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# WORDS OF ADVICE FOR MUSIC STUDENTS

*(YOU GOT THE GIG BUT NOW WHAT?)*

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## THE PEOPLE BEHIND A PROFESSIONAL GIG YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

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So it's happened at last .....you got that gig and now you're faced with even more challenges that will lie ahead. What's the ideal gig for me ?

I consider myself very lucky. I've played some wonderful gigs in some beautiful venues. As a keyboard player, turning up to the venue with my gear already assembled thanks to the magnificent '**techie**<sup>1</sup>' (*a musical technician and roadie, often given the responsibility of setting up/packing down gear amongst other things*). The best ones normally come to your rehearsals and mark up all gear and leads with colourful stickers. Sometimes a photo is taken of the gear just to be able to remember the exact set-up and to know where the myriad of leads should go. The worst techies are often inebriated before and after your gig. Lose most of your leads that unbeknown to you were farmed out to others in need and never returned.

Are you properly prepared for this gig ? Have you done your homework ? Travel arrangements sorted ? Airport parking booked ? It's never ending it would seem...

But let's have a closer look at the various 'components' for that gig....

### THE MUSICIANS

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Chances are, that's what you want to be. And I don't use the term lightly either. Today's top session musicians are hard-working, multi-skilled, switched on and usually with an inherent gift for travel logistics ...

### THE MD (MUSICAL DIRECTOR)

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An assortment of characters await you. The 'Good' and the 'Bad' about sums it up. A good MD is the buffer between the musicians and just about anyone else involved with the gig. He is the spokesperson, sometimes the band councillor – the hirer and the firer. The negotiator and the delegator. And ideally he can play his instrument too but don't always count on this.

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And I still feel we've only just touched the tip of the iceberg. In essence, he should know what's going on and be prepared to deal with the proverbial crap as it's propelled into the even more proverbial fan. An on occasion he will be allowed to bath in glory but not for long.

What does he want from you ? The answer is usually simple – other than the obvious of expecting you to play your instrument well, it's peace of mind knowing you will remain efficient and enthusiastic and not give him any reason to panic.

## THE ARTIST

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This can be a total unknown. Unless you've worked with them before, you will have no idea what to expect. So your people skills need to be very finely attuned to their needs. It's not uncommon to see a certain level of insecurity. But then again, it's their reputation on the line when they walk onto that stage. So regardless of your appraisal of their musical output, give them the respect and enthusiasm they need and deserve.

## THE CREW

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Usually some of the most hard-working and loyal chaps you'll ever come across. Whilst I'm sure you'll be exhausted after your 2 hour gig, just imagine a typical day in the life of a crew member.

*8am – 10am – Arrive and unload Artic (lorry).*

*10am – 2pm – Set up stage and bands gear*

*2pm-2.15pm – lunch ....assuming you've bought it yourself (because the venue forgot to supply it)*

*2.15pm – 4pm – Sort out everything that should be working but isn't.*

*4pm – 5.30pm. Band sound check – be prepared for general moaning about sound and gear for various band members*

*6pm – take a break and find some dinner.....assuming there's no last minute hitches with the gig (in which case you can forget dinner)*

*7.30-10.30 - gig . Standby the wings and focus intently on every member of the band for anything to go wrong and be visible to the band members at all time.*

*11pm -2am – pack down and load back on to track-try to sweet talk the locally hired 'humpers' to work overtime for no extra*

*2am – 7am – drive from Truro to Gateshead*

*8am – start all over again !*

*(Groundhog day !)*

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## FOH ENGINEER

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As a general rule, you don't really need much professional contact with the Front-Of-House engineer. His/Her job is to make you and your fellow musicians sound wonderful to your paying audience. It is one of those times you hand over this complete responsibility to them because you rarely have any useful control over this aspect. How can you possibly know what the sound is like out front. From time to time, the better engineers might ask you to make nominal tweaks to your sound. Assuming these are agreeable suggestions, you should cooperate as it will make everyone's life easier on the long run.

## MONITOR ENGINEER

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Not the most enviable of jobs in this world. The best that most monitor engineers can hope for is to get it right. So perhaps you can imagine the worst case scenario.



It doesn't bear thinking about. Stay friends with him at all times because he has it in his power to make your life (stage life) and monitor mix a misery. Sounds checks are for the very purpose of getting your 'mix' right. Take care and time to explain what you need and insist, where possible, that your sound is right before you start. And be prepared for your mix to change, often for the worse, when the actual gig starts. It does happen so that's why its important to get it right during sound check so any diminishment is still within acceptable boundaries.

With experience, you'll soon figure out the best engineers. There are the one's you turn up to at sound check and miraculously the sound is already near perfect in your ears. I personally love a stereo mix in my ears – it can be like being immersed in a live recording

and very helpful for us keyboard players too with our varied sound palettes. The better your mix, the more natural your playing will be. Nothing worse than over-playing to compensate for a nasty sound.

