

The Rock Guitarist's Guide to Gigging

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You may be the number one guitar star in your basement or garage, but you haven't arrived as a musician until you've played a gig. Gigging, or performing, is the lifeblood of music. The thrill of playing for an audience is like no other. It's an affirmation of everything that drew you to the guitar in the first place: your love of music, your desire to translate that feeling into action, your need — and your right — to be heard.

Before you get foggy-eyed over this idealized picture, however, remember that a gig is also a business proposition. Whether you're playing a high school gym or Wembley Stadium, recording a demo or a number one hit single, you and your guitar are officially entering the business world. You will expect to be compensated fairly for your work, and your employers — the club owners, the record company, the bandleaders, and most important, the audience — will demand that you deliver the goods.

Getting the Goods on Gig Basics

Whether you're trying to find your way into a band, planning on creating a band of your own, or attempting to gain a spot the local watering hole's open stage night, you will need to know the basics of the types of gigs that are out there and what role you may want to play in a gig.

What's your type?

Gigs come in many forms, as the following list describes:

- ✓ **Society gigs:** Weddings, bar/bat mitzvahs, and corporate parties can be lucrative, but they're also demanding and light on creative fulfillment. Professionalism is a must. You'll need to know a wide selection of pop hits and jazz standards, own a tie, and learn how to smile through your 800th performance of "Feelings."
- ✓ **Club dates:** Yes, bars, coffeehouses, and nightclubs still do book live music. You can find jobs playing cover tunes or original music. Pay varies; some clubs offer a set fee, others give the band a percentage of the door (or bar receipts). Some clubs even have a "pay to play" policy — you pay *them* to play (sadly, this is not a joke). You are then responsible for selling your own tickets to make the money back.
- ✓ **Festivals:** Summer festivals, street fairs, and community and library concert series pay reasonably well and cater to a surprisingly eclectic variety of music. Contact your local Chamber of Commerce and other community organizations and see what they offer. These gigs usually have a long lead time, so book in advance.
- ✓ **Colleges and universities:** The college music scene is usually associated with cutting-edge music. Most school student organizations budget funds for booking bands for parties and concerts. Fraternities have also been known to throw the occasional soirée — just be sure to cover yourself and everything you own in plastic before entering the room.
- ✓ **Primary and secondary schools:** Your dreams of stardom may not include playing for an assembly of fifth graders, but such gigs pay well and can be quite fun. You'll need to build your show around an educational theme, but it needn't be dry: You can do a program of historic blues songs, a set that demonstrates the influence of Latin music on rock, or a biographical play about Jimi Hendrix. Use some imagination.
- ✓ **Ensembles:** Pit orchestras, for example, often employ electric guitarists, especially if they're working on contemporary material. Most of these jobs require good to excellent sight-reading skills, the ability to play with orchestral musicians and to follow a conductor, and an uncanny knack for getting it right the first time — every time.
- ✓ **Recording sessions:** The term gigging might be associated with live performance, but recording sessions also come into play. As a guitar for hire, you must learn how to create a part on the spot (or read one that's been written for you) and deliver a good, clean performance in just a few takes. With the advent of home recording and MIDI (musical instrument digital interface, which allows one person to program a whole series of instruments to play back automatically), full-on demo sessions — the traditional proving ground for upstart studio guitarists — are becoming scarcer, but opportunities do arise. When they do, you must jump on them.

Tell me who are you?

No matter what gigging situation you find yourself in — and hopefully, you'll get a chance to try all of the aforementioned — you must understand your role. Most musicians move freely from role to role — many players who make their living as sidemen also lead bands of their own, and vice versa. Here's a description of each role:

- ✓ **The leader:** This person sets a band's musical agenda, chooses the material, supervises the arrangements, and organizes the musicians and equipment. The leader either books the gigs herself or has someone else do so under her direction. Most important, she pays the band and therefore calls the shots.
- ✓ **The sideman:** This musician works for the leader as a one-time contractor (as opposed to a band member who enjoys a more exalted status). A good sideman knows how to add to the creative vibe without taking too much of the limelight. Versatility is the key because you must adapt your playing to each leader's tastes.
- ✓ **Band member:** A band is like a miniature tribal society. Some bands are totalitarian regimes, with a clear leader (usually either the chief songwriter or the guy with the PA system); others are more democratic, with every member having a say in all decisions. Many are pure anarchy — few of these ever make it out of the practice room.

