

ROAD RULES
TOUR ETIQUETTE FOR YOUNG MUSICIANS
Professional Tips, Decorum, and Responsibilities
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National Peer-to-Peer All-Star Jazz Sextet with Lisa Henry (right) and Don Braden (3rd from right) receive standing ovation from Roosevelt High School students and faculty - Sioux Falls, South Dakota • 2018 (photo - Bart Marantz)

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.

For the past 14 years, I have had the pleasure of annually taking combos comprising the country’s top performing arts high school music students on National Peer-to-Peer Jazz Education “All-Star” Tours on behalf of the Herbie Hancock Institute. Through this initiative, the young jazz prodigies tour for a week with an eminent jazz recording artist, presenting jazz “informances” in public schools across the nation in an effort to develop jazz audiences for the future while honing their own musical and professional skills. The groups also have performed from coast to coast in the country’s top jazz clubs such as the Sequoia Room, Jazz Showcase, Blues Alley, and Yoshi’s; appeared at such venues at the Dolby Theater in Hollywood and the Kennedy Center, U.S. Department of Education and, yes, the White House in Washington, DC; and recorded at Van Gelder Studio where so many of the classic Blue Note recordings were made. To date, we have been everywhere from Anchorage, Alaska to Miami; Portland, Maine to San Diego; and virtually everywhere in between. Recent guest performers have included such distinguished artists as Ambrose Akimusic, Don Braden, Bobby Broom, Gerald Clayton, Robin Eubanks, Kellylee Evans, Antonio Hart, Lisa Henry, Ingrid Jensen, Sean Jones, Delfeayo Marsalis, Christian McBride, Terell Stafford, Dayna Stephens, Charenee Wade, Bobby Watson, and Steve Wilson.

Being selected to participate in one of these tours can be a life-changing opportunity. Maximizing it not only helps each student grow as a musician and professional, but as a person as well. I have seen incredible friendships form and have watched them develop into future professional playing opportunities that enrich the lives of performer and audience alike. My goal is to make the students’ time on the road as meaningful as possible, musically and otherwise.

Before and during each tour, I offer the young musicians professional tips and other useful “on-the-road” information, the kind they aren’t likely to learn in school. Given the fact that they perform on these tours with major artists who are commonly in a position to help them procure college scholarships and/or in other respects help jumpstart their careers – a superlative networking opportunity – the students need to understand that how professionally they comport themselves is as important as how well they play. After all, you only have one chance to make a first impression. Being regarded “such a pro” at a young age is the best; “such an amateur,” the worst.

Simply put, 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. As honor bands – such as the Herbie Hancock Institute National Peer-to-Peer Jazz Sextet, Monterey Next Generation Jazz Orchestra, and Carnegie Hall National Youth Jazz Orchestra – embark on national and international tours now and in the future, I offer the following advice to the participants to help them attain the stature of *pro*.

Admittedly, 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.

Know the Music

Make sure you have all the music for the tour solid under your fingers long before the tour begins. If you'll be playing in a small group, this means the music should be totally memorized – heads, changes, harmony parts, backgrounds, hits, everything. I suggest you 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. Make sure you know the personnel as well. I also highly recommend you practice along with the recordings, copping the phrasing, groove, and feel. And transcribing a few phrases from your favorite soloists not only will increase your jazz vocabulary, but give you credibility when you quote them, subtly letting the guest artist (and anyone else in-the-know) know that you've done your due diligence vis-à-vis listening and transcribing and that you are serious about your goals.

For standards and jazz classics, I advise you to practice them daily with an Aebersold play-along from the first day you memorize them up to the day the tour begins, emulating a seven-night per week gig. This way, when it comes time to perform with the guest artist and your fellow adept band mates, you are experienced and ready to go. Again, all tour tunes should be completely committed to memory; you don't want to be the only one in the band not knowing what everyone else knows.

Five-Minute Rule

If you're not hip to the five-minute rule, you are not yet a pro. The Rule states: always be *at least* five minutes early for everything. For example, if the itinerary says depart the hotel at 7:00 am, you should be packed up, ready to go, and seated in the van no later than 6:55 am. For rehearsals, it's the 15-minute rule, meaning that if a rehearsal is scheduled for 4:00 pm, you are set up and ready to play at 3:45 pm. Please note that everything takes longer than you think – breakfasts, elevator rides, checking out of the hotel – everything. Plan accordingly. Keeping your band mates – and especially the guest artist – waiting is not cool, totally unprofessional and, frankly, disrespectful.

Proper Attire

Look sharp, put together, and clean. On our Herbie Hancock Institute peer-to-peer tours, our male performers wear jackets (preferably light-colored) for our school concerts, and jackets and ties for our nightclub hits. Naturally, this includes nice pants and clean shoes as well. Our female performers wear a dress or pants with a nice top. In other words, while still looking young, hip, and current, they look professional. As the concerts are pretty intense, I also recommend the students bring a different shirt for each day, making the long van rides ever so much more tolerable. And, of course, nothing should look disheveled; please note that an iron and ironing board are available at most hotels.

