

ROAD RULES

TOUR ETIQUETTE FOR YOUNG MUSICIANS

Professional Tips, Decorum, and Responsibilities

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Touring can be an exhilarating and rewarding experience – if you are prepared for it. But if you are not prepared, or you do not comport yourself appropriately, it can be a huge drag for the entire band and crew while you establish a reputation of not having your act together – a reputation from which it’s hard to recover.

I. Networking

- A. Touring can be a superlative networking opportunity.
- B. Those with whom you are touring are often in a position to help jumpstart and/or boost your career.
 - 1. Hiring you for more gigs (concerts, tours, recording sessions, etc.).
 - 2. Recommending you to others (performing, recording, and teaching opportunities).
- C. How professionally you comport yourself is as important as how well you play.
- D. You only have one chance to make a first impression.
 - 1. Being regarded “such a pro” at a young age is the best.
 - 2. Being regarded “such an amateur,” the worst.
- E. A pro is someone who has it together, musically and otherwise. He or she is always prepared and on time, and needs to be told things only once.
- F. Besides playing jazz with integrity at an advanced level, the goal is to be as impressive as possible on *and* off the bandstand, prompting all those who have the ability to help you succeed in this business to do so.

II. Know the Music

- A. All the music for the tour should be solid under your fingers long before the tour begins.
- B. If you’ll be playing in a small group, this means the music should be totally **memorized** – heads, changes, harmony parts, backgrounds, hits, shout choruses, everything.
- C. Make a playlist of the definitive recordings of all the tour tunes and listen to them continually from the day you receive the titles through the day of the plane ride on the way to the gig.
- D. Know the personnel on the recordings.
- E. Practice along with the recordings, copping the phrasing, groove, and feel.
- F. Transcribe a few phrases from your favorite soloists on the recordings. This not only will increase your jazz vocabulary, but give you credibility when you quote them, subtly letting those with whom you’re performing (and anyone else in-the-know) know that you’ve done your due diligence.

III. Five-Minute Rule

- A. Always be at least five minutes early for all departures.
- B. Always be at least 15 minutes early for all rehearsals (set up and ready to play 15 minutes before the downbeat).

IV. Proper Attire

- A. Look sharp, put together, and clean.
 - 1. Nothing should look disheveled.
 - 2. An iron and ironing board are available at most hotels.
- B. When touring, bring a different shirt for each day.
- C. Before bringing in and setting up equipment, hang up your jacket or place it on the back of a chair, keeping it from getting wrinkled during the rigorous setup and sound check process.
- D. When you’re not on a stage but still in public, e.g., in restaurants, hotel lobbies, airports, etc., continue to look well put together. Casual, yes; sloppy, no.

V. What to Pack

- A. Your instrument in perfect working condition
- B. All necessary musical appurtenances (e.g., instrument stand; extra neck or guitar strap; extra strings, patch cords, picks, reeds, cork grease, valve oil)
- C. Drummers should always bring their own cymbals, hi-hat clutch, and stick bag (with sticks, brushes, mallets, and a drum key).
- D. Hard copies of all the music that was sent to you – the pages of each tune taped together – alphabetized neatly in a manila folder
- E. iPod or other listening device, including the definitive recordings of all tour tunes
- F. Phone charger (pack in your carry-on)
- G. Personal items
 - 1. Photo ID
 - 2. Money/Credit Card
 - 3. Alarm clock (or alarm clock app on your phone)
 - 4. Small umbrella
- H. Always have a hard copy of the itinerary on you.
- I. Make sure you have a couple of pencils at every rehearsal.

VI. Professional Responsibilities and Demeanor

- A. Be easy to communicate with.
 - 1. Check and reply to all emails daily, so the sender receives your response within 24 hours of sending it.
 - 2. Read each email thoroughly in its entirety and respond by confirming and answering all questions completely (don't just reply "got it").
 - 3. Respond to text and voicemail messages even more timely, that is, ASAP.
- B. Make sure you have everyone's phone number in your contact list (those of the road manger, each member of the band, and any others pertinent to the tour).
- C. Comport yourself professionally at all times.
 - 1. Keep the volume of your voice at a reasonable level.
 - 2. Never using any foul or offensive language or make any disparaging remarks.
 - 3. Be friendly, kind, respectful, considerate, appreciative, and accommodating.
 - 4. Don't be argumentative (it's not worth it).
 - 5. Don't complain about ANYTHING. Suggestions are cool (expressed politely), complaints are not.
 - 6. Behave in a mature manner.
- D. During rehearsals and performances, don't talk or noodle on your instrument while someone is talking. If you are in the annoying habit of always noodling between tunes, get out of it now.
- E. Don't make any excuses.
 - 1. Even if they're legit, keep them to yourself. (People rarely remember, or care, what the excuse was, but they do remember that you're a person who makes excuses).
 - 2. If you mess up, apologize, learn from your mistake, and move on (that's what a pro does).
- F. When at a reception or out to dinner with VIPs, put the cell phone away!
 - 1. Use this opportunity to engage them.
 - 2. How you comport yourself in these situations can make a big difference in your life and career.
- G. Meeting new people
 - 1. When introducing yourself to new people, look directly at the person to whom you're speaking, give your first and last name, where you are from, and what instrument you play.
 - 2. Speak clearly and loud enough to be heard easily.
- H. If you are provided borrowed or rented backline gear (drum kit, bass amp, electric keyboard, etc.), treat it with kid gloves so that the condition you return it in is as good as, if not better than, how you received it.