As a band member, you'll be responsible for more than your own playing. Tasks such as booking the gigs, setting up the gear, and promoting the band, are usually divided up among the members. Even if the band is made up of your buddies, take all your tasks seriously and treat your bandmates as you would any coworker.

Finding Gigs

The music business can seem like an impenetrable wall, but in many ways it's like any other trade. If you do enough market research and target your product accordingly, you should have success.

Finding gigs can be easier than you think — if you know where to look. Check out these resources:

- ✓ **Local alternative weekly newspapers:** These are a great resource. Most list area clubs and the bands performing in them, and their classified sections can be full of musical opportunities. These papers can also be great for promotion — they may review your show or CD, or even do a feature on your band.

- ✓ **Open forums:** These forums such as “open mike nights” and jams are a great way to meet musicians and find out about a venue’s booking policy. The advantage is that you get to play without having to go through a formal audition. You can build up experience in front of an audience and hear other players do the same. You might meet a songwriter who’s looking for a lead guitarist, or find the singer of your dreams.
- ✓ **Union:** Your musician’s union local can lead you to professional gigs. Joining the union has some real advantages — including a pension plan and health insurance — if you’re working consistently.
- ✓ **Personal connections:** Friends and coworkers can also lead you to opportunities. You can have fun, gain experience, and meet other musicians by playing at parties and other social functions.
- ✓ **The ol’ walk-in:** You can do the old-fashioned technique of just walking in off the street to your local coffeehouse or bar and ask if they have — or are considering having — live music. Offer to play for free the first time, perhaps in a miniature “audition” set.

Bottom line: finding gigs is like improvising music — stay alert, keep your ears open, and be ready to follow a lead at a moment’s notice. But *finding* an opportunity is only part of the battle. Before you can deliver the performance that wows the audience and changes your life into an endless pool party, you must *get* the gig. And to do that, you must audition — either in person or through a press kit, which should include a demo tape or CD, or both. (It’s also a good idea to bring a press kit to the audition.)

Personal audition

A successful audition is equal parts talent, preparation, and personality. To get a gig with a band, you must fit in with the leader and the rest of the band — musically and personally.

- ✓ **Know the material:** You may have the fastest hands this side of Bill Clinton, but they won’t impress the leader of a folk-rock outfit whose last album was *A Tribute to the Dirge*. Your playing must fit *their* music, not the other way around. Ask the leader for charts or demo tapes and learn a few songs ahead of time. This sends the message that you’re serious.
- ✓ **Leave your ego at home:** Bandleaders find few things more off-putting than a hotshot who thinks he’s better than the rest of the band. Be humble, stay focused, and listen before you speak — or play.
- ✓ **Be confident:** When the time comes, play with authority and economy. Don’t be afraid to make a musical statement — just be sure to keep it short and to the point.

- ✔ **Be personable:** Make an effort to talk to each band member. Even small talk is okay, as long as you don't bend their ears about your summer vacation or the time your music teacher told you how great you were at reading the C scale.
- ✔ **Give them your background:** They'll want to know about your experience. If you're not comfortable talking about yourself, bring a resume and demo tape (this is a good idea anyway because it gives the leader a way to remember and contact you). Be forthright and honest — the leader may be willing to try an unknown, but no one likes a liar.
- ✔ **Come prepared:** The audition is your one chance to make a first impression. Make sure your guitar is in perfect working order, with new strings, clean pots, and all the other factors that make it putty in your hands. The same goes for your amp and effects. Treat the audition like a gig. If you have to make excuses, you may as well go home.
- ✔ **Arrive on time:** Musicians may have a reputation for casual timekeeping — don't believe it. Successful musicians are busy people with tight schedules, and their time is valuable. Your lateness says, "I don't value this gig."
- ✔ **Dress appropriately:** *Every* situation has a uniform. Attire is often the first clue people have about a person. If you're not sure how to dress, err on the conservative side — it's easier to convince a biker band that you own a pair of jeans and a t-shirt than to explain to an orchestra leader why you're using a brassiere as a pair of earmuffs.
- ✔ **Don't be afraid to ask questions:** You want them to offer you the gig, but you don't have to take it. Find out the details of upcoming shows, what's expected of you in terms of time and equipment, and — most important — what you'll be getting paid. This is crucial. If they fail to answer these questions to your satisfaction, find a polite way to say "Maybe next time."

