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## Hanks: For those able to find work at festival, music was just bonus

Anna Hanks, Local Contributor

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On the Friday afternoon of the Austin City Limits Music Festival, I met Marina, 19, a sophomore political science student at Texas A&M International University in Laredo. The day before, she had taken an eight-hour bus ride to get to Austin. It was her first visit to the city.

Dressed in a purple shirt, she had her hair pulled back and the most elaborate manicure I've ever seen. Unlike the snaggly bitten mess of my own nails, each of her nails was decorated to resemble the face of the Japanese cartoon character Hello Kitty. I was so jealous.

"It's been fun," Marina told me when I asked how ACL had been for her. Like lots of people, she was looking forward to hearing the band Coldplay, which was performing later that night. Though Marina had enjoyed all the bands she'd heard in Zilker Park that day, she hadn't made the trip just to hear the music. She was here to work.

When I met Marina, she was standing just outside the crowd of people watching the hip 22-year-old English musician James Blake while holding a trash bag. Her purple shirt bore the name of the cleaning company she was working for, making her one of 4,500 paid staffers keeping the city-within-a-city-park functional during the event. She'd traveled to Austin after her mother told her about the opportunity to work at the festival.

In this economy, it's no surprise that jobs are a major topic of conversation.

The federal Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 14 million people are unemployed, about 9 percent of the working-age population. That figure means politicians are talking about creating jobs while a fair number of my friends are very interested in the possibility of catching and keeping one of these mythical jobs for themselves. (Employment is so scarce — and people were so reluctant to chat — that I've stuck to first names.

I originally surmised that people would find it difficult to work during the festival while other people were having fun. Instead, most of the people I talked to were thrilled just to be working. Not all the people I talked to had glamorous jobs, but some of them had an unexpected touch of glamour fall into their working lives.

When I chatted with DJ, 32, of Austin, he had parked the sanitary services truck he was driving on Barton Springs Road so he could snake a hose over the fence to empty the portable toilets in the fancier areas of the festival. While working one morning, he got to overhear Stevie Wonder rehearsing, before later watching Wonder's headline set from the audience.

For Wes, 25, who was keeping the performers safe during the event, the touch of glamour came from being the recipient of an unexpected hug from singer-songwriter Conor Oberst of the band Bright Eyes during his Friday set. With that simple gesture in front of thousands of people, Oberst converted Wes into a fan.

"I never really heard this guy's music, but I assure you that I — and everyone I know — will be checking him out," Wes said.

Later, following Bright Eyes' ACL aftershow Saturday night at Stubb's, I had a brief talk with Jacob Feinberg, 34, who has been



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touring as a sound engineer for Oberst for eight years.

Feinberg told me that he works a lot of festivals with Oberst and his many different musical projects. He explained that, for him, festivals were about trying to do the best for your artist.

Given the fragile economy, I couldn't help but think of the people in precarious employment situations when, during the broadcast taping of Arcade Fire's show at ACL Live, I saw musician Régine Chassagne delivering the lyrics for the song "Sprawl II (Mountains Beyond Mountains)." Wearing a dress the color of the gold standard, Chassagne sang the following:

"They heard me singing and told me stop/ Quit these pretentious things and just punch the clock."

These days, just punching that clock is a luxury that too many Americans don't have.

Getting to overhear even a moment of a private performance from Stevie Wonder while on the clock is an amazing bit of workplace gravy.

These days, nearly everyone with a job ought to be considered lucky.

Hanks is an Austin resident.

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