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# WORDS OF ADVICE FOR MUSIC STUDENTS

*(BEFORE GOING ANY FURTHER)*

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## PREFACE

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So you want to be a jobbin' muso then ? Have you considered any other career ? If so, stop any aspirations of being a musician right now ! It's probably true to say, all my colleagues are musicians because there simply isn't anything else they want to or possibly can do. If you're counting on substantial financial gain and glorification as being reward enough, I'd not hold your breath. And if you 'wanna be famous'? - then get down to those 'X-Y-Z'-Factor auditions now, and forget the hard graft that being a musician is all about. You're obviously more attracted to the 'limelight' than the shadows that many of us professionals frequent.

This is a conviction that will keep you going through the most barren of gigging times. It's a vocation that will justify every concern your bank manager may have. When I'd made up my mind to be a musician, I'd agreed to myself that however I'd earn money, it had to have some connection with music. For example, working in a record shop (although they don't really exist anymore) or for an instrumental hire company. You could work for a rehearsal studio and learn about setting up a PA etc. I even worked in a headphone company warehouse for 2 weeks during student holidays. It was the most mundane of tasks but I certainly learnt a thing or two about headphones.

If you have decided to be a professional musician, you'd better get ready for a lot of frustrations, rejections, doubts .....shall I go on ? And if you're looking for stability, look elsewhere. Try to have a little 'rainy day' savings account. It's a safety net that may prove vital one day.

But if you can succeed as a professional musician, you will probably spend your life being very happy and content knowing your's is a career that thousands would also like. The knocks will make you stronger and more focused...



**Son, someday you will make a girl very happy, for a short period of time. Then she'll leave you and be with new men who are ten times better than you could ever hope to be. These men are called musicians.**

#### WHY THESE ARTICLES

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Having hit middle-aged-dom, in all its philosophical glory, I'm seeing younger players make exactly the same mistakes that I made. Not all I hasten to add. Some may argue this is a prerogative of being young. But if I can at least offer a helping hand to those aspiring players on a 'take-it-or-leave-it' basis, my conscience will be clear. Of course there are some amazingly astute young players out there with their heads very much screwed on the right way. Good for them – sadly, they don't appear to represent the majority.

I've performed with many artists and musicians all over the world and taught aspiring students in music colleges and academies. I've really enjoyed the experience of working in a professional environment with players that reflect the very same attitude. Nothing can beat the sheer elation and comradeship working with a team of wonderful musicians.

I have immense respect for the colleges and teachers alike that undertake the gargantuan task of coaching tomorrow's professional musicians / composers / performers etc. But I have always been aware that such places of learning can only teach so much about a musician's life. It's so difficult to cover the practical everyday issues of being a musician. How to create an invoice for example – a bit boring but getting it right from the start will really make life easier. How to find a rehearsal studio – things you need to know. How to conduct a successful sound check in 60 minutes or less with five or more artists? And so on.

All of these experiences of course will be learnt in time, but imagine how much further on you'll get with a little prior practical knowledge ?

This article (blogs) aims to inform and help budding musicians in the making get ahead. Of course others may enjoy the read if only assure themselves that this world is not for them. Yes it can be a tough life. But it can also be an incredibly rewarding one too. I get up in the morning and know that I make a living out of something I really love to do and enjoy. How many can say that. Rarely a day goes by that I feel I haven't learnt something new. It's a reasonably honest profession too. There are those that may have the gift of the gab and are able to charm the pants off promoters and alike. But they can't fake being a good musician, certainly not in front of other good musicians.

You'll find recommendations in future articles for all kinds of things, including software I like to use. But please don't take these as gospel. There's always alternatives. I just want to let you know what I'm using and why.

So what exactly is a Jobbin' or 'session' musician ? I define them as a musician that can make a living playing one or more genres of music. One that most likely can read music. One that has respect for all kinds of music and musicians. One that has an assortment of varied clients all providing a healthy but unstable income. Survival depends on versatility. Be prepared to adapt to an ever changing industry. Be prepared to reinvent yourself. Certainly the biggest change I've seen since the 80s is the proliferation of technology in most facets of the industry. So always be on the look out for change. Don't delude yourself that the industry will carry you through on reputation alone. If you're of no use to industry, then you will soon become no use to you.

## WHERE TO BEGIN..?

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To be honest, the topic of being a musician is vast and frankly very personal. The rights and wrongs of this business are not set in stone and, as I've just mentioned, are constantly evolving. But I think it's fair to say the principles stay pretty much the same. You do a gig to the best of your ability. You get paid and then hopefully you get asked back.

But it's not just about playing the gig. Did you give that 120% extra effort ? Did you have the band in stitches in the changing room with your antics and witticisms. Playing your instrument well is a given I'm afraid. What else will make people want to ring you back for work time and time again ? Think about it because it will become important

One other consideration. When I was at the Royal Academy of Music, we had a lecture on post-student life. The lecturer finished with a simple, obvious but incredibly 'wake-up-and-smell-the-roses' comment. He said, "...and remember, the day you leave college and look for work, is the day you'll most probably be competing with your professors...". So think about that one too.

Have I put you off yet ? If not, maybe there's a chance you are destined to join this industry. If so, I wish you the very best of luck.