

PREPARING TO PERFORM

OK, so you've written the material, got the set together and you feel you are ready to expose yourselves to the general public – time for a gig. Starting in your local area is probably best as it will be easier to manage, cheaper and you have more chance of building up a following. Let's assume you've secured the local gig, second band on a three band bill at a local showcase night on a Tuesday – what do you need to do to ensure this runs smoothly?

Mentally prepare

Keep calm and run through the gig in your mind in advance.

Does all the equipment work?

At your last rehearsal before gig day, ensure that all your equipment is in good, healthy working order. If there is anything that is intermittent, unreliable, buzzing unnecessarily? If so, get it fixed before the gig – technical failure will soon get in the way of your performance.

The Stage Plan

Plan who is going to stand where and where the equipment is going to go. This is something that should come out of the rehearsal process. You will then have had a dress rehearsal with this line up so you can get an idea of what it will feel like at the gig.



"Sometime before the gig, physically check out the venue as regards any problems loading your equipment. Stairs, for example, can be a nightmare as can long corridors, small doorways etc. (Remember to use wheels on heavy equipment). Can your transport be parked near the stage area? Check out access to and size of the stage. Do you need extra cable extensions for power points?" Mark Singleton

EQUIPMENT AND TRANSPORT



The “back line” is the band’s equipment
Amps, drums etc that will be mic’d up through the house PA. Monitors are speakers that allow the musicians to hear what is coming through the PA system - another common term is **foldback**.

Getting organised & packing the gear
Be organised and methodical. It is very easy to forget one crucial piece of equipment that could affect the whole gig. Get a tick list together to ensure all the right equipment leaves the rehearsal room and returns to the rehearsal room in one piece. Even if you don’t use a physical list, go through the process mentally.

EXAMPLE EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

EQUIPMENT	OUT	IN
Kick Drum		
Snare		
Rack Toms		
Floor Tom		
Cymbals		
Traps Case (drum Stands)		
Kick Pedal		
Bass Amp		
Bass Cab		
Guitar Amp		
Guitar Cab		
2 Keyboard Amps		
Bass Guitar		
2 Guitars		
Ensonique		
Farfisa		
Production Case and gaffa tape		
Back Drop		
Merchandise Case		
Spare strings, picks, battery and fuses		
Toolbox (screwdriver, pliers)		
RCDs (circuit breakers) and extension leads		

Use **flight cases** if you can afford them. It’s also more likely you’ll get insurance if you use them. A **production case** is also really useful as this can be the central box for storing mics, leads, stands and other bits’n’bobs that are easily lost. Have a check list in this bag / case as well.



Keep like with like together and this will make managing the gear much easier e.g. start with the rhythm section and work your way through the band’s equipment – are all the drum kit parts together, amps, instruments, keyboards, leads, production case, stands etc? Is everything packed safely and securely?