Press kit

Whether you're performing solo, playing in a local bar band or touring the world to support your latest million-seller, you need a basic demo package, or press kit. Think of your package as a multimedia resume. It should detail your history and describe your strengths (we'll leave your weaknesses to others). A good demo package should also tell a potential employer an idea of your looks, goals, and — most important — your playing.

Following is a list of all the elements your press kit should contain:

- ✔ **Bio:** Keep it short and lively — about one full typewritten page is all you need. Focus the bio on your musical achievements and goals. You can tailor separate bios for specific jobs: focus on teaching experience when approaching schools, focus on performance experience when approaching a gigging band, and so forth.

- ✓ **Photo:** One clear, black and white glossy (or a presentable shot from your own printer) is all you need. Photo houses that cater to actors can reproduce large quantities inexpensively. Make sure the photo conveys the image you want your audience to see. If you're applying for the guitar chair in your church folk group, don't use that Polaroid of you, the bikini model, and the boa constrictor. Your publicity photo should have the contact info right on the photo too.
- ✓ **Press clippings:** Two or three relevant clippings are always a big help because they show people of your existence. If you don't have any clippings, try to manufacture some: Invite the press to gigs, send local writers demo tapes, and so forth. Note: Getting arrested for disorderly conduct is not a good way to generate a press clipping — you're not a drummer.
- ✓ **Demo tape or CD:** Each package you send out should have a demo tailored to the appropriate audience (see next section). Be sure to label all demo materials clearly with your (or your band's) name, contact info (including phone number and e-mail address), list of songs included on the demo, and appropriate copyright info. Label the CD or tape as well as the packaging; this way, if the leader loses your CD insert but loves your music, she can still get in touch with you.
- ✓ **Special skills:** If your assets include the ability to sing, double on bass, harmonica, or musical saw, or play pedal steel, classical, or slide guitar, let people know. This can only enhance your value.
- ✓ **Business card:** Every professional carries a business card. You can make your own with a computer or have your local print shop do the work. It's a small investment, but it lets the world know you're serious.

Demo tapes

Demo tapes (or CDs) are an essential part of the gig-getting process. If you have access to a dual-cassette tape recorder or computer and some basic digital audio editing software, you can create several different demo tapes or CDs, each focused on a specific type of gig.

A good demo, or *reel* (as it's known among professional musicians), is like a good pop song: short, lively, and full of hooks. Target your reel to your audience. If you're after a metal gig, leave off the bluegrass — unless, of course, the band plays grunge-grass. Have your various reels available at all times: Don't wait until you're up for a job to start making your demo.

Here are some points to keep in mind as you put your demo tape together:

- ✓ **Stick to the highlights:** Select your best work and present just enough of each piece to leave the listener hungry for more. Thirty seconds is long enough for most segments.



Songwriters and bands must include complete songs in their demos. Pick your top three and cut together a short “teaser” that highlights all three for the top of your reel, followed by the complete songs. Label the sections clearly (for example, “Track #2: “My Great Song [guitar solo only]”) to avoid confusion. This gives the listener an idea of what she has to look forward to.

- ✓ **Keep transitions smooth:** Avoid abrupt endings — you know, the kind that sound like someone walked in and turned off your amp in the middle of a solo. You have two choices — you can fade each segment out and separate it from the following by a short silence, or you can create a medley and crossfade between segments.
- ✓ **Show the big picture:** You may love to play blues-rock licks, but don't neglect other aspects of your playing, such as rhythm work, fingerstyle acoustic, or slide. Don't waste your whole demo on an eight-minute solo — the listener won't get past the first 30 seconds.
- ✓ **Make sure the recording quality matches your goals:** Demo recording was once an expensive proposition, but these days high-quality recording equipment is both affordable and easy to use. Make the cleanest, clearest recording you can. Many professional situations call for near-CD-quality demos. However, there are times when you can use a lesser recording just as effectively. A singer/songwriter looking for a collaborator may be satisfied with a cassette full of good ideas. A club owner or booking agent will not.

