

COURTESY OF ATMA ANUR

Atma Anur—Drums
Richie Kotzen/Tony MacAlpine
Jarek Smietana/Cacophony
www.myspace.com/atmaanur

“Bring your own drum rug and mark the stand layout on it, mark your stand heights, and use memory locks. Having the same setup every time makes playing easier and more fun. I have been carrying a tool kit with me for almost 20 years. In it are tools for fixing and maintaining the drums, various drum keys, two kinds of tape, glue, hose clamps, oil, WD-40, files, sandpaper, Band-Aids, extra wing nuts and screws, hand cream, a flashlight, reading glasses, and aspirin.

If possible, rehearse the order of the set before the show. I also suggest a short preshow warm-up to get you loose and relaxed before playing. This also means getting where you have to be . . . early! Matching preset volumes, knowing which effects are for what song and exactly where they are in your set will help.

Having a calm, friendly attitude and keeping an open mind will get you through every unexpected situation. Peaceful communication is the key to conflict resolution and problem-solving in the music business. Try to at least ‘appear’ to be humble and grateful. I find that soundchecks are generally a waste of time unless you are headlining, but you should do them anyway. Make your needs known, but be prepared to not have them met. Headlining is quite a different story, and your soundcheck is essential to the show being great!”

2. HAVE A LOOK AROUND

“Okay, I’m here early, now what?” Find the closest parking spot to load in. Go in and have a look around. Check out the current soundcheck and see how it’s going. Pay attention to the stage levels by walking right up to the stage and having a listen. It might not be a good idea to walk onto the stage during someone else’s soundcheck, but walk all the way around it, front to back, side to side. Listen to how loud their amps are, how loud the monitors are and what the mix sounds like out front. This will give you an idea of what you may need to do for your band. Pay attention to how they are set up as opposed to how your band sets up. Would the difference cause a problem? Is there an adjustment from chapter 2 that would help? Is the headliner striking their drums? What is the best way to load in? Is the rest of your band here checking things out too? How about the lights? Will this work for our stage props?

Once you have a good idea of what’s going on, talk to the stage manager and see where you can stage your gear and what time you can get started. If you’re there early, the engineer may get you started sooner. If you’re late, it means that you don’t care; why should he? Even if it isn’t time to start your soundcheck, get your stuff in and preassembled. Tune your drums and guitars, set up stands, and do whatever else you need to. Now would be a great time to get something to drink, hit the bathroom, smoke a big fatty, or whatever. When you can have a minute to relax and warm up your instrument, you have nailed it! It is at this point that you know you have gotten there on time. Keep pushing your starting time forward until you have time to relax and warm up. It really matters! Showing up on time is simply professional courtesy. This is for the benefit of others you’ll have to work with, and will definitely help their attitude when you do. Showing up early is not for your benefit only. It may not really matter to anyone else, but it will make things easier for you in the long run.



Bruce Bouillet—Guitar
Racer X/The Scream/DC 10
Epidemic/Bottom Dwellers
Grammy-Winning Producer/Engineer
www.myspace.com/brucebouillet

“Onstage, I want to be just above the level of the drums, so I set my volume while the drums are playing. I recommend that you walk out and get ear level with your amp for a second and hear what your amp sounds like. Once I’m done, then we’ll go to the bass. If I try to check my guitar while the bass is playing, it usually sounds a little thin when the bass is not there. If I get it to sound right without the bass, it sounds even better when the bass comes in! On some of the bigger tours, they’ll let us dial in our show on the first day; from there we try to stay with those settings for the rest of the tour, and if we have to we’ll make slight adjustments. I used to put a graphic EQ in my signal path, but now I just do it from my amp.”

Anyone with a pedalboard should have at least one 30-foot cable ready in case you have a problem and need to run straight to your amp. It’s just so much easier than fighting a problem onstage; that will take you right out of your game. I try to make it where there’s as little room for error as possible. I have a loop effect in my rig that I use to create some atmospheric sounds in case there’s a problem with anything else. I can just create some riffs and improve around them while things are getting resolved and there’s not much dead time onstage.”



