“Let’s preserve the seamless flow of information between artist and fan and recognize that net neutrality is critical to the conservation of this dynamic.”

-R.E.M.
For over a decade, Future of Music Coalition (FMC) has championed innovative structures that allow more musicians to reach audiences and earn a living. Early on, we recognized the impact that the internet would have on traditional music business models. Yet where some saw only disruption, we also saw opportunity.

Historically, relatively few artists had a chance to be heard. In most cases, musicians had to sign away their copyrights to even have a shot at reaching listeners. Widespread consolidation in the broadcast industry all but extinguished opportunities for local, independent and niche artists. Major record labels kept a tight hold on distribution, with little room for independents. Manufacturing costs and limited retail space meant that many albums had impossibly short shelf lives.

The internet changed everything.

With commercial radio play and widespread distribution out of reach, many artists embraced the web. The internet’s open structures meant that they could compete right alongside the biggest companies — an unprecedented development in music history.

The internet ushered in an era of connectivity, enhancing participation and amplifying voices. It also transformed how music is acquired. The road to a legitimate digital music marketplace has been bumpy, but the scenery is starting to get good. A growing number of sites and services serve up a vast array of music, while compensating creators and rightsholders. Web radio outlets like Pandora and Slacker customize to listener preference, accelerating music discovery. Subscription services like Rhapsody and MOG offer a bottomless catalog, on-demand and on-the-go. Download stores like iTunes and eMusic make collecting simple and fun. Blogs and social networks enhance the entire experience.

These innovations have something in common beyond music. They’re all the direct result of open internet platforms.

The open internet is the oxygen of the music ecosystem. Artists rely on it to do everything from booking tours to selling merchandise to collaborating with musicians on the other side of the globe. A musician’s website is their storefront. Their blog is a window into their ideas. Their message board is a backstage hangout. Their social network is an interactive news ticker. These platforms let musicians make connections with their audiences while advancing their careers.

Today’s musicians are in fact small businesses, and the internet is their global marketplace.

FMC has witnessed firsthand how important net neutrality — the principle that protects the open internet — is to musicians. They understand that innovation and creativity is as important as deep pockets. Besides talent and drive, all they need is a level technological playing field.

Net neutrality also safeguards expression. In 2007, AT&T censored a portion of the live webcast of a Pearl Jam concert, during which singer Eddie Vedder made critical comments about then-President George W. Bush. Our democracy demands that the speech of Americans — from rock star to retiree — is not silenced. Net neutrality helps guarantee this essential freedom.

In 2007, FMC created Rock the Net as a platform for musicians to show their support for the open internet. Founding artists such as Pearl Jam, R.E.M., Kronos Quartet, Death Cab for Cutie, Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Bob Mould, Calexico, Les Claypool, The Wrens and more demonstrated what’s at stake for creativity, commerce and free expression. In a few short months, Rock the Net had grown to include thousands of musicians and independent labels.

The artists names listed on the inside covers of this booklet are just a few of the thousands of artists who support FMC and Net Neutrality. Here are just some of their stories, in their own words.
VISIONARY NEW MUSIC STRING ENSEMBLE, KRONOS QUARTET

The open internet has allowed Kronos Quartet to find people who are out there exploring and looking for new and interesting sounds. It’s given us the means to have direct, two-way connections with our existing fans and also uncover new audiences. The music Kronos Quartet plays is not just from America and Europe — it’s from all over the place. It’s from Azerbaijan; it’s from New Zealand; it’s from China; it’s from Russia; it’s from India. We don’t see the world with boundaries, we don’t hear the world with boundaries. Neither does the internet. Single entities should not have the ability to choose who gets to speak and to whom. This is a central reason why the internet must remain open and accessible, and why artists and all citizens must be vigilant in ensuring that our rights to speech and expression online are not restricted.

stic.man OF PROVOCATIVE HIP-HOP DUO DEAD PREZ

As a member of a politically-conscious hip-hop group, I recognize the important platform for speech and organization the open internet represents. Without access to this powerful tool for communication, even more Americans — particularly people of color — would be without a voice on the most important debates of the day. Democracy and civic understanding require access to information, which is hard to come by these days if you can’t get online. And once you connect, you still need to be able to go where you want without restrictions from some corporate entity. As an artist and member of the public, I count on the open internet to not only keep creating, but also to address social issues in the best way I know how: through my music and my message.

“Single entities should not have the ability to choose who gets to speak and to whom. This is a central reason why the internet must remain open and accessible, and why artists and all citizens must be vigilant in ensuring that our rights to speech and expression online are not restricted.”
-Kronos Quartet

GRAMMY-AWARD WINNING ROCK LEGENDS R.E.M.

