

# June 21 is Make Music Day around the world — and now in our region



A girl helps conduct a keyboard event on the streets of New York during a previous Make Music Day event. (Photo credit: Cindy Ord, Getty Images)

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June 21 isn't just the summer solstice. It has also become, over the past 35 years, Make Music Day, when musicians with a range of abilities and specializing in a wide array of genres give free performances outdoors — in parks, storefronts and public spaces, and even on sidewalks and in backyards.

The 2017 Make Music Day boasted more than 4,000 concerts in nearly 1,300 locations in 120 countries. The participating cities ranged from Los Angeles to Nashville to Paris, where it originated.

And, this year, Make Music Day is coming to Connecticut.

How Make Music Day musicians and venues connect is interesting — through something that is like a music-based dating website. More on that in a bit.

First, there is the guiding principle behind Make Music Day.

“It is a way for people to spread the joy of music and the love of music,” says Wendy Bury, executive director of the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition, which is spearheading the effort in southeastern Connecticut. She adds that people can “realize music is something we can gather around, and (we can) become a community together through the love of music.”

It's meant for all ages and abilities, she says. The idea is that there's music when people can walk out of their workplaces. Maybe a church choir or a glee club is performing on a sidewalk. Or maybe a small orchestra is playing, and people can stand in front of the instrumentalists and wave their hands “conducting” for a few minutes.

Make Music Day was dreamt up by France's Ministry of Culture in 1982. The idea is that everyone could play music or host free outdoor performances. (In France, it's called Fête De La Musique.)

Make Music Day has become a national holiday in Paris, where around 70 percent of Parisians have participated in the event at some point.

It's expanded around the globe and has been the focus of articles in Rolling Stone and the New York Times.

Late last year, the Connecticut Office of the Arts brought Make Music Alliance Executive Director Aaron Friedman and deputy director Dave Ruder to Hartford to meet with regional arts organizations about bringing the festival here. There was “overwhelming support” for this to be statewide initiative, Bury says. Ruder has met a few times since with the participating Connecticut organizations, whose role is it to administer the program here.

Musicians and venues come together on a website. In this case, the site for southeastern Connecticut musicians and venues is CultureSECT.org, under the Make Music Day button. They have to register with the program. (In taking on the leadership role in southeastern Connecticut, the Coalition bought the associated software.)

“It is truly matchmaking,” Bury says. “A musician is going to go in and fill it out and say, I play jazz, I do this, I am a singer, a songwriter, and here's what I would need to perform – I need an outlet, I need a sound system, I need a stage, and then they register and put the profile out there,” she says.

“Venues can do the same thing: I have an indoor space, I have an outdoor space, we have a sound stage available, we have sound equipment available, we have nothing available, we don't even have a plug, no outlets. We only need acoustic people.”

Then, the venues can scan the musicians on the site, and the musicians can take a look at the venues. They can contact each other, ask questions — about hours, for instance, or types of music. Once they decide they want to work together, and they agree to terms, then a member from the Cultural Coalition clicks on the confirm button, and the info goes on the performance schedule.

The deadline to register and match up is May 21.

The first selectmen and mayors of all towns have been contacted and made aware of the event, so they might allow musicians to play, say, on sidewalks and in parking lots and waive any permit fees that day.

“What we really need now is more musicians and venues to get on the registration process ... We need more people to populate it so that there are more choices,” Bury says.

Among those already confirmed is music in Sprague, where Sprague First Selectwoman and State Sen. Cathy Osten is working with Artreach to program the entire day at the town park. On deck: a singer-songwriter showcase and a participatory sing-along.

And the Mystic River Jam, which is a festival running Friday and Saturday at Mystic Shipyard, has added a free Thursday night preview concert at the site that will be part of Make Music Day.

An app is available for download, so someone could, for instance, see all the events available as part of southeastern Connecticut's Make Music Day.

If a venue wants to, say, host a band to play for free but wants to pay the band, they can seek out a sponsor (a local business, perhaps). A sponsor logo would be included in the Make Music Day materials and noted in the schedule. Bury says that, in the future, the Cultural Coalition might look for larger sponsorships to help fund performances so that costs like travel and equipment are covered even though the event is free.

With Make Music Day, Bury says, "Music is something being celebrated and truly becoming a public amenity that day."

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