COURTESY OF BRUCE BOUILLET

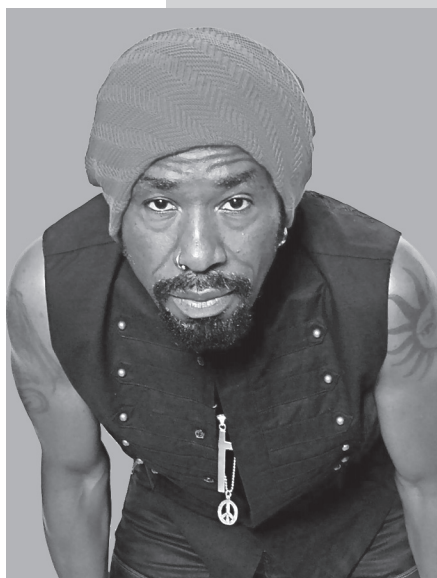
It’s been my experience that not everyone is consistently late, but sometimes there’s one guy in the band who is, or a couple of guys who take turns. It is here where you should exercise discipline and be consistently early. If you decide that you aren’t in a hurry and show up at their regular late time, they feel justified, and it gives them a reason to be even tardier! Set the example or forever hold your peace.

3. GET SET UP AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE

The next step in this process is to allow your band as much time as possible to do a soundcheck. After all, this is a precursor to your show setup, if not the show setup itself. You want to get the drums up as quickly as possible; they take the longest to get set up, miked up, and dialed in. They should be ready to go in every sense of the word possible. That means taken out of their cases, tuned up, stands pre-adjusted, cymbals pre-mounted, and racks stood in place with drums mounted. Have your drum cases put away and stacked inside each other. This alone will cut 10 minutes off your setup time. You want them as close to the stage as possible without interfering with the preceding band’s teardown. (Be sure to allow them a couple of obvious lanes to strike their equipment, though.) When the preceding band has cleared the stage, *attack!* Have everyone in the band grab some drums and get them in place immediately! The average four-piece band should be able to get the drums onstage in three minutes. From there, the rest of the band can move on to their equipment. An exception to this would be keyboard players with extensive rigs; they will need a hand as well. In this case, have half the members carry in the drums and the other half carry in the keys. This may mean a little more work for everyone, but it will always be worth it. From there, the other players can move on to setting up their equipment. Once everyone’s gear is in place and wired up, you are ready for the next step. For bands playing their



first shows together, you may want to time your setup and see approximately how long it really takes. This is the only way to track and improve your progress.



Wyzard—Bass/Vocals

Mother's Finest

Stevie Nicks

www.myspace.comwyzard1

"My experience on tour goes long and deep; with Mother's Finest we toured with acts like the Who; AC/DC; Parliament Funkadelic; Santana; Aerosmith; and Earth, Wind & Fire, to name a few. As a bass player and backing vocalist, I liked to keep it simple; that way there was less to go wrong with my mix. What I needed most was my vocal in my floor monitor. I got my bass sound from my amp, and the drummer and other vocals from the sidefill monitors; I could always hear guitars and keys from the source.

Each venue has a different sound situation, from boomy to dry to slapback, etc., so my simple approach would get me through every situation with the least amount of time spent. Also as an opening act, the soundchecks are very inconsistent and sometimes there are none at all! It's important to be tight with your band members and work together to make the band sound great; by being at the proper volume with dynamics so you can have a great stage sound. That makes it easier for the sound man to get that sound to the people."

4. START WITH YOUR REHEARSAL SETTINGS

You should take note of what your settings are in rehearsals and have an idea where to start, but you need to be aware of the differences between your rehearsal space and the stage. Set up like you do at practice, put the amps in approximately the same places, and turn your settings to where you normally do. If you have spotted an advantage before soundcheck, now would be the time to make use of it.

5. ADJUST YOUR PLACEMENT AND LEVELS FOR THE STAGE

If the stage is deeper, then you may need more volume from your backline or to upstage it. If not, then you may need less volume or to downstage it some. *If the stage is wider*, then you can spread your backline out a bit, but for best results try to keep it pretty close to what you rehearse with. Some of the exceptions to this technique are covered in the extra chapter "Unusual Stages and Other Oddities," on the www.rockinyourstagesound.com website.

It is rare that everyone will finish setting up at exactly the same time, so as soon as you are ready you can ask the engineer for a quick line check. Even though your levels and placement onstage may need to be adjusted, this will ensure that your channel is functional. This will apply to everyone as they finish setting up and are pre-dialed in. There is no need to be too exact about this part; there often will be some adjustments during the "balance check."

