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Should My Band Play at Trump's Inauguration?

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By **RON BERLER**

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A worker removing President-elect Donald Trump's chair after a rehearsal for the inauguration. Credit Al Drago/The New York Times

I've been awaiting the phone call for weeks, ever since the president-elect tweeted that he's not interested in "so-called A-list celebrities" performing at his inauguration events — this, despite the fact that his team reportedly reached out to Kiss, Elton John, Garth Brooks, Celine Dion, Andrea Bocelli, Kanye West, Rebecca Ferguson and Charlotte Church to perform, and was kissed off by all.

The president-elect went on to say that he'd rather have "the PEOPLE." I'm not familiar with that musical act, but given his run of misfortune, I wouldn't be surprised if they turned him down as well.

And so I sit here wondering what to do, knowing that sooner or later his staff will troll so deep into the entertainment sea that they will at last locate me.

For those of you who haven't followed my career, I am the lead singer of Rocky Miller & the Homecoming Queens, a '60s rock-and-soul band that plays once a year, most recently at a suburban Chicago American Legion hall. I know that doesn't sound very substantial. But most of us cut our musical teeth in another Chicago-area band that, for a while, was very big in three local ZIP codes. Larry Lujack, the city's Dick Clark, spun one of our singles on his 50,000-watt AM radio station — once. We're all in our 60s now and are no longer considered relevant in the music industry. But we're still out there, prancing about the stage in our matching Hawaiian shirts and receding hairlines. Last fall we debuted two new oldies — "What Becomes of the Brokenhearted" and "Like a Rolling Stone" — our first fresh material in 30 years.

Now, I suspect, we'll soon have to decide: Should we play the Capitol, or not?

There are several aspects to consider.

For starters, saying yes could potentially resuscitate our career. The pay would be great, the prestige of performing at one of the balls almost certainly would lead to more jobs, and we'd probably have a lot of fun.

Although perhaps not. The last time we played for a major corporate C.E.O., the occasion was his daughter's wedding party. After we had set up our equipment and completed our sound check, the bride approached me. "Would you fellows mind parking cars until you start playing?" she asked. Let's just say I declined.

On the other hand, if we say no to the president-elect, many might point to us as a beacon of dignity. We'd be part of that A-list brotherhood, right there beside Kiss, Elton John, Garth Brooks and the others. Of course Rocky Miller & the Homecoming Queens would soon be summarily forgotten. But we'd still have the suburban Chicago American Legion hall.

That would probably be for the best. We're not that good. It's entirely possible the president-elect wouldn't even like us. Given his history of not paying independent contractors who disappoint him, we might end up riding a Greyhound back home.

Perhaps I shouldn't fret. There's a chance the president-elect will decide not to seek any additional entertainers for his inauguration. Recently, Vanity Fair magazine asked the Broadway star Idina Menzel whom she thought would ultimately perform.

Maybe, she said, Donald J. Trump will "just have to sing something himself. He probably thinks he has a great voice."

Ron Berler is the author of "Raising the Curve: Teachers, Students — A True Portrayal of Classroom Life."