

The Tour Book

How to Get Your Music on the Road

Andy Reynolds

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COURSE TECHNOLOGY
Professional ■ Technical ■ Reference

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About the Author

Andy Reynolds has worked as an international concert tour manager and audio engineer for 17 years. He has toured continuously during this time, working on an average of 200 shows per year. Andy has worked for such bands as All-American Rejects, House of Pain, Machine Head, Nightmares On Wax, Pavement, Roots Manuva, Super Furry Animals, Skunk Anansie, Squarepusher, and The White Stripes. He has worked with bands on tours by such acts as U2, Whitney Houston, Manic Street Preachers, and Foo Fighters. His touring experience encompasses stadiums, arenas, theatres, pubs, bars, clubs, outdoor festivals, rooftops, subway stations, cruise ships, mountainsides, and very, very muddy fields.

Andy has taught sound engineering and modern tour management at Red Tape Studios in Sheffield, and he appeared as guest lecturer at Liverpool University and City College Manchester.

Learn more about Andy at www.tourconcepts.com.

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Introduction

“The top 10 percent of artists make money selling records. The rest go on tour.”

—Scott Welch, manager for Alanis Morissette and LeAnn Rimes

Live music is a huge industry. In 2005, concert ticket sales totaled \$3.1 billion in North America alone! Playing live is an integral part of the success of any musician, band, or artist. There is a huge difference between writing and recording your songs in your home studio or rehearsal space and going out and putting on a show. If you can’t cut it live, then you really are not going to impress any audience, let alone gain a record deal and sell your music.

But how do you make sure your show has the maximum impact? How do you appear professional and knowledgeable in an industry that has its own conventions, language, and baffling technical terms? How do you get booked into a venue and get paid? How do you then get bigger and better shows?

These are all questions to which you should find the answers.

The music industry is extraordinarily fickle, and often people only get one chance. By being unprepared and unprofessional, you run the risk of making mistakes that could lead to the end of your career before you even get started!

If you are serious about working or performing in the live industry, you need some help to avoid those mistakes.

That’s where I come in. I can help. Let me tell you why. . . .

The Book

The Tour Book is not a “how to get rich playing music in public” book. It is not a “careers in the music industry” book. Nor is it a “behind the scenes” fact book.

The Tour Book is all those things and more. It is obvious that we have already entered into a new era of music distribution, and the live show is becoming not only a place to show off your performing talent, but also an immediate marketplace to sell and distribute your songs.

I have been a concert tour manager and audio engineer for nearly 20 years now. I have toured all around the world and I have learned a considerable amount about how a rock show works. The aim of my book is to share my knowledge and experience (and that of the musicians, road crew, artist managers, promoters, booking agents, and record label people I know) to give you a valuable insight into the live-music performing culture. Some of this knowledge may help you make money. Some of this information will definitely help you save money! Most of this information is just really useful. Whether you are a part of an

alternative rock band, a DJ, a fledgling concert promoter, a music course leader, or a concerned parent of a teenage musician, this book should be useful to you.

The Tour Book will help you to put on your show in a more professional manner, enabling you to produce your own contracts, work schedules, and marketing materials. *The Tour Book* will give you advice on insurance, foreign taