

Title:

A guitarist guide to surviving the gig from Hell!

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Summary:

Joe is a lead guitarist in a covers / remake band. He is a good guitarist and cool under pressure. He plays for a band called the Psycho Nymphs. They are a five piece band with two guitarist, keys, bass and drums. The other guitarist also doubles as the singer. Yet this is Joe's nightmare. As a guitarist, this scenario should induce uncontrollable trembling of all body parts and have you soiling your underwear. This, is the gig from hell.

Keywords:

guitar, gig, survive, live, perform, performing live, stage

Article Body:**Scenario**

Joe is a lead guitarist in a covers / remake band. He is a good guitarist and cool under pressure. He plays for a band called the Psycho Nymphs. They are a five piece band with two guitarist, keys, bass and drums. The other guitarist also doubles as the singer. Yet this is Joe's nightmare. As a guitarist, this scenario should induce uncontrollable trembling of all body parts and have you soiling your underwear. This, is the gig from hell.

Thinking that he starts at 10:00, Joe shows up at the venue with two hours to spare. Well, it would be two hours to spare, but Joe got given the wrong information. The Band is due to start at 8:30 and Joe hasn't even unpacked his gear yet, let alone set up. They had been trying to call Joe on his phone, but it was switched off. Joe, keeping cool, unpacks his car in a hurry and somehow manages to get everything set up only 10 minutes late. The crowd is getting restless and the bar manager is furious. Joe is keeping his cool.

No sooner than finishing his finally tune up, the Nymphs start. After another minute of working out what song to play, the Nymphs kick off their first song. It sounds terrible, with Joe's guitar too quiet and bass guitar too loud. The band plays the song half heartedly while they adjust levels and try to get things right. The crowd is wondering what the hell is going on, and the bar manager is wondering who the hell he hired and why. Joe is a little frustrated.

After standing around working out what to play next, the band begins the second song as suggested by the drummer. This one sounds better until the first chorus. Half way through the first chorus... TWANG... Joe busts a string. Joe makes do for the time being until the solo, when he realizes that the guitar solo is going to be somewhat difficult with only 5 strings. Joe fumbles his way through until the end of the song. Joe is very embarrassed.

The band stands around for a minute or two while Joe replaces the broken string. Once that is done they kick off into the next song. This one goes OK, and the crowd seems to be getting into it a little bit more. The bar manager is starting to relax, and Joe is starting to enjoy himself.

In fact, everyone is enjoying themselves. And their beers. A little too much. The Nymphos are starting to get a little sloppy and starting to miss cues. Especially the singer. He is starting to miss when he is supposed to be coming in, and slurring words. While the boys in the band are finding it hilarious, the crowd are not. Joe is starting to get tipsy.

The next song Joe's guitar starts making funny noises, and the sound starts cutting out. Eventually Joe's guitar disappears. He randomly stomps on some pedals and realizes that there is no power. He was sure those 9 volt batteries were still good. Joe unplugs his guitar lead from the pedal board and plugs it straight into his amp. Joe is getting angry, just like the crowd and the bar manager.

Two songs from the end, the stage goes black. All the amps turn off and all that can be heard is the drummer pounding away. After a few seconds all of the Nymphos are standing around, looking stupid wondering what is going on. About 30 seconds later, the power returns. The band chats quickly and decides to start the song again. This time they get through it all. They play there last song the few remaining patrons, pack up, pick up their cheque and leave the bar, never to return.

Could it get any worse for Joe and his band, the Psycho Nymphos? I doubt it. But they could have survived all of these problems by being prepared. It may seem insurmountable, but I have played a gig where nearly all of this happened in one night, and we survived. It's all preparation. This is what you need to do to survive this nightmare.

ALWAYS STAY IN CONTACT

There is no excuse to be late to a gig. With today's modern communications

technology, everyone has the potential to be contactable all of the time. Even if Joe got the time wrong, a simple phone call would have solved all the problems. However, it is always a great idea for a band to meet at a central location at some point before a show, and travel together "convoy" style if possible. This is a sure fire way to make sure everyone arrives on time, doesn't get lost, or can get assistance if something does go wrong.