VII. Set-up

- A. If there are no roadies, help load in and load out the gear.
- B. When setting up the equipment, do so quickly and be as unobtrusive as possible so your band mates can easily set up around you.
- C. Drummers – once the drum rug is placed in performance position, put all the drum and hardware cases right next to the rug, unload the drums and hardware onto the rug, and then move the cases backstage before setting up the kit (that way, no one has to dodge them while setting up).
- D. *All* instrument cases should be put backstage stacked close to a wall so no one will trip over them (don't put anything on chairs or couches).
- E. Don't leave any superfluous items (e.g., instrument cases, bookbags, etc.) on the stage.

VIII. Soundcheck

- A. The sound engineer often likes to first hear one instrument at a time in order to get an initial mic level adjustment.
- B. Don't play or noodle on your instrument during this process until it's your turn.
- C. After the sound check, be sure to vacate the stage before the audience starts filing into the auditorium.
- D. Don't wander off before the set begins, that is, stay in close proximity to the stage and your band mates as there are often last minute changes, instructions, etc.

IX. Performance Tips

- A. Before taking the stage, think through what's about to happen; make a commitment to the music you're about to make.
- B. When performing, look at the soloist and your other band mates.
- C. Play close to the mic; don't bob back and forth (that way the sound engineer is better able to make adjustments and get a good mix in the house).
- D. Don't solo too long (the last thing you want is for your soloing to be thought of as self-indulgent).
- E. In the small group setting, horn players should step off to the side of the band when not playing, then return to the mic a few bars before it's time to play again.
- F. Always stay completely engaged, keep your place in the form, and think about what's coming next (e.g., backgrounds, trading fours, interlude, playing the head) as you don't want to be caught off guard and make the amateurish move of missing an entrance.
- G. Make it obvious that you're enjoying yourself (the better time you have, the better time your listeners will have).
- H. When talking to the audience, use eye contact and speak close to the mic (no more than an inch away), slowly and clearly. Have your winning personality, sincerity, and sense of humor shine through. Announce each tune you play (title and composer) before and/or after you play it. And don't forget to thank your audience for coming and anyone else who made your performance possible.

X. After the Performance

- A. Be easily accessible to the audience members who want to meet you.
- B. Be gracious, charming, and humble.
- C. Don't forget to thank your hosts.
- D. Make certain you leave the stage, greenroom, dressing room, and backstage area as or better than you found it, with no half-empty bottles of water or other trash left behind.

XI. Clinics

- A. Demonstrate on your instrument as much as possible, but don't play anything that is too technical or theoretical (or "outside") for those whom you're instructing to grasp.
- B. Utilize *active* teaching/learning techniques, i.e., it's far better for those whom you're teaching to be active (e.g., playing their instruments) rather than just sitting and/or note taking.
- C. Make sure those you're teaching leave the clinic with at least three things they didn't have before, for example, better technique, new piano and/or guitar voicings, tonguing/slurring concepts, improved swing feel, a practice plan, a list of important recordings to check out, etc.
- D. Be as positive, inspiring, and encouraging as possible.

XII. Murphy's Law – Using it to Your Advantage

- A. Murphy's Law – the adage that “what can go wrong, will go wrong” – shows up on many a tour. For example:
 - 1. It begins to pour just as you're leaving the venue.
 - 2. Your cord goes bad during your guitar solo.
 - 3. The hotel wakeup call didn't work.
 - 4. A bass string breaks in the middle of the set.
- B. Murphy typically won't arrive unless you're unprepared, for example:
 - 1. It will rain when you don't have your umbrella handy.
 - 2. Your guitar cord will malfunction when you don't have a spare easily accessible.
 - 3. The hotel wakeup call won't work when you haven't set your own personal alarm.
- C. Ergo, if you are totally prepared, it helps keep Murphy at bay, i.e., it won't rain, your cord won't break, and the wakeup call will come through!

