

## **You are in a BAND.**

An Editorial and Rant. A rather scathing one.  
(A Rantatorial? An Editorirant?)

Even if it is your name that is on the marquee, you are in a band. **This means adjusting to the venue so that the soundperson can get the best result.** Better sound = more fun for the listeners = more and better-paying gigs for the band = more money in your pocket.

**Drummers and Percussionists:** Get your emotional high from creating the groove of the music, not from the physio-psychological pleasure of pounding on things. If you are too loud, it will be impossible to get a proper mix at a suitable volume level. You will be screwing the band. I've been told "I can't play differently just because we're in a bad/small/cavernous room." If I can learn to choose a pool cue of correct (lighter) weight and to use it properly (instead of pounding the crap out of the cue ball), you can learn to choose lighter sticks and to use them properly. You'll discover that you have more dexterity and feeling, and the band will sound a lot better. Even beyond that, skilled professionals adapt to the situation. When the situation demanded it, I've seen drummers put towels on the drums, use much smaller sticks, use brushes, and even play with their hands.

**Instrumentalists:** The volume control on your amplifier has settings between those of 0 and 11. Please use them. Your fun should come from the feeling the vibe of the song and the crowd, not from feeling your speakers vibrate your body. If you are too loud, it will be impossible to get a proper mix at a suitable volume level. You will be screwing the band.

**Guitarist:** "But I can't get my sound!". You may be hearing a fat, punchy guitar sound from your speakers that are pointing at your knees, but what the audience\* gets is loud and tinny as hell. Point the speakers (you only need one anyway - why are you still lugging that heavy-ass thing around?) at your head (preferably from in front of you) and adjust your rig to get what you want. (\*Some of them. Guitar cabinets, especially the traditional 4x half stack, have very narrow dispersion. The folks it's aimed at get a ton of highs. Everyone else gets mud. The PA disperses all over, so use it, not your cabinet.) (And oh yea - please get your levels together! The distorted lead is supposed to be the loud sound, and the clean rhythm the quiet one.)

\* A case in point: The guitarist's 4x12 was pointed right at me, at the center of the back wall. It was too loud and a little bright, even though I was about 70' away - and this was after I had him turn it down. Over at the side of the room however, all I could hear from it was the bottom end. Onstage, the guitarist said he could not hear it. I walked up to the (18" high) stage, and the guitar was way too loud on the dance floor. I had him come down on the dance floor, and he affirmed that he could hear it fine (even though he was now six to eight feet farther away from the cabinet). We put the 4x12 on a chair. With it now elevated and tilting back slightly, it was pointing at his head - where his ears are - instead of at the crowd. He could hear it fine, after a little tweaking he liked the tone

better, and it was now sufficiently quiet in the crowd that it could be mic'd so everyone could hear it, and at the right volume in the mix.

**Bassist:** Your sound on stage may be much thinner than you like, but out in the room there is way too much upper bass (anywhere from 80Hz to 200Hz. Try this: Use your EQ to take out everything below 300Hz, so the soundperson can put you in the PA nice and loud. Then put back in only what the soundperson says is not screwing up the sound out front. With your rig no longer overloading the room with upper bass, and running hot in the subs you'll have a better sound out front than ever before, and may feel your bass like never before as well. (Oh: when you "spank the plank", the highs either kill the folks at whom your cabinet is aimed, or blast into the vocal mics. Point your rig at your ears so you can hear what you are actually putting out). The only live bass sounds I have heard that I'd say were beyond the ordinary were from only three bassists. One had a very small rig in a very big room. One used only a single 12" speaker aimed at his head from beside his vocal monitor. One used no rig - just the monitors for definition and the spill off of the house for feeling. In all three cases, the lack of the usual mud coming off the stage allowed the bass to be hot in the PA, and without any squirrely EQ to compensate for the stage mud. Such deep, smooth, punchy, and articulate bass I have never heard from anyone else. (The single 12" guy later went to in-ear monitors and abandoned his stage rig altogether. No speaker, no monitor wedge: a new quality standard for bass sound.)

**Keyboardist:** The above gripes and recommendations apply to you as well. Also: It's a rare keyboardist that has his/her patches at least close to the same volume level. This is a problem with many keyboards as they come from the factory (and effects units too, so you are not alone). Please fix this!

**Vocalists:** Stay as close to the mic as possible, preferably at 0" but certainly no more than 2". And project, especially when speaking (especially when in a noisy bar)! If you don't, your tone will be very thin and/or you will not be heard, as the soundperson is likely using all of the gain before feedback that there is to be had. In the rare occurrence of you feeling that you are too loud, do not back off of the mic, just ask the soundperson to turn you down in the monitors. (This almost never happens - you will make the soundperson's day.) (If you are too loud only when you are really belting it out, ask the soundperson if he can put a little compression on your vocal.)

**At a suitable volume level:** With the best gear and the best soundperson, it may be possible to get the vocal monitors loud enough that everyone in the band is happy even if everything on stage is too loud. The problem is that there will be so much vocal mud coming out front from the monitors that it may not be possible to get the vocals hot enough in the PA to get a decent sound. If it is possible, it'll be too loud. It's not loud that makes the band sound powerful, it's articulation and a deep, powerful bottom end\*. The fewer sources a sound comes from, the more articulate it will be. The quieter you are on stage, the more you can be in the PA, and the better you will be heard throughout the room. Better tone, better articulation, more balls, less loud. More fun, more \$. (\*Low bass, not what a bass rig puts out - most peak at about B above open A, with a

<http://www.padrick.net/LiveSound/BandRant1.htm>

secondary peak at about F above open E - by the time you get down to your open B, harmonics and distortion are all that come out. Regrettably, most subs are not tuned so as to do much better, but thankfully some manage a little bit of real bottom.)