



A GUIDE TO GETTING OUT THERE – GETTING NOTICED – AND FINDING MORE GIGS FOR THE BEGINNER AND DEVELOPING ACTS

INTRODUCTION...

When Myke and I discovered that we had a musical formula that we could turn into an act we turned our attention to how we would present ourselves to our audiences.

Despite being recently referred to as “veterans of the Folk scene, our togetherness has been rather recent. I know, that for Folk Club organisers, Open Mic MCs and some Land Lords it might seem a lot longer.

We've learnt a lot in our short time as we have attempted to make an impact on the local music scene.

As we travel around Folk Clubs and Session nights we come across a lot of entertainers who like ourselves are constantly seeking Gigs, and venues at which to perform their material.

The truth is that these days ***it's tuff out there***. Unless you have a high local profile and a recognised presence then you are going to have to chase the Gigs rather than have the Promoters phoning you. Couple this to the falling trade in the Licensed Trade which is making it difficult for Land Lords, (no one of can have missed the number of Pubs that have closed or have "To Let" signs hanging from their walls) and we in the “***live music***” business, no matter the level, are really struggling to find venues to perform.

The Mashers made a decision early, that being “***old buggers***” we did not have the time to sit around waiting for things to happen, we had to make them happen. So we set about creating a profile for ourselves.

In fact, you needn't be "old buggers", **any performer or act** seeking to make an impact with their music at any level needs to be pro-active when it comes to creating an image.

So the general purpose of this article is to pass on to others what we have found to work, and what we have found to be a complete waste of time. There's information for everyone, from the beginner to the semi pro – and while we might already know what we **should** be doing, a little reminder never goes amiss.

We hope that you find the information it contains useful and of interest.

DOING IT.....

The first and most obvious thing we did was to get out to as many **Open Mic / Jam / Folk Clubs** as we physically could.

Several venues we have made almost regular stopping off haunts, thus creating a couple of **home bases** where we can be found most weeks. We've also made a lot of new friends at our "home bases" allowing us to network and exchange ideas with other musicians, singers or writers.

Our home bases provide the opportunity to test run our new material to folks who are used to us, this is important when building a repertoire that an audience will find entertaining and of value.

Thus, when visiting other Clubs we always use our well tested material so as to make the maximum impact. We always want to make best possible impression, hopefully leaving people wanting to see more of us.

Listening to what your peers on the Busker scene have to say about your performances and songs can be of considerable help. Most people are positive and encouraging, and will volunteer their thoughts, on where improvements could be made.

Even negative responses can be helpful – sometimes.

Session / Open mic nights come in many formats, but you'll soon learn the protocol and ropes. Most evenings allow a performer two or three songs, make the most of it. Impose your personality. Learn from what you are doing - songs that turn people on, etc., above all though have fun and network with the other artists.

And don't be tempted to just stay inside Clubs of your musical genre. Get out of the comfort zone be brave, get out there into all sorts of venues, you'll be surprised at the audiences that you can win over.

But this in it's self is not enough if you are seeking to impose yourself on what often seems to be an established local music scene.

CAR SIGNS

If you are serious at wishing to up your profile then why not invest in some **car signs to promote your act**, be it solo or as a group.

If car signs can promote local businesses, sell cars, warn drivers of a baby being on board, or invite you to earn extra cash, then they may just work for your act by generating inquisitiveness. Essentially we are all nosey, and so people quite often will take a note of a Web Page address or telephone number and seek out further information about what you do.

DON' BE A SHRINKING VIOLET – YOU NEED TO BE UP FRONT

Car signs help to get your name out there.

When all is said and done musicians are no different to anyone else, plumbers garages, electricians, we all need to earn a living. And we're not convinced by the musician who says "well it's not serious", as one Act told me recently, "if you are not serious, then what right have you got to expect others to take you seriously." A sentiment to which we subscribe one hundred per cent.

PRESS RELEASES

Press Releases can be a great way of getting Local Media to take attention to your Act.

For example, if you hit upon a period of sudden activity where you are being invited to appear at Festivals and special shows along with your normal Gigs. **Trumpet the facts.**

If you've produced a new Demo Disc, or are about to launch a new CD upon an unsuspecting public, **tell everyone.**

With today's technology Press Releases are so simple to deliver to News Rooms. Search round for the Email addresses of all your local News Papers, Radio Stations, TV Channels and the relevant Music Magazines, and at the press of a button, your Press Release is delivered direct to the people who count.

You never know what might happen, especially during a poor news day.

Building a media contact lists is worth the effort.