XIII. Airline Travel Tips

- A. Check in for your flight online 24 hours before departure.
- B. Plan to arrive at the airport at least two hours before departure (remember Murphy's Law).
- C. Don't forget your government issued photo ID (e.g., driver's license or passport).
- D. Never check your instrument as baggage where it could get lost, damaged, or stolen (yes, all three have happened); rather, personally bring it on the plane with you and stow it in the overhead compartment above your seat.
- E. If having to change planes on route to your final destination, hustle to the next gate, getting there in plenty of time to make your connection.
- F. If you don't have a frequent flyer number for this airline, sign up when you check in to start accruing points on this flight for free travel and other amenities in the future.
- G. Download the airline's free app, making subsequent reservations, check-ins, flight changes, and the like a snap.
- H. If your plane is delayed, text the road manager immediately, providing your new arrival time.
- I. If you have a connection that you're not going to make, speak with an airline agent ASAP to book another connecting flight.
 - 1. If you don't realize this until you're already in the air, book another connecting flight using the airline's app or go to its webpage if the aircraft is equipped with Wi-Fi. If this fails, call the airline the second you land, that is, while you're still on the plane, and speak to an agent.
 - 2. Those who are savvy enough to do this right away are far more likely to get on another flight sooner rather than later, as it's first come first served.
 - 3. Make it clear to the agent that you are an artist who has a performance that evening and that you absolutely must make the gig. Be kind and respectful, but be firm.
- J. Continue to update the road manager regarding your arrival time as you receive further information.
- K. The two best activities during plane travel:
 - 1. Listening to the definitive recordings while visualizing and miming the fingerings
 - 2. Sleeping
- L. Practicing without instrument in hand and sleeping on the plane are chops all pros possess.

XIV. Per Diem and Saving Money

- A. On most tours you are provided a per diem, that is, cash for your daily meals and other incurred road expenses.
- B. Stay ahead of the per diem. For example, if you are provided \$50 per day, live on \$45.
- C. A pro always returns home with leftover per diem cash.
- D. You can save money on the road by always taking advantage of the freebies that are often provided, for example:
 - 1. complimentary breakfasts at many hotels
 - 2. bottled water and snacks in the greenrooms
 - 3. meals provided by the venues in which you are performing

XV. Know the Itinerary

- A. Read and re-read the entire itinerary thoroughly prior to the tour so you know what's up ahead of time.
- B. During the tour, read the next day's itinerary each day before, noting whatever you need to do or bring to get through the next day comfortably. For example, if a lunch break is not included, bring a couple of pieces of fruit or whatever to tide you over.
- C. Besides having an e-copy of the itinerary on your phone, always have a hard copy on you throughout the tour.

XVI. Questions

- A. Questions are a good thing, but don't ask them if you should already know the answer. For example, don't ask what time is lunch or what time you depart the next day; that's on the itinerary and a pro knows what's on the itinerary.
- B. Don't ask stupid questions.

XVII. Downtime

- A. Use your downtime to take advantage of the things your location has to offer that your hometown doesn't. For example:
 - 1. If you're in New York, go to the Statue of Liberty, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and one of the iconic jazz clubs.
 - 2. In Los Angeles, it's the Getty, Venice Beach, and Universal Studios.
- B. When possible, experience the local cuisine.
- C. Don't just sit in the hotel room and watch TV and eat at McDonalds (you can do all that at home). Rather, learn, grow, and be inspired by your different surroundings, becoming evermore cultured and worldly.

XVIII. Follow-Up

- A. Once the tour is over, be sure to email everyone involved (tour sponsor, road manager, guest artists) to say thank you. Thank them for their superb musicianship, tutelage, and friendship. This is not only the right thing to do, but it will go a long way in their remembering what a fine person and pro you are.
- B. Share with your peers back at home what you learned from your experience, and help them progress in any way you can. It's now your time to give back.

XIX. Additional Professional Comportment

- A. If an unforeseen circumstance or other conflict arises and you are unable to fulfill a commitment you made, give as much notice as possible, e.g., if you are going to be late or unable to make a meeting, rehearsal, gig, etc., let the leader/manager know ASAP (i.e., as soon as you know). Apologize.
- B. If you can't make a gig or rehearsal, it is your responsibility to send in a reliable sub, i.e., someone who is capable of handling the gig (musically and professionally) and of whom the leader/manager approves.
- C. If somebody does something for you (e.g., gets you a gig, writes you a recommendation letter, gives you a ride, loans you equipment, etc.), thank them verbally **and** in an email or text.
- D. Have a friendly disposition and always be easy to get along with.
- E. If you have personal problems, keep them to yourself.
- F. Always come through, and do everything to the nines.

XX. Final Thoughts

- A. The only way tours truly succeed is when *everyone* is professional.
- B. If you take heed to the advice above, you won't believe what an educative, musical, exhilarating, productive, career-building, and fun tour you will have!
- C. If you don't, it can be an exasperatingly unpleasant experience for everyone involved, making it difficult to ever recommend you for anything.
- D. Great opportunities only knock a few times in life. Make sure you answer.