



By JB Dyas, Ph.D.

# ROAD RULES

## TOUR ETIQUETTE FOR YOUNG MUSICIANS

Touring can be an exhilarating and rewarding experience—if you are prepared for it. But if you’re not prepared, being on the road can be a drag for the entire band and crew.

For the past 14 years, I have had the pleasure of annually taking combos comprising the nation’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, young musicians tour for a week with an eminent jazz artist, presenting jazz “informances” in public schools. These talented young musicians help develop future jazz audiences while simultaneously honing their own musical and professional skills.

Besides schools, the combos have performed from coast to coast in the nation’s top jazz clubs, such as the Sequoia Room, the Jazz Showcase and Blues Alley. They’ve also appeared at prestigious venues, such as the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood.

Our guest artists have included luminaries such as Ambrose Akimusire, Bobby Broom, Gerald Clayton, Sean Jones, Steve Wilson, Bobby Watson, Antonio Hart, Don Braden, Kellylee Evans, Lisa Henry, Ingrid Jensen, Delfeayo Marsalis, Christian McBride, Terell Stafford and Charenée Wade.

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, but as a person as well.

I provide these teenage musicians with useful “on-the-road” tips—the kind they aren’t likely to learn in school. These young players go on tour with artists who are in a position to help jump-start their careers, and perhaps offer a college scholarship. I frequently remind students that the manner in which they comport themselves is just as important as how well they play. Being regarded as “such a pro” at a young age is the best; being regarded as “such an amateur” is the worst.

Simply put, “a pro” is someone who has their act together. 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, the Monterey Jazz Festival’s Next Generation Jazz Orchestra and Carnegie Hall’s NYO Jazz—embark on tours, I offer the following advice to the participants to help them attain the stature of “a 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 potential to help you succeed in this business to take notice.

### KNOW THE MUSIC

Before the tour begins, make sure you have all the music “down.” If you’ll be playing in a small group, this means the music should be totally memorized: heads, changes, harmo-

ny parts, backgrounds, hits, everything. Make a playlist of the definitive recordings of all the tour tunes and listen to them continually. Make sure you know the personnel as well.

I also recommend you practice along with the recordings, copying 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 your band mates know that you’ve done your due diligence.

For standards, I advise you to practice them daily with an Aebersold play-along recording from the first day you memorize them up to the day the tour begins, emulating a seven-nights-per-week gig. This way, when it comes time to perform with the guest artist and your fellow bandmates, you’ll be ready. Again, all tour tunes should be completely committed to memory.

### FIVE-MINUTE RULE

Always be at least five minutes early for everything. If the itinerary says to depart the hotel at 7 a.m., then you should be packed up and seated in the van no later than 6:55 a.m. For rehearsals, it’s the 15-minute rule, meaning that if a rehearsal is scheduled for 4 p.m., you should be set up and ready to play at 3:45 p.m. Unexpected delays can arise, and things can take longer than you anticipate. Keeping your bandmates—and especially the guest art-



BART MARANTZ



Herbie Hancock and Peer-to-Peer All-Star Kalia Vandever perform in Cleveland, Mississippi, during 2013.



Peer-to-Peer All-Stars perform in 2014 with Kellylee Evans (second from left) at Hollywood's Dolby Theatre.



STEVE MUNDINGER



Peer-to-Peer Sextet members Stéphane Clément (right) and Dario Bizio backstage with Herbie Hancock (left) and Jimmy Heath following their performance at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

ist—waiting is 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 for our school concerts, and jackets and ties for our nightclub gigs. Naturally, this includes nice pants and clean shoes. Our female performers wear a dress or pants with a nice top. Because 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. (An iron and ironing board are available at most hotels.)

Before bringing in and setting up equipment, it's a good idea to 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 (in restaurants, hotel lobbies, etc.), keep your clothing neat and present a positive image. In those situations, casual attire is OK; sloppy clothing is not. Take a cue from the masters: How would Wynton Marsalis or Maria Schneider look?

### WHAT TO PACK

Besides your instrument in perfect working condition, make sure you bring all necessary

musical gear. This would include such items as your instrument stand, extra guitar strap, extra set of strings, patch cords, picks, spare mouthpiece, reeds, extra neck strap, 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. You also need to bring your iPod or other listening device, including the definitive recordings of all tour tunes. Make sure you have ear buds or headphones.

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

### RESPONSIBILITIES & DEMEANOR

First and foremost, be a good listener and a good communicator. This means checking and replying to all emails daily, so the sender receives your response within 24 hours. Make sure you read each email thoroughly, confirming each point and answering all questions fully. (Don't send a note that just says, "Got it.") Reply to any

text or voicemail message within two hours. The way you respond and how soon you reply should convey respect and professionalism. Anyone who is forced to resend an email or text, or call you again about the same thing, will remember your unprofessionalism.

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

While on tour, comport yourself professionally at all times. Keep the volume of your voice at a reasonable level. Never use any foul or offensive language or make any disparaging remarks. Be friendly, kind, respectful, considerate, appreciative and accommodating. Refrain from any use of alcohol or illegal drugs or smoking of any kind.

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. 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.