David Garfield—Keys**George Benson/Boz Scaggs****Natalie Cole/Smokey Robinson****Karizma/Los Lobotomies**www.creatchy.com

“At soundcheck, the first thing I do is make sure everything is in fact ‘working’; that it’s in the system. From there, I work on the stage sound and leave the mix to the engineer. Once the FOH engineer is happy, we’re done! Whatever you do, don’t go out front and badger the engineer in an empty room over the little stuff. It’s a Pandora’s box, and you don’t want to open this up! The only requests I’ll have is to keep me up in the mix since I’m leading a lot of the songs and melodies and don’t start us off at full volume in the beginning. If you start off at the top, there’s nowhere to go with the show. Keep us around 75 percent in the beginning; as the show goes along bring it up some, and toward the end take it up. It keeps the show dynamic.

When you’re working with the monitor engineer, you have to keep in mind that you’re not the only one onstage; you’ve got five or six other people onstage that need help as well. A lot of people seem to have no concept of this, and I think it’s very important to show some consideration for the engineer and wait your turn. *When something goes wrong, don’t freak out; try to keep a smile on your face and get through it.* When you’re working with techs and roadies, try to have some respect for them. When something happens, I’ll instantly react; but it may take a second or two for this to get picked up on, and it seems like an eternity. Just try to stay cool and not overreact or draw too much attention away from the show, but make sure you communicate what the problem is so it can be handled.”



COURTESY OF DAVID HAPLEY

6. BALANCE YOUR STAGE LEVELS EVENLY

When everyone is set up and ready, play a quick few bars and check your stage levels. This is called a “balance check,” and is where you determine your best location, focus, and balance. Sometimes this is difficult to do in a busy show: the engineer often wants to go right to soundcheck. There really is no need for PA levels until your stage levels are set. Ask for a quick minute to set stage levels before the engineer starts. Have someone stand out front about halfway back in the room and check to see if all the players are fairly balanced in volume *without the PA*. The drums, which are capable of levels over 115 dB, should be slightly louder than the instruments or just as loud, but you should balance everyone else equally. Everyone’s perception of volume is different, so be flexible if you need to and listen from different spots in the room.

Don’t just turn the quietest player up; you may have to turn the loudest player down a bit as well. Keep in mind that it doesn’t have to be perfect, because that is impossible, but you don’t want someone to be buried onstage. This only takes a minute; after a few bars of a typical song it should be easy to decide. Do a quick chorus from an old cover tune—you don’t have to play anything from your set, unless you just want to practice it.

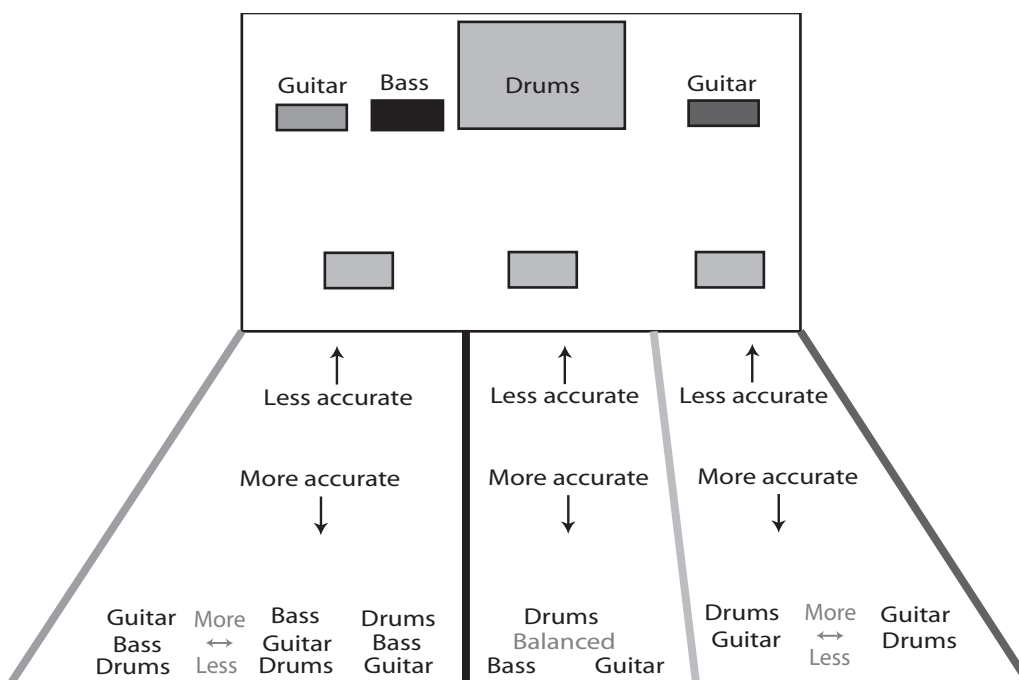
If turning the guitarist up makes her uncomfortable with her stage volume, have her push her cabinet back some. While it will matter very little to the balance out front, it will make a sizable difference onstage due to the “proximity effect.” This also works in reverse; if the guitar needs to come down in volume, upstage her cabinet a little to compensate for some loss of volume.

