



Solo Saxophone Gigging Handbook

by Fred Cavese
Rockledge, Florida
EZDIMUSIC, LLC

<https://fredcavesemusic.com>



July 2023

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1. Background: For 7 years, I've been playing solo sax gigs for a variety of audiences (e.g., corporate clients, civic events, private parties, nonprofit organizations, restaurants, senior living facilities) ranging in size from a dozen to 200 people. I'm a retired USAF officer and attorney with no formal music training other than private clarinet and tenor sax lessons in my teens and your standard high school band participation. I've never made a living through music; actually, music was on hold for about 25 years until after I retired in 2008. I played occasionally in a few big bands in the greater St Louis, Missouri area for a couple of years before relocating to the Space Coast of Florida in 2016, but I'm mostly a self-taught jazz/pop saxophonist over the past 10 years. I play mainly tenor and soprano sax, and sometimes alto or sopranino. I started playing solo sax gigs as a once or twice a month retirement hobby, but it has blossomed into a part-time business, with over 500 solo gigs under my belt now.

My gigs range from 1 to 4 hours and my repertoire is a sax/vocal mix of mostly jazz standards and 60s/70s/80s pop/soft rock/contemporary tunes (Demo video: <https://youtu.be/x-lKytmx-z4>). And although solo gigging with backing tracks doesn't offer the spontaneous interaction with other musicians you'll find in ensemble performances, I enjoy it because: (1) I'm in complete control, (2) I don't have to coordinate my activities with anyone else, and (3) I get out of it what I put into it – unaffected by others' (sometimes shoddy) work ethic (*yes, I've had a few bad experiences*). I like being able to choose the music, rehearse whenever I want, and set my own gig schedule. And for what it's worth... I make better money on my solo gigs (with a smaller investment of time) than I do when I perform with an ensemble.

But soloing is also demanding and has its pitfalls if you're not careful. Over the years, I've learned some lessons that I'd like to share in an attempt to shorten the learning curve for others who might be starting out. Here goes...

2. How to Get Gigs: This is always a concern, and the answer depends on

how talented you are and how aggressive you want to be. What type of advertising should you do? How do you approach prospective clients? It's **tough to convince someone to hire you when you don't have a track record of performance**, so it can be a Catch-22.

When I started, I advertised by performing. I went downtown and busked on a shady sidewalk once a week during busy hours to see if I could earn enough tip money in an hour to buy lunch. It was just a soprano sax, a small bluetooth soundbox to play backing tracks from my iPad, a tip jar, and me. Busking gives you immediate feedback as to how well you're connecting with people. In addition to the tips, a couple of influential people dropped their business cards into my tip jar, which led to some paid civic event gigs that occur on a regular basis and draw a lot of attendees. More gigs resulted from contacts established at those gigs, and so forth, and so forth. Most of my gigs have come from referrals or were the result of someone seeing me at a gig.

When it comes to advertising... You can throw a lot of mud against the wall with social media, direct mail, etc. to reach potential clients, but here's my view: **If you're good at what you do, your best form of advertising is a gig.**

3. Do Your Homework: When getting booked for a new public venue, **learn as much about the venue in advance of your gig as possible.** The internet helps, but talking to other musicians who've played there is even better. And visiting in person is best. Before playing at a restaurant for the first time, I always go there for a bite to eat, to meet the owner/manager, and to listen to another musician's performance. That shows respect for the venue and gives me a feel for the audience, acoustics, lighting, equipment issues, foot traffic, intangibles, etc, I'll likely encounter.

4. Be Punctual: Musicians are notorious for being free-spirited fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants types, so if you're the bandmember who's always the last to arrive

and is scrambling to get set up on time, maybe solo gigs aren't for you. On a solo gig, **there's no one to cover for you and start the gig while you're still wetting a reed and catching up.** You're "it," so you must be prompt and professional. You must have reliable transportation. If you need 30 minutes for setup, plan to arrive 45-60 minutes before your scheduled start time. Anticipate traffic issues, especially around rush hour.

5. Expect the Unexpected: Plan for parking/offload problems with no one to assist you. Expect "gotchas" when setting up. For example, where's the nearest power outlet? How many tables/chairs do you have to navigate around to access it? Do you have a long-enough extension cord with surge protector? (This is why I like battery powered PA systems). **Plan for the worst, and if all goes smoothly, great.** Clients will love it when you're ready to play a few minutes before the appointed time.

6. Dress Appropriately: I'm turned off by musicians who look like they just rolled out of bed. You may feel differently, but if I'm paying money to watch someone perform, I believe he/she should be dressed at least as smartly as I am. **I think it shows respect for the audience.** I've seen **Paul McCartney** in concert twice, and he follows this principle (in fact, he was dressed better than I was each time). **Good enough for him, good enough for me.**

A couple of years ago, my wife and I watched a trio at our local jazz club and the bassist and drummer were both wearing loose untucked oversized shirts, baggy/wrinkly cargo shorts, sneakers, and baseball caps. There we were, in an upscale, classy venue, paying \$10-15 for house drinks, and these musicians looked like they had just stepped off a fishing boat! Sorry, but I wasn't impressed, despite their musical talent.

Of course, "**appropriate**" attire will vary with the type of gig (think outdoor festivals), but for me, indoor gigs for cocktail/dinner audiences usually

mean button-down dress shirt with necktie and/or vest, dress slacks, and closed-toed shoes. I can always take off my vest and/or necktie if I'm overdressed or the room is too warm.

7. Equipment: Unless your gig calls for only a saxophone played acoustically with no accompaniment, you're going to need some additional equipment. Here are my thoughts (*Note: all equipment referenced below in **bold** is listed at **Appendix A** with website links*):

a. PA System - Small Footprint: Solo gigs are often simply background music for cocktail/dinner audiences in small to medium-sized venues, and your dedicated performance area may be quite small. **Volume is usually the venue operator's main concern and you'll rarely be asked to play more loudly**, so you probably don't need a PA system that'll blow the doors off the place. **A small, one-piece lightweight PA system will usually suffice**, and I've never needed a floor monitor or in-ear monitor for my gigs. However, you might want to spread out 2 units if the room is very large, or to cover a separate dining area, or for outdoor gigs where the sound can dissipate quickly.

