

'Live music is definitely good for business'

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IMAGINE YOU'RE IN a hotel lounge, enjoying the sounds of live music. Suddenly you see a man drop to his knees and pull a ring out of a box. All eyes go to the couple. There is an electric stillness in the air. The man murmurs a question to his companion, and you hear the answer: "Yes!" Suddenly, the pianist starts playing "Can't Help Falling in Love," and the room breaks out in applause.

Now try to imagine that scene without live music. You can't.

Only the classiest hotels in New York City currently provide live music for their guests, but Local 802 is on a mission to show other hotels that live music is the best way to make an impression and the best way to increase the bottom line.

"We're here to say that more hotels should add live music," said Recording Vice President John O'Connor. "Live music is good for business and it's the best investment a hotel can make."

The Carlyle Hotel at East 76th and Madison, is proud to present live music with Local 802 musicians under a union contract. "Live music is, and always has been, an integral part of the Carlyle experience," Giovanni Beretta, who is the managing director of the hotel, told Allegro. "It's great for business."

Beretta added, "Our guests associate

us with live entertainment as much as they do with our luxurious accommodations, and we revel in providing a home for some of the world's finest musicians. It not only makes for a more enriching and memorable experience for our guests, but also gives New Yorkers and people from around the world a reason to come visit this legendary property."

Local 802 pianist Loston Harris II can be heard leading his trio at the Carlyle most nights. He says that the hotel patrons love live music. "It's always fun to see the audience smiling, dancing and often singing along with me," Harris told Allegro. "Unlike a concert setting, the audience doesn't feel as inhibited by making conversation and expressing themselves. Although I have a set list prepared, there will always be requests for a special song or special occasion. Whether out on a date, celebrating an anniversary or getting down on one knee to propose, love is definitely in the air."

The same magic goes on at the Pierre, a few blocks south, on East 61st between Madison and Fifth.

Nora Walsh, a spokesperson for the Pierre, told Allegro that "Guests have expressed to us directly how much they enjoy our weekly jazz evenings. Patrons do tend to stay longer and with increased dining consumption on the evenings we provide live music."

Local 802 member Ray Cohen per-

formed at the New York Palace hotel for 14 years. He says that a professional musician is essentially a good-will ambassador for the hotel, "playing songs for all generations with a varied repertoire of American favorites and melodies from countries all over the world."

Cohen added, "I came to realize how much of a magnet the music can be, how it can eventually build a clientele base that more than offsets the cost of music in the budget. Live music in a hotel raises the qualitative image and ambience level in a way that is not solely measurable in dollars."

Over at the St. Regis, on East 55th Street and Fifth Avenue, spokesperson Liz Stonehill says that music "liven's the experience for the guest, and a piano or harp playing in the background provides a calm and relaxing atmosphere."

Stonehill added that live music helps guests stay and linger and not feel rushed to leave. "Live music is definitely good for business," she said. "If guests experience the sounds of good music at the hotel in the relaxing environment, they will be likely to suggest it to friends and colleagues, furthering the number of guests and individuals visiting the hotel."

Local 802 member Kirsten Agresta says that guests choose the St. Regis in part for her live harp performances. Guests frequently comment on how much they enjoy the music, or how in-

teresting it is to see the harp. Agresta interacts with guests on a regular basis, and their reaction to the music is always positive. One customer even requests the table next to the harp to conduct his meetings because he loves the music so much.

"Live musicians add an energy and create an ambience that canned music cannot provide," Agresta said.

Local 802 member and pianist Kurt Wieting, who also performs at the St. Regis, told Allegro that guests like to hear live music because it "counters the technology that has encompassed so much of their lives. A beautiful version of a favorite song can go a long way to connecting someone back to an emotion. It's that effective and important."

Wieting also feels that live music can add an immense amount of value to the guest's experience. "Live music can really bring in repeat business," Wieting said.

Another St. Regis musician, Local 802 member and pianist Rich Jenkins, told Allegro that he thinks of music in a hotel as a soundtrack for the experience of the guests.

Jenkins said that guests see music as a special service provided by the hotel.