For someone listening out front, the closer you are to the stage, the less accurate

your perception of balances will be. The farther away you are, the more accurate your perception of the mix blend will be; *however*, your primary concern is the area where most of the audience will be. Fig. 6.1 shows how this balance will change from front to back and side to side. Once again, you should hear the drums slightly better in the center, especially when you are closer to the stage.

Sometimes it's not about the volume as much as it is about the tone. If an instrument is extremely bright, it will sound very loud. If it is particularly dark, it will sound muddy and indistinct. Often, it's here where most stage level mistakes are made. Since electric guitars and basses have the most control over their tones, these instruments should be matched with the drum kit. Everyone's taste is different, and this may be easier said than done and still keep everyone happy, but highly contrasting tones should be balanced to complementary settings. You don't want the guitar to sound like a bass, or vice-versa. Overly bright guitar sounds and heavy-bottomed bass tones are the most common mistakes by players. When each player is comfortable with their levels and tone, then you can move on to the next step. Since this extra procedure will add a few minutes to your soundcheck, your setup has to be quick.

Fig. 6.1.
Out front
balances



Glen Sobel—Drums

Elliott Yamin/Sixx A.M.

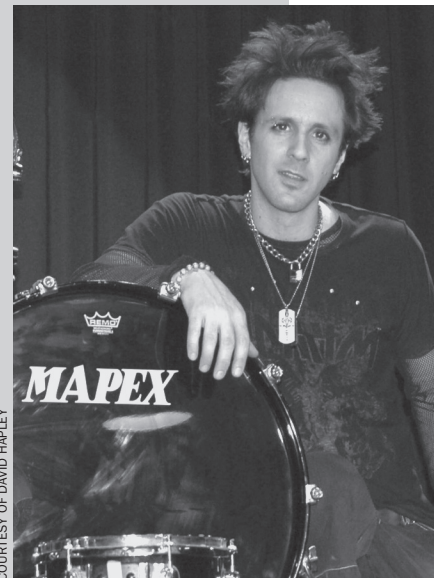
Beautiful Creatures/Impelliteri

P.I.T. Instructor

www.myspace.com/drummerglen

“I try to have my stands memory locked in place for quick setup. *Anything that can be done at home should be.* Not on stage during setup! It could be a “throw and go” situation where there is minimal time between bands. For the Ozzfest side-stage acts, sometimes the changeover time is 10 minutes; the band and crew need to work quickly and efficiently to set up on time.

Musicians should be prepared for less-than-stellar mixes onstage if they are an opening act or playing local gigs without the benefit of their own personnel. *As an opening act, a band is lucky to even get a soundcheck.* If it’s a quick change or “throw and go” situation, the less complicated, the better. I wouldn’t want too much in my monitor. For example, if it’s a tight stage and the bass player’s cabinet is close to or right next to me, I probably won’t need much or any bass in my monitor mix. I’ll ask the monitor engineer for some of myself in the monitor mix: kick, snare, and then toms, overheads, and hi-hat if those are available. Then I go to guitars, etc.”



COURTESY OF DAVID HAPLEY

7. BRING UP THE MONITORS FIRST

If you have given the engineer(s) your sound and monitor cues, they should be already dialed in and ready to bring up at this point, beginning with the monitors. In chapter 5, these cue sheets and how to go about creating them were covered in detail. Now is where you actually get to put them to use.