Battery-powered PA units enable you to set up anywhere easily and quickly, and I've had great success with one in particular (more on that below). Wireless mics and a wireless connection for your backing tracks device will also simplify things, make setup go faster, and minimize tripping hazards. **I use wireless devices extensively** – but they have their limitations, so be careful (more on that below).

b. Keep it Light: The more solo gigs you play, the more you'll appreciate compact, lightweight gear. I've been using the **Bose S1 Pro** for a few years and really like it. It has 3 channels, a full sound, an internal rechargeable battery (up to 11 hrs playing time) and built-in EQ and FX. I try to keep my gig setup as simple as possible... My philosophy is ***"The more gadgets, electronics, and***

wires, the more that can go wrong.” For FX, all I need is just a little bit of reverb – so the S1 Pro's built-in FX suffices for me – and I don't carry a separate mixer, effects pedal, or other peripherals. There are several PA unit brands/models similar to the Bose S1 Pro that are good as well. Shop around for the one that has the features you need in your price range.

For many of my gigs, my required gear is so minimal that I'm able to **haul everything to/from my car in a single trip.** I typically will have: (1) A **Gard Double Sax Rolling Gig Bag** (for tenor and soprano) with telescoping handle, (2) a **Boombah Rolling Baseball Equipment Bag** with telescoping handle for instrument stands, iPad, mics, and other accessories, and (3) a **Bose S1 Pro** unit w/accessories in a **Bose S1 Pro Backpack** on my shoulders. The S1 Pro can often be positioned on the floor or a table with good sound quality, but I'll use a **Gator Frameworks Speaker Stand** for certain venues. Large venues may need a second Bose S1 Pro. Sometimes I'll use my more powerful **Bose L1 Pro 8** PA system (more bass; no battery power) instead of 2 S1 Pros.

For most gigs I play, I'm able to do a complete setup in 10-15 minutes. That's tenor and soprano sax, a Bose S1 Pro or L1 Pro 8 PA unit, iPad, wireless sax mic, wireless voice mic, and promotional banner. Add another 5-10 minutes if the gig calls for a second S1 Pro, stage lights, and/or tip jar, or I decide to set up audio/video recording devices.

c. Mic'ing your Sax: There are competing schools of thought as to whether a sax needs a microphone for solo gigs. Some say no solo sax ever needs to be mic'd. However, **I mic my sax through my PA system for every gig,** just like my vocals and backing tracks. **Three reasons:** (1) I get a consistent, homogenous mix, which enables me to hear the balance as I play – and maintain a consistent sound for the audience if I stroll, (2) There have been some really loud cocktail parties (which started out not-so-loud) where mic'ing my sax was necessary in order for it to be heard beyond just a few feet,

and (3) Running my sax through my PA system gives me a clean audio recording of both sax and tracks via the Line Out port on my PA system. I carry a few old iPhones in my gear bag and sometimes record audio into GarageBand on an iPhone using a \$25 “**Headset Buddy**” adapter. Video is recorded with another iPhone (or 2) on a small tripod, and the audio and video are later mixed in iMovie on an iMac to create live performance videos for my YouTube channel (“[Fred Cavese Music](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8)”). If you want to record more than 60-90 minutes of video, you may need to connect a **5V external power bank** to your iPhone, because recording video drains the battery quickly.

d. Wireless Sax Mics: You may certainly use a wired sax microphone mounted on a stand, but the mic stand constitutes extra equipment to haul, and I've found that a clip-on wireless mic provides freedom of movement and is especially good for strolling. There are many brands/models out there, and I've tried about a half-dozen, but **I currently like the NUX B-6** for good sound quality, cost effectiveness (about \$200), and easy “plug and play” convenience. As I said... ***I try to keep the gadgetry and electronics on my gigs as simple as possible – with as few wires as possible*** – so I use the NUX B-6 a lot. But being on the crowded 2.4Ghz wireless band, it is sometimes susceptible to interference and drop outs. So **I always have my AMT Q7-LS Mini Wireless System on hand as well.** It's a professional-level all-in-one mic/transmitter and receiver (about \$800) with superior sound quality and 99 channels on the UHF band (interference is never an issue), but its setup is a bit more involved than the NUX B-6 and the mic & transmitter are bigger/bulkier on the bell of the sax.

I previously used the Audio-Technica ATW-1101 Wireless System with the excellent DPA 4099 clip-on microphone, but I've gravitated away from backpack transmitter systems and now prefer systems where the microphone and transmitter are an “all-in-one” unit.

e. Other Wireless Devices: Sometimes a gig will necessitate a second

PA unit. For instance, if I'm playing a large dining room, positioning a second Bose S1 at the opposite end of the room will provide a balanced sound throughout the room and avoid having to turn up the main unit so much that diners close to it will complain of volume. Also, hearing the backing tracks when strolling is easier. Rather than connecting the units with speaker cable, I like to use a **wireless guitar transmitter and receiver**. Plug the transmitter into the "Line Out" of PA unit 1, and the receiver into the "Mic" input on PA unit 2, and that's it. There are many choices available online for \$40 to \$150, and they facilitate quick setup of multiple PA units without tripping hazards. **Here's a tip...** Try to use a pair that does not use the same wireless band as your wireless mic does (2.4Ghz, 5.8Ghz, UHF), to avoid potential interference.

f. Backing Tracks: If you don't want to create your own backing tracks with software like Band in a Box (I've created a few), there are many sources for tracks on the internet. Some are free; some cost a few dollars per track; some are pricier. Nearly all sites allow you to listen to a sample before deciding to download the track. I try to avoid "Midi" files because I think they sound tinny and artificial. **I prefer tracks that use live musicians playing real instruments for an authentic jazz rhythm section sound.** And I sometimes have to tailor a track in GarageBand to get it to a duration of 3 to 4 minutes, which I've found to be a good length for gigs. Shop around, and you'll find tracks that suit your needs. (See **Appendix B** for a list of sources I like)

There are several ways to play your backing tracks (laptop, phone, etc.) but **I run my tracks** using the simple **Apple Music app** (formerly iTunes) from a **2017 13" iPad Pro** via a bluetooth connection with my PA system – BUT I always have a 1/8" connecting cable handy in case of interference (bluetooth uses the crowded 2.4Ghz band). The large 13" screen is helpful on gigs.

I always stand when performing and prop my iPad on the front pocket of my Gard Double Sax Rolling Gig Bag for waist-level fingertip

access, and I hang my **vinyl promotional banner** from the handle to cover the **backside of the bag** – which faces the audience. So my sax gig bag operates as a discreet music stand and all the audience sees is my banner (and I don't have to find a storage area for my gig bag). See photos at **Appendix C. It's a very compact and useful setup.** (Again... think small footprint) Playing the tracks from the Apple Music app works fine for my purposes and the app is free.

If you choose to use the Apple Music app, **here's a caveat...** the app will automatically start playing the next track in your music library at the completion of a track, and you don't want that on a gig. So, to avoid that, I create a one-track “playlist” for each track when I enter it into my library, and all my tracks are actually listed on the left-hand side of my iPad's screen as one-track playlists all the time. When I play a track on a gig, I just select it from that list of one-track playlists, so it doesn't advance to another track when complete. It works well for me, but there are plenty of apps that are specially-designed for playing tracks on gigs (just search the internet), and many musicians prefer them, so some trial and error may be necessary to figure out what works best for you.

g. Repertoire: How large a repertoire you need may depend on how many different genres of music you plan to feature. **The more genres, the larger your library will likely be, so you can go deep into each genre if necessary.** It can also depend on the length or type of gigs you do. Busking and civic event sidewalk gigs (e.g., arts/crafts festivals) probably require the least robust repertoire, because your audience is transient. Occasionally, someone will stick around for a full song and maybe make a request.

My focus is jazz standards and 60s/70s/80s pop, soft rock & contemporary melodies (see website: <https://fredcavesmusic.com/setlist>). Generally, I cover 12 to 15 tunes per 60 minutes of playing time, so I usually play around 35 tunes over 3 hours (minus one 15 to 20-minute break). I have

about 150 tunes in my library, and I've found that there are about 75 that I play most often (the crowd favorites), with another 75 that are requested less often but are still popular with my audiences.

h. Setlists: I use the **Apple Notes** app to create my setlist, and I keep it swiped to the right-hand side of the iPad screen for pullout during the gig. I color-code song names for quick reference (e.g., **red = soprano**; **blue = tenor**; **orange = soprano w/vocals**; **green = tenor w/vocals**).

Should you prepare a pre-planned setlist for each gig? For me, the answer is **“It depends on the audience.”** For example, if the gig is a **private party dinner/dance**, I'll prepare a setlist that focuses on easy listening background music for the dinner hour, then kicks it up a notch the rest of the way with a higher-energy blend of swing/rock/party tunes.

If it's a **group of seniors** for "afternoon entertainment hour," I know they usually like Great American Song Book standards, swing, bossa nova, and sing-a-longs, so I'll prepare a 15-16 song setlist that focuses on those genres. I may get a request for a particular song or have to skip a few to stay within the allotted time, but generally I'm able to stick to the game plan.

However, if I'm playing background music for a **restaurant dinner audience**, I usually don't prepare a 3-hr song-by-song setlist, because I don't know who's going to walk through the door. Might be an older audience that likes easy listening; might be a younger crowd that wants to dance; might be a mixture. So I'll use the Apple Notes app to categorize my "Top 100" songs into columns (jazz/swing, blues, bossa, R&B, pop/rock) and select from the columns as I read the audience and let their responses be my guide. I might play something in the first hour, then play it again in the third hour because a new patron requests it. **The rules are... There are no rules.**

Whether I'm playing from a prepared setlist or not, I try to **mix up the order** for variety's sake -- so **no two consecutive songs have the same rhythm or key**, and if one song is pure instrumental, then the next one is usually an instrumental/vocal mix. I'll do 3 or 4 tunes on tenor, then a few on soprano, to minimize switching. But again, it doesn't always go that way. Audience responses/requests control the flow.

When I prepare a setlist for an audience I know I'm going to see again soon (e.g., a senior living facility that I play at once or twice a month), I edit that setlist afterward to reflect what I actually played, so the next time I play there, I avoid repetition. Some folks have good memories.

i. Sheet Music: If you need to use sheet music on a solo gig, do it. There's no law against it. And for strictly background music gigs where most eyes are not directed toward you, it probably won't make much difference. However, **I don't use sheet music on gigs**. Others may disagree, but I'm a firm believer in the old adage ***“You play better when the music's in your head than when your head's in the music.”*** I think the absence of sheet music fosters a smoother and more visually-impressive performance. Additionally, it enables me to make eye contact with the audience and do some strolling, to hopefully develop a rapport. Even with just a background music gig, there are always some folks who are paying attention to what you're doing. Eye contact helps.