Before bringing in and setting up equipment, I suggest you 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. And 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. Remember, you're not only representing yourself, family, band director, school, and city, but the sponsor of the tour as well. Take a cue from the masters: how would Herbie or Wynton look?

What to Pack

Besides your instrument in perfect working condition, make sure you bring all necessary musical appurtenances. This would include such items as your instrument stand; extra neck or guitar strap; extra strings, patch cords, picks, and reeds; cork grease and valve oil. Drummers should always bring their own cymbals, hi-hat clutch, and stick bag (with sticks, brushes, mallets, and a drum key). Also make sure you have hard copies of all the music that was sent to you – the pages of each tune taped together – alphabetized neatly in a manila folder (professional tip). You also need to bring your iPod or other listening device, including the definitive recordings of all tour tunes.

Don't forget your mobile phone (always turned on except when performing) and charger; and, of course, make sure your phone is always charged. Be sure to bring your photo ID, money, alarm clock (or alarm clock app on your phone), and small umbrella. *Always* have a hard copy of the itinerary on you, and make sure you have a couple of pencils at every rehearsal.

Professional Responsibilities and Demeanor

First and foremost, be easy to communicate with. This would include checking and replying to all emails daily, so the sender receives your response within 24 hours of sending it. Make sure you read each email *thoroughly*, confirming each point and

answering all questions fully (don't just respond, "got it."). And you should respond to text and voicemail messages even more timely, that is, within a few hours. The way and how soon you reply should indicate that you are both respectful and professional. Anyone having to resend an email or text, or call you again about the same thing, is the first sign of your not having it together; and so your reputation begins.

Make sure you have everyone's phone number in your contact list. This would include those of the road manager, each member of the band, and any others pertinent to the tour.

While on tour, comport yourself professionally at all times. This would include keeping your voice down and *never* using any foul or offensive language or making any disparaging remarks. Be friendly, kind, respectful, considerate, appreciative, and accommodating. Don't be argumentative; it's not worth it. Refrain from any use of alcohol or illegal drugs or smoking of any kind. Behave in a mature manner. You don't want to be known as the one who is "still so high school."

During rehearsals, don't talk or noodle on your instrument while the guest artist is talking. If you are in the annoying habit of always noodling between tunes, get out of it now.

Don't make any excuses. 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. If you mess up, apologize, learn from your mistake, and move on. That's what a pro does.

When at a reception or out to dinner with the guest artist, put the cell phone away! Use this opportunity to engage the guest artist, show that you're not one of these high school kids glued to the phone, and ask any questions you may have regarding music, the music business, and anything else in which you may be interested. Their opinions and advice could make a big difference in your life.

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. For example, "Hi, I'm JB Dyas, I'm from Los Angeles and I play the bass; nice to meet you." Speak clearly and loud enough to be heard *easily*; after all, if you want to be successful in this business, you want people to know and remember your name, where you're from, and what you play.

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. You don't want to be stuck with the bill for new drumheads, a broken hi-hat, lost power cords, speaker replacement, bass repair, or whatever else (not to mention a reputation for "destroying" equipment).

Setup and Sound Check

Help load in and load out the gear. Grab a drum case, a bass amp handle, a cymbal bag. Don't make the drummer bring in the entire kit or make the rest of the rhythm section bring in the electric keyboard and amps by themselves. When setting up the equipment, do so quickly and be as unobtrusive as possible so your band mates can easily set up around you. For instance, once the drum rug is placed in performance position, drummers should 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 is having to dodge them while setting up. *All* instrument cases should be put backstage stacked close to a wall so no one will trip over them. And please don't put anything on chairs or couches in the greenroom or backstage where people would like to sit. Make sure you leave no superfluous items on the stage.

Regarding the sound check, the sound engineer often likes to first hear one instrument at a time in order to get an initial mic level adjustment. Don't play or noodle on your instrument during this process until it's your turn. After the sound check, be sure to vacate the stage *before* the audience starts filing into the auditorium. Seeing the setup void of any musicians hanging around before you're introduced makes for a much more professional experience. And 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, or otherwise valuable words of wisdom from the guest artist. Think through what's about to happen; make a commitment to the music you're about to make.

Performance Tips

When performing, look at the soloist and your other band mates. Art Blakey said, "you hear with your eyes." Play *close* to the mic; that way the sound engineer is better able to make adjustments and get a good mix in the house. Don't solo too long, especially, don't take more choruses than the guest artist; the last thing you want is for your soloing to be thought of as self indulgent.

In the small group setting, horn players should step off to the side of the band when not playing – this allows the audience to watch the soloist and rhythm section – then return to the mic a few bars before it's time to play again. 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. Make it obvious that you're enjoying yourself (the better time you have, the better time your listeners will have). 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.

After the performance, be easily accessible to the audience members who want to meet you; be gracious, charming, and humble. Don't forget to thank your hosts. And 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. The way you comport yourself after each performance and how you leave the premises can grow your reputation as a class act (or not).

