

The Art of Subbing

By: Mitchell Coates



Hello fellow bass players! I am very grateful to have an opportunity to write this article. I have read many bass articles over the years and always wanted the chance to do it myself. For the first time I am able to do this so I hope you enjoy the information. In this article I wanted to focus the attention on subbing gigs. This is a subject that I really enjoy talking about.

First I wanted to clarify what I mean when I say "Subbing". I am sure most people will know what I mean by using that terminology but just in case you don't, I want to make sure we are all on the same page. Subbing is when you do a performance that is not with your regular band and you will be performing with them for the first time or maybe not. In this article I will talk about three basic topics that I feel will help in this endeavor which are actions to take before,

during, and after the gig!

Actions before the gig

There are several things to take into consideration before accepting the gig. First find out from the person that called you for the gig the style of music the band is performing. Make sure you are comfortable with that style of music. You don't want to accept a gig performing music you are not comfortable with or can not play. I don't know about you but I would not want to embarrass myself thinking I can play a country gig when I have never listened to that style of music. Be true to yourself and not just accept the gig because you need the money. This will save you a lot of problems down the road. If you are comfortable with the style of music you will be performing, get as much of the music in advance if possible before the gig so you can listen to and absorb it before the performance. You don't want to get to the gig and tell the band leader you don't know most of the material the band will be performing. That will make for a very interesting gig and you will probably not get called back!

Actions during the gig

On the day of the gig make sure you arrive to the venue extra early. Make sure before you leave you go to your favorite website to download directions so you can arrive without getting lost. Getting to the venue early has several advantages. This gives you plenty of time to talk to the band leader about any concerns he/she may have, set-up, check for any problems with your gear and instrument before the sound check (if you get a sound check), warm-up, discuss the tunes on the set-list and possibly play through some of the tunes. You may need to work out some last

minute things that may be causing you trouble in the tunes. Make sure you interact closely with the drummer and piano player. They can help you get through some tricky spots in the tune or any problems you may have during the performance. Once the performance starts, play your best and remember to play what is required for the music! During the performance is not the time to show everyone in the band how well you can play other material. Don't overplay! My motto is "If what you are playing is not enhancing the music it is taking away from the music". Overplaying can be the easiest way to not get called back for future performances. Also remember to be flexible as things may be subject to change. Be attentive to changes in the music or subtleties in the dynamics and intensity.

A good practice that I find helpful is after the first set check with the band leader and ask for feedback. This is important because if there are adjustments that need to be made you can do so before you irritate everyone on the bandstand. Also, very important, don't use any mind altering substances (i.e. alcohol, drugs, etc.) before or during the performance because this clouds your focus. Remember this is the music business and you should be professional at all times. Your emphasis should be on the business so being professional is important and will get you more calls for gigs. Another tip is while you are on the gig remembering to network with the other band members and pass out your business cards at the end of the performance. You never know if you may get a call from someone else in the band for other performances with other bands if you do a good job on the current gig. Last but not least never bad mouth the person you are subbing for. Ever!

Actions after the gig

When the gig is over thank the band leader and the other band members for allowing you to work with them and make sure you shake everyone's hand before leaving. Also, develop a working relationship with the regular bass player in the band after the gig. You never know when he/she will need you to sub again. One more note, if the reason you got the gig in the first place is because you received a call from the regular bass player in the band you were performing with and you know them personally follow-up with them after the gig and let them know how things went. If things went well and you enjoyed the performance let them know. You may need that person to sub for you someday or they may call you to sub other gigs for them in the future.

Well my fellow players, I hope you enjoyed this article and found the tips in it helpful. These tips can be helpful for veteran players as well as others without a lot of experience. And remember, if someone calls you to sub a gig for them you have a few additional tools in your arsenal to use!

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