When I add a new tune to the repertoire, I practice it until I've memorized the melody and can incorporate at least a simple improvised verse/chorus based off the melody. When I add a **new backing track** to my Apple Music library, I include a shorthand notation in the title line for quick reference on a gig. The **title line includes the key, the first note, the number of verses, and other pertinent info** (key change; intro, etc). For instance: “PA – Moondance (Bm-F#)(3x)(4-bar intro)” means “Play along track of Moondance

in the key of B minor (for Bb instruments), first note is F#, played 3 times, with a 4-bar intro.” Those bits of info are all I need on the gig to then play the song from memory and do some improvisation. Remember, for most solo sax gigs, audiences want to hear music they recognize, so sticking close to the melody even when improvising isn't bad. Unless you're headlining at your local jazz club, you probably don't need to be able to play 7 fingerbusting choruses of “Giant Steps” with 3 key changes in order to connect with the audience.

j. Vocals: If you can incorporate some vocals into your performances, it'll **add another dimension to your gigs, make you more competitive in a tight market, and open a few more doors.** The good news is you don't need pipes like Sinatra's... Simply being able to carry a basic melody so you can alternate verses between sax and voice on some songs will brighten your gigs and help you connect with your audience on another level. It's really beneficial for those gigs that are NOT background music – like “afternoon entertainment hour” at a senior living facility when there are 25 faces staring at you. Just choose your songs carefully so you stay within your vocal range.

I memorize the lyrics to each song in my vocals repertoire, and I use a **wireless voice microphone** so I can move around and engage the audience. And a wireless voice mic helps even if you don't sing, because when playing special events you can hand it to the event coordinator so he/she can walk around when making announcements, conducting raffle drawings, etc.

k. Stage Lights: Not all of your gigs will necessitate stage lights, but for those that do, it's good to have something light and portable. I use a couple of **36 LED Par Lights** with internal rechargeable batteries that may be angled upward from the floor, and they do the job nicely. They're about \$50/pair and I carry them in a \$30 **Rockville Compact Soft-Sided 2-Light Carry Bag.**

I. Miscellaneous Equipment: In addition to saxes, PA system, mics and

iPad, here are some additional items I take to gigs. Most of these items fit into my rolling baseball equipment bag:

- **Instrument Care Accessories (ICA) Soprano Sax Cover**
- **Hercules Tenor/Soprano Sax Stand**
- vinyl promotional banner w/velcro (rolled up and stored in side pocket of Gard Double Sax Rolling Gig Bag)
- small folding stool with black cloth covering
- tip receptacle and business cards w/holder (to place on folding stool)
- old iPhone (x3) for audio/video recording
- **table-top tripod w/iPhone holder** (x2) (for shooting video)
- **Headset Buddy adapter** (for recording audio)
- **wireless guitar transmitter/receiver** (x 2)(different frequencies)
- iPad/iPhone charging cable w/**5V power supply** (x2)
- 25ft 1/4" speaker cable (x 2)
- 1/8"-1/4"-XLR adapters
- 25ft extension cord w/surge protector
- extra AA rechargeable batteries (for certain wireless devices)
- rope/string/bungee cords/rubber bands
- plastic coverings for equipment in case of weather issues
- masking tape
- pen/paper
- hand towel
- travel toothbrush, toothpaste, mouthwash (after eating on a break)
- neosporin, bandages, ibuprofin (injuries can happen)
- 8oz bottle of water (in case refreshments aren't available).

m. Backup Equipment: What's your plan if your PA system craps out on you only 5 minutes into a 3-hour gig? How about if your sax busts a spring or loses a pad and it's beyond your ability to make a quick repair? What if your wireless mic is cutting out due to interference? The show must go on, and there are no bandmates who can continue the gig without you. For this reason, **I take 2 saxes to every gig, and I carry a backup item for everything else:** backup iPad, backup sax/vocal mics, even a backup PA unit (if I need only 1 Bose S1 Pro for the gig, the other is in the car).

One reason why I love the **tenor and soprano sax combo** for gigs is because **they're both Bb instruments**, so if one sax has a problem I can't fix, I can play the entire gig on the other sax with the same backing tracks and fingerings (although I may have to take things up or down an octave for best sound on some tunes). Switching from tenor or soprano to alto sax for an entire gig with the same backing tracks would require an on-the-fly transposition for each tune and be riskier. Again, I try to **keep things simple** on gigs.

If you're using rechargeable battery-powered equipment, **be sure everything is fully charged or you have backup batteries on hand**. If you're depending on wireless mics or other wireless devices, I recommend backup devices on different frequencies, or having wired connections ready in case of interference.

n. House Sound System: Plugging into a house sound system can minimize the gear you need to haul and provide a balanced sound throughout the venue, but **some venues have cheap ceiling speakers** that don't have the audio quality of your own PA system, and **connecting to the house system may not be easy** (*Another reason to check out the venue in advance!*). For instance... Where's the main console? How do you connect to it? Is it wired or wireless? Do you have the right software/adaptor? Will you be able to hear

your tracks and yourself when playing or will you still need your own monitor?

8. Read the Audience: Pay attention to the response (or lack thereof) you're getting from your audience as the gig progresses. **Facial expressions, body language, applause, and tips will signify the music they like**, and if you can, give them more of it – even if it's not what's on your planned setlist. I'm always receptive to requests. However, I never try to fake my way through a song if I just don't know it. You never know who's in the audience, so my theory is: ***“The song I don't play is always better than the one I play poorly.”*** If I don't know a particular song, I offer an alternative by the same artist or in the same genre. Often, the requester is happy with that. And later, I learn the song that was requested, because I may see that person again. There are a dozen tunes in my repertoire that exist because people requested them and I didn't know them at first. And now that I've learned them, I use them in my gigs regularly.

9. Take Care of Yourself: The beauty of a solo gig is you're the star of the show and don't have to share the spotlight with anyone. But that's a double-edged sword. **As a soloist, there's no one to cover for you, so you can't have an off night.** You can't take it easy behind bandmates' solos if you injured your hand, cut your lip, are suffering from a head cold, or are enduring a hangover from the previous night's festivities. You have to be “on” for every song of the entire gig, so everything you play must reflect your “A” game. Know your limits, eat right, get plenty of rest, and manage your schedule smartly, so you show up for each gig fresh and ready to impress, not dragging your butt. Each client deserves your best.