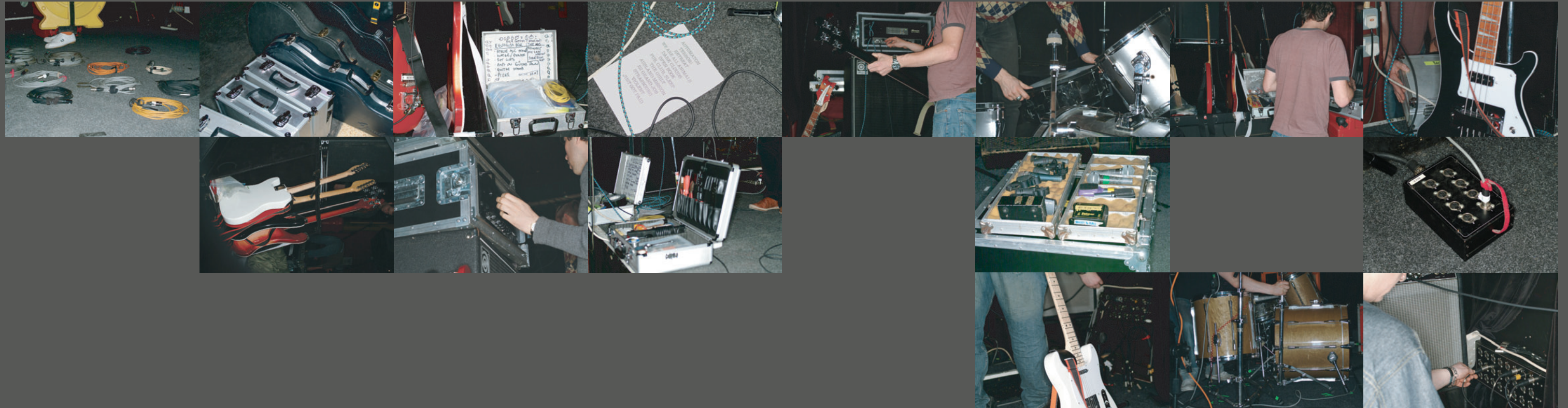
Always carry spares Leads, sticks, guitars, 4 way, power breakers, tool kit, batteries, fuses, plectrums. Things do go wrong, break, run out, snap, get lost at gigs. – it’s the very nature of live performance.



Getting to the gig. **Use a van**. This is much more professional than packing gear into your mate’s dad’s car and it also allows you to keep all the gear together. If you hire a normal Transit type van, there is room for three to sit in the front so you will need a car to get the rest of the band there unless they make their own way (which is also potentially dangerous as musicians can get lost...) Don’t be tempted to pack the musicians into the back of the van too, this is illegal and you will get pulled over by the police before you even make it to the gig.



AT THE VENUE



TIP

Set up safely and make sure you know whose equipment is whose if you're sharing a night with others.

THE SOUND CHECK

Once you have set up the gear on stage you will need to do a sound check. Unless you have your own sound engineer with you, the venue will supply a house engineer – a (wo)man whose job it is to mic up the equipment, get a balance right between all the instruments and pump it through the venue’s PA (Public Address) system.

Sound checks have a very specific order and there is a professional way to manage the sound check. They vary in time wildly depending on the engineer and band – they can usually take anything from half an hour to well over an hour. Generally they will start with the drums where the engineer will work through the kit in a methodical manner – starting with the kick (bass) drum, snare and then hi-hats. Once these have been mic’d up satisfactorily, the engineer often gets the drummer to play a simple groove using kick, snare and hats to get a general mix between the three. Next will be the rest of the kit.

The bass is often next. This can be mic’d up (stick a mic in front of the bass cabinet) or it can be DI’d (where a DI Box is used to directly input the bass into the PA). Engineers then like to have the bass and drums play together for a while to get a balance between these two instruments at the backbone of the band.

The rest of the sound check varies depending on what the line up of the band is. Typically guitar will be next, then keyboards and finally vocals. Once all the elements of the band have been sound checked individually, the band gets to play a few tunes to allow the engineer the chance to get the mix right between all the instruments. When playing through the songs in the sound check, try to choose contrasting songs so you try to cover the variety of the set.



TIP

Sound Check Tips

- Be patient, professional and don’t noodle!**
It is the kiss of death for any musician who noodles during the sound check. If the engineer is sound checking the kick drum, (s)he will not want to hear your favourite guitar lick and (s)he will not be impressed by your newly developed two handed tapping technique – engineers do this all the time and have a job to do – save it for your fans.
- Keep the back line down**
A common mistake is for musicians (especially guitarists...) to turn their amps up too loud on stage. If your amp is too loud, you will not be put through the PA and this will have an effect on the final mix. Remember what settings you leave things on.
- Can you hear what you want?**
If you can’t hear yourself, then (politely) ask the engineer to address this – don’t ignore it as it could well affect your performance.
- Don’t hog the show**
If you have managed to get the sound that you want fairly quickly, then wrap it up as there are often other bands waiting to sound check and time is precious.
- Monitors**
There will be some monitors on the stage to allow you to hear different elements of the band (often mainly just the vocals). Sometimes monitors are split which means that different monitors can have a different mix. Monitors can be split “front and back” so that the drummer can have a different mix to the rest of the band. More systems will have them split in pairs at the front of the stage or even individually, so that different musicians can hear different instruments. What each musician will hear is also going to vary on where you are situated on the stage (i.e. how close you are to your own and the rest of the band’s amps). Getting the monitor mix right is crucial – if you cannot hear what is going on it will affect your performance considerably.