Having a Band of Your Own

Putting together a band of your own can be a tricky process. Your bandmates must share your musical vision, contribute fresh ideas to help that vision grow, and have enough musical ability to execute the material correctly. Good bands know how to communicate with one another and — by extension — the audience. As any episode of VH-1's *Behind the Music* will tell you, not all bandmates are the best of friends. But you should try and surround yourself with people you can get along with and trust.

Conducting auditions

Choosing the right player isn't always a matter of who's good, but who's *right* for the role. You can improve your chances of finding your musical Mr. or Ms. Right by preparing for the audition process. Consider the following points:

- ✓ **Be specific about musical style:** Let players know the genre you're playing and your musical influences. If you audition a metal drummer for your Eagles tribute band, you're wasting his time — and yours. Be specific about the look, age, and gender, and state them clearly.

- ✔ **Know your goals:** Are you planning on playing weddings, showcasing for a record deal, or just hanging out in the garage? You must answer this question for yourself before you can tell prospective bandmates what you want.
- ✔ **Budget plenty of time:** Set aside one or two nights a week for the auditions, and try to group as many prospects as possible into one day. If you have a gig upcoming, start the auditions as soon as possible. You'll need plenty of time to rehearse.
- ✔ **Be prepared:** Give prospects demo tapes, charts, a song list, or any other materials they need to prepare. This helps them get up to speed on your stuff and weed out the people who don't share your musical tastes. Use this as an opportunity to judge their commitment and work ethic: If they've had the charts a week and *still* don't know the material, move on.
- ✔ **Ask questions:** Find out about a prospect's background, goals, contacts, and additional skills. Playing ability is only a part of what makes a good bandmate — you may find hidden assets (such as that they own a sound system and a Winnebago) that can help your band succeed.
- ✔ **Be organized:** Let the prospect settle in and get comfortable, and then get down to work. Run through each song or section as crisply as you can. Be specific about what you want from them.
- ✔ **Show leadership:** You may be the one running the audition, but you're also under scrutiny. Be confident and show leadership ability. Stay cool — a drummer audition is no time to lose your temper with your bass player.
- ✔ **Get references:** Ask each prospect for a list of previous musical associates. Ask them about his playing — and his ability to get along in a band dynamic.
- ✔ **Keep contact information:** You never know when you might need to call someone back. Keep track of every person you audition. Even if they don't fit the current band, they might be the right player for the next one.

Auditions can be stressful and frustrating. Worse, a player that might seem like a good fit on day one might turn out to be a disaster by day three. If so, don't hesitate to make a change. The longer you let a bad situation fester, the tougher it is to fix.

Booking gigs

Most musicians love playing for an audience, but few enjoy the art of booking gigs. Almost all bands have one person who is volunteered for the role. If that person is you, be prepared for some hard work. Successful booking involves preparation, research, persistence, organization, and a thick skin. Oh, and lots of time on the phone.

- ✔ **Find the right venue.** No matter what style of music you play, there's a stage for you. Concentrate on the clubs or booking agents that cater to your audience. Don't be afraid to look outside your local area.
- ✔ **Make contact.** Don't send your package "to whom it may concern," because the answer will be "no one." Find out the name of the venue or promoter's booking agent. Some clubs have specific hours for accepting booking calls. Mark the time and charge up your speed dial.
- ✔ **Be prepared.** I've said this already, but it bears repeating. Assemble your press kits and demos *before* you start contacting venues and booking agents. When you do make contact, send all materials immediately.
- ✔ **Follow up.** Give the venue a call two weeks after you send your package. Politely ask if it has been received and when you might expect an answer. Make an "appointment" to call back a week or two later. This lets the booking agent know you're serious.
- ✔ **Be persistent but respectful.** Call regularly and let the booking agents know that you're serious about playing their club. Don't push too hard, though, even if the agent is stonewalling you. If you lose your cool, you can kiss any chance of a gig goodbye.
- ✔ **Keep the venue informed of your success.** Did you just pack the house at a local pub? Have you gotten some airplay on a college station? Is your drummer the new Calvin Klein underwear model? Let the booking agent know. If they think you can attract an audience, they'll book you — simple as that.
- ✔ **Prepare an audition set.** Many clubs have audition nights for new talent. You may be invited to play a short set (for free) to show your stuff. It's your chance to rock the house — don't waste it.
- ✔ **Get out and network.** One of the best ways to get to know your local music scene is to hit the clubs — as a member of the audience. Introduce yourself to the bands and the owner; make conversation with the soundman; take note of the size and makeup of the audience. You can get a leg up on landing a gig and find out about other possible area venues. You may even have a good time.