10. What to Charge: This is entirely up to you, because **only you know what your time is worth.** But it's not difficult to find out what comparable musicians earn for similar gigs, which will give you a ballpark reference point. And those who are just starting out are usually more inclined to take lower-paying gigs, mainly for the experience. Everyone has to start somewhere. And whether you

gig for a living or just as a sideline may help determine what you charge and which gigs you'll take.

Generally, I've found that corporate/private events have bigger budgets than do civic festivals or restaurant gigs. Therefore, **corporate/private events usually pay better**, although a good night of tips at a civic or restaurant gig can often compensate. And it's always nice to give back to the community, so **consider doing the occasional freebie or reduced rate gig for your favorite charity or nonprofit organization**. They'll love you for it, you'll feel good about it, and the publicity never hurts.

11. Bar/Restaurant Gigs: This can be a contentious subject, because many musicians feel these venues take advantage of them by not paying them “what they're worth” – which usually means “what the gigs paid in the 70s/80s, adjusted for inflation.” But times (and consumers' preferences) change. And, contrary to what musicians may desire, **bars/restaurants aren't in business to employ as many musicians as possible and support the arts**. They're in business to generate maximum food/beverage revenue at minimum cost.

With the exception of jazz clubs and similar venues for whom live music is their focus, **live music is only a means to an end — not an end in itself**. It's just another operating cost line item – like the meat supplier or beer distributor (“How much of that stuff can I get for as little as possible?”), and the **client doesn't care that you may have a music degree and/or 20 years experience honing your craft**. Like it or not, **you're not being paid for your training or experience**.

The harsh reality is the laws of supply and demand determine what you'll be paid, because **there are usually many more musicians who want to play live music than there are people who are willing to pay money for live music**. This isn't the 70s/80s anymore. With the advent of free (or low-cost)

online music instruction and free advertising via social media, it has never been easier for an energetic person to learn an instrument, become a minimally-qualified gigging musician (any instrument), and then publicize his/her talent and availability. So **the playing field is much more accessible to entry-level musicians than in the old days and the overall competition is greater.**

Combine that with a change in listeners' preferences due to the proliferation of alternative music sources such as DJs and streaming online platforms – all competing for the limited entertainment dollar – and you have a consumer's market, which keeps the price of live music down in many locales.

There are musicians who'll tell you not to accept anything less than X dollars because you'll be hurting other musicians, but **some venues have a strict budget for live music and simply won't pay anything beyond that** — despite how many musicians say no to the gig. So, if you're interested in one of those venues, you either take the money that's offered or you stay home and someone else will take it.

You are paid for what the client thinks your services are worth relative to the operation. For instance, do you connect with the audience, take requests, play the music they want to hear and make them feel good – so they stick around and order another round of drinks? **If your music doesn't increase revenue beyond the cost of your services, why should the owner hire you?** Always keep that in mind when discussing your “worth” with the owner.

And if you play bar/restaurant gigs, beware... They are probably the least stable gigs you'll encounter. They're usually not guaranteed in writing and they come and go faster than you can tune a saxophone – often on short notice – sometimes with a good explanation; sometimes a feeble explanation; sometimes no explanation. For instance:

- You have a regular weekly or monthly gig at a restaurant, and the

- venue suddenly decides to remodel and rebrand (with or without a change of ownership) – and your music no longer fits their concept.
- Your gig gets cancelled on only several hours notice because the restaurant owner realizes she double booked entertainment for the evening and wants to shift you to the following week.
 - Due to another calendar error by that same restaurant owner, she texts you frantically at 11pm on a Thursday to book you for the following night... You have a jazz quartet gig the next afternoon but agree to squeeze in the evening solo gig as well... so you prepare for a 6-hour doubleheader of two different-style gigs... and then during the afternoon gig the owner texts you and says “Oh, I'm sorry... Because its a holiday, I don't think we're going to be busy tonight, so I'm cancelling the music.”
 - Another restaurant owner hires you to boost slumping Tuesday night dinner business and you play the gig for 6 weeks... Business improves each week, customers like your music, tips are great, and the owner praises you – then decides she no longer needs you.
 - Your Saturday night dinner/dance gig that's been on your calendar for 6 weeks gets scratched on 2 days notice because the struggling dinner boat operator found a friend-of-the-family DJ who'll do it for free.

I speak from experience on each of the above examples.

12. Consider an LLC: Are you prepared for legal/financial consequences if someone trips over one of your wires, or a speaker stand tips over and injures someone? How about if you plug into the house sound system and the venue blames you for blowing out \$25,000 worth of equipment? If you're playing more than just the occasional gig and you're maintaining a steady stream of business — you may want to consider forming a Limited Liability Company (LLC). In Florida, it can be done with a simple application online and \$125 in filing fees, and it **helps shield your personal assets in the event you are sued.** Check

your own state's laws for details. After you form your LLC, you can make it clear in your written contracts that the client is hiring the LLC – not you in your personal capacity (example: “John Smith Music, LLC,” not “John Smith.”) That way, the assets of your music business are what are at stake if you’re sued. I formed an LLC 5 years ago when the gigs really started to take off, and my wife and I sleep well at night, knowing that our house, cars, and life savings aren’t at risk over a \$250 gig.

13. Insurance: This is additional peace of mind and should strongly be considered with or without an LLC in place. There are 2 types of insurance... (1) Liability insurance (which provides protection in the event you cause injury or property damage on a gig), and (2) Equipment insurance (to cover your gear against damage/theft). Occasionally, a venue will ask for proof of liability insurance before agreeing to the gig, so the lack of coverage can be a showstopper. When you injure someone or your equipment is damaged in the course of a business venture, **don't be surprised if your homeowners' policy doesn't cover you.** There are companies that provide these types of coverages specifically for musicians, so shop around and find a policy that meets your needs. I carry a \$1 million liability policy with up to \$10,000 coverage for equipment loss at a cost of about \$250 a year.

