

Nfld. & Labrador

## Local musicians say 'pay-for-play' show is a raw deal

But company RAW says its business model helps promote artists

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Musicians Jordan Young and Evelyn Jess say an upcoming event by RAW is not in the best interest of artists. (Paula Gale/CBC)

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An arts exhibition coming to St. John's later this month is a pay-to-play show that will benefit the promotions company, not the participating artists, two local musicians say.

But the company, RAW Natural Born Artists, says artists are fairly compensated with a valuable promotional opportunity and that criticism is coming from "a noisy few" who haven't participated in or attended one of their showcases.

“We do not need big promoters from Toronto to do this for us.”

- Evelyn Jess

Evelyn Jess says her goal in publishing a Facebook post sharing her concerns about the organization and its planned Nov. 29 event in St. John's wasn't to run the company out of town.

Rather, she hopes to help people get the information they need to make an informed decision about the show, which requires participating artists to sell 20 tickets at \$20 each or pay a \$400 fee.

"Please make an educated decision, decide for yourself whether it's the right opportunity for you or not," Jess told the *St. John's Morning Show*.

## Alarm bells

Jess first became aware of the upcoming showcase when she was contacted via Instagram by a RAW booking manager. The subsequent phone call with that manager was vague and rushed, she said.

- [B'ys, b'ys, b'ys, b'ys, just paint the crosswalk!](#)

"Right away the bells were kind of ringing for me," said Jess, who said that Music NL also warned her against the show.

“The alarm bells were going loud.”

- Jordan Young

Her bandmate Jordan Young also thought things sounded off when Jess told him about the message and phone call, but the two decided to attend an in-town meeting about the show for potential acts in order to get more information.

At that meeting, there was a lack of basic details available to the interested artists, Young said: no information on the age group for the show, or what booth sizes and layouts would be like, or which audio-visual company would work the event.

"I've been at this long enough for my beard to go grey," said Young, who said he has been playing, promoting and producing local events for some time.

"The alarm bells were going loud."

## 'It's not the right thing'

After the meeting, Jess found some information online from others who had concerns about RAW — specifically about its requirement that artists who will be in the show to sell a quota of tickets or pay a \$400 fee.

"They're a well-known business and they've done well at this, but I feel that it's not the right thing for our market and our city," she said.

“I don't think that RAW is in the business of promoting artists in the cities where they put off these events.”

*- Jordan Young*

Event promoters should offer artists a guarantee for music shows, Young said, not the other way around. And a pay-to-play structure isn't the norm in the local music industry.

Some smaller venues in the city, like The Ship, charge no fee for playing, he said.

Instead, artists get ticket sales, and the venue gets bar sales. Other larger venues may have a rental fee, or a bar sales minimum, but that's something negotiated between the venue and the artist, he said.

"RAW has been around for a while and they've put off a lot of events, but I don't think that RAW is in the business of promoting artists in the cities where they put off these events," Young said.

"RAW is in the business of soliciting those artists to sell those tickets or pay in that \$400."

## What RAW artists get

In a written statement, Michelle Bylow, RAW's Canadian director of events, said that artists receive good value for the ticket sales requirement, including promotional and performance photos, the opportunity to play for hundreds of people, a venue to sell items without paying commission, \$10 per ticket sold above the 20-ticket minimum, and free inclusion in other RAW events around the world.

"Putting on showcases of this nature is not free to us, there are a plethora of costs involved, so everyone chipping in a small fraction allows all of us to benefit from the greater whole," the statement read.

Both Jess and Young said the requirements for artists participating in the RAW showcase were not hidden in any way.

Their concern is that inexperienced artists will agree to those terms when they aren't in their best interests, and that the time and energy involved in participating in a RAW show could be better spent supporting local organizations, venues and artists.

"This show can be done between artists and local groups, and we do not need big promoters from Toronto to do this for us," Jess said.

*With files from the St. John's Morning Show*

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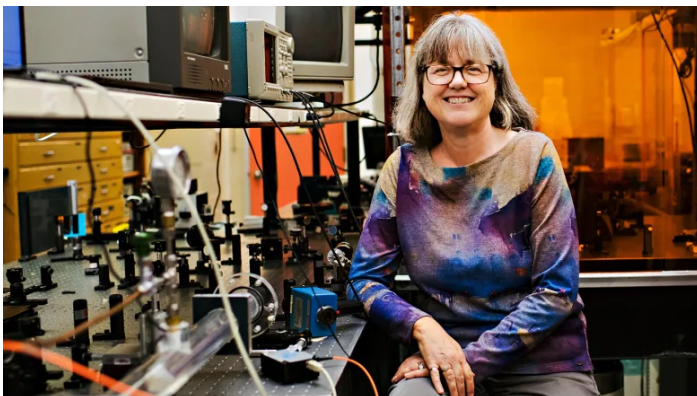
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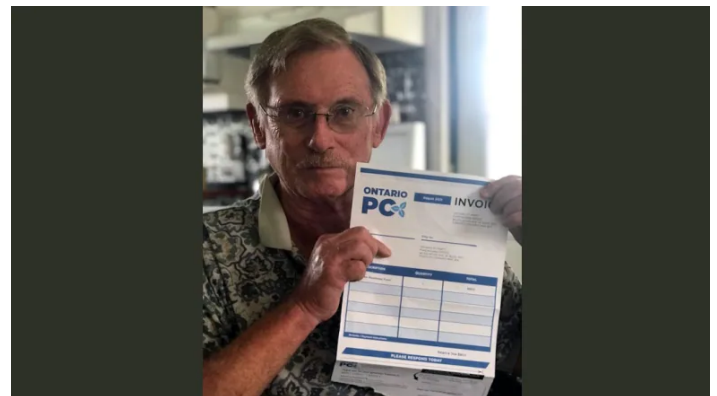


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