

SUSTAINABLE & ETHICAL MERCH



Illustration: Coree Thorpe

One of the most important ways we've been financially supporting each other in the music industry this year is by purchasing artist merchandise. But at what cost? There are a few things to consider when outsourcing ethical merchandise, and we think it's time to dig out our old band tees, hang them out to dry and see the impact of cherishable vs. perishable.

Unfortunately, there's no way to be 100% sustainable when selling merchandise, but we recognise that it's often a necessary source of income for musicians. Here's our guide to making your merch as eco-friendly and ethical as possible!

ABOUT: GREEN MUSIC AUSTRALIA

We're an Australian not-for-profit making sustainability achievable, providing tools, case studies, encouragement and hands-on support. We partner with sectors across the industry to make change happen, and know that together we can harness the power of music to create a healthier planet and better future. Read more at greenmusic.org.au

WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY NORMAL MERCH?

It's usually full of plastic. 60% of new clothes are made from synthetic fibres (check the labels of your clothes - common synthetic materials are acrylic, polyester, rayon, acetate, and nylon), which never biodegrade and instead just break down into smaller and smaller parts, filling our waterways and oceans with microplastics.

Non-synthetic clothes need significant amounts of water to produce. It can take 2,700 litres of water to make one cotton t-shirt, and cotton accounts for 24% of the world's insecticide use. So you need to look for natural but sustainable fashion such as bamboo or recycled fabrics.

'Fast fashion' means clothes often end up in landfill. In Australia, 6000kg of clothing and textiles are discarded every 10 minutes - that's 23kg per person per year. It's not sustainable, and it can't be continued forever.



AS AN ARTIST, YOU CAN PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE FASHION.

This means looking for brands that use recycled content, organic cotton, and/or fair trade working conditions. If you already have a partnership with a merch provider, ask them about a more sustainable option. With more and more artists pushing for sustainable merch, the options will get better and better!

Case study: Melbourne-based 60s psychedelic garage-pop band Sunfruits collaborated with Green Music Australia to create organic t-shirts with the slogan 'No Music on a Dead Planet'. Photo: Winter McQuinn



SOME ETHICAL MERCH PROVIDERS IN AUSTRALIA IN 2020: A QUICK COMPARISON

When designing your merch, consider employing First Nations artists - awesome resources like @ausindigenousfashion, @tiddas4tiddas and @first.nations.fashion.design on Instagram can help you find designers.

Etiko Merch

This brand has a traceable supply chain and organic, fair trade cotton, plus wins awards for their ethical production.

OCC Apparel

OCC Apparel offers eight different sustainable brands. All are ethical and most are made with organic cotton, but are made in different places and have varying materials such as bamboo. See a comparison of their brands to the right, and read more about wholesale ethical merch on their [website](#).

Shirtbox

Entirely solar-powered operations mean Shirtbox is a great place to head for merch options - check out their eco range [here](#).

BRANDS	ETHICAL	MADE IN	FABRICS	ACCREDITATIONS
Certton	✓	AUSTRALIA	100% ORGANIC COTTON	ethical clothing
green	✓	INDIA	100% ORGANIC COTTON	2 FAIR WEAR
CONTINENTAL	✓	TURKEY	COTTON, BAMBOO, TENCEL	2 FAIR WEAR
SALVAGE	✓	INDIA	RECYCLED POLY-COTTON	2 FAIR WEAR
FAIR SHARE	✓	INDIA	100% ORGANIC COTTON	2 FAIR WEAR
stanley	✓	BANGLADESH/ TURKEY	100% ORGANIC COTTON, MODAL, TENCEL, LINEN	2 FAIR WEAR
colour	✓	BANGLADESH/ CHINA	100% ORGANIC COTTON, MODAL, COTTON	2 FAIR WEAR
ANVIL	✓	HONDURAS	25% COTTON, 50% POLY-ESTER, 25% RAYON	2 FAIR WEAR

Walk the talk in photographs, on stage and in your film clips - it's not sending a great message if you're wearing the latest fast-fashion shirt made in a sweatshop overseas. Support local brands, wear upcycled clothes and ethically made clothing wherever you can!

NEW MERCH ISN'T THE ONLY MERCH.

If you have old merch that didn't sell, repurpose it! The 1975 reprinted new designs onto their old t-shirts, saving money and the planet. Opera North used old costumes to make beeswax wraps. Or consider incorporating an environmental message into your merch, like WAAX or Alison Wonderland. You could even get t-shirts from an op shop and work with an eco-friendly screen printing company like the Melbourne-based Dragonfly Screen Printing.

WAAX designed a t-shirt calling out dirty coal, with all profits going towards the 2020 Brisbane bushfire relief.



Alison Wonderland donated all proceeds from this t-shirt to the Victoria CFA, the NSW RFS and WIRES.



The 1975 repurposed old merch that didn't sell from earlier tours by simply printing their new graphic over the old designs. Better yet, people could bring old The 1975 shirts (or ANY old shirt) to their concerts and get the same screen print done then and there! [See their Instagram video.](#)



OTHER MERCH OPTIONS: WATER BOTTLES & CARDBOARD ALBUM COVERS

There's more than just clothes! You can have your own personalised reusable water bottles or reusable coffee cups, which artists like Ash Grunwald and Maggie Rogers have as merch, or a tote bag for shopping. When selling CDs, we recommend recycled cardboard CD covers, like the ones offered by Austep, a carbon neutral company; look for cardboard/paper packaging that's from sustainably managed forests (the best is FSC certified, followed by PEFC). Alternatively, consider releasing physical copies only on special occasions. Consuming music via digital download reduces the CO2 footprint of that music by 40-80%!

SHOPPING FOR YOURSELF?

Make an ethical and environmental statement when you can. Use the 2019 Ethical Fashion Report to support ethical companies - the report grades as many brands as possible from A+ to F, based on strict guidelines checking for an absence of child labour and worker exploitation, plus the mitigation of environmental damage. See the 2019 Toxic Textiles report to look at the environmental impacts of popular brands.



MORE THAN JUST A MERCH STAND

On her 2019 Complex tour, enviro legend Montaigne ran a Red Cross clothes drive at a Sydney show. Fans were invited to drop off old clothes, which were then donated to the Red Cross. If you're thinking of doing the same, consider also collecting clothes that are no longer suitable for op shops (irreparable tears, old socks, etc.), and giving them to brands that collect clothes for recycling - [using this handy directory.](#)



READ MORE

- Learn more about the #whomademyclothes movement and fashion industry transparency [here.](#)
- See this great Australian [ethical brand directory](#), showcasing cool brands like [Ahimsa Collective](#), which makes bags from pineapple leaves and plastic water bottles!
- Got clothes that can't be donated? [Recycle them.](#)



Make a statement with your fashion! Pictured: Billie Eilish at the 2019 American Music Awards; Sun Salute at Airlie Beach Music Festival.