14. Keep Good Income/Expense Records: Is your music endeavor a business or a hobby? Generally speaking, for tax purposes, the IRS says a business operates for a profit, whereas a hobby is something that’s done for sport or recreation. But **there are factors the IRS looks at when determining whether something is truly a business or hobby.** Research the rules so you know. This is important because it will determine what expenses you may deduct and how your income will be treated on your tax return. A dedicated bank account for your music income/expenses helps you keep track of things.

15. Practice Good Business Techniques: Being a good solo musician is more than just playing music well. You need to be a good businessperson. **This means returning calls/texts/emails promptly, anticipating issues, and sweating the details.** You will likely be responsible for all your own promotions. Some clients may publicize your gigs well, but don't rely on it.

A professional-looking website and business card are a good start, but do you have a demo video? Do you have a sharp-looking banner or placard you can display at your gigs? Think about how you present yourself to the world... When someone calls you, what does your outgoing voicemail message say? Is it businesslike or is it goofy? Do you return messages promptly? Or is your voicemail box always full and unable to receive messages?

16. Get it in Writing: When you negotiate terms, be sure to get the important details in writing (date, location, start/end time, attire, fee, breaks, perks, etc.). For corporate/private event gigs, **I usually create a one-page invoice on my LLC's letterhead**, containing all the agreed-upon terms, and I send it via email, asking for a return email to confirm receipt and understanding of the agreement. You should include in the invoice any special logistical needs of yours and any special song requests the client may have already made. If there's a cutoff date for making additional song requests, include that in the invoice as well. Include a general description of the type of music you play (e.g., "will perform an assortment of jazz standards and 60s/70s/80s pop/rock/contemporary melodies"), so there are no misunderstandings and disappointments.

Specify the form of payment (cash? check? electronic?) and when it's due. Will you require a deposit? If so, how much? Is it refundable? What's your cancellation policy? Be sure to include all of that in the invoice.

Also... **Beware of senior living communities with distant out-of-town home offices.** Your local point of contact will usually send your invoice off to

Timbuktu after the gig and you'll have to wait up to a month or longer to receive a check. Are you ok with that? If not, and if the client cannot change the payment procedure, then you should probably decline the gig (I've done that).

17. Protect Your Gear: When playing a bar or restaurant, don't let the manager cram you next to the door where the servers will be whizzing by you all night with trays of food. It's an accident waiting to happen. I carry vintage saxes with me and **I consider Job #1 to be the return of all my equipment home without damage.** Consequently, there are gigs I decline because I don't like the environment. For instance, I play restaurants, but not bars. If the venue doesn't serve food and is dedicated primarily to alcohol sales, it generally has a different ambiance, clientele, and music preference. I decline those gigs. But that's just me. You need to set your own comfort parameters. I've learned that outdoor gigs here in Florida are especially hazardous to person and equipment due to sun, heat, humidity, wind, rain, sand, insects, and cold (winter months) — so I now accept only carefully-selected outdoor gigs with adequate protection.

18. Manage the Environment: One of the terms I state in all my written agreements is “**client/venue is responsible for providing a level performance area of 25-30 square feet away from foot traffic or other disturbances.**” You'd be surprised how “level” or “away from foot traffic or other disturbances” isn't always guaranteed and the event coordinator expects you to set up in an awkward spot that isn't conducive to a good performance.

For example... If it's an outdoor festival, make sure they don't expect you to set up on an inclined walkway or play next to a food truck with a loud generator (yes, both have happened to me). A pop-up canopy to protect you from the sun is nice – except at sunrise/sunset when the sun is so low that it's in your face (again, I speak from experience). **Think through the flow of the gig in your head beforehand** and be sure the event coordinator knows your logistical requirements, because he/she is probably not a musician and doesn't

think like a musician. Ask the right questions and **know what you're getting yourself into before you agree to the gig and set your price...** For example:

What's the exact address of the event?

If there is restricted access, how will you be able to enter?

How large is the venue and how many people are expected? (this may affect how much sound equipment you'll haul)

Where can you park and offload your gear?

How far of a bag drag is it to the performance spot?

If the gig is on an upper floor, is there an elevator? (beware of boat gigs... the stairs can be a nightmare)

Is more than one performance spot expected? (yeah, it's always fun to have to move your gear once you're set up!)

Where's the nearest electrical outlet?

If it's an outdoor gig, will the event be moved indoors if there's inclement weather? If not, what weather precautions will be in place? (You may need to bring a canopy, rope/bungee cords, protective coverings for equipment, etc.)

19. Booking Services: There are online services (e.g., The Bash, GigSalad) that screen prospective clients, connect clients with musicians, assist with bookings, and arrange for secure and timely payment electronically. They usually have various levels of service for different fees, and these services can help you get some nice private party gigs. I subscribe to GigSalad and get a few gigs per year through their platform for only a 5% fee per gig. They obtain full payment up front from the client and distribute the deposit and final balance at selected intervals. Their system works well.

20. Social Media: A double-edged sword. Yes, the internet can help promote your music but **be careful with your online activities.** Ranting about the latest hot button political topic on Facebook might make you feel better, but it might cost you gigs with potential clients who are researching you.

21. Final Thoughts: I hope this handbook has been helpful. Solo gigging can be a lot of fun and financially rewarding, but it's also a lot of individual responsibility. Expect hurdles, curve balls, and disappointments along the way. And there's no safety net. It's all you. *Remember...*

- **Keep it simple:** Less gear, fewer problems. (*but have backup equipment ready*)
- **Protect your gear:** You can't play the next gig if your gear is damaged
- **Connect with the audience:** It'll get you call backs and referrals.

I always tell the audience: “If you're enjoying the music, please tell [name of client]... If you're not enjoying the music, please tell me.”

A caveat... Although I'm a retired attorney, there is no attorney-client relationship established by this document, and nothing in this guide should be construed as legal advice. Everything stated above is strictly my personal perspective drawn from my own experiences as a part-time freelance musician. I'm sure there are musicians who'll disagree with some of my views, so keep that in mind. There's no one-size-fits-all approach to solo gigs.

