

# Cyprus Today

Your comprehensive weekly — since 1991

JUNE 20, 2015

ISSUE 1,449

5TL/£1.50/1.75 EUROS (S CYPRUS)

TV Leisure

## Snakes: I was given a month's notice for airing my opinions

By ANNE CANALP

TWO well-known musicians have parted company with the pioneering North Cyprus entertainment agency which they were the first to join three years ago, citing inflated costs and bad publicity.

Barry "Snakes" Steward, the first to join the All Stars Agency Promotions (ASAP), said: "I was given a month's notice for airing my opinions about services allegedly provided by two agency members and for comments I made which appeared on the front page of *Cyprus Today*."

Gavin Simons announced his resignation last week in a statement to friends on his Facebook page.

Agency manager Ken Hibbit confirmed that Mr Steward had been sacked for breach of contract after he made "disparaging and homophobic" forum comments about

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missing their gas tank and again been hurt.

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From front page

ASAP performers.

He also confirmed that Mr Simons had resigned from the agency — set up to provide multiple-venue work permits for entertainers as required by law — and that both performers' work permits had been cancelled.

Mr Simons said: "The agency was founded for the right reasons, to support local entertainers, but it has gone sour.

"Barry and I both felt left out in the cold after changes in management.

"Two months ago our monthly agency charges were upped from 400TL to 700TL per month and no breakdown of expenses was provided despite repeated requests.

"I was also paying a 10 per cent commission on all my bookings but was not provided with bookings or promotion as promised by the agency."

He added: "This is not a vendetta against other performers. Our main worry is that we will be paying from our own pockets to survive as legal performers during the winter season."

Girne Labour Department head Ahmet Tmaztepe said: "Only TRNC citizens and students working a maximum of four hours per day for up to 24 hours per week may legally work part time. Turkish, EU and other foreign nationals may only work full-time."

Many performers have complained that they are forced to put in more hours than they would like in order to cover their costs.



Barry Snakes and below, Gavin Simmons



Both Mr Steward and Mr Simons said that they had been advised that they could legally continue by paying their contributions of 385TL per month until they renewed their permits, which are priced at 800TL for one year and 907TL for two years plus the cost of health checks.

Mr Tmaztepe warned that if the existing work permits were cancelled by the employer, EU nationals would have to take a trip to the South and re-enter the TRNC to comply with the law as a pre-permit application must be made before the prospective employee arrived.

He warned that individuals should always check that payments and permits were up to date with the authorities before leaving the country, as they would be liable for doubled fines on their return.

ASAP founder Ahmet Aşik said: "I did not start this agency to make money but to help performers work legally and claim benefits. Three performers have already received hospital care and should eventually qualify in the long term for the white identity card."

He added that agency costs, which had to be covered, included VAT, administration and accountant's fees and a bond of 200,000TL which has to be provided when a new company is set up.