

CHAPTER 2 - TEN DISTURBING FACTS THAT MUST BE UNDERSTOOD

Most musicians and many professionals think they understand the business, often under the delusion that knowing it's treacherous and exploitative is sufficient when combined with intuitive senses of perception and judgment. Even if that highly questionable assumption is accurate, it's essential to understand the real mechanisms of the business in order to properly protect yourself *and* take advantage of the various opportunities that are out there.

But more crucial, and substantially more productive, it's essential to understand the difference between "getting ripped off" and standard operating procedures. In order to judge and measure such unquantifiable elements as trust, reliability and skill, one must understand the playing field upon which the "game" takes place. And you must understand that in spite of its seriousness in terms of its art and the personal lives of those who inhabit it, the Jazz World is a game. Everybody likes to play. Musicians play music. The business plays the musicians.

That's the playing field. And while this book is dedicated to finding successful business alternatives that are more in keeping with artistic expression, it also focuses on interaction with the existing business structure – but out of *choice* rather than necessity. So, for those who choose to do so (and I expect that will include most of you) the following ten facts are fundamental in understanding the methods, and even more importantly, the *reasons* why the business functions the way it does.

1. Virtually everyone on the business side of jazz is a failed musician.

The proof? Ask around. Ask any agent, clubowner, record exec, jazz society director, writer, activist, whatever, if they always aspired to their profession or if their original goal was to be a musician. Failed may be a harsh word, but true.

While this could be a positive element, in that the business professionals should understand and respect the effort and skill required to be a performing musician, it quite often isn't the case. When the decision to abandon the dream of performing occurs, it's generally accompanied by a true spirit of commitment toward improving the harsh realities and expanding the opportunities for those who possess the greater talent and commitment – along with a more selfish desire to be part of a world that is so enticing, exciting and meaningful. But somewhere along the way those good intentions tend to go astray, often mutating into exploitation and contempt.

Why does this occur? There are a variety of reasons that will be examined throughout this book. Some, like greed, are simple. But there is one overarching circumstance that is key to this disintegration of good intentions. And that is the distinct and nearly uncrossable line drawn by musicians between themselves and non-musicians. This line, which is evidently more impenetrable a barrier than was the Berlin Wall, might exist for the sense of security it provides to a community that has rightfully come to expect assault and looting, but is really no more than self-inflicted protective custody. And as such, it ultimately makes that community so much more easily controllable.

This invisible but clearly distinct line does not blur even in the light of age, race, friendship or circumstance, and any non-musician who thinks it *does* is either blind or deluded by their own self-misperception. That line, in one way or another, always contributes to the abandonment of part or all of the professional's original altruistic intentions. Some try to ignore the line or pretend they've successfully crossed it by forcing their participation on the creation of music – the label exec who provides “artistic direction,” assemblers of Fantasy League All-Star events, promoters who insist on performing with artists of enormously superior talent.

Then there are the label honchos, club owners, agents, etc. who remain in awe of those who play the music, and are so “respectful” that they can't say no, even though they know they'll never say yes, in spite of the fact that they'd be doing so much better by the artist in giving the straight skinny.

Sometimes the line becomes a “justification” to exploit. Other times it produces a basic indifference to once-important concerns and a settling for membership in the non-musician subculture that assembles for various conferences, meetings, festivals, and other events that contribute to their personal illusions of importance to the art form. And sadly, that line forces talented, sincere and dedicated individuals into business careers where simply being around the music is supposed to provide a substantial part of their professional compensation. But worst of all, the sense of isolationism that line produces among musicians often unites them under a yoke of ignorance that's continuously reinforced by a vicious cycle of uninformed perceptions spread among themselves.

I've personally watched dozens of committed and enthusiastic individuals step into the jazz profession only to become frustrated, disillusioned, and contemptuous – or in some cases, viciously exploitative and abusive. Unrequited love often mutates into resentment and even hatred.

Is this line a justification for the terrible history of abusive exploitation? Absolutely not. But from a humanistic standpoint, taking in all of our frailties, insecurities, misgivings and wants, it's an understandable reaction. Now this can be interpreted as blaming victims for their own violation. Not at all. What I'm saying is that musicians must gain an understanding of their environment and the unique passion that jazz evokes in those who pursue it as a vocation. If you hike in the desert, you must understand how heat, sun and the nature of its various flora and fauna can affect your very survival. The world of business makes similar demands.

This line of demarcation will not disappear; just understand how it affects things. In the cases of those with whom you hope to do good business, recognize the sense of deprivation and frustration that failing as a musician may produce.