

KNOW YOUR WORTH

A Musician's Guide to Quoting, Negotiating, and Getting Paid

This card is for you. Not for venues, not for event planners. For you. It exists because knowing your rate is only half the work. The other half is being able to hold it when someone pushes back.

BEFORE YOU QUOTE

Know your number before you pick up the phone or reply to the message. The ZU Arts Initiative Fair Pay Rate Guide has regional benchmarks for Montezuma County. Use them as your floor, not your ceiling.

Your rate should account for:

- The time you spend performing
- The time you spend preparing, rehearsing, and loading in and out
- The cost of your gear, maintenance, and any equipment you bring
- The years of practice that got you to where you are
- The fact that you are providing a professional service

Your rate is not a wish. It is a professional quote. State it plainly, without apology.

HOW TO QUOTE YOUR RATE

Keep it simple and direct. You do not need to justify it, explain it, or soften it.

"My rate for a two-hour set is \$200. That includes setup and soundcheck. I accept cash or Venmo at the end of the night."

That is the whole message. Short, clear, professional. If they want to book you they know what it costs. If they come back with a counter you have a starting point to work from.

WHEN THEY PUSH BACK

This is the part most musicians find hardest. Here are the situations you will run into most often and how to handle them.

They say: *"We don't really have a budget for this."*

You say: *"I understand. My rate is \$200 for a two-hour set. If that doesn't work for this event I'm happy to talk about what you're working with and see if there's a fit."*

They say: *"Can you do it for tips?"*

You say: "I don't do tips-only bookings. My base rate is \$200 for two hours. Tips are always welcome on top of that but they don't replace the fee."

They say: *"We can offer you great exposure."*

You say: "I appreciate that. Exposure doesn't cover my costs though. My rate is \$200 for two hours."

They say: *"Other musicians play here for less."*

You say: "That's their choice to make. My rate is \$200. I'd love to play here and I think it would be a great fit, but that's what I charge."

They say: *"It's for a good cause, can you donate your time?"*

You say: "I support the cause. I'm happy to talk about a reduced rate with the understanding that my contribution is recognized as an in-kind donation with a dollar value attached, the same way a cash donor would be acknowledged."

They say: *"We'll pay you in free drinks."*

You say: "I appreciate the hospitality. Drinks are a nice gesture but they're separate from my fee. My rate is \$200 for two hours."

They say: *"Can you play a little longer? The crowd is loving it."*

You say: "Glad to hear it! I can extend. My rate is \$X per hour so another 30 minutes would be \$Y. Want me to keep going?"

You are allowed to say no. You are allowed to hold your rate. You are allowed to walk away from a booking that does not value your work. None of that makes you difficult. It makes you a professional.

WHEN TO WALK AWAY

Not every gig is worth taking. Here are clear signs it is time to decline:

- The venue refuses to discuss any fee and insists on tips only

- You are being pressured to accept less than your stated rate with no genuine budget conversation

- The terms keep shifting after you have agreed on something

You are asked to play significantly longer than agreed with no additional pay offered
Payment is being delayed without a clear written agreement

Walking away from a bad booking is not leaving money on the table. It is protecting the standard for every musician who comes after you.

GET IT IN WRITING

Every booking should have a written agreement, even if it is just an email thread that confirms the key details. Before you show up, make sure you have agreement on:

Date, time, and location

Set length and break expectations

Your fee and how you will be paid — cash or digital, end of the night

Who is providing sound equipment

Load-in time

Cancellation terms — 50% of your fee if cancelled within 48 hours

ZU Arts Initiative has a free performance contract template you can use for any booking. Email grow@cortezarts.org to get a copy.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE IN THIS

ZU Arts Initiative's Musician Members are building a community where these conversations get easier because the standard is shared and public. When more musicians hold their rate, holding yours becomes easier too.

If you have questions, need support navigating a difficult booking situation, or want to get involved in shaping the Fair Pay standards for this region, reach out.

QUICK FAQ FOR MUSICIANS

Am I obligated to charge the rates in the Rate Guide?

No. The rates are a floor. You can and should charge more when your experience and the situation warrants it.

Is it okay to negotiate below my stated rate?

Sometimes, yes. Negotiating in good faith with a venue that is honest about its budget is different from being pressured into accepting less. The key is whether the conversation is genuine and whether the choice is yours to make.

What if a venue I really want to play at cannot meet my rate?

That is your call. You might choose to play there anyway because you value the relationship or the opportunity. What matters is that it is your choice, made with full information, not something you were maneuvered into.

What if I quote my rate and the venue just stops responding?

That is information. A venue that goes quiet after a professional rate quote is telling you something about how they value artists. Hold your rate and move on.

For the full FAQ visit cortezarts.org or email grow@cortezarts.org.

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