



By John McGlasson

I think for most people, the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the words “professional musician” is money, and for most, that equates with success, but in my line of work, I know a lot of professional musicians who make little or no money after the expense of being a pro is weighed against the bottom line. The cost of gear, travel, and basic living expenses make it nearly impossible for most to ever profit in this biz, much less base their futures on it, but this never stops them.

There are those of you who just read the previous paragraph, who may be sitting there with your guitar, rehearsing, writing, or recording, with crappy day jobs and empty bank accounts, who now think, “yeah, well what about me, who will make a living once the world hears my stuff?” The previous paragraph doesn’t apply to you, you’re working hard, you’re convinced it’ll happen for you if you work as hard as your heroes, and for that reason, you’re probably right. You’re a pro.

Pros write, rehearse, perform, and plan like pros all the time, whether they’re being paid or not, whether or not they’re happy with the venue or the crowd, they always play the same, like a pro. Pros are punctual, reliable, and flexible. Pros are respectful to the people who work hard to make it possible for them to do what they love in front of an audience.

Too many talented musicians today feel that being a professional means having everything done for them, having endless cash, parties, a full-time guitar tech, and not a care in the world other than strapping on the guitar for 45 minutes a night. Unless you’re playing to 5000 people a night or already famous, that’s probably not the case. Most touring musicians doing national club tours can’t afford to pay drum/guitar techs, or for people to carry their gear around for them, or set up, or tear down, they do it themselves.

I think what got me thinking about this, other than my daily activities, was a great article I read in a recent issue of Bass Player that feature the B3 guys; Sheehan/Hamm/Berlin, on a tour to select cities where there are enough bassists and guitar/drum geeks to make the show worth the travel, and these 3 monsters of their instruments, Gods to millions, are in a van, lugging their own gear every night, for far less money than they're used to getting for their brilliance, just for the love of playing. There was a picture in the magazine of Billy down on his knees soldering on a piece of gear after some rough travel, and glad to do it.

The point is, Billy Sheehan has been living that way for a long time, even when tours with David Lee Roth and Mr. Big brought him the big-time limo life, he treated this B3 tour with as much, or more, importance, because he's a genuine pro, which happened because Billy acted like a pro long, long before he ever made a penny, money's got nothing to do with it. It's probably safe to assume Billy's got the money to pay someone to tech for him on this small tour, but why? Billy knows his gear, how to maintain it, because he's always done it, and it makes him feel good to be a hands-on guy in every aspect of the biz. He's a pro.

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