When at a reception or out to dinner with the guest artist, put your cell phone away. Use this opportunity to engage the guest artist. Ask the artist questions about music, the music business or anything else in which you are interested.



Kris Bowers (second from left), who composed music for the 2019 Academy Award-winning film *Green Book*, learns about professionalism during a 2006 Peer-to-Peer tour with saxophonist/educator Bobby Watson (second from right).



The 2013 National Peer-to-Peer Jazz Sextet (clockwise from left): Miles Berry, James Francis, Mike Mitchell (a.k.a. Blaque Dynamite), José Albizu, Joel Ross and Nick Saia

Their opinions and advice could make a big difference in your life.

When meeting new people, make eye contact, give your first and last name, where you are from, and what instrument you play. Here's my personal example: "Hi, I'm JB Dyas. I'm from Los Angeles and I play the bass. It's 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 your name, where you're from and what you play.

If you use borrowed or rented backline gear (drum kit, bass amp, electric keyboard, etc.), be extremely careful with it 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 drum heads, a broken hi hat, lost power cords, a damaged speaker or anything like that. Anyone who has a reputation for "destroying" equipment is unlikely to be invited back. Show your hosts that you are considerate and responsible.

### SETUP & SOUND CHECK

When setting up equipment, do so quickly and be as unobtrusive as possible, so your bandmates can easily set up around you. Put your instrument cases backstage stacked close to a wall. In the greenroom, don't put anything on chairs or couches where people would like to sit. Never leave superfluous items on the stage.

After the sound check, be sure to vacate the stage before the audience members file into the auditorium. Then stay in close proximity to the stage and your bandmates in case there are 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 and stay focused.

### PERFORMANCE TIPS

When performing, look at the soloist and your other bandmates. 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. Never 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). 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, make 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 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 clean as you found it (if not better than you found it). Don't leave any trash or bottles of water behind. The way you comport yourself after each performance and how you leave the premises can help establish 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 with their like-instrument counterparts. Everyone can teach and learn, peer to peer.

In these situations, 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. Make sure those you're teaching leave the clinic with at least three things they didn't have before. Examples include better technique, new piano and/or guitar voicings, tonguing/slurring concepts, improved swing feel, a practice plan and a list of important recordings to check out. Be positive, inspiring and encouraging.

### MURPHY'S LAW

You might have heard the adage known as Murphy's Law: "Anything that can go wrong will go wrong." Unfortunately, "Murphy" frequently applies to tours. A rainstorm begins right as you're leaving the venue. The hotel wake-up 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: It doesn't rain when you have your umbrella handy. The hotel wake-up call will work when you have set your own personal alarm. Your bass strings will be fine when you have a spare set. In other words, if you are totally prepared, it keeps "Murphy" at bay. And if "Murphy" does happen to show up, it won't be a problem because you're ready for the unexpected.

### AIRLINE TRAVEL TIPS

Check in for your flight online 24 hours before departure. That way, if there have been any changes (which there frequently are), you'll have plenty of time to adjust. You often are able to change your seat to a better one (if available) during this time. Arrive at the airport at least two hours before departure (remember Murphy's Law). Don't forget your government-issued photo ID (driver's license or passport). Never check your instrument as baggage because it could get lost, damaged or stolen. Instead, per-

sonally carry it on the plane with you and stow it in the overhead compartment above your seat. If there is something that you anticipate you will need during the flight, such as a listening device, pack it in your carry-on, not in the suitcase that you hand to the check-in agent at the airport.

If you change planes en route to your final destination, hustle to the next gate, getting there in plenty of time to make your connection. Download the airline's free app, which will make subsequent reservations, check-ins and flight changes easy to do.

If your plane is delayed, text the road manager immediately, providing him or her with 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; call 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. 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. As you get additional information, continue to update the road manager regarding your arrival time.

The two best things to do during plane travel are listening to definitive recordings while visu-

alizing and miming the fingerings, and sleeping. These are chops that all pros possess: being able to practice without having an instrument in hand and napping on a plane.

### PER DIEM & SAVING MONEY

On most tours, you are provided a per diem, that is, a daily allowance for meals and other expenses. My professional tip is to always "stay ahead of the per diem." For example, if you are provided \$50 per day, then live on \$45. A pro always returns home with leftover per diem cash. You can save money on the road by taking advantage of the "freebies" that are often provided: complimentary breakfast at the hotel, bottled water and snacks in the greenroom, meals provided by the venues where you play.

### KNOW THE ITINERARY

Read and reread the entire itinerary thoroughly prior to the tour. Visualize each step of the journey. Also, during the tour, be sure to always read the following day's itinerary, 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 another snack to tide you over.

Besides having the itinerary on your phone, always have a hard copy with you throughout the tour. Also, make sure a parent or guardian has a

copy before you leave; it will include phone numbers, as well as hotel and flight info.

### EXPRESSING THANKS

When the tour is over, send emails to everyone involved (the tour sponsor, road manager, guest artists) to say thank you. Let them know how much the tour meant to you and what you learned along the way. Not only is this the polite and proper thing to do, it helps people remember 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.

### TRUE TEAMWORK

I have found that the only way these honor band tours truly succeed is when everyone is professional. But if you don't conduct yourself appropriately, a tour can be unpleasant 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. **DB**

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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.



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