## THE CLIENT

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Clients really do come in all shapes and sizes. Whether you're dealing with the bride's father or an audience of 20,000 people, they all have one thing in common, they've most likely paid for your services, whether directly or indirectly so whilst advice should always be offered, be prepared to have it mercilessly ignored. There will be the genuinely appreciative ones and then there will be the downright difficult ones

Many clients will struggle to understand the fees that musicians should charge. "All that money for 2-3 hours playing?" or "wish I was on that kind of hourly rate". Of course such clients will never take into account the travel time, the set up time, the inclusive provision of very expensive instruments and PA equipment, let alone the years of training to achieve what you do. But this is a fact of life. The sooner you get used to it the better.

# HIRING A MUSICIAN ?

OR ASKING THEM TO PERFORM AT YOUR EVENT ?

## What you think you're paying for:

- Someone to perform some music.

## What you are actually paying for:

- Someone to perform some music, plus:
  - Equipment and instruments.
  - Hours of rehearsal time.
  - Rehearsal space.
  - Transportation to and from the venue.
  - The amount of money spent on lessons and training to become the musicians that they are.
  - Promotion and website costs.
  - The percentages that goes to income taxes.
  - Telephone and Internet bills spent organizing the performance and its rehearsals.
  - Any manager, agent, or other booking fees.
  - Insurance.

Not to mention...

- The payment also has to cover food, housing, bills, and all other living expenses

## Still think that offering "exposure" and experience is a fair price?

*You wouldn't expect a plumber, carpenter, hairdresser, doctor, dentist, optician, electrician, chef, mechanic, dressmaker or shop owner to work for free, would you?*

**SHARE THIS WITH EVERYONE AND GET THE MESSAGE ACROSS**

So to make your life easier and your clients, you'll need to perfect the art of listening, understanding and assuring your client that their impending purchase of your services is indeed not only a wise move but actually great value for money. Make them feel good about their purchase. After all, it's not an everyday purchase for many, so 'value for money' is everything, or at the very least, the perception of it.

Listening sounds simple but actually, it's remarkably difficult to truly take on board. The customer is always right? Well that might be stretching the truth a little but ...



An interesting species. Many I have met tend to be loaners, but in a good way. The best tour managers are totally indispensable, the worst are a positive nightmare to be with. Always remember who's paying that tour manager and where his or her priorities will probably lie. It might help you to make sense of some of the nonsensical decisions that have to be made. But a tour manager's job is to stay calm and ensure the smooth running of that gig, from initial booking to the return journey home. It's not until that final stage that he can say his job is done. As an MD, I rely on close communication with a tour manager to know what's going on. Occasionally I'm required to 'filter' and sometimes 'censor' the info for the band members. One useful tip however I have found, is with any new tour manager, to clearly mark out the responsibilities of both the TM and the MD so that there's no misunderstandings later down the line where each other's responsibilities lie. Will it be the MD booking the rehearsal studio or the TM for example.

## THE PROMOTER

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I've been lucky. I've worked with some great promoters. Not only have they showed respect for musicians and their needs, they have paid invoices quickly and promptly

Now these are a diverse species. They come in all shapes and sizes. The bottom line is simplicity itself. They wish to make money. They've chosen music as a means to that end. Some of course will have a passion for music but in my experience, the best ones won't let that passion rule their head. If you are to be a negotiator with that promoter, never lose sight of their goal. And be happy if they are making money – because that means you will too. Never forget, they take the risks, they pay the bills. It could even be worth learning a little about corporate thinking. So many musicians tend to be so focused on their own personal gain and agenda that they forget the relatively small part they play in the money-making machine. It's all about 'bums-on-seats'.

If a promoter asks me to put a house band together for a gig backing famous artists and trusts me, I shall get on with the job in hand quietly and confidently. I'm careful not to bore the promoter with details and specifics. Because like any business, the boss usually just needs to know everything is going smoothly. The details are left for his managers to cope with.

## DEALING WITH FIXERS

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Just about every musical, touring or otherwise that has a band, normally has a fixer attached. You may come across them in orchestras, recording session bands. They are there to find suitable players for the job. They may be paying. Fixers need reliable players who get on with the job in hand and ask as few questions as possible. The best kind of musician I'm sure for a fixer is one they never need to speak to. Time is money so the less time dealing with a musician, the better. There is a tendency for musicians to get associated with one fixer. This can be both good and bad. You'll soon find out that certain fixers do have their foibles. Some are lenient with the dipping situation – others aren't. Certainly if you end up playing for a westend show from opening night onwards, be prepared for a possible 2-3 month exclusive – meaning you will play for every show and rehearsal with no exceptions. This can be a tough and testing time but of course the rewards further down the line speak for themselves – mainly money in healthy regular chunks.

Now of course there are often many other people involved with the preparation of a gig, but this I think is a good start in terms of understanding who you're most likely to deal with.