Try to **be professional.** Make sure that your Press Releases are neat, to the point, and in a format that can be easily read by the recipients, especially if you are sending it by Email.

Email Releases have several problems, first you have to get through the SPAM filter used by many organisations these days. It's worth investing in one of those neat programmes that will check your output for words or phrases or Titles that will trigger the Spam filters.

If you are sending an attachment in a “Word” file, make sure that you send in “doc” Word 1997 – 2003 format and not “docx”, Word 2007, not everyone has updated.

You might consider using a pdf file, especially if you are including pictures as part of the release as most systems have the Adobe Reader installed these days.

If you can add pictures so much the better.

NEWS LETTERS

Keeping in touch with your audience and Promoters is important to maintaining your image.

This does have to be a chore, once you have your data base set up.

Building your data base is important. Create a list of all the pubs that promote live music, all the local Entertainment Agents and of course your audience.

The first two sections can be researched by use of the Telephone Directory and Google, it’s the “audience” bit that often becomes a problem.

If you’re not sure who your audience is ***the answer is simple***, just print off a load of news letters and spread them around whichever Clubs you are visiting.

However, there are a number of other ways to get yourself around, especially if you are Computer savvy.

All the major social networking sites either have direct music areas, or music add on units. These are well worth exploiting for discovering and communicating with your audience, as well as obviously promoting your Gigs.

There are also sites that cater only for the musicians giving them a chance to play talk together and even co-operate on music projects.

REVERBNATION.COM

This site has recently developed into one of the most useful and powerful tools for a budding Act or performer that we have come across.

Set up a ***free account*** with this site and you have access to a number of ***free*** widgets that you can place not only into all your other Web Pages, but also give access to your fans to place within their own Web Sites.

As if this were not enough, you can set up Facebook, Bebo, Myspace, Twitter all through this one site and link all the pages together.

Use of RSS allows you to shift your Blogs in Myspace to all your other sites via Reverbnation.

You can make as many MP3 tracks as you like available to your fans for free, both to you and anyone placing your player on their site. Tracks have to be below 8MB though and there is an initial limit of 100 tracks.

If all this were not enough, you can for just a few dollars have your music placed on iTunes and all the usual big name retailers, upload as many tracks to your Reverb Player as you like and sell tracks direct.

If you you've got a decent sized ego you'll also like the Daily Published Charts. Acts gain equity by promoting plays on the Player, the number of times the Widgets are imprinted on the various Web Sites placed by you or your fans, the number of new fans signed up on your basic Networking Accounts and the number of unique listeners you attract to your music.

With over 6,000 Accounts in the Folk section and over 180,000 acts in all genre, on a Global basis, it's great fun to check out where you are standing on a week to week basis.



There are loads of ideas they provide you with regards to promoting yourself, from advising the best places to put your widgets, to a very professional looking Email and

All in all this is one of the best music sites around for the budding and developing act.

MYSPACE

Myspace is one of the now well established tools for ***gaining a positive profile.***

Like all tools though you have to learn how to use it positively.

Before setting your page up visit as many of the "music" pages as you can, most always you will find the artists have something interesting to say about themselves and shout out about their music.

Don't be shy. Tell the folks about yourself, what you do. Upload some photographs.

Most important, upload some recordings of your own songs. Myspace requires MP3s and these days it takes little time or technical knowledge to convert your CD Audio files into MP3 format. It's worth the effort. There is a limit of six tracks currently on the Myspace player.



If you have nothing recorded then with the aid of a Laptop or even in your back bedroom you can knock up some acceptable sounding songs.

Keep your page up to date. Keep people informed about what you are doing, any Gigs you have list them. Make it the first port of call that people will make when they want to know what you are up to.

If you are looking for Gigs ***tell people.***

The "**Friends**" section can also be great fun and help to raise your profile. Search for local Myspace users who are into your sort of music, and send them friend requests. Look for the Myspace pages of your all time heroes and send friend requests. You will be surprised at how quickly your profile can grow.

It's no good having a nicely produced profile page with some great tracks if no one can find you. So use the Friends section to get the message that you exist across. Myspace is a network, so every friend you make will bring hundreds of other people into your network who themselves might well visit your site.

The Mashers have made many new friends and contacts by using the Myspace tools. We've got Gigs and best of all we have got ideas for new songs that fit in with the sort of material expected from The Mashers.

But remember, your Myspace page is your shop frontage. It says a lot about you. Use the multitude of tools available, most of them free of charge to build a site that people will want to come back to time and time again.

