

Musician

Play or sing for a living. The hourly rate looks good, the number of paid hours is the problem.

TYPICAL PAY

\$99,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$42k to \$276k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Clubs and concert halls, recording studios, orchestras, houses of wor...

How you get there

- 1 Play constantly** Grades 6 to 12
Lessons, ensembles, a band, a church group, youth orchestra. The hours you put in before 18 are the foundation for everything after.
- 2 Start getting paid** 16 and up
Function gigs, church services, pit orchestras, background music. Small money, but you learn to show up prepared and on time.
- 3 Decide about a degree** 0 or 4 years
A music degree buys you four years of concentrated practice, teachers and a network. It buys you no job. Many players skip it, and many wish they had not.
- 4 Build a name in one scene** 2 to 5 years
Reliable players get called again. Reputation inside a single city does more for you than talent nobody has heard.
- 5 Add income streams** Ongoing
Teaching, recording, arranging, producing, touring. Nearly every full-time musician has three or four.

Pros and cons

- + No license, no degree required, you can start earning as a teenager
- + The hourly rate is genuinely good when you are working
- + You choose your own projects, players and schedule
- Very few people are paid for anything like a full working year
- Federal projections put growth below average for this occupation
- No employer benefits, no sick pay, no pension unless you build one

Optional boosts

Sight reading. Doubling. Home recording. Arranging and producing.

Good to know

The survey will not publish a yearly wage

For most occupations the federal wage survey gives an annual salary. For musicians and singers it gives hourly rates only. The reason is stated plainly in the methodology: annual figures would be misleadin...

The military is a major employer

The armed forces run dozens of bands and hire musicians by audition as enlisted service members. Pay comes from the Department of Defense basic pay table by rank and years of service, plus housing an...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Musicians and Singers (27-2042.00)
American Federation of Musicians
Berklee College of Music
United States Copyright Office

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/musician>



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