

As you can see, I've been very, very bored in the van today. Here's some thoughts I've had about music that I've compiled, divided into a few different categories. If you don't need this stuff, great. Good for you. If it tells you something ya didn't already know, glad you got something out of it. Did typing it kill 3 hours in the van? Yup.

GIGGING/TOURING:

Be nice. Most people don't care how good you are if you're a dick. While almost everyone I've worked with has been kind, wonderful, and humble, I've met a few people who were amazing players that I would never call for a gig based on how lousy their attitude was.

There's a difference between stupid decisions and bad decisions. When you're just starting out and making a band, be excited to make the stupid ones, avoid the bad ones at all costs, and be mindful of the difference between the two. For example: Before I was even an official member of Dopapod, Eli asked me to come play with them about 3 hours away, for no money. On top of that, his car was full of gear, so I would have to rent a car for a couple hundred bucks. I also missed a shift teaching lessons, and also missed a paid church gig. I did the gig anyways. Now, here I am.

When you're just starting to dip your toes in the ocean of gigging, recording sessions and touring, take as many gigs as you can. If someone calls you for a reggae gig, and you hate reggae, take the gig. You never know who you'll meet that'll lead to another gig or just become a lifelong friend, and you'll learn how to play music you're not familiar with, thusly making you more knowledgeable, versatile, etc.

*****HAVING SAID THAT- there's limits. If someone called me to sub on a last minute shred metal gig, I would have to gracefully decline. Don't take someone's gig if you know you're the absolute wrong guy/gal and you're gonna unintentionally ruin their shit by being unqualified. *****

Don't be afraid to get paid. You've worked hard to be able to play the way you do. You deserve to make a living from doing it. Just because it's fun doesn't mean it's not a service that deserves compensation. DISCLAIMER: Get paid, but don't be a dick about it. Talking about money is weird, but you have to do it. Just be kind and gracious when you do. You'll get along with who you're working with better, and you're more likely to get a better payday.

Be on time. Even better, be a little early. Not creepy early..... pro early.

When you buy an instrument, you want it sound great, do everything that you want it to, stay in tune, be reliable, and be fun to work with. When people hire you for a gig they want the same exact thing; Work hard, practice, and learn the material you are given so that you can give them exactly that. You, yourself are an instrument. Be a really good one.

When you're on tour, people will become grouchy. When they do, just remember you will become grouchy at some point, too. Everybody deserves patience and forgiveness for it.

If and when you act like a dick, apologize. If someone else is being a dick, give them space and let them be a dick by themselves for awhile. Be cool with it when they apologize.

- Talk about stuff that's bothering you on tour. Listen to people who do the same. No matter how "Rock and Roll" people will tell you it is, being fucked up on stage does not rock. Not cool. Keep your shit together and be pro.

- Don't have a backup plan. That way, failure will not be an option.

PRACTICING:

Don't try and be the best guitar player, or singer, or bass player etc. in the world. And definitely don't try and be the next anybody else. Try and be the best you in the world. In college, there was a lot of pressure from other people and even from myself to make the most out of college and become a brilliant jazz guitar player. As hard as I tried, I didn't become that. I remained, and still am, a geeky Jam Band kid from Western New York. But I did become a more seasoned, versatile, and reliable version of myself through opening my mind to other kinds of music that were challenging. Embrace what kind of a musician and person that you are, and make it the best version it can be.

*****ON SECOND THOUGHT***** Fuck that. This sounds better: TRY and be the best guitar player/bass player/whatever in the world, and then be happy and grateful when you only turn out to be the best YOU in the world. That's all anybody's really gonna get. Maybe I wouldn't have learned as much as I did if I hadn't been naive enough to think I could be the best whatever at something. But what do I know? Im just a geeky Jam Band kid ;-)

Practice a lot while you still can. The older you get, the less time you're gonna have to get better. Just trust me on this. Get it in while you're young and you have time on your hands and stamina in your hands.

Don't try and become a better guitar player or whatever you are backstage half an hour before the gig. It's not gonna work. I know. Concentrate on what you can do with the tools you've already got.

Stretch and take breaks. I've been in physical therapy twice for tendonitis. It sucks. It's very real. Take it seriously.

Some people will tell you not to try and play something unless you've practiced it behind closed doors a lot. While this is true, you can't make an omelette without breaking a couple eggs. Trying something on stage at the risk of failing is the final test.

****This one's one of my favorites:**** Don't only listen to what your favorite musicians are doing. Listen to what they aren't doing that you wish they would, and then go out and do that.

Learning music that you don't like or care about is really good for you. It is a skill that you will be grateful you have down the road when someone is paying you to learn something that isn't necessarily your favorite music. It will teach you patience, humility, and you just might love it by the end of the gig.

- Practicing or building a band's career is like climbing a mountain that never ends. You do all this climbing so that every once in awhile, you can chill out and look at the view. It's okay to enjoy where you're at. Take some time to forget about where you want to be so that you can enjoy where you already are.
- Transcribing is tight. It's like a musical full body workout. You don't even necessarily have to write down what you're learning. In fact it's just as good if you don't, because you'll be exercising your memory retention. It also doesn't have to be a solo. It can be a movie score, it can be an Ella Fitzgerald vocal melody, it can be the fucking Barney theme. Whatever. It's all gonna give you better ears, a bigger vocabulary, better chops, better work ethic, and inspire you to play new stuff.

TRANSCRIBING SUB TOPICS:

-If you do write it out, learn a whole musical phrase and be able to play it with some proficiency. Then write it down. Then move on to the next phrase. If you do it the other way around, you'll be left with a fancy looking sheet of staff paper, and no idea how to play it. Nor will you likely have the energy or interest left to actually learn how to play all the shit you just wrote down for no reason.

