

## **Getting Paid for Performances**

by Dennis Winge

In his book "For Guitar Players Only," Tommy Tedesco said it perfectly: "When you take a job, it should have one or more of these qualities: good money, fun, connections for the future, learning. If it doesn't have any of these, forget it. Move on."

This succinct advice seems so obvious, but has not only helped me on numerous occasions, but there were also many times in which I did not take this advice and suffered the consequences. These are the consequences I am hoping to spare you, so we are going to dig deeper into each area.

Today we will discuss the first quality: money.

Oftentimes if there is no mention of monetary compensation when an amateur musician is asked to play, then there was no money intended to be exchanged by the asker. It is a judgment call whether to ask for money when you are a beginner or intermediate player. An early intermediate player may not care whether there is any pay upon being invited to play at a friends' birthday party as much as a pro would, but knowing in advance whether there is any money would be good to know. If a gig has at least one of the other qualities (fun, connections, learning) and you feel uncomfortable asking for money (to play at the birthday party, for example), then don't ask.

On the other hand, recognize that how good or not good you think you are has nothing to do with whether or not the participants of the event benefit by your playing there, and that what you do has value. So even if you ask for pay and are declined, you can still choose to play there, but in the asking, you strengthen your skills to ask in the future. If you are not sure how much to ask for, simply start with a question like "what is your budget for this event?" Sometimes, if the person booking you has no budget, just by your having asked the question they will think of what else they can offer you (like promotion, free beer, etc.) that they may not have thought to offer you had you not asked.

Advanced players should (and usually do) ask for compensation for their services. Taking a gig for no money could happen but only with a clear understanding of why you are doing it. In other words, ask yourself "who I am doing the favor for and what do they already give, or will give, or will potentially give to me in return?" If you don't ask this question internally, you may resent having said yes to do the freebie.

This happens to me sometimes when being asked by a non-profit to do a fundraiser for such-and-such a cause. They'll say "this is our first year and we don't know how much money we can raise" etc. So I ask myself "is this a cause to which I feel moved to donate my time?" If yes, I take the gig and ask for a tax-donation letter with the estimated value of my services that I can use against my taxable income at the end of the year. If no, then I ask myself "Is there any real potential benefit for developing a long-term relationship with this organization?" There's nothing like getting in at the

ground level with a venue that has real growth potential, although there is also a risk that they could use you for the freebie or low-paid events and then hire a bigger, more established band when they grow and have bigger events.

Again, it's all a judgment call on your part, but two things to consider here:

1. You could always say "yes I will do it for nothing but could you sign an agreement that says I will be considered first for any other events you do for the next x number of years?"
2. Most established non-profits know very well that paying a good band generates a great atmosphere that people will tell their friends about and make future events even bigger and better, so they are happy to invest in good entertainment even though the expense goes against their bottom line.

Once it has been established that money will be exchanged for a gig, offer to make a contract with the person who booked you. This will be discussed in a separate article, but, briefly: be aware that having an agreement is a great advantage to the person who booked you because it protects their money (and it's a great advantage to you for obvious reasons). Call it an 'agreement' to make it sound less formal, and allow it to be as elaborate as an attorney-drawn document to as simple as an exchange via text or email of the details of the event so that there is a written record of some kind in case any mix-up occurs before, during or after the event.

So remember: value your time and your talent, and you will command greater respect just by doing so. Money is simply the tool whereby value is exchanged, so don't feel uncomfortable asking or at least inquiring about getting paid for a gig. Here's to your taking lots of great gigs and getting paid well for them.