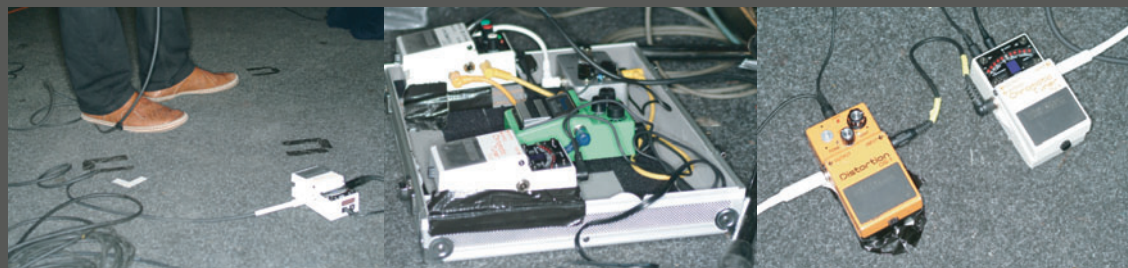
PRE GIG FOCUS

Depending on where you are on the bill, the gap between sound check and performance could be quite short (e.g. first band on who normally sound check last and go on first) or there may be quite a few hours before you go on for the performance itself.

Don't fall into the temptation of consuming copious amounts of alcohol before the gig as this will undo all your hard work in the rehearsal room. Try to relax, rest, eat and get into the right frame of mind for the gig. It is often useful to get out of the venue room for a while.

At least 10 minutes before you go on, give your instruments a final tune before you put them on the stage and ensure that all leads, effects pedals etc are secured to the floor using Gaffa Tape.

Once all the gear is set up and ready to go try to get a few minutes with your fellow musicians in the dressing room before you go on. Try to focus as a group on the performance and draw together on the group energy. Madonna, for example, is famous for praying with her musicians before they go on stage. There are many games and other devices that can be used to help get you "in the zone" for a performance – try to experiment with some of these and see if they help you.



THE PERFORMANCE

How you start your gig is crucial. From the moment you walk onto the stage the performance has begun. Some bands use an “intro tape” to help set the scene before the performance. Try to think back to performances you have seen and how the band presented themselves as they took to the stage.

Always aim to start your set as quickly as possible and get straight into it. Checking that your gear is on and works and noodling around just before the start of a set is completely unprofessional and will come across as such – don’t do it!!

When you are on stage, you are the artist and are no longer just a punter. You have to come across as if you really believe in your performance and that you mean it. How do you want your audience to perceive you?

Body language and eye contact with other musicians are a must. If there is a problem and you spend the set staring at the floor, you have little chance of knowing what’s wrong and what you can do about it (e.g. if the guitarist has broken a string and needs to change guitars between songs).

Communicate with your audience: looking out towards the audience (often above them a little) can come across well as you will be seen to be presenting the music to the audience – try not to ignore them!

Technical failure in performance – having technical spares (strings, guitar, leads, sticks) is crucial – things can and do go wrong in live performance and it is crucial that you have a back up.

Try to avoid resorting to jokes about your mother in law while the guitarist is changing his/her string – this can turn your professional show into a poor amateur effort. Try to use the music to fill the gap where possible or even use the silence to build the tension before you start the next song. In this sort of situation it may be possible to jump to a different song in the set to keep the momentum going or even get the rhythm section to play a groove or get you guitarist to repeatedly strike a chord to keep the energy in the set and build the tension until the next song can start – whatever you do, think and act like a professional.