FACEBOOK

Personally we find Facebook just a bit messy. However, it is the most popular Social Networking site in the World so it's important to have a presence.

Facebook has a number of commercial add on units that you might find useful, for example their advertisement service.

We've found that the link up with Reverbnation the most useful thing, so check it out for yourself.

THE WORLD WIDE WEB

If you want to try to find a wider audience there are other sites that let you create a profile and upload your songs **for free**.

<https://www.soundclick.com>

<http://www.isound.com>

<http://www.bandmeup.co.uk>

<http://ezfolk.com>

<http://uk.music-jobs.com>

<http://www.entertainment-heaven.com>

<http://www.imusicscene.com>

www.igrooves.net

www.folkalley.com

<http://afcollective.ning.com/>

<http://londonrecording.ning.com/>

<http://www.mixcraftlive.com>

A special mention for this one

<http://folkshow.ning.com/>

Where you can meet up with all the Friends that have been brought together via the Bishop FM Folk Programme hosted by Terry Ferdinand.

So get clicking it's worth a few hours work to get yourself out there in the world and you just never know what might happen.

THE WIDER WEB

If you search around on the Internet you will find a wealth of information and ideas to help you, be your act established or just blossoming.

It's worth spending some time looking around for resources, and a lot are free.

But be warned, many of the sites are looking to sell something, be it a Music Business Directory, or a course in better Guitar playing. Buy if you think it will be of use.

Most of these sites require some sort of basic Registration, normally free, and you will get weekly News Letters by Email, and these are normally a rich vein of ideas.

For marketing ideas try Kavit Haria. A music business consultant.

<http://www.innerrhythm.org>

I think there is a heavy link between this site and

www.MusicBizz.com

For advice on your guitar technique, not that any is need of course, visit Jamie Andreas site. Jamie, is typical American type guru who bases his whole teaching on a book he wrote called The Principles of Practice. He now has an empire based on it. WARNING – it does get a bit heavy and philosophical on occasions.

<http://www.guitarprinciples.com>

Another site we have found useful for acoustic based material is Just Acoustic. A site with a wealth of material and well the time checking out.....

<http://www.justacoustic.com>

And for those looking for song ideas, or some basic tabs check out P.J. Murphy's site. Over a thousand songs with more being added weekly. Plus it has links to hundreds of other really useful music sites.....

<http://www.iol.ie/~murphypj/>

For general news on the Busking scene we think you will find this site really useful. News of auditions, competitions etc. Well worth the time particularly if you are a confident busker.

<http://www.musicalbusker.co.uk>

DEMO DISC....

Demo Discs are just that. A collection of your songs that demonstrate to a potential promoter your work.

Obviously, you would like the disc to be as professional as possible, but a CD generated in a back bedroom can often be as good as anything that is produced in a studio as far as a Land Lord might be concerned.

Remember the Demo is not for resale.

However, if you want to get a collection of songs together that you might also wish to turn into a Resale CD then you will find many Studios out there looking for your business.

The average price for a studio seems to be around £20 per hour with up to £30 per hour being added if you also want a sound engineer or technician.

Some sort of recording is almost essential these days to help establish your profile locally as well as nationally.

FINDING GIGS....

We've already touched upon the difficulty for basically unknown acts finding venues at which to perform.

So having produced your Demo Disc, use it. ***Don't wait to be asked for a demo give them out.*** Visit as many pubs or potential venues for your act as you can, introduce yourself etc.

Be selective though. A venue that is a heavy rock venue will not be that interested in a traditional folk act.

Mail outs to targeted Pubs who you know promote live music is a good practice to get into. In The Mashers experience you can expect to pick up at least one Gig for every twenty or so letters sent out.

Follow up the mail outs with a **leaflet / news letter** mail out.

When talking to potential promoters, make sure you are honest about your act. Don't promise the earth unless you can deliver. One bad experience can often put a Land Lord off booking unknown acts in the future.

AGENTS....

When talking to some acts about their progress we often get the impression that they are hanging around **waiting to be discovered**. Unless you are very, very lucky, **this will not happen**, especially if you are an acoustic act of any description, as such acts appear to be viewed as being none-commercial

It's an unfortunate fact of life that these days many Pubs and Working Men's Clubs are tied to Entertainment Agency Contracts. This means that for a set fee an Agent will fill all the entertainment requirements of the venue with artists on their books.

This makes it very easy for the venue, but a complete nightmare for a new act, or one that might be a little different to the norm as Agents have a very fixed idea about what constitutes "entertainment" in either Clubs or Pubs. And this is normally a singer performing to backing tracks, or in some cases bands doing cover songs.