Rehearsing your band

Rehearsal is your chance to develop and nurture your performance. A good rehearsal is energetic, fun, and focused on the task at hand. You can divide the rehearsal process into two main tasks:

- ✔ **Developing and learning new material:** Go through each song in your set and assign parts. You can work on complete songs or hone in on specific sections, such as your guitar solo, until you have them right.

Use this period to refine your sound as well as your chops. Use the same settings and effects you plan to use on stage. Work with your bandmates to develop sonic balance and fluid dynamics.

- ✓ **Running through the set:** As the gig approaches, you should begin practicing the set as a whole. Work on transitions between songs, and time your set list itself (Are the songs organized according to tempo and feel? Do you have a dramatic arc in the way the songs are placed?). Practice the extras — such as announcing the songs and the band members. Make conditions as close to the actual performance as possible. An important component of running through the set is dealing with problems on the fly. If, for example, you break a string in the middle of a song during rehearsal, deal with it as you would at the gig.

Making the Show

You've secured your first gig, opening up for the Taskmasters at your local watering hole. You have a half hour to perform. Your next question is a good one: "Now what?" You must concern yourself with three areas: logistics, readying the gear, and performance.

Knowing the logistics

Your gig fantasies probably start with you on stage in front of throngs of adoring fans and end with you . . . well, never mind that. Unfortunately, few musicians spend much time thinking about getting to the gig. But logistics are important to your success. In a way, your gig starts the moment you make contact with the venue. This is your chance to find out all the gory details. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

In addition to the obvious information such as date, start time, pay, and number of sets, you must learn the information in the following list. The promoter or booking agent can answer most of these, but you'll have to find out others on your own.

- ✓ **Load-in time:** When should your band arrive?
- ✓ **Sound check:** Does the club offer a sound check? When?
- ✓ **Necessary equipment:** Many clubs have house P.A. systems (the P.A. is for *public address*); some even provide amps and drums (called a *back-line*). But some venues — especially outdoor band shells, private parties, and society gigs — require you to bring your own P.A. system.

- ✓ **Sound personnel:** Find out if the venue provides a sound engineer or sound staff. If so, open a line of communication. Tell them about your band and let them know about special needs — such as the extra electrical outlets for your smoke machine — ahead of time.
- ✓ **Travel time and directions:** Leave plenty of time for the unexpected, such as traffic jams, construction, a flat tire, and getting lost. Supplement your directions with a detailed street map. Don't rely completely on Web-based map systems, because they sometimes don't reflect current conditions or even the best route. If possible, travel with one or more bandmates. One person can stay in the car while the other goes into the venue and works out the load-in arrangements. You can prevent theft by moving your gear in shifts, so that someone is always with the equipment in the car.
- ✓ **Keep in contact:** Always carry a notebook that you dub your "Gig Log." Write down the venue's phone number and call ahead if you're delayed. Work out a contact chain with your bandmates: Know where you can reach each member at all times leading up to the gig. If you don't already own one, invest in a cell phone — it can save you if you're stuck in the middle of nowhere.
- ✓ **Parking:** This can be a major issue in a city, but also comes into play at large social gatherings. Remember, you're hauling heavy gear such as amps and speaker cabinets. You need to be close to the doors. Some private-party hosts or hostesses may not be aware the band needs to load in, and that your drummer likes to load in dressed in jeans, a T-shirt, and with a big leather wallet bulging out his back pocket connected to his belt loop with a chain.
- ✓ **Stage time vs. setup time:** Many clubs book four or five bands in a single night. Each plays a short set — say, 30 to 40 minutes. The time allotted to your performance slot may include setup time; in other words, if you have a 40-minute slot and it takes you 15 minutes to set up, you'll be playing for only 25 minutes.
- ✓ **Promotional opportunities:** If you're playing a new area for the first time, find out about local media outlets and other ways of promoting your gig. You must get as many bodies into the venue as possible.

