

November 23, 2009

**Subject: Translink Musicians Program, Vancouver, BC**

Dear Board of Directors of SOCAN,

I have just received a letter from Translink (see scanned copy attached) indicating that SOCAN is requiring the payment of \$40,000 per annum, in order that Translink may continue to provide a few public venues in which local musicians can play music. I am deeply saddened by the realization that, due to SOCAN demands for money, Vancouver's largest and most active busking community will soon be a thing of the past. Yet another venue for struggling musicians will soon become severely restricted and unaffordable, if not entirely lost. Since the majority of Translink Musicians (of which there are only 30) are playing their own original compositions or classical/public domain music, I can't even begin to understand why SOCAN feels the need to target this program for licensing revenue.

I am deeply confused about who SOCAN is serving. As a SOCAN member since 2001, I cannot see how this action would aid me. Translink has indicated that the only way they will be able to meet this demand is by making the fees payable by the licensees (ie. the buskers/musicians). This would mean a license would cost up to \$1500/year, instead of the current \$75/year asked for by Translink, to cover administrative fees to run the program.

Although being a 'Translink Busker' is no longer my livelihood, this program was a lifeline for me, financially *and* creatively, when I moved to Vancouver in 2000. My glowing resume couldn't even get me a steady job behind a coffee shop counter. I am infinitely grateful for the opportunity that the Translink Musician Program provided me from 2000 to 2002, when my income was derived solely from *playing my original music* in Skytrain stations.

As a result of my presence at Skytrain stations I was contacted by a Translink rider that offered to design and build a website for me. You can see this beautiful site at: [www.angieinglis.com](http://www.angieinglis.com). Nearly my entire email list of 650+ supporters, (over those 2 years) was derived from people who had become acquainted with me and my music through hearing me at the Skytrain stations. Indeed, 90% of the more than 100 people who showed up to support me at my cd release in December 2001, had also become 'fans' through exposure to my music at Skytrain stations. I met several musicians (who ended up playing shows with me), countless friends and I sold more than 500 cds during my performances at Skytrain stations. Fans from Japan, Ireland, the UK and Toronto, who had heard my music in the Skytrain when they were visiting or lived in Vancouver, sent me requests through the mail when my cd was ready, so that I could send it to them at home. Without the Skytrain station venues, none of this would have been possible.

These venues offer the only option for busking through winter. My entire career as an independent musician was feasible only because Translink allows licensed buskers to play in their stations. Were it not for the Translink Musician Program, I would have remained mired in obscurity for years to come. I would not have been able to support myself and would have likely given up playing music entirely. You see, I learned to play guitar in the Skytrain stations. Knowing that my audience was just passing by helped to abate my fears and gave me a chance to improve my skills as a performer in this unique 'transitory audience' environment. This program changed my life. I have been described in interviews as Vancouver's Skytrain Songstress and if you read my bio, included with this letter, you'll see that my identity as a musician has, and always will be, strongly linked to the life-affirming experience of busking. To stand amidst my people in this frenetic urban environment and share with them my woes and victories through song. This is freedom. This is what makes me grateful to live in a country like Canada, a city like Vancouver.

(page 2, Letter to SOCAN Board of Directors from Angie Inglis)

So, please consider: Who are you working for? Whom is it your intent to protect, support or serve by systematically destroying opportunities for struggling musicians to perform? If you make these venues obsolete, where can we go for exposure? Nevermind livelihood.

I cannot see any sense in what you are doing. In this age of internet downloads and MP3s, do you not have bigger copyright infringement/royalty fish to fry?

By demanding these fees from Translink, you will shutdown this program. This is not the first I have heard of SOCAN's money demands shutting down a small, local musician's venue. This happened with Trees Organic Coffee around 2003. Also a venue I used to play my original music at, until they had to discontinue performances due to an inability to pay SOCAN fees. Likely, these are only two examples of many, no?

Soon, our 'contemporary', 'cutting edge' city will be so bereft of art and music, due to corporate attitudes like the one behind this SOCAN initiative, that we will forget what it was like to hear *live music* in our neighbourhood coffeeshop, the Skytrain station or bus stop, or on the street corner. Soon everyone will walk with their ears stuffed full of corporate music from their ipods, their heads down, surfing the net on Blackberrys or with eyes glued to shifting images on massive digital screens, mounted above the heads of their fellows on city buildings. And because the Translink Musician Program and local coffee shops can no longer afford to allow musicians to play (and, I repeat, largely originals or public domain music) in their spaces, there will be no reason for anyone to do anything *other than* listen to stolen MP3s on ipods, watch corporate ads on digital screens and surf the net on their iphone.

Are the busking cultures of Toronto and Montreal and every other Canadian city next on your list? I don't think it is your intention to destroy busking culture and leave our streets barren of all but the mass-produced sounds of corporate radio... is it? Will you take away this opportunity for free self-expression? Self-sufficiency? *Do you realize that you are creating a situation where I, and others like me, can no longer afford the license required to play our own compositions and/or public domain music in public thoroughfares?* Where we can no longer step out into the urban landscape and jar our fellow humans from their slumber with our words, our thoughts, our stories, our voices, our songs?

In a city with so few venues for small, independent musicians, this initiative of SOCAN's will further limit options. Struggling musicians will become rivals, rather than allies, as they fight each other, competing for a spot at one of the few, steadily diminishing busking locations. I can't believe this is really your intention, but it is the situation you will create if you pursue this action.

*Please*, rethink your strategy now; while we still have time to keep the streets alive with music. Change gears and find out how you can be a leader in a real cultural revolution.

Ask yourself why you got involved in this business and then consider whether you are still serving that purpose or whether something has been lost or forgotten along the way.

Please do not reduce us to a city of cement and silence.

Please, think again.

In hope of a different way,

Angie Inglis