

Busking: An Old Street Tradition or A New Way Of Living For Musicians?



It couldn't be a much more beautiful day in Nice, France. Deep blue skies with just a hint of clouds, sparkling turquoise water as far as the eye can see, flamboyant statues standing tall, and the soft strum of an Ovation acoustic accompanied by a gruff and soulful voice singing "What a Wonderful World". The visitors stare and clap along to the familiar songs that they know. Smiling and dropping their money in a jar to show appreciation. But do they know his name? To some, he is just another street artist there to entertain, but to others, he is Aaron Lordson-musician, a street busker, a friend, and a father.

Street busking is a way of life for many musicians and performers that strive to chase their dreams while maintaining financial freedom from the corporate world. It dates back to medieval Europe. Those that do this, strive to gain money usually, but also drinks, food, and other gifts are given. However, Aaron has earned some respect in that many now recognize him in the area and await his next performance.

"The method is always to surprise the people" Lordson replies with a sly grin. "I never perform in the same place more than a couple times...I want the people to look for me". Usually, many artists like to list where they will be and when. But for Aaron, his method has proven different,



and the monetary results are quite shocking. "83 thousand I made in 2015," he says smiling as he continues "How else can I send my daughters to the best private school in Nice?"

I have to admit, I was shocked. As most would be. He makes more than many that have bachelor's degrees! I never believed much could be made from street busking. I must add

though that his successes are also due to the fact that he does it 6 days a week, for years on end, and often sacrificing family time to generate the revenue he desires. This income also reflects private gigs he picks up from visitors at his shows.

One has to wonder; how does this affect the personal lives of his family? “I don’t mind that he does it as it keeps the girls in a good school” states Mrs. Lordson. “I love that I am able to watch my husband do something he loves, and I get to help out at his gigs”. “It’s a family affair really” she states.

“I like when my daddy asks me to sing like Whitney (Houston)” Venus Lordson replies with an eager nod. Her love for American music is distinguished by her advanced repertoire of all the greats: Whitney Houston, Tina Turner, Etta James, Minnie Ripperton, James Brown, and even Prince and Beyonce. She has picked up the skill from her father. “I think watching him do this has given me a better view of what people like...but me, I just really love to sing, thanks to him” she responds. “English is not my first language, but this music has taught me to speak it better”.

Another thought that came to mind as Aaron gushed about his favorite performances was, are there any licenses you have to get in order to do this? “Yes, you have to have one here in France if you are to sell CDs,” Lordson responds.

To further state what Lordson is talking about, performers must get a license from the city hall in whatever town they plan to busk in. It is usually a nominal fee and has some restrictions that allow busking for so many days or weeks depending on where you get the license from. However, some are willing to take risks and play without a license.

Pilgrim of Love -guitarist and singer/songwriter from Italy takes the risks as he isn’t selling CDs like Aaron Lordson but does it for the pure enjoyment of meeting interesting people. “I enjoy making a buck, but I really just like meeting new people and it’s like practice for me...” His story is a bit more contrasting with Aaron who prefers to make a living from street performances. “I have to have a regular job because I’ve



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had my bad days that made me thankful for my regular job. It all depends on yourself as a musician and where you do it at”.

Pilgrim of Love was shy about disclosing his name but did state that he treats it more as a hobby and side money. His talents were none less than Aaron’s performances, however, his musical taste was much jazzier and melancholier. Aaron’s performances would be considered mainstream music that we hear today on most popular radio stations along with the classics.

According to [Frontiersin.org](https://frontiersin.org), studies have shown how street performers can help or hinder a location. Overall, the studies proved to be favorable towards various locations. Frontiers goes on to suggest that music is a common experience. Even if not from street performances, we often encounter music in public spaces. An obvious case is the background music in service environments such as supermarkets, shopping malls, restaurants, etc. Background music in public settings as such can impact our perception of the settings. Numerous studies have demonstrated that shoppers of a supermarket and retail mall perceive the store and sales personnel more favorably and spend more time and more money in the store if they like the background music being played.

It’s a win for all-the businesses, the audience, and the performers.

“It really helps my wife’s boulangerie out here in Bordeaux” states Randy Resnick of Bordeaux, France. “It adds an ambiance, so we never have a problem with it. We also enjoy the talent that comes through here”.

Street performers come in all kinds. But behind the song and voice, is a person that wants to be heard and appreciated. Appreciation of music comes in all forms. For Aaron and his family, it is monetary, for Pilgrim of Love it is for pure enjoyment, but also a little side money for a rainy day. For the businesses that invite these performers, it is an added nuance to enhance the customer’s experience. For the rest of us listeners, it is an experience to add to our memories.

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