Packing up the gear

Traveling light is great, but a gig is no time to be caught short. Make a checklist of all the items you need, and consult the checklist before you leave your house — and again when you leave the venue. The only thing worse than leaving gear at home is leaving it behind at the venue. Figure 1 shows a sample of how you might design a checklist. Make it small and narrow enough to stash in the receptacle of your choice (guitar case, gig bag, and so forth).

Jon's Gigging Checklist		
	<i>House</i>	<i>Club</i>
Guitar		
Amp		
Effects		
Tuner		
Picks		
Accessories (slide, capo)		
Cables and patch cords		
Power supplies and batteries		
Strap		
Strings		
Extension cord		
Multi-outlet power strip		
Guitar stand		
Amp stand		
Fold-up cart or dolly		
Notebook		
Pencil and paper		
Music stand		
Guitar toolkit		
Earplugs		
Stage clothes		

Figure 1:
A sample
checklist for
gigging.

Of course, just the checklist won't save you if your gear isn't in working order or if it's the wrong kind for the gig. Before you blithely check off the items make sure you consider the following points before you pack up the goods:

- ✓ **Guitar:** Make sure it has fresh strings, plays in tune, and that all the parts are in working order. If possible, bring a spare guitar along, too. You never know when you might break a string and have to make a quick change.
- ✓ **Amp:** Check that your amp is working before you head to the venue.
- ✓ **Cables:** These essential items are easily forgotten, but you can't play without them. Bring at least two cables for connecting between your guitar and amp. If one goes bad — or the bass player forgets his — you have a spare.

- ✔ **Strap:** This is an item that's often left behind. Keep an extra strap in your guitar case.
- ✔ **Effects/pedalboard:** Account for all the power supplies and patch cords you need to operate your effects. If you use more than a couple of pedals, assemble them in a pedalboard, as shown in Figure 2.
- ✔ **Tuner:** Electronic tuners are affordable and they let you tune silently on and off stage.
- ✔ **Picks and accessories:** Store spare picks and all your accessories in guitar case.
- ✔ **Strings:** Bring at least one complete set of replacement strings. Carry additional spares of strings that break more often, such as the high E.
- ✔ **Extra batteries:** The middle of a performance is no time to troubleshoot your effects or tuner. Keep the batteries fresh and have spares on hand at all times.
- ✔ **Tools:** Keep a toolkit with you wherever you go.
- ✔ **Extension chords, multi-power outlet strips, and adapters:** You may get to the venue — especially one not normally geared for music, such as a church or temple — and find that there's only one power outlet available, and it's 50 feet from the stage. Or it might have only the two-pronged outlets in the walls, and all your gear has three-pronged plugs. So you'll need one of those three-to-two adapters.



Figure 2:
A pedalboard can save setup time on stage.

- ✓ **Guitar stand and amp stand:** Always put your guitar on a stand when it's on stage. It looks more professional and is safer than propping the guitar against an amp or chair. An amp stand helps you position your amp for optimal projection to the audience. A chair will work too, but it looks pretty cheesy.
- ✓ **Folding cart or hand truck/dolly:** A luggage cart is light and compact. It's also the perfect size to hold two guitars in hard-shell cases, or one guitar and a small amp. Roll larger gear around on a hand truck or dolly. Resist the temptation to carry everything yourself — a slipped disk is no way to start your rise to fame.
- ✓ **Music stand:** Even if you don't read music, a stand can come in handy. Use it for lyric sheets, set lists, a travel clock, and to hold accessories, spare picks, strings, and your tuner.
- ✓ **Notebook, sheets of paper, and a pencil:** Use the notebook to keep directions, contact information, and track mileage and other gig-related expenses. The sheets of paper are handy for writing out quick charts and getting names for your mailing list.
- ✓ **Earplugs:** Ear damage is a serious problem among rock musicians. Protect yourself with earplugs that filter the sound to a safe level without blocking it out completely — you'll find them at most music stores and pharmacies. Wear the earplugs in a couple of rehearsals so that you'll be used to them when you take the stage.
- ✓ **Stage clothes:** Make sure you have everything you need — jacket, tie, pressed shirt, clean shoes, hair extension, nose ring, chain mail, cod-piece, rhinestone dog collar, and so forth — before you leave for the gig.