Peer-to-Peer Clinics

Following school concerts, the guest artist often presents a clinic for the host school's jazz band in which the visiting honor band performers sit side-by-side their like-instrument counterparts, everyone teaching and learning from one another peer to peer. This is not unlike how all great jazz artists have learned since the music's inception. My advice on this is threefold: 1) 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; 2) 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, and the like; and 3) be as positive, inspiring, and encouraging as possible. Remember, while perhaps only a few of the band students you touch will actually become professional musicians, the better experience they have with jazz in high school, the more likely they are to be listeners and supporters of the music for the rest of their lives.

Murphy's Law – Using it to Your Advantage

Murphy's Law – the adage that "what *can* go wrong, *will* go wrong" – shows up on many a tour. It begins to pour just as you're leaving the venue, your cord goes bad during your guitar solo, the hotel wakeup call didn't work, a bass string breaks in the middle of the set – the list goes on and on. However, I've found that Murphy typically won't arrive unless you're unprepared, that is, it will rain when you don't have your umbrella handy, your guitar cord will malfunction when you don't have a spare easily accessible, the hotel wakeup call won't work when you haven't set your own personal alarm. Ergo, if you are totally prepared, it keeps Murphy at bay! That is, it won't rain, your cord won't break, and the wakeup call will come through! And if Murphy does happen to show up, you're cool because you do have an umbrella, an extra guitar cord, your own alarm clock, a spare set of strings.

Airline Travel Tips

I urge you to check in for your flight online 24 hours before departure. This way, if there have been any changes (which there frequently are) you'll know in plenty of time. You are often able to change your seat to a better one (if available) at this time as well. Plan to arrive at the airport at least two hours before departure (remember Murphy's Law). Don't forget your government issued photo ID (e.g., drivers license or passport). 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. 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. 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. I also suggest you download the airline's free app, making subsequent reservations, check-ins, flight changes, and the like a snap.

If your plane is delayed, text the road manager immediately, providing your new arrival time. If you have a connection that you're not going to make, speak with an airline agent ASAP to book another connecting flight. If you don't realize this until you're already in the air, call the airline the second you land, that is, while you're still on the plane. 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. 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. Continue to update the road manager regarding your arrival time as you receive further information.

The two best activities during plane travel are listening to the definitive recordings while visualizing and miming the fingerings; and sleeping. These are chops that all pros possess: being able to practice without instrument in hand, and sleeping on the plane.

Per Diem and Saving Money

On most tours you are provided a per diem, that is, cash for your daily meals and other incurred road expenses. My professional tip on this is “stay ahead of the per diem.” For example, if you are provided \$50 per day, live on \$45; if you’re provided \$45, live on \$40. A pro always returns home with leftover per diem cash. You can save money on the road by always taking advantage of the freebies that are often provided – complimentary breakfasts at many hotels, bottled water and snacks in the greenrooms, meals provided by the venues in which you are performing, etc.

Know the Itinerary

Read and re-read the entire itinerary thoroughly prior to the tour so you know what’s up ahead of time. Also, 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 instance, if a lunch break is not included, bring a couple of pieces of fruit or whatever to tide you over. Besides having an e-copy of the itinerary on your phone, *always* have a hard copy on you throughout the tour. Also, make sure your parents have a copy before you leave as it will invariably include important phone numbers as well as hotel and flight info.

Questions

Questions are a good thing, but don’t ask them if you should already know the answer. For instance, I always tell my students that if they have a question about the Coltrane matrix or how to manipulate pentatonic scales over altered dominant chords, I’m the one to ask. But please don’t ask me what time is lunch or what time we depart the next day; that’s on the itinerary and a pro *knows* what’s on the itinerary.

Downtime

Use your downtime to take advantage of the things your location has to offer that your hometown doesn’t. For instance, if you’re in New York, go to the Statue of Liberty, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and one of the iconic jazz clubs; in Los Angeles, it’s the Getty, Venice Beach, and Universal Studios. And, when possible, experience the local cuisine. 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. That’s what an artist does.

Follow-Up

Once the tour is over, be sure to email everyone involved (tour sponsor, road manager, guest artists) to say thank you. Let them know how much the tour meant to you, what you learned along the way, how you grew as a musician and person, and whatever else you gleaned from the experience. Be as detailed and articulate as possible. 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.

Share with your peers back at school what you learned from your experience, and help them progress in any way you can. It’s now your time to give back.

Final Thoughts

I have found that the only way these honor band tours truly succeed is when *everyone* is professional. If you take heed to the advice above, you won’t believe what an educative, musical, exhilarating, productive, and fun tour you will have! If you don’t, it can be an exasperatingly unpleasant experience for everyone involved, especially the guest artists, making it difficult to ever recommend you for anything. Great opportunities only knock a few times in life. Make sure you answer.

Dr. JB Dyas serves as VP for Education and Curriculum Development at the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz at UCLA where he oversees the Institute’s education and outreach programs, including the National Peer-to-Peer Jazz Education Program. Through this initiative, combos comprising advanced high school music students tour with major artists, performing in high schools across the country in an effort to teach their peers about jazz and the deeply held American values it represents: teamwork, unity with ethnic diversity, the correlation of hard work and goal accomplishment, persistence & perseverance, democracy, and the vital importance of really listening to one another.

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