From what we have gathered this is because Agents are looking for a full sound, and an act that will perform instantly recognised material. One gets the impression that they consider themselves to be "X Factor" judges for the local scene.

Of course, by searching around you will find Agents who specialise in Original Bands, or singer song writers. But those who really know what they are doing are few and far between.

There are also Agents who specialise in a certain music genre, like Folk. From what we have seen so far, these Agents go for either singer song writers who have a commercial potential, or what the Mashers call the "clever, clever, pretty, pretty" end of the Folk spectrum.

A Google search will demonstrate how these Agents concentrate on names that are already well established, just don't take my word for it.

In our experience, Agents do not have the time to provide you with any help or advice, unless your act is in the main stream. The Mashers circulated forty Agents, by mail and Email asking for advice and help enclosing our demo disc, we received just one reply. This Agent actually took the time to visit one of our Open Practice Sessions, and after promising to get back to us in a few months never did, despite a reminder being sent by us.

We've learnt that a solo Acoustic Act will find that it almost impossible to gain any support. Duo's will fair little better. Trio's / Full Bands will always be more popular because of their

bigger sound. The more popular the repertoire, the more likely your act will be picked up by an Agent.

The bottom line is that for acoustic and original acts, you have to build your profile and start leaving your footprint on the local music scene big time before you are likely to be "discovered".

PRO ACTIVE

So you need to get out there. ***Kick down doors.*** And take every opportunity to demonstrate what you do.

An audience of one or two can sometimes be more affective in helping to improve your profile than one of hundred, because the word gets out that you take trouble and are bothered about other art groups etc.

Search out opportunities to appear at Festivals. Many Festivals have opportunities at the ground floor for support acts. You might not get paid, but you will get yourself noticed, and it always look great on the CV.

If invited to perform at Charity Events, take them. Again, it's about stepping up the profile of your act.

LOCAL RADIO

Many local Radio Stations have weekly Folk Programmes. Some of the Presenters have pages on Myspace and are worth checking out as they are often looking for new acts to play on their programmes.

Some local Radio Stations also have a regular slot where they will play a local artist and give a short presentation on the artist.

Use these opportunities. Having a song played can help raise your profile. The Mashers had a single song played on their local radio station, and this generated many new hits on the Myspace page and a couple of Gigs.

If you live in The Great North, Chorley FM and Bishop FM have designated Folk Programmes on which they will feature artists, but only if you are prepared to put yourself out and make the trips.

The exposure is great though – and of course you will make many new friends.

SO YOU HAVE A GIG....

So by your efforts, the telephone rings and you are offered a Gig. One assumes that you are **pricing yourself** correctly. Recognise where you are in the feeding chain. Unless you have something really special to sell, then in the early days a **fee** of under £100 can be expected.

In fact, currently any act will be more than lucky if they can squeeze £80 out of a Land Lord.

As demand increases, like any other commercial venture, so your price can increase.

Support slots will pay little or nothing at all, but they are important for gaining experience. **Take them.** They also really help to get your name out there.

Be professional. Send the Promoter a confirmation letter confirming the date, the length of time you will be on stage, the start time, the fee. If a mistake has been made, then the Promoter can quickly rectify the matter.

When times are hard, as is the current situation, then you may have to be **creative** when it comes to negotiating fees.

Some Folk Clubs for example will book you on a share of the Raffle, or entrance fee basis, while some venues will be making a ticket charge and pay you according to ticket and door sales. In these cases it is worth negotiating a minimum fee to cover your basic expenses.

Festivals have differing policies. But again, if you are travelling any distance make sure that travel costs are covered. You are unlikely to be paid for Festivals unless invited onto the main stage.

PROMOTE YOUR GIG....

Those who may have been reading The Mashers News Blogs at www.Myspace.com/therawmarshmashers will know that Gig promotion is one of their main gripes about the local music scene.

Venues / Promoters and Artists are as guilty as each other at under promoting their events.

Remember your little GIG is competing for people's time, against television, a wealth of other live entertainment, hobbies etc, etc, etc.

The Venue is in our experience simply lazy. A few posters scattered around their bars is thought to be enough, and then only if the artist has taken the trouble to produce some posters themselves.

The Mashers always provide venues with around five or six **A4 sized Posters** for the walls, and around fifty **A5 fliers** for leaving on bar tables during the week leading up to the event.

While the posters are used, for some reason the venues in some cases are simply too lazy to leave the fliers on the tables, no matter how entertaining they may be – and The Masher fliers are quite funny, even if they say so themselves.