Setting up and being heard

Although there's no ideal stage position for the guitar, proper setup is crucial to delivering your best possible performance.

- ✓ **Elevate your amp:** If your amp doesn't have tilt legs built in, or if you can't afford a specially made amp stand, putting your amp on a stand helps it project to your audience and makes it easier for you to hear over the din of the band.
- ✓ **Make sure you can hear your bandmates:** A band can't interact unless all the members can hear each other. Listen for the other instruments during sound check and don't be afraid to ask the soundman to hear more bass, drums, or vocals. If necessary, move yourself and your amp so that you can hear well.
- ✓ **Don't play too loud:** Your job is to entertain the audience, not pulverize them. If you can't hear yourself, point your amp's speakers toward you or ask the soundman to turn you up in the stage monitors.

- ✔ **Keep your tools nearby:** Spare strings, picks, accessories, and other tools are useless if they're back in the green room or stored in the trunk of your car. Keep them handy in case of emergency.
- ✔ **Cable with care:** The cables that run between your guitar, effects, and amps are your lifelines to your audience. Secure the cable inside the strap of the guitar as shown in Figure 3. This will prevent it from popping out of its jack at the worst possible moment. Make sure that your cables don't interfere with the movement effects pedals.



Figure 3:
Secure the
cable by
tucking it
inside the
strap.



Avoid cables whose length is over 20 feet. They get in your way on stage and diminish sound quality. If you roam wide stages regularly, invest in a wireless system.

Presentation

Music may be your motivation, but a good performance consists of more than the right notes and a great sound. Presentation is just as important as execution. The audience takes its cues from you — if you look angry or nervous, you'll make the crowd uneasy. If you act bored, they'll *get* bored. If you look like you're having fun, they'll pick up on that too.

Your image is important — and image is more than wearing the right uniform for the gig or using cool graphics on your fliers. Your behavior is under a microscope every second you're on stage. The audience, the club owner, and even your bandmates are watching your every move. Follow these tips to improve your presentation on stage:

- ✔ **Stay cool:** Every performer gets butterflies before a gig. Being nervous is okay, but avoid fidgety behavior, such as noodling between songs or obsessing over your equipment.
- ✔ **Make contact:** Eye contact is important when you're playing. Look at your audience and let them know you're comfortable and are having a good time on stage.
- ✔ **Be respectful:** Don't talk to the singer during the bass solo, don't yell at the soundman between songs, and never — never ever never ever — fight with your bandmates on stage. If you have a problem, smile your way through the end of the set and discuss it quietly during a break — out of view and out of earshot of the audience and venue staff.
- ✔ **Be in tune:** Never play an out of tune guitar in front of an audience. Tune carefully before you take the stage, and use the tuner to correct any tuning problems that occur during the course of a set — silently.
- ✔ **Know who's boss:** If you're a sideman and the leader says you're too loud — you're too loud. If a club owner asks you to cut your set short to accommodate a crowd favorite, do it, even if it seems unfair. You can stand up for yourself later (remind the club owner how you did her a favor when you negotiate your next booking). A gig is no time to be an antagonist.
- ✔ **Have fun:** Enjoyment is contagious. Even if your music is sorrowful, play with a sense of joy and commitment. Your band and the audience will feed off your positive energy.
- ✔ **Let the audience know who you are and what's next:** Before the last song, introduce the band and promote any upcoming shows. Tell the audience that you'll be coming around with a mailing list and invite them to sign it.

After the show

The immediate aftermath of your show can be as important as the show itself. If you follow these simple steps, not only will the club owner be impressed with your professionalism and keep you in mind for upcoming gigs, but also you'll get an opportunity to increase your number of fans and keep a good working relationship among band members:

- ✔ **Break down your equipment in an orderly fashion.** Move quickly if there's a band behind you — they're just as anxious to hit the stage as you were. As you pack up your gear, run through your checklist and account for everything.

