

# STAGE CRAFT

In part one of this new series designed to help you hone your band into a killer live act, professional musician and author Gareth Bird explains the right way to fill your band's diary with gigs...



## GETTING THE GIG

Firstly, you don't need an agent, band management or music industry contacts before you can get your band booked. Getting a gig is something that anyone can learn to do. Even those of us who may not be technically great musicians can start playing live; all you need are two sets of material (about ½ hour to 45 minutes each), some reasonable gear, a home-produced demo and the right approach.

### PREPARATION

1. Check out the 'competition'
2. Agree your gigging goals
3. Create a demo with a difference
4. Find venues

Like most things in life you're much more likely to succeed if you do a little preparation first.

Once you've got your material together and you're rehearsed, there are four key steps to take before you actively start pitching your band for gigs. You need to carry out each of these to ensure you can move on to filling your gig diary. It's crucial that you understand why any venue should book your band ahead of others in the same area that might play similar material.



#### CHECK OUT THE 'COMPETITION' -

Google other local bands ("metal band Ipswich" etc) and check out their websites or my space pages. From these you should be able to learn what these bands consider to be unique about themselves, where they play, what music they play and (via any mp3 demos): how good these other bands are. You should make an effort to go and watch them live. Take a friend who's seen your band play or at least rehearse. Get some honest feedback about how they see the differences between them and you. Ultimately, you need to be able to verbally condense what makes you different into a one liner when you come to talk to venues about your band.



#### AGREE YOUR GIGGING GOALS -

This is one factor that can cause big problems once the gigs begin flowing in. Make sure you get full band agreement on your gigging goals before you start trying to fill your diary. Otherwise, you'll end up cancelling work and damaging your reputation.

Your goals will also give you targets to aim for which keep you focussed and motivated to bring in the bookings. Discuss and agree how many gigs



#### CREATE A DEMO WITH A DIFFERENCE -

When you start talking to potential venues and they express an interest in booking your band, you'll need some proof of what your band can do. One of the most effective ways is to make a

demo comprising a brief 3-5 minute medley of around 10 numbers (not whole songs) which best showcase the strengths of your band. A medley ensures the person that you give the demo to listens to the whole thing as there are no natural pauses in it.

As long as one of the band (or someone you know), has some basic music editing software on their PC and a fairly simple digital sound recorder, you can easily make a great demo. You can either record each individual instrument separately into your PC or record your rehearsals and



#### How not to present your demo cd...

edit the best bits for use on the demo. Once recorded, the demo should be available both as an mp3 on your website and a CD. Then you can either send the link or mail the CD once a venue is interested and expecting the demo – NOT before.

CDs should be printed with a picture of the band and full contact details on the CD itself – not the accompanying sleeve or case. Cases and sleeves often get lost or separated from CDs.



#### FIND VENUES -

Marketing your band, like most selling, is a numbers game. The more targets you have the more bull's-eyes you'll hit. Make it a goal to add potential new venues to your target list every week.

Aim for at least 100 venues to target. The more you have on your list the less stress you'll feel about being successful approaching each of them. You can find potential venues via other bands websites, Facebook or band networking websites like [www.lemonrock.com](http://www.lemonrock.com). ▶



U2 are mega-stadium stars but they started out playing in pubs too!

## ► PITCHING YOUR BAND

It is unlikely that an unknown band will get approached by a venue. Most venues, especially pubs, are busy running the day to day business. Be proactive, you need to contact the venues directly. The best way to do this without spending a lot of time or money travelling to and from venues is via the good old 'phone. Check they have time to talk to you before you launch into your pitch. Tell them you have one quick question for them and then ask about the bands they currently book. Find out if the band they are currently booking "meet all their current needs" or whether they felt there might be some "room for improvement". Be confident but not too pushy, remember to concentrate on what you can do for the venue – not what it can do for you. Focus on how your act could encourage people to go to their venue and boost their takings.

Sometimes you'll strike gold and get a booking there and then. Other times they'll ask for your demo or say don't need more bands at moment. At the very least you should ask whether you can stay in touch "in case circumstances change". When that's the case you need this next tool.



Whether you are playing down your local pub or a major venue like the Royal Albert Hall, a professional attitude will guarantee that your audience is happy and that you'll be invited to play there again...



## HOW TO GET VENUES TO APPROACH YOU

Your initial phone call to a venue will only work if they're not satisfied with their current acts or they're open to trying to find new bands when you call. If they tell you they're happy with their lot – you need to stay in touch. Obviously you can't just call them on a regular basis and ask: "So now will you book us?" You need another way to keep your name in front of them. The best way is to publish a band newsletter. Write a simple one pager (A4) and send it out to all your prospective venues every quarter. Hard copies tend to work better than emailed versions. Your newsletter should be a 'brag sheet' which shows how well you're doing and gives reasons why the venue should book you. Include reviews of recent gigs (write them yourself or else get a friend to write one if needs be), details of forthcoming gigs, numbers added to repertoire and availability of dates for bookings. Venue managers change and bands split up. Make sure yours is the band the venue turns to first.

## Anyone can get a gig. Marketing your band properly is as important as learning to play your instruments...

## HOW TO MULTIPLY YOUR GIGS

Unfortunately, many venues won't want you when you first contact them. Commit yourself to getting booked and you'll still fill your gig diary. When you get that elusive first gig or additional new venue you'll soon find that more bookings will flood in. There are two easy ways to make sure you do this.



### ADVERTISE WHILE YOU PLAY -

Ever wondered into a bar, seen a band on stage and had no idea who they were? Make it easy for people in the crowd to book you for private work. Get the band name out there in front of everyone along with a contact number and email or website address. Use flyers on tables, mention your name & website address on mic or have a banner behind you so everyone knows who you are.



### ASK THE VENUE FOR REPEAT BOOKINGS -

Get the venue to book you again on gig-night rather than wait until later to call them or hope they call you. If you've gone down well they'll be at their most enthusiastic at the end of the gig.

Just as you're being paid for the gig, ask: "We're getting pretty busy now so do you want to sort out another couple of dates while we've got them?"

Make sure you have your gig diary with you so you can take the booking there and then. At the very least you'll usually get with the question above is an invitation to call them later for a repeat booking... so long as you have done a good job and gone down well.

## NEXT MONTH:

Suffering from pre-gig nerves? Banish those irrational fears for good and build the confidence that guarantees you will always play great gigs.

**Gareth Bird** is an active semi-pro musician who gigs regularly at venues like the Hard Rock Café. He's the author of *Gig-Getter: How to get more gigs than you can play* and *Rouse the Crowd: How to interact with audiences for gigs they can't forget*. He's written about gigging for *Total Guitar* and *Bass Guitar* magazines along with numerous online publications. He's currently finalising details on a *Gigging Masterclass* for the ICMP in London scheduled for later this year. Gareth also has his own *Marketing business* advising a number of leading independent companies.