AFTER THE GIG

OK, so the show's over and you want to meet the adoring public – what about the gear? When you walk off stage after the last encore, your work is not done! Pack up your gear as soon as possible after the show (particularly guitars and fragile equipment) and ensure that you can account for everything. Stages can be dirty places so it is worth having a packet of wet wipes in your kit bag so you can wipe the leads etc. down before packing your gear away. The sooner you pack up after a gig, the sooner you can relax and account for all your equipment, ensuring none gets stolen or lost.



“Most musicians work late and usually long hours and this can often lead to a situation where chances are taken and the most important thing is either getting to bed or stopping for a Chinese takeaway... leaving the equipment outside for ‘just a minute’ - well that’s all it takes and it’s gone.” Mark Singleton

Bands often evaluate a performance in an informal way, often in the van on the way home from a gig. Some points you might want to consider include :

How well did you all perform?
Was the set the right running order?
Did you all interact well with each other and the audience?
Did you win the audience over and did they enjoy it?
Were there any technical problems and could these have been prevented?

It is worth getting the engineer to record the gig if possible or getting a friend to video record your performance so you can see what it looks like visually – you may well be surprised at what you actually look like when you are up there...



CASE STUDY
JON – DJ

Jon is a very experienced international DJ, remixer and producer. He works in a variety of different settings, including DJing and promoting local, national and international events, working as a musician, teacher and producer.

He regards himself as a DJ, producer and writer, having built his reputation up in all of these areas over the last 15 years, after a short spell working in a local record shop when he left college.

There is no such thing as a standard day, but most days involve around 4 hours of teaching and 6-7 hours working in his home studio, catching up on E-mails, organising gigs etc. A lot of time at the weekend is taken up in travelling to and from gigs – the actual performance time in any week is relatively small.

Jon would place musical knowledge and intelligence as key skills needed to do this work, as well as high level practical skills related to the production of music. Although he’s got a degree, he doesn’t have any qualifications in music which have helped him get where he is – it’s more about getting out there and doing it yourself, have the perseverance and the love of music!



Jon’s tips

Don’t go into music for the money. Some years you’ll get paid great, others you’ll struggle to make ends meet.

CASE STUDY
COLIN – GUITAR, KEYBOARD, VOCALIST IN A FUNCTION BAND



Colin plays lead guitar, keyboards and backing vocals in a covers, function band in the NW and also earns money doing some peripatetic guitar teaching in local schools. If things become too tight he still manages to do some building work with his dad’s company.

Playing in bands since he was at school, Colin first realised there was money to be made on the covers 'cabaret' circuit, when his band got paid from a ‘whip round’ at a local working men's club. The band’s next aim was to find an agent who could put them out on a more regular basis, getting paid to do something they loved.

Gradually the cabaret and covers scene became a bit of a chore and Colin decided to try his hand at writing original songs. After a few years of near misses and some false dawns and the arrival of small feet – Colin realised that to survive he would have to revert back to the covers circuit, but continued writing songs in the hope that someday Kylie may pick up on one.

He now had more skills and experience as a musician and, having the equipment to do more up-market gigs, Colin decided to move into corporate / function work, knowing the money and conditions would be better. Training as a peripatetic teacher and having two half days work at a local school, he could afford to be a little bit more fussy as to the choice of venue.



Colin's tips

- 1 Be professional and polite to everyone you meet in the industry. You always seem to bump in to them at another time or place.
- 2 If working through an agent, be prepared to travel but set a distance you are comfortable with.
- 3 Agents don't really care how far you are travelling as they will receive the same fee whether you travel 300 miles or 10 miles.
- 4 Buy the best equipment you can afford and practice till you drop, learn as many different styles as possible.
- 5 There are thousands of guitarists out there, try and be one of the best.
- 6 Learn to sing, everyone's looking for musicians with backing vocals.
- 7 Don't despair if you are having a bad night in a rotten club, there are worse jobs.
- 8 Get anywhere you are going early.