Thanks for listening and best wishes,

/Signed/

Fred Cavese, Lt Col, USAF, JAGC (Ret)

Saxophonist/Vocalist (and developing bassist/banjoist)

Rockledge, Florida, USA

EZDIMUSIC, LLC

gbcc77@gmail.com

<https://fredcavesemusic.com>

Demo Video: <https://youtu.be/x-IKytmx-z4>

July 2023

Appendix A – Equipment Referenced in this Handbook

PA Systems:

Bose S1 Pro:

https://www.bose.com/en_us/products/speakers/portable_pa_speakers/s1_pro_system.html#v=s1_pro_system_with_battery_black

Bose S1 Pro Backpack:

https://www.bose.com/en_us/products/speakers/speaker_accessories/s1-pro-system-backpack.html

Bose L1 Pro 8:

https://www.boseprofessional.com/en_us/solutions/portable/l1-pro-family/l1-pro8.html

Wireless Sax Microphone Systems:

NUX B-6: <https://www.nuxefx.com/b6sax.html>

AMT Q7-LS Mini: <https://appliedmicrophoneshop.com/products/amt-q7-ls-mini>

Audio-Technica ATW-1101 w/DPA 4099: <https://www.audio-technica.com/en-us/atw-1101>
<https://www.dpamicrophones.com/instrument/4099-instrument-microphone>

Wireless Guitar Transmitter/Receivers:

<https://www.amazon.com/wireless-guitar-transmitter/s?k=wireless+guitar+transmitter>

Wireless Voice Microphones:

Tonor TW-620: <https://www.tonormic.com/collections/wireless-microphones/products/tonor-tw-620-wireless-microphone>

Fi fine K025: <https://finemicrophone.com/products/fi-fine-k025-wireless-system-handheld-microphone>

Lococo Wireless Headset Mic: <https://www.amazon.com/Microphone-Amplifier-TourGuide-Promotion-Discussion/dp/B09V7NKVTC>

Stage Lights:

36 LED Par Lights: <https://www.amazon.com/Controlled-Activated-Uplights-Christmas-Lighting-2/dp/B07D778PLC>

Rockville 2-Light Carry Bag: <https://www.rockvilleaudio.com/rlb40-u/>

Gard Double Sax Rolling Gig Bag:

<https://www.gardbags.com/en/woodwind/saxophone/tenor/125-wbfsk-gard-doubler-s-tenor-sax-wheelie-2-tenor-sax-or-tenor-alto-sax-or-tenor-soprano-sax-synthetic-with-leather-trim>

Boombah Rolling Baseball Equipment Bag:

https://www.amazon.com/Boombah-Rolling-Superpack-Baseball-Softball/dp/B08QXGNYC3/ref=sr_1_4?keywords=boombah+rolling+baseball+bag&qid=1689560304&sr=8-4

Headset Buddy Phone Recording Adapter:

<https://www.headsetbuddy.com/audio-adapters/>

13" iPad Pro: <https://www.apple.com/shop/buy-ipad/ipad-pro/12.9-inch-display-256gb-space-gray-wifi>

Hercules Tenor/Soprano Sax Stand:

<http://herculesstands.com/international/products/winds-and-percussion/combination/ds533bb/>

Tabletop Tripod for iPhone:

https://www.amazon.com/Torjim-Extendable-Lightweight-Compatible-Recording/dp/B0B5GFNF9G/ref=sr_1_17?keywords=iphone+tabletop+tripod&qid=1689562806&sr=8-17

Gator Frameworks Speaker Stands: <https://gatorco.com/product/gfw-spk-2000-pair-with-carry-bag-gfw-spk-2000set/>

5V External Power Supply: <https://lockconnection.net/battery-power-bank-5000-mah/>

Instrument Care Accessories (ICA) Soprano Sax Protective Cover:

<https://www.instrumentcareaccessories.com/shop/soprano-saxophone-straight-classic-cover>

Appendix B – Backing Track Sources I Like

<https://www.karaoke-version.com/custombackingtrack/> (Only \$2.99 each, and once you buy a track, you can tailor it to add/subtract instruments to your liking)

(Don't be fooled by "karaoke" in the title ... these are high quality tracks with live musicians playing real instruments -- and they closely resemble the original artist's recording)

<https://jazzbacks.com> (nicely arranged; available in different keys)

<https://www.learnjazzstandards.com> (tend to be long, but can be shortened)

<https://www.backingtracks.pro> (good, but expensive)

<https://galvanijazz.wixsite.com/jazzbackingtrack> (good deals if you buy in bulk)

<https://smoothjazzbackingtracks.com> (good, but expensive)

<https://bettertrax.com> (saxophonist Jay Metcalf's tracks)

Also... I've purchased a few play along books from the Hal Leonard series:

<https://www.halleonard.com/series/JZPLYA?dt=item#products>. For about \$10-15, you get a dozen or so tracks on CD with the sheet music.

The Hal Leonard Corporation also sells a USB drive with backing tracks for 240 songs taken from The Real Book. Usually sells for about \$50

(<https://www.halleonard.com/product/110599/the-real-book-volume-i-sixth-edition>). I bought the Volume 1 edition a few years ago. They're high quality jazz rhythm section recordings and sound great. There's now a Volume 2 edition available: <https://www.halleonard.com/product/204126/the-real-book-volume-ii-second-edition>

