

Notes from the movie “The Gig”

By Dennis Winge

There is a great movie from the 1970’s about musicians called “The Gig” and its all able to be seen for free (currently even without ads) on Youtube at the following link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jwqSq_CrSE

For those of you who are interested in watching the movie, let it be said that the pacing is slow and the film quality is poor. But it has a lot of useful points about being a musician that makes watching it well worth it. Spoiler alert: If you do intend to watch the movie, then I suggest that you postpone reading the following points because it may give away some of the plot line.

But If you are not going to watch the movie, you may read the following points made in the movie as a substitute, although they won’t be nearly as good as seeing the real thing. They are no particular order and may even overlap each other a bit. They came to me the morning after having seen it, and I hope you find them valuable.

- Touring can put a strain on interpersonal relationships like marriages.
- Race has no relevance in music-making.
- A pro musician knows what he’s worth and is not afraid to ask for it.
- Pros are always respectful to others, but can often be curt in conversation.
- Pros can play songs they have never heard before on the fly just by their musical instinct and their ear.
- Amateurs fail to get all the relevant details of an engagement ahead of time. They let their passion and zeal override logic.
- Amateurs are unable to see a bigger picture on an engagement. In other words, to know what to play first, last, and in between.
- Pros are versatile enough to know what to play and when, and can even walk the rest of the band, though unrehearsed, through an engagement when necessary.
- Pros are always on the lookout for extra wages, and they know that last minute changes are a perfect time to negotiate with venues are not afraid to do so.
- Amateurs sometimes try to deceive themselves, each other, their families, or venues about what they can and cannot do.
- Amateurs take things personally when they are denied opportunities.
- Pros have an extensive network of other pros who can fill in on gigs in a pinch when the wages make it worthwhile.
- Amateurs are sometimes more interested in the non-musical perks that come with certain gigs than they are about the wages.
- Pros are willing to endure inconveniences of travel and accommodation in exchange for good wages.
- Pros will avoid hiring amateurs, even to the extent that they might shift instrumentation accordingly.
- Pros can read charts on the fly.

- Pros can handle a wide variety of musical situations with ease and grace.
- Amateurs are more likely to decide to quit due to their feelings being hurt, even when doing so would seriously jeopardize an engagement for the other musicians.
- Amateurs underestimate the power of the first song they play in its ability to set the mood and give a first impression that will pervade the entire engagement.
- Amateurs may be inclined to let their personal musical preferences influence what they play, and sometimes an audience will love them even more for it.
- Pros sometimes resent amateur bands for taking good gigs, as they feel that it takes away from their own opportunities.
- Pros are willing to work with amateurs if the price is right.
- Pros rehearse and are meticulous to detail.
- Pros try to maintain good interpersonal relationships, yet sometimes get frustrated with lack of talent, skill, or preparation in other musicians.
- Pros compliment other musicians on their talent and skill when appropriate.
- Amateurs can potentially be more overtly confrontational in stressful situations.
- Amateurs have good hearts and feel the emotion in music. Pros do as well, but are less often willing to show it.
- Amateurs are often unprepared for the practical hardship of traveling such as vehicle maintenance, shabby accommodations, and loneliness on the road.
- There can be a lot of pressure on the musician who has acquired fame to live up to his or her reputation. Sometimes that pressure results in their being demanding, high strung, or even rude.
- There can sometimes be highly stressful situations in which there is pressure on the promoter or venue to attract a sizeable audience for a well-known, but past his prime, artist.
- There can be tension between musical director and an artist in delivering what the artist wants on short notice.
- There can sometimes be back-stabbings in the music industry in competitive situations. This can either mean psychological manipulation, or outright violence.
- Amateurs are lured by the opportunity to play along-side musicians with great reputations or those who have played with big names.
- Pros are much more matter-of-fact about playing with well-known stars.
- Pros will not tolerate being disrespected by amateurs, and will demonstrate their prowess when necessary.
- Sometimes a life or death situation can help us reprioritize our lives to include more of the things we love, and less of the things we think we should be doing. Music is often in the former category.
- Playing music in dedication to a musician who has died can be a very powerful and moving experience.
- Relationships formed on the road are almost always short lived and can rarely be very meaningful.
- “Devotion isn’t enough” for an amateur to qualify for a pro situation. In that respect, music is “not a religion”
- Amateurs are less likely to play at a volume-appropriate level.

- Overzealous practicing cannot make an amateur into a professional overnight.