Play another few bars of a song and check your monitors. Move around the stage to the places you like to be and listen for dead spots in those locations. There will be some dead spots on a larger stage, but don’t try to fix them unless they are important spots. Simply avoid those areas as much as you can. The most important place for you to be concerned about is where you spend most of your time onstage. If you sing as well as play, you will need the spot where you sing to have enough vocals and where you play to have enough instrument. Make sure that the monitor is focused on that point before you ask for more monitor.

It’s okay if your instrument level is a little bit low at that vocal spot, because you will be singing right there; when you are just playing, you can always step back closer to your amp. This is the third variable in the triangle: *your location within the zone.* And while drums and keys don’t have this option because they are stationary, a keyboardist could place his vocal monitor on the side he hears best with and the keyboard monitor on the other side. From there, it’s simply a matter of moving left to right to find the right balance. The middle is where you will place your vocal mic. Try to keep your monitor requests as simple as possible; don’t ask for “all that and a bag chips” in your wedges. The more sounds you put in a mono wedge, the less you will be able to distinguish.



COURTESY OF REISEG & TAYLOR PHOTOGRAPHY

Mindi Abair—Sax
Concord Recording Artist
Duran Duran/Backstreet Boys
Lee RitenourMandy Moore
Adam Sandler/Keb' Mo
www.mindiabair.com

"I usually run soundcheck fairly tightly. I figure we have a lot to check in a little amount of time. I want to get it to the point where we've line-checked everything to make sure it's working, and then move to each member to get their monitor rockin'. *The better we sound and the better the mix is in our monitors, the more comfortable we'll be on stage and the better show we'll put on, guaranteed!* Once we get through the band, I'll ring out my microphone by singing different octaves and scales into it. I'll sound t's and puh's into it to simulate overloads at those frequencies. That'll show where the EQ is punched up and where it's too low. Always make sure your main mics are rung out before your band hits the stage, or it will be a concert of all distortion and

feedback. No one wants that!

Last but not least, I walk around the house during soundcheck. I want to hear what the mix sounds like in the house. I want to hear what the band sounds like. *Usually there are huge variations in sonic quality from the front to the back of the room and from side to side.* I try to gain a happy medium of quality for the whole room with the sound man. I make sure I like the effects used. I make sure I like the bass-to-drum ratio, etc. I want to make sure that it's loud enough to get people moving and feeling the show, without making them hold their ears and become disengaged. If it's an acoustic show, make sure your instruments sound the way you want them to and have the right balance. If it's a rock show, make sure it rocks. The only way to know that you're achieving the sound you're going for is to walk offstage during soundcheck and make it's right.

Make sure during your show that you showcase who you are. Know what you have to offer, and feature it. Remember that you're there for the audience. Play to them . . . love them . . . don't ignore them. They paid to come see you."

8. CHECK FOR GROUND LOOPS AND FAULTS

Now is the time to listen for hum, buzzes, and weird stuff in your sound. Use a groundlift adapter (a three-prong to two-prong plug) to isolate ground faults. If there are any two-prong AC devices in your rig, make sure that they are not plugged in upside down or backwards. Sometimes, reversing these types of connections will fix the problem (or make it much worse). Use the same AC outlet for all your gear; this keeps everything on the same ground plane. There are exceptions to this, but only in rare cases. If you have worked on your tones, most of your ground problems should already have been solved.

9. USE A WINDSCREEN TO AVOID GETTING SHOCKED

Before you approach the mic, ground yourself with your guitar by touching the strings; then moisten your finger and touch the ball of the mic. If there is a ground fault, you will notice a small pop. Sure beats finding out with your lips! Sometimes there is little you can do about this; it means that there is a difference in the ground potential between the PA system AC power and the stage AC power that your amp is connected to. In some cases it could be your amp; try reversing the polarity of your on/off switch or ground lift. You can use one of those foam wind covers to keep from actually touching the mic. It changes your

sound, so you may have to touch up the levels and EQs on that mic. The thinner the foam cover is, the less it affects the sound. As long as it keeps your lips from touching the mic, it will keep you from getting shocked.