Appendix C – Equipment Setup Photos



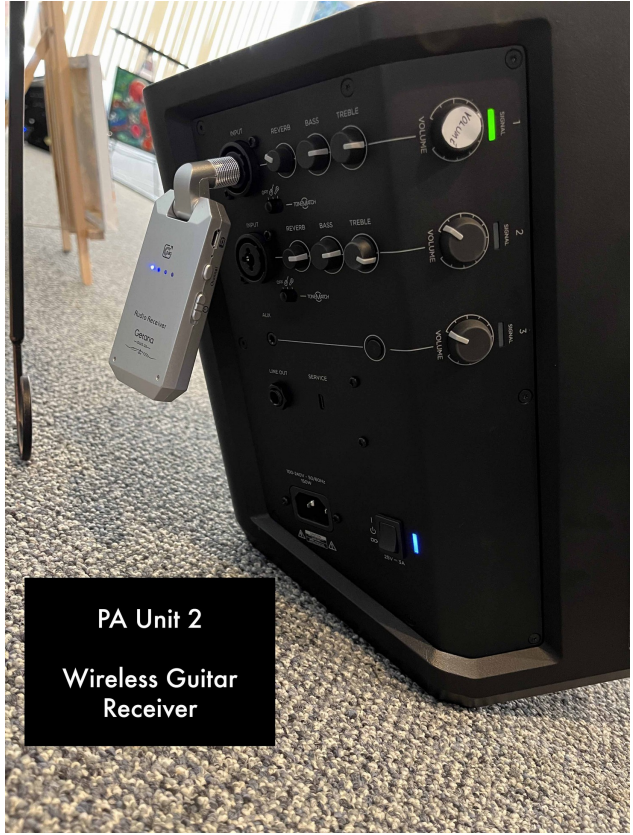


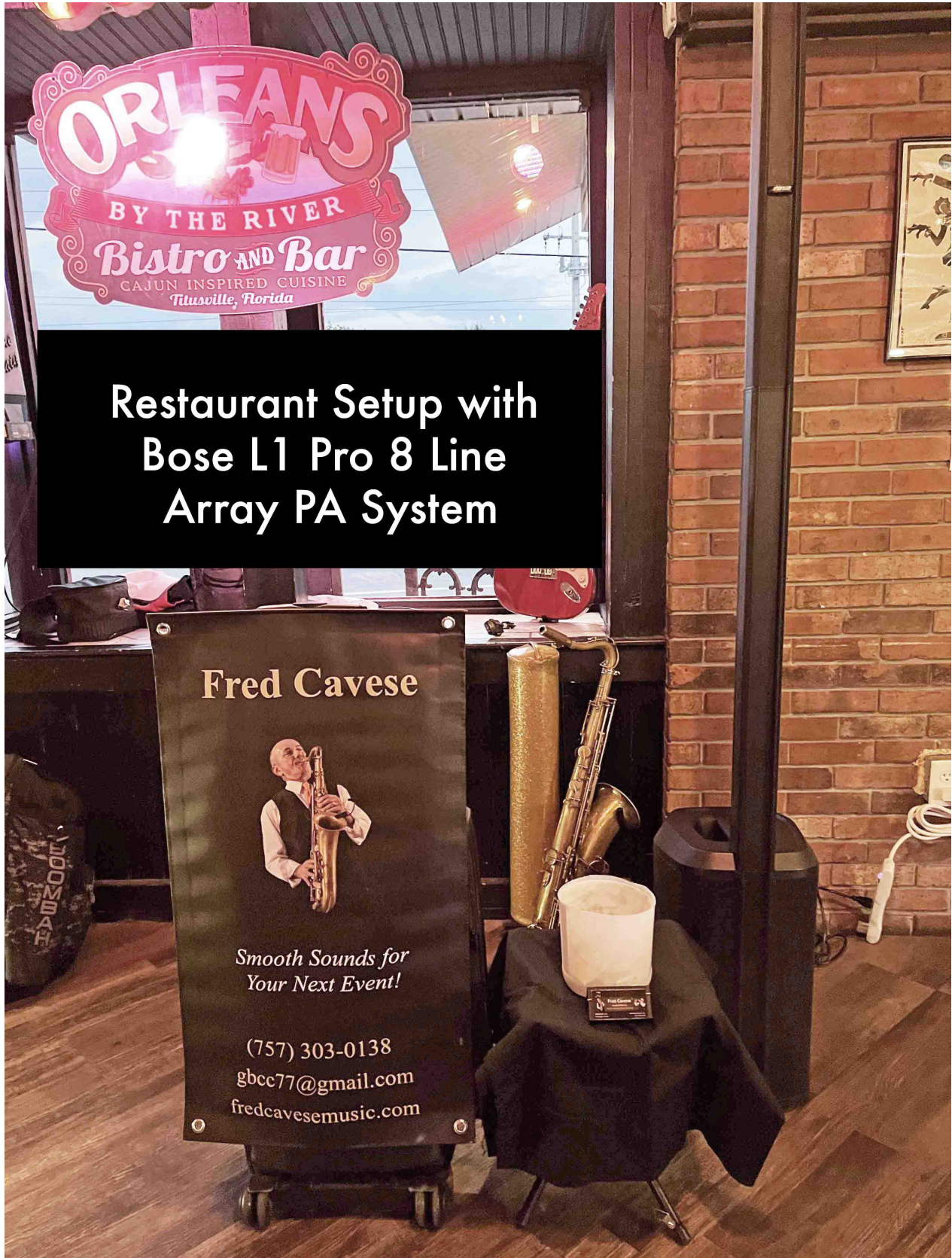
Bose S1 Pro on floor with wireless sax mic and wireless headset voice mic for afternoon “entertainment hour” performance at senior living facility. 15-minute setup, including banjo.






**Compact restaurant setup
using 2 Bose S1 Pro units
(1 indoor; 1 outdoor)
connected by wireless guitar
transmitter/receiver**





**Restaurant Setup with
Bose L1 Pro 8 Line
Array PA System**

Fred Cavese



*Smooth Sounds for
Your Next Event!*

(757) 303-0138
gbcc77@gmail.com
fredcavesemusic.com



“Behind the Scenes”... Sax gig bag holds iPad and Voice Mic; all instruments, tip jar/stool, and sound equipment fit into 5 x 5 area. Sax and voice mics are wireless; bluetooth connection for iPad. Only 1 wire: L1 Pro 8 PA unit power cord w/surge protector.