

Taking Gigs for Fun

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; it has not only helped me on numerous occasions, 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 second quality: fun.

The word amateur means someone who is not a professional and generally has negative connotations. However, as most people know, the original meaning of the French word is "lover of." It's true that many pro musicians become jaded from touring and performing and as a result, are not inclined to do 'freebie' gigs or even fundraisers. However, every musician, no matter what their level of professionalism, is ultimately in music for the love of it.

Even the most famous musicians' career status and often income levels are unpredictable. Of course, you and I can both name plenty of 'has-been' artists. Sometimes you even hear that they are playing a show in or near your town and you think "wow, those guys are still around?" My point is that if a musician is in it only for the money, then audiences, band mates, record companies, etc. will soon start to detect a genuine decline of enthusiasm for the art that the artists once believed in so passionately, and that artist's career will start to decline.

So let me be clear: I am not advocating that you shouldn't respect your right to be paid for gigs, or that you should put the request of a person or entity that asks you or your band to play for free above your own needs and desires. What I am saying is that when you feel that a gig is genuinely going to be completely enjoyable for you, and yet there is no money in it, then take it!

A gig could be fun for many reasons. Perhaps it is a group of people whom you really love to play with and it always generates good feelings for everyone when you perform together. Perhaps there is a particularly great musician booked on the gig whose playing you simply love to interact with. Perhaps it's the material that you'll be playing, whether it's original songs you've written and want to try out, or cover material that you have always loved and can play in your sleep so there's no preparation time. Or it could simply be creative gigs where you have lots of room to experiment, improvise, and stretch out.

Reasons to take a gig just for fun could simply be circumstantial. Suppose your family member is getting married and asks you to perform solo at the wedding. You want to

give that person a wedding gift anyway, right? Technically, if you suggest that performing will be your wedding gift to them, you are 'making' the money you would have spent on a gift, so the lines blur sometimes between fun, money, networking and learning, but you see what I mean overall.

Suppose you are asked to play for free at a summer concert series in your town. You take the gig for 'exposure,' but you also make sure to have fun simply because you love the summer concert series, and are happy to be part of it. Similarly, the lines blur between fun and networking.

Music is a gift, and people love it. When music becomes a means to an end, it can also sometimes be the beginning of the end. I will conclude with words from Jim Hall. "If you go into music only with an eye toward 'making it' you are missing the main point and you'll probably not receive the inside, personal rewards unique to this art form."