While the phone, the fax, the copier, and the postal meter are still in service, they’re but a small part of the overall effort to get music and messages to those who want it. Minus open access to the convenience and immediacy of web-based tools, it’s not so hard to imagine a return to a time when they weren’t around. Let’s preserve the seamless flow of information between artist and fan and recognize that net neutrality is critical to the conservation of this dynamic. It doesn’t matter if you’re a band or a blogger: the open internet provides access to the same platform for communication as a large corporation or even a government agency.
FRANZ NICOLAY, MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST, COMPOSER AND MEMBER OF THE HOLD STEADY

For all the disruptive effects of the internet on the traditional music industry, the level playing field it established for artists is far more valuable. Everyone — amateurs, neophytes, late starters, or simply isolated or unconnected artists — can now get their music to a wide audience at virtually no cost. Every other advance in mass communication since the printing press has required a substantial investment in equipment and distribution costs that relatively few can afford. Before the internet, the portals of mass communication were controlled by a few powerful gatekeepers. It would be a tragedy for democratic and artistic expression if similar bottlenecks were placed on the web.

“The internet is an indispensable utility for me – something as important as running water or electricity. This is why I’m worried about what might happen if net neutrality is not preserved.”
-Vijay Iyer

MULTI-AWARD WINNING JAZZ PIANIST
VIJAY IYER

The open internet is especially important for jazz artists, who will never have the promotional budget of major pop stars like Taylor Swift or Kanye West. The internet is an indispensable utility for me – something as important as running water or electricity. This is why I’m worried about what might happen if net neutrality is not preserved. A wall would go up between me and my fans, and a new set of gatekeepers — the cable companies — would take the place of the old program directors and label honchos. The old system was a rich-get-richer model and the new one could very well be too. The biggest, best-funded artists could afford the web fast lane, with smaller artists pushed to the virtual equivalent of bumpy back roads. This would make the music landscape blander, more homogenized and afford listeners fewer opportunities to discover niche genres of music – bluegrass, Christian rock and, of course, jazz.

JOSH NOREK OF INFLUENTIAL INDEPENDENT LATIN LABEL NACIONAL RECORDS

From day one, we knew that Nacional Records couldn’t compete with the major labels in traditional retail environments, where the costs of promotion and placement are too great for most independent labels. The story is much the same with traditional broadcast media such as television and radio, where the barriers to entry are extraordinarily high. And due to the rampant ownership consolidation within these industries, programming has become increasingly homogenized, leaving little room for the progressive, genre-bending approach our artists bring to Latin musical culture. Net neutrality is critical to our business — it’s what allows us to reach our audience directly, without interference from middlemen or gatekeepers. And open internet structures don’t merely benefit independent labels and artists — they’re crucial to the people we most want to reach: young Latinos who need to experience and reflect back their own culture in a way that makes sense for them.
DAMIAN KULASH AND THE OK GO STORY

My name is Damian Kulash and my band is called OK Go. We’ve been around for a decade, during which time we’ve sold over a half a million records, won a Grammy, played thousands of shows in the States and on five continents. We’re also fortunate to have been among the first bands to achieve much of our success due to the power of the internet, where we’ve had tens of millions – maybe hundreds of millions – of streams, downloads, and website hits.

Our achievements are due in large part to our online presence, a type of success that couldn’t have been imagined even a decade ago. The principles of openness that define the internet are what made everything possible.

Creating, distributing, and listening to music is easier now than ever before. Musical ideas are spreading and combining and growing, even as the traditional music business struggles to adapt. All sorts of exciting new things are possible. It’s an exhilarating time.

My band is a good example. OK Go started in 1999 and followed a pretty well-trod path for the first few years. We developed a following at local clubs in our hometown of Chicago, spent as much time on the road as we could afford to, eventually landed ourselves a record deal, and then played the promotional game as it is generally defined by major labels: a ton of no-profit touring, a lot of free shows for radio stations, as many interviews as we could get, and the occasional music video, where the cost is advanced by our label and deducted from our royalties. Our first record, which came out in 2002, did fairly well: on the Modern Rock radio charts we just barely broke into the Top 20, and on Billboard’s sales charts we made it to about 100. We were in the middle of the pack — successful enough to continue, but facing an uphill slog.

In 2005, we released a follow-up. When the record came out, we did all the standard promotion advised by our label, but we also decided to launch our own online campaign with simple, absurd videos we made ourselves.

With the help of my sister, we choreographed a parody dance routine and shot a single-take home video of us performing it in my back yard. If you include the Starbucks run, the total budget for the video was about $20. We posted the clip online, and it caught on like wildfire. We watched, astonished, as the video racked up hundreds of thousands, then millions, then tens of millions of hits at online video sites. Before long, we were getting offers to play to thousands in countries where our record had never even been released.