10. REFOCUS YOUR CABINETS IF YOU NEED TO

It's time to fire up the mains. Most engineers will already have rough levels for the FOH, but you should give them a chance to work the mix. Play a verse and chorus of a loud song, and then play a verse and a chorus of a quieter song or one with different instruments. Everyone needs to know how the dynamics are going to work. Try to play your opening song last; this way everything should be as close to "right" as it can be. Sometimes the engineer will want to make some adjustments to your stage levels. This is the place for "out of the box" thinking. If your amps are kind of loud and overpowering the mix out front but you are comfortable onstage, try refocusing the cabinet so that it isn't pointed directly out front, but more toward you. The trick is to point it away from the sound engineer, but make it appear as if you actually adjusted the volume. Keep in mind that most pro sound engineers know this trick, so be prepared to actually turn down if you get called on it! Sometimes all you need is just a little angle to overcome a phasing anomaly. If needed, you can always take "a little volume off the top" if it has increased the levels too much.

11. USE EQ TO GET SLIGHT VOLUME CHANGES

Another method of volume control is to use the EQ instead of the actual volume level. By bringing down 100 Hz and 3.1 kHz just a little, you will achieve a similar effect to lowering the volume. The "equal loudness contour" is an effect of these frequencies becoming considerably louder when the volume is raised. When all you have is a three-band EQ, the high and low EQ adjustments work fine. By lowering *just* these frequencies a small amount, you can get a similar effect to turning down without actually turning the volume down. It will change your tone slightly, but it shouldn't be enough to cause a problem. A slight adjustment of the mids may offset any difference.

This also works in reverse. Let's say that the levels are set and everyone is happy where things are, but during the show you need a little more level. Instead of turning up the volume control, add just a little low end and high end to your amp. If you have to make a substantial adjustment, you'll have to adjust the volume level. But if all you need is a slight amount of boost, you can try to do it with EQ. It's another option to consider, but one you won't have if your EQ is pinned to the top! Try to keep your EQ balanced.

Using EQ to control your levels is a technique you should be aware of. If you are making a considerable adjustment to your stage levels, keep in mind that the EQ will probably need some compensation as well. The more level you add, the less "ELC" (Equal Loudness Contour) EQ you will need. While this technique is certainly not exact, it's

ROCKIN' YOUR STAGE SOUND

reasonably close. The effect of ELC has been known for decades. You may notice that the ELC effect of output devices is very similar to the proximity effect of microphones. Why? They are identical processes in reverse. Studio engineers use this technique along with others to bring sounds up and down in the mix without adding too much actual level. You may have to play with the mid control at some point to rebalance your sound, but this is just another weapon in your arsenal.



COURTESY OF KEYVON BEHPOUR

Tollak Ollestad—Harmonica

Don Henley/Michael McDonald

Kenny Loggins/Jewel/Seal

www.tollak.com

“At soundchecks, I try to get my monitor mix as dialed in as I can. And when the room fills up, that can change a little bit. *Make sure you know where the monitor guy is located so you can make contact with them when you need to at show time.* You’ll want to introduce yourself to them and create a good vibe, a principle that extends into being cool to everyone you work with! You’ll find that people will be much more willing to help you when you need it, and it’s saved me many times! It’s important for both the stage and the FOH to sound great, *but once the show is going you have no control, so you just have to let it go and have fun.* If you think about it too much, you’ll take yourself out of the show. You have to get in your comfort zone and be in the music. At soundcheck I want to get a feel for what’s happening out front, so if there’s something glaring I can take care of it, but most engineers are pretty savvy about things.

Regarding the mechanical aspect of your voice, make sure you get plenty of sleep and warm up; you can’t just get up there and start singing. It doesn’t have to be a long, elaborate warm-up, but don’t just get up there cold. You can hear when someone does that! I have a particular philosophy that was handed down to me by my vocal mentor, George Peckham. He always said, “The mind is musical, not the body,” meaning your voice doesn’t just come from your throat; its true power comes from your mind. I’ve cultivated this attitude over the years, getting into a more relaxed mental space and just trusting that my voice will sound the way I want it to. It’s essentially a Zen approach: stop making your voice happen, and let it happen. It’s tricky, but the more you get the hang of this the more your voice will surprise you in a good way. You still have to take care of it; after all, it is a muscle and is subject to some fluctuations, but this approach creates more consistency and has ultimately been much more powerful than just relying on mechanical methods.”