinates with many other types of Arts organizations to advocate on issues related to our membership. Checkout the links page on [www.calgarymusicians.org](http://www.calgarymusicians.org) to learn more.

8) CONTRACT GUARANTEE: It is amazing how many musicians I talk to do not use a formal contract for their performances. It is just good business practice for both parties and I would encourage you to make it part of your booking policy. In the case of a dispute or failure to honour a contract by the presenter, we are very fortunate that the CMA has a contract guarantee fund to cover scale wages for all members. The local can also offer legal aid when necessary and help to negotiate a resolution to the situation.

9) AFM HISTORY: The creation of the AFM is a fascinating story and during its 115 year history, it has been the most important advocate of musician's rights and benefits in Canada and the US. (<http://afm.org/about/our-history>)

10) COMMUNITY: We are part of a large and influential community. Participation in the AFM allows us to better support our business and creative projects at all stages of our career. I have learned a lot as an AFM member but the most valuable lesson was to be an active part of the community. It just makes good sense especially in the constantly evolving world where in my opinion we need good music more than ever.