- ✔ **Get your money.** If you haven't been paid in advance, now's the time to collect your fees. If you receive cash, distribute each band member's share immediately, at the venue, but in private. This will save confusion later on. Some venues — such as libraries and festivals — pay by check. If so, let the band know (in advance) when to expect their shares.
- ✔ **Visit with the audience.** One of the best things about playing live is a chance to get immediate feedback on your performance. And don't just listen to the folks who love your every move. Some audience members, especially experienced musicians, can offer constructive criticism. Use this as an opportunity to learn.
- ✔ **Circulate a mailing list.** Now, aren't you glad you brought that notebook? Let the audience know that you want them to be part of your following.
- ✔ **Load up the gear.** When the time comes to load up the cars, have one band member stay behind at the club and watch the gear. Unattended gear in a crowded club is an invitation for thieves, and is just as vulnerable as an unattended vehicle on the street. Don't expect the club owner to know that the guy who just walked out with your '59 Les Paul isn't part of the band.
- ✔ **Thank the club owner or promoter.** Let them know you'd like to return to the club. Find out when you should make contact for your next booking. And write it down.
- ✔ **Tip the soundman:** In many clubs, this is standard practice. Inquire discreetly if you should show "remunerative appreciation" to the person running sound.



Whether your gig is around the world or around the corner, preparation is the key to success. Have your set down cold. Know the venue. A good way to do this (especially if the venue is local) is to catch another act there so you can get a handle on the general atmosphere and any acoustic eccentricities. Equip yourself properly and provide for the unexpected. Give yourself enough time to get there, set up, and get home. The sooner you have all these details under control, the more time you'll have to focus on the most important thing — your performance.

Hittin' the Road

Travel is one of the great perks — and hardships — of being in the music business. If your gig is beyond driving range, you'll need to take extra steps to ensure that you and your guitar arrive safely and are ready for action.

Traveling by air

Flying is stressful enough without the worry of having your guitar along for the ride. You have two options for transporting a guitar by air:

- ✓ **Heavy flight case:** Check the case with the rest of your luggage. Seal it carefully and put tape over the clasps to make sure they don't open in transit. Label the case with your name, contact info, and destination — this will make it easier to retrieve the case if it's lost in a luggage snafu.
- ✓ **Carry-on gig bag:** Most airlines will let you carry on a guitar in a gig bag, as long as the instrument is small enough to fit into one of the overhead bins. They can be less cooperative on crowded flights, however, so it pays to check ahead. Never check a gig bag (because it offers no impact protection whatsoever) with the rest of your luggage — your guitar will be toast.

Amps pose a greater challenge. You can secure your amp by putting it in a heavy-duty flight case, but be prepared to pay a weight penalty if you try to take it on the plane — they don't call those cases “heavy duty” for nothing.

Shipping your gear

You can ship your amp to your destination via a carrier such as UPS. Costly, yes, but it saves you the hassle of schlepping the amp through an airport. Pack the amp carefully and be sure to insure it for the proper value against damage. Tube amps are at greatest risk, since the tubes are made of fragile glass. Consider removing the tubes and packing them separately, or surrounding them with protective materials. Or, you can dispose with the whole problem by making arrangements to rent or borrow an amp at your destination.

Effects are relatively easy to pack. Most pedalboards fit into a suitcase. Wrap the effects in clothes, towels, or bubble wrap to protect them from jostling.

Going overseas

If you're traveling overseas, make sure your passport is in order. In fact, keeping your passport up to date at all times is a good idea — you never know when you'll need to flee the country. Also, make photocopies of your passport and leave one at home and carry one with you, but in a place separate from your passport. If you (heaven forbid) lose your passport abroad, a photocopy will often save the day.

Be aware that any country outside your own may use different electric power than your gear calls for. This won't hurt your guitar, but it can be an issue with an amp and effects. Find out about the power before you leave. You can rent the appropriate gear at your destination, or carry the appropriate voltage converters.



Some amps and effects have switches that let you configure them for various voltages. These are great tools for international touring.