The spill over effect of this is that when you arrive on time, you can take your time and set up properly, sound check, as well as check your equipment for problems and in general, relax before the show starts.

KNOW WHAT SONG COMES NEXT

Unless you are some freeform jam rock improv jazz type thing, you need to know what you are going to play. Every member of the band should know what song is coming next so they can prepare for it without having to debate first what song to play in the first place. Have a set list in sight for every member of the band. Know in advance what songs may require guitar changes or change of tuning so that you don't kick off the tune until everyone is ready. Moments like that are easily filled with some banter, usually between the singer and the audience.

ALWAYS KEEP A SPARE

It's not always possible, but you should aim to have a backup guitar ready to go at all times. This is especially true for a band with two guitarists like the Nymphs. With the second guitarist still playing, and your backup guitar primed for playing, it is more than feasible to switch guitars mid song. It takes about 10 seconds and looks very professional. Even if you are the only guitarist, depending on the song you can sometimes get away with it as well. However sometimes you just have to grit your teeth and get through it. Once the song is over you can grab your backup guitar and play the rest of the set without keeping everyone hanging around while you change a string. Change it between sets or if you only have one set then don't bother.

If you can't keep a spare guitar handy and need to change strings, have some backup material. This applies to all band members. You should have a song that can be played when any member of the band is incapacitated. Then any running repairs can be made while the rest of the band covers.

STAY SOBER / CLEAN / STRAIGHT

It doesn't matter what you think, you do not sound better when you are smashed. Sure, maybe to your ears, but not to mine or anyone else's. A few years ago, I

remember playing a huge New Years Eve show where there were two bands. There was us playing inside, and the main band playing on the outside stage. The other band I had seen many times before and they were great. In fact they were one of the most popular bands to play this particular venue. In between sets, they were heading up to their rooms, getting stoned and drunk, then coming back down to play their set in a semi comatose state. We were inside, enjoying a few drinks between sets and keeping it together. Our sets overlapped slightly and by the end of the night, whenever both bands were playing, inside was packed and outside the other band was ignored. The following year, we were asked back to play New Years again as the only band. In fact after that New Years gig we were booked regularly to play both nights of the weekend every month (think about that for a second, we were booked for 25% of that venues available shows). It may be fun to get tanked and play, but it won't get you anywhere.

NEVER TRUST A BATTERY

To this day I still cannot believe people run their effects off batteries. It is just a disaster waiting to happen. Sure, I have batteries in my pedals that I swap out every few months. But they are the BACKUP for when some drunken idiot in the crowd falls onto the stage and pulls out a power lead or something similar. Or perhaps you accidentally leave a cable plugged in between sets and the battery drains on you. If you do need to run off battery, work out how long they last and change the battery in half that time. This should help avoid unwanted failures at critical times, and make sure you have extra batteries.

By the way, have you ever heard the sound a Tube Screamer makes when it's failing? It's awful.

WE DON'T NEED NO STINKING ELECTRICITY

There is not a lot you can do about this but ride it out. Although it's not as bad as it sounds. When a venue loses power, you can be sure it will be up in less than minute unless something MAJOR has gone wrong, in which case the venue will normally shut if it is a building wide blackout. So for the next 60 seconds, what do you do? It's easy. Nobody stops. The entire band keeps playing. The singer goes to the front of the stage and starts yelling the lyrics at the crowd. I am yet to see this not work. The crowd will start singing back. When the power kicks back in the band hasn't missed a beat and the crowd will go crazy. It is slick and professional and will fire up the crowd for the rest of the night.

If it goes over the 60 seconds just finish the song and wait. Not much more you can do, but at least you tried.

JUST BE PREPAIRED

If you are prepared and use common sense, you can cope with any disaster. I personally have had all these issues, besides the drunken stupidity, happen in one night, and we survived by having an escape plan and sticking to it. It's not that hard to come up with your own emergency escape route, and I hope these examples can inspire you to be even more gig ready.