"A hotel with live music separates itself from all the hotels without live music, by offering their guests this really noticeable perk," said Jenkins. "If the hotel offers what appears to be a free service, guests

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Local 802 member Kat Gang performs at the Plaza Hotel and other venues in NYC

A TOUCH OF CLASS

Why the best hotels in NYC use live music...and why more hotels should



Loston Harris II



Rich Jenkins



Shawn Aileen Clark (in red) leads Lapis Luna at the Plaza

PHOTO: TORY WILLIAMS



Kurt Wieting



Emilee Floor



Michael Feinstein



Kirsten Agresta

Live music adds a touch of class

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will be that much more satisfied with their stay and more likely to return. At the St. Regis, the music is the feature that is the most personal and interactive.”

At the Plaza Hotel, on Fifth Avenue at Central Park South, live music is also a great attraction. Cynthia A. Scherer, director of sales and marketing, told Allegro that “live music is inherent to the Plaza. It is an integral part of our history, what made and makes the Plaza an icon in New York City.”

Scherer added, “As many remember, the Persian Room was the legendary nightclub that once played host to jazz and cabaret icons such as Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Billie Holiday. Today, the Rose Club stands in that space and continues the Plaza’s live music legacy with a splash of contemporary style and spirit.”

Local 802 member Emilee Floor, who sings and plays piano at both the Plaza and Waldorf, told Allegro that canned music is impersonal and one-dimensional.

“It’s passive with no interaction,” said Floor. On the other hand, live music is “active, creative and three-dimensional. It livens the environment of the hotel. The hotels that have live music are set apart from the ones that do not, and this gives them a classier edge.”

Floor recalls a gig that took place the

weekend after 9/11, just over eleven years ago. People had come from all over the globe to commemorate the victims of the 9/11 tragedy. “The mood that night was somewhat somber,” Floor remembers, “but when someone asked for ‘New York, New York,’ the entire restaurant spontaneously burst into song and sang the whole thing with me! It was wonderful! Then, several guests gathered around the piano and my last set became a sing-along. I marveled as I watched strangers put their arms around each other as they sang and swayed together.”

Floor added, “This is the power of live music. The spiritual element of the shared energy simply cannot be captured by recorded background music.”

Local 802 member Kat Gang also sings and leads a band at the Plaza. She said that people are always excited by the band when it starts to play. “The air changes instantly from dim to bright,” she said. “Our energy adds to the movement and conversations around us. This is part of what makes a live band so important – the personal interactions with the audience that makes them feel like they have had a special and unique night out. We set the vibe.”

Gang said that she is both saddened and hopeful by the current state of live music in New York.

“People need to realize that musicians

are artists and thinkers and hard workers, and deserve the same respect as any other profession,” Gang said. “Could a hotel open without its waitstaff? Without the housekeepers? Musicians need to be on the same level of necessity! Life needs art.”

Local 802 member and singer Shawn Aileen Clark agrees. She leads the band Lapis Luna, which performs at the Plaza. Clark says that live music in hotels is an absolute must. It “keeps guests around longer and can bring in more clientele. It’s well worth it in the end and is a great investment for the hotel,” Clark said. “People appreciate it so much and will return again and again.”

Local 802 member Michael Feinstein heads up the nightclub that bears his name: Feinstein’s at the Loews Regen-

cy at 540 Park Avenue. Feinstein told Allegro that live music in hotels and nightclubs “provide an essential element needed to make them distinctive. Without music, a physical space is just an empty shell without personality or character.”

Feinstein added, “Music brings a life force and energy that transforms our lives and makes us feel better about life and the world we live in. It gives us a heightened sense of joy and reminds that life is about living, loving and laughing. Music in a hotel brings people together, makes them feel more connected to each other and is the best way for a person to feel welcome when they enter a space. There’s nothing better than live music.”

Where to hear live music

TO HEAR ANY or all of the great musicians mentioned in this article, call the hotels to find out current schedules: **Carlyle** (212-744-1600); **Pierre** (212-838-8000); **Plaza** (212-759-3000); **Regency** (212-759-4100); **Ritz-Carlton** (212-308-9100); **St. Regis** (212-753-4500); and **Waldorf-Astoria** (212-355-3000)

IF YOU’RE A hotel manager reading this article, we hope we’ve convinced you that bringing live music to your hotel is an excellent investment. If you’re ready, call us at **(212) 245-4802** and ask for the Organizing Department.