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Day jobs and SOCAN cheques: Support for up-and-coming members' careers

By Jim Kelly for www.socan.ca



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Newfoundland singer-songwriter Colleen Power works at the Mt. Scio Savory Farm in St. John's

"Keep your day job."

That's the witticism/criticism a singer-songwriter might hear if someone is less than impressed with their talent. Of course, the reality is that there are countless accomplished songwriters for whom a day job is a necessity. They need a source of steady, gainful employment to pay the bills while they move their music careers forward.

Jay Clark Reid of Toronto alt-country band [Jay Clark & The Jones](#) has taken that most traditional of day jobs: waiting tables. For the past year he's been working three nights a week at the downtown restaurant/bar C'est What, where his band also plays from time to time.

"It's a nice place to work if you're a musician because they expect you to do other stuff," Reid says. "They don't expect you to be tied to your job. They're a decent bunch of people. So for me it's a total blessing to have that."

And though he's happy with his present day job, he recalls working at many places where the bosses weren't so willing to give him time off for his music career.

"I've worked at places where they just absolutely refused," he says. "What are you gonna do? So you just don't show up, and then you look for a new job."

Newfoundland singer-songwriter [Colleen Power](#) enjoys a day job that not only puts butter on her bread, it also adds some spice. She works at the Mt. Scio Savory Farm in St. John's, packaging savory, the popular herb that Newfoundlanders add to their poultry stuffing for holiday meals. Orders come in from displaced Newfoundlanders all over the world, especially in the months leading up to Christmas. The farm is about a 10-minute drive up the hill from the downtown apartment she shares with her 14-year-old daughter Robyn. Power typically puts in 30 to 40 hours a week, working days, which leaves her evenings free for playing gigs.

"If I play a weeknight gig and I'm too tired the next day, I'll just call them up and ask if I can come in a bit later," says Power. "Usually they'll have no problem with it, because they know that I'm sketchy as it is," she says with a laugh.

She's been employed there on and off for the past seven years, working for months at a time and then getting time off to tour if she needs to.

"They're really good about that," she says. "They're kind of friends more than anything. Whenever I have something to do, they don't mind if I go off and do that."

Toronto singer-songwriter [Linda M](#) (Moroziuk) has managed to find a different kind of day job after having tended bar for several years. She works as a background actor (formerly known as an "extra") on TV and film shoots around the city, mostly doing walk-by scenes. She is on call to a casting agency and spends about two days a week on set. Unlike Reid and Power, Linda is in a situation where her primary job is music, and her day job helps fill the financial cracks between gigs. As such, the flexibility it offers is crucial.

"The [casting] agencies know that a lot of the people who work for them are musicians, so it hasn't been a problem yet," she says. "I'll usually book off in advance. For instance, I'm going to Kentucky for about a week, so I just told them I'm not available. I've got a pretty good relationship with them, so they don't mind, but they do like when you give them warning."

While a songwriter's day job obviously provides a much-needed source of income, what's perhaps less obvious is that it can also be a source of creative inspiration for songwriting.

"I think it's perfect," Reid says of his job at C'est What.

"You're out at night. People are getting crazy. People are having a few drinks. There's human interaction on almost every scale. It helps songwriting."

Though in a somewhat different manner, Power also finds that the nature of her day job can be useful for her music career.

"In the summertime, I'm out in the fields," she says. "But when you're inside, packaging, it's such mindless work, I come up with ideas for songs; I can come up with set lists. I write stuff down while I'm packaging. I kind of like that about it."

Naturally, being SOCAN members, each of these artists has also received payments for radio airplay, and from reporting their live performances, and that money helps to finance their music careers as well. Both Colleen Power and Linda M have had songs featured in television series. The royalties from that did wonders for their SOCAN cheques. Three songs from Power's debut CD *Lucky You Are* were used in the CTV Alliance/Atlantis series *The Associates*.

"It was great, because I'm always having to pay for stuff; making press kits and doing tours and getting runs of CDs made," says Power. "It certainly came in handy."

Linda M's SOCAN cheque received a boost when one of her songs was featured prominently in a scene in the popular American TV series *Dawson's Creek* in 2002.

"I'm still feeling the effects of that, so I'm kind of lucky," she says. "I operate my record label (Luscious Productions) on a line of credit, so anything just goes to keep that down and to keep [the label] operational. My whole life is geared now towards music. Whatever it takes financially, I'm willing to do. So those cheques are like a godsend. I need that kind of capital."

Likewise, Reid also reinvests his cheques into his music career.

"SOCAN money goes into paying for a rehearsal space. It goes into paying for gas to find a gig," he explains. "At this point, we're a seven-piece band, so just about every dollar we make with a gig or as far as royalties are concerned, goes back into the band."

Still, while they're willing to do what it takes to support their music aspirations, the day job remains a necessary evil.

"I just wish I could only do music," Linda M says. "I'm doing okay. It's been getting better." She mentions that she's been lining up some better-paying gigs in the States. "Unfortunately, I still have to slog it out a little bit."

So, yes, they'll keep their day jobs, thank you very much. And they'll also keep making music. And even though their

bosses have been supportive and accommodating, no doubt it will feel good when the day comes that they're finally able to live the moment that Johnny Paycheck sang about: "Take this job and..."

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