-When you finish learning something, I assure you you will forget how to play most of it over time. This is a good thing. If you remember everything you learn, you will become a talking parrot, with no originality. Embrace the forgetting.

-slow-downer programs are a last resort. Don't let them be a crutch.

-It's not enough to learn a solo or a chord progression or what-have you. Take what you've learned and make something with it. Improvise with the ideas or theme you've gotten out of the transcription. Write a tune with a chord change you liked. Just find yourself in there.

SANITY:

If you're lucky, someday you'll have fans. It might be two. It might be two million. Either way it's awesome and most people don't get that. A few years ago I met Trey Anastasio. He talked to me for about two minutes and was an absolute prince. I'm sure he doesn't remember one second of that conversation, but I will remember every word of it forever. Here's the kicker; if he had been a total dick, I still would've remembered every word of that conversation forever. Think about that when someone comes up to you and wants to shake your hand.

*******IF YOU ARE IN A BAD MOOD******* It's okay. We're human. Try and go someplace where fans won't see you at your worst. If you can't, just give them something. A smile, a wave, a hello, a guitar pick.... something.

Have fun. It's called playing music, not "working" music. This one's courtesy of Craig Brodhead.

- You have to have something more important than music in your life, or you will go crazy. A career in music isn't enough. Have something or someone to come home to.
- There will be people who are more successful than you because they are a better player than you, or they a better at connecting with music fans than you are. There will also be people who you are absolutely positive aren't as good as you that will still be more successful than you. Both of those things are ok. As much as you'll want to, you won't be able to control those things. Just control yourself and try not to compare yourself to other people too much.
- Don't talk shit about other musicians on social media. Ever. Even if you think there's no way they'll ever see it. It is highly likely that you will lose professional opportunities, sever friendships, or both. You are, however, entitled to your opinions. Vent those feelings if you really need to, but in a private manner that won't belittle or embarrass someone.
- Don't fucking do drugs. Don't fucking drink too much. Exercise when you can.
- You're gonna make mistakes on stage. Lots of them on some nights. Luckily, we're not brain surgeons, and no one dies or

becomes a vegetable if we screw up. So chill out about it.

When I decided I was gonna drop out of college, my private guitar instructor, David Tronzo, told me that he only knew about 3 people who had gotten exactly the music career that they had aspired to. He asked me if I could be happy with wherever my career ended up, even if it wasn't what I had originally envisioned or expected. When the time comes to ask yourself that question, think hard and believe strongly that yes is the answer. Beggars can't be choosers.

- In the words of Colonel Bruce Hampton (RIP), don't take yourself seriously. Take music seriously.
- Don't be cynical. The older you get, the harder this will become, but try. As Conan O'Brien said when Jay Leno took his show: "Please don't be cynical. I hate cynicism — it's my least favorite quality and it doesn't lead anywhere. Nobody in life gets exactly what they thought they were going to get. But if you work really hard, and are kind, amazing things will happen."

JAMMING/ON STAGE:

- You are the last person you should be listening to on stage. Listen to your band as if they are a record you are enjoying, and add to it in ways that make the record better. Be aware and present.
- Be polite and leave space for your bandmates when it's appropriate. Be Boisterous and outgoing when it's time for that. Judge accordingly.
- Have a conversation. When you're done saying something, leave space for your bandmates to answer you. Don't make the conversation about yourself, but don't be shy either.
- Quiet, dynamic jamming is rad. Don't be afraid to do it. Also, not every jam needs a screaming solo in it.
- Don't be that guy at the party who won't stop talking about himself. There's a lot of musicians who talk an awful lot on their instrument and say an awful lot of nothing. Say something.
- Brevity is the soul of wit.
- When you find something cool to say, say it enough times for your bandmates to latch onto it and make an impromptu song about it. When that idea starts to get repetitive, morph it slightly so it can stay fresh and eventually become a new idea.
- If you're not having fun on stage, figure out what you have to do to have fun, rather than put on a happy face and be dying inside. If you really can't figure it out, then pretend to have fun. Because anyone who bought a ticket doesn't deserve to know that you don't feel like playing for them. Sometimes this will not work. During those times, you are usually just angry that you got angry. Be conscious of that.
- Not every jam or song will go the way you want it to. When it happens, don't be the basketball player who sulks when he misses a shot or gets the ball stolen. Run your ass off to the other end of the court and get the rebound.
- You practice and put in hours behind closed doors so that once you're onstage, you have a ton of toys in your toolbox. The more work you put in, the more fun you can have once you're up on stage.
- Having good ears and being a good listener are two completely different things. Most people don't care if you can play your bandmate's Melodic minor lick back at him or her, although sometimes that shit does kick ass. More often, use your ears and ear training to help you assess what you can do to make the music sound better.
- Be patient. Good things come to those who wait. Don't ripcord a jam just because it's not getting interesting right away. Give it time. Sometimes 15 minutes of uneventful jamming is worth the wait for 2 or 3 minutes of glory.
- Not all long jams or good jams. Not all short jams are bad jams. One of my favorite guitar solos of all time (although not improvised) is the Beatles' Carry That Weight solo. It's literally only 3 bars long, and it's amazing.
- Things don't always go as planned. The Allied Normandy Invasion in WWII was the most densely planned military operation of all time. It all went to shit on June 6th. They improvised, paratroopers landed nowhere near where they were supposed to, and they made squads out of dudes who didn't even know each other and got the job done. Get the fucking job done. And remember, you're not on Omaha Beach, so you have the luxury of enjoying the whole thing, and not getting blown up if you make a mistake. Got it? Good!