Some artists have some nice glossy posters produced, but the affect of these can often be lost when someone scribbles in a date and time for the event on the poster.

It's worth shopping around for print prices.

The Mashers make their own, and anyone with a computer can these days do the same.

But the artist too can do a lot to promote an event. Artists often take the view that they are simply there for the music, rock and roll man. That might well be the case, but unfortunately at the level we are working and if you want an audience, this attitude will simply not work.

Wherever an artist performs, be it only a Jam Night, or Busker session, make sure that you ***tell people*** about the event. Leave your fliers for the event on the bar tables etc.

Local Radio Stations often have free local listing on their Web Site, which also get a mention on air. ***All it takes is an Email.***

Make sure your Gig is listed on your ***Myspace*** site. You might not believe it but people will log on to see what you are up to.

Myspace also has a number of other tools that you can use for promoting your event. They have an Event Invite facility. Where you can select Friends to be circulated with your event, this even has an rsvp facility and it's always fun reading all the excuses as to why folks won't be able to make the Gig.

Myspace also has a Bulletin Board, which by far the quickest way to contact all your Friends with your activities.

Some Acts have also been known to use the comment facility to promote their events. The Mashers, and we aren't shy, frown on this practice as it can mess us the pages of Friends.

In addition to all this there is a relatively new breed of ***Listings Web Sites*** on the Internet. These sites in our experience can be quite good. After registering you create an entry for your Gig. The site will then place it on their listings and also circulate it to local Newspapers and Radio Stations. Some will also send a reviewer if so requested.

Most ***Local Papers*** have an Entertainment listing page. Venues can advertise their events for a small charge. A reasonable size advert costs around £40.

The Mashers now add a paragraph to their ***Confirmation Letter*** where we list what we will be doing to promote the event and in view of our reasonable fee hope that the Promoter will make a similar investment.

And don't forget your car. Make a couple of little signs that you can put in your *car windows* promoting your Gig.

Here are a couple of links

<http://www.ents24.com>

<http://remotegoat.co.uk>

<http://www.folkandroots.co.uk>

<http://www.folking.com>

<https://www.artistdata.com>

THE GIG

This is the biggest chance to *promote yourself*.

Be professional in the way you present your act. Turn up on time; quietly go about setting your equipment up.

Stage areas in many of the pubs will be very small. And sometimes you will find yourself hidden away in a corner along with the fruit machine and juke box. You will find that Land Lords will switch juke boxes off, but are very reticent about turning the fruit machine off. This can throw up some very interesting situations, don't allow yourself to become distracted.

Find the Manager / Land Lord and introduce yourself and check on what they are expecting from you.

Leave your **general publicity fliers** on the tables. Some of you might also leave a few Demo Discs lying around, depending upon how much money you have invested in developing the discs. But if they are simply what might be described as rough home produced then the cost duplicating the discs is now so low that it is certainly worth a thought.

No matter what happens perform. Remember that many in the bar will not have come to see you, they are simply out to enjoy a pint and that you are incidental, hopefully an added bonus to their evening's experience.

Every Gig that you do is gaining you experience no matter what the provocation play on. The Mashers in their short time have experience of many situations. We've been delayed from our start time by an important Rugby match, and then were faced with an excited audience wound up by the sport and not the least interested in an acoustic act. We've started Gigs with an empty bar. We've played on nights where the weather has been simply awful and played to an audience of dripping wet and very cold punters. We've finished Gigs to empty bars, because it

was past the customers' bed time, but we have always maintained our standard and worked through.

Be true to yourself when planning your set lists. But remember you are on the stage and have been employed to entertain. So a full two hours of self written ballads might just prove to be a little draining for anyone who might be listening. Try if you can to work in songs somewhere that people might know. The Mashers early Gigs were full of comedy songs – it didn't work.

The style of the performance is yours though. And at the end of it all, it is the style that will count.

If you go about it all in a tidy and professional manner, no matter what the response from the audience the Land Lord will remember you and you are likely to get a repeat booking. Not only that he might well go and **recommend** you to other Land Lords.

The Mashers have also taken to sending Land Lords a **Thank You Letter** about a week after a Gig. Wishing them well and asking for any comments they may wish to make about the evening or performance. **Honest Feed Back** can be useful to improving your act.

And **GOOD LUCK TO YOU ALL**

We hope this missive will have been of some help to you and if nothing else might provide you with some food for thought or provided some ideas that you can develop for your own use.

Please feel free to tell us of your ideas and experiences as we will be adding and amending the Blog over time and it's always open to new ideas.

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