And something even wilder started happening: fans started posting their own versions of the video.

Thrilled by the direct connection with our fans, we launched a dance contest, and received homemade ремекs of our video from all over the world. We got hundreds of entries, videos of the dance at weddings, in churches, at high school talent shows, in firehouses, and even a version performed by animated Legos. This is a whole new phenomenon, a feedback loop of creativity that allows us to be more than just a commercial product to our fans — we are the center of an active, creative community.

We followed that video up with another that we shot at my sister’s home in Orlando. It was also a single take and we were dancing again, but this time on eight moving treadmills. In the first two days after we posted the clip on
YouTube, it was viewed a million times. In the month after it went online, our album sales increased nearly 4000 percent. We won a Grammy for the video, beating out much bigger acts with exponentially bigger budgets and promotional campaigns. To date, it’s been viewed more than 50 million times on YouTube alone.

For seven years we barely covered our bills, and since our internet success, OK Go has become a very successful operation. We believe the videos were so loved because they came directly from us. There was no one telling us what we could or couldn’t do, no middlemen or marketers, and we didn’t have to sell a committee of gatekeepers on our idea before we could take it to our fans. Our success couldn’t have happened in the pay-to-play music industry of ten years ago, or in a world without an open internet.

The internet is not just a medium for our videos; we use it for everything. We connect with fans through our website, our online forums, and through social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook. We alert our online fans to concerts and television and radio appearances, and we promote those appearances to new fans. We sell our merchandise and CDs, and book our tours online. We broadcast concerts, and have done many performances solely for a web audience. I’d venture to say pretty much every working musician out there today will tell you how vital an open and neutral internet is to their business.

Creativity and innovation are the lifeblood of any successful endeavor, whether artistic, commercial, or political. There are only two guitar companies who make the majority of guitars sold in America, but luckily they don’t control what we play on those guitars. Whether we use Macs or PCs doesn’t govern what our minds can bring to life with our computers. The telephone company doesn’t get to decide what we discuss over our phone lines. Similarly, the companies who deal with the nuts and bolts of the internet should not determine what we can do, or make, or access, or dream up while we’re using it. The internet has always been a place for freedom of speech, art and commerce. We should keep it that way.

The internet is as close to a genuine meritocracy as we’ve ever seen. It’s a place where my band’s $20 video found a wider audience than the industry’s million-dollar productions, because ours was simply better.

Preserving this level playing field is essential not just for the music community, but for all of us. The world of tomorrow must be built on our society’s best ideas, not just those ideas that align with the interests of a powerful few.

“Preserving this level playing field is essential not just for the music community, but for all of us.”
- OK Go

ARTISTS ORGANIZE TO RELEASE ROCK THE NET BENEFIT CD

On June 29, 2008, Thirsty Ear Records released Rock the Net: Musicians for Net Neutrality, a compilation CD featuring a dynamic assortment of artists who understand the importance of preserving an open internet.

The CD, which Rolling Stone called “one of the sexiest compilation albums in some time,” featured tracks from Wilco, Aimee Mann, They Might Be Giants, Bright Eyes, The Wrens, Portastatic, DJ Spooky, Guster, Matthew Shipp, Vernon Reid and more.

This critically acclaimed release showed yet again that musicians depend on the open internet for practically every aspect of their career. Fans, too, made the connection that the internet works because it belongs to everyone.

To purchase this album, please go to: http://www.thirstyear.com/store
MARTÍN PERNA, FOUNDING MEMBER OF OCOTE SOUL SOUNDS AND ANTIBALAS (HOUSE BAND FOR TONY-AWARD WINNING MUSICAL, FELA!)

The internet has been instrumental in allowing me to keep in touch with my fans and make my music available to a broad audience. This open platform lets artists like myself collaborate and generate new ideas, resulting in works that have been rewarding both creatively and commercially. It has allowed me to build, maintain, and exercise creative relationships with artists across borders. Through the open internet, I regularly collaborate with musicians from New York to Paris to São Paulo. Currently, we have a playing field that, if we make good choices, can accommodate even more voices. Yet we’re facing pressure from bigger players who want to build trenches, hills, and walls. The internet is crucial to preserving freedom of expression. This freedom, like freedom of speech on a public street, must be maintained and defended.

MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST AND SINGER-SONGWRITER ERIN McKEOWN

As an independent artist with a committed fanbase, the internet is the engine that powers my career. I now have more tools, direct access to my fans and many more creative options to express myself than ever before. And I don’t need to depend on outside entities to determine how and when I communicate with audiences. Net neutrality simply ensures that all users, creators, innovators, small businesses and regular citizens have the means to compete in a crucial marketplace that isn’t slanted to favor only the powerful players. Where we can freely access the internet, where we can speak freely, read freely, educate ourselves and others without interference, we engage in the same democratic process that inspired the vibrant and diverse country in which we live.

“Net neutrality simply ensures that all users, creators, innovators, small businesses and regular citizens have the means to compete in a crucial marketplace that isn’t slanted to favor only the powerful players.”
- Erin McKeown

AWARD-WINNING COMPOSER AND ARTISTS’ ADVOCATE ALEX SHAPIRO

The internet has had a remarkable impact on my career. This technology has allowed me to reach audiences around the world, obtain commissions and sell recordings and scores — all from my home on a bridge-less island in rural Washington State. The open internet is increasingly vital for those of us working in genres like contemporary concert music, classical music, jazz, bluegrass or other cultural forms that are considered outside of the popular mainstream. Whereas traditional broadcast media like terrestrial radio rarely provides a platform for niche music, the internet allows artists like myself to reach audiences and connect with others who help to promote American art and culture. For this and other reasons, such as our right to free expression, the open platform of the internet must be preserved.
ARTIST ORGANIZATIONS FOR AN OPEN INTERNET

The open internet isn’t just important to musicians. Arts and cultural organizations have gone on record in support of net neutrality rules that would protect their ability to communicate with their diverse constituencies.

Independent Creator Coalition for Net Neutrality

American Composers Forum, American Music Center, Center for Creative Voices in Media, Film Independent, Fractured Atlas, Future of Music Coalition, International Documentary Association, International Music Managers Forum, Just Plain Folks, Meet the Composer, Nacional Records, National Alliance for Media Art and Culture, and Writers Guild of America West

“From musicians to filmmakers to writers to independent labels to arts and service organizations, today’s creative community depends on the open internet to conduct business and contribute to the rich tapestry that is American arts and culture.”

American Federation of Musicians

“In the 21st century, artists at all levels of success use the internet to get their music to fans, through iTunes, eMusic, Amazon, YouTube, MySpace or the myriad other websites and services that allow music to be sold or streamed. The internet allows music and musicians to flourish and must remain open and neutral.”

National Association of Latino Arts and Culture

“It has become paramount that our community — particularly our artists and cultural ambassadors — has access to the same communication platforms enjoyed by other members of the public. The views and perspectives of Latinos are as diverse as our artistic expression, and our ability to participate in the broader cultural conversation depends increasingly on access to the open internet.”

The American Association of Independent Music (A2IM)

“The internet has allowed independent labels to compete on a more level playing field and develop direct relationships with our customers. This has been a phenomenal development in our ability to bring more music to more people. Without the benefit of an open internet, we may very well end up with another set of gatekeepers who determine who gets to play and at what cost.”

Voto Latino

“The open internet lets Latino youth have their voices heard. This is an incredible thing for a historically disadvantaged group, and particularly important for younger generations who need the freedom to express themselves and their culture.”
ABOUT FUTURE OF MUSIC COALITION

Future of Music Coalition (FMC) is a national nonprofit organization that works to ensure a diverse musical culture where artists flourish, are compensated fairly for their work, and where fans can find the music they want.

Founded in June 2000 by musicians, artist advocates, technologists and legal experts, Future of Music Coalition gives musicians a voice in the issues that affect their livelihood. Over the years, FMC has provided an important forum for discussion about issues at the intersection of music, technology, policy and law. By documenting historic and emerging trends in the music industry, FMC has become a trusted voice in the ongoing dialog about the challenges and opportunities facing today’s musicians. By promoting a legitimate digital music marketplace and a broadcast media that values local and independent culture, FMC helps establish a healthier music ecosystem.

FMC actualizes its mission through a number of activities. We organize events that bring hundreds of musicians, technologists, attorneys, policymakers and industry representatives together for cutting-edge discussions about the future of music. We submit testimony, publish articles and give presentations highlighting the creators’ experience. We distill and translate information for musicians, keeping them abreast of an evolving music landscape. We also generate original research to more completely illuminate the mechanics of an evolving music industry.

Since 2002, FMC has published several data-driven reports including studies on the effects of radio station ownership consolidation and payola and musicians’ access to health insurance. We also continue to solicit artist opinions about the impact of new business models on their ability to earn a living.

FMC’s monthly newsletter includes breaking news and information about the policies and technology developments affecting musicians, as well as advocacy campaigns, articles and upcoming events. Sign up here: www.futureofmusic.org/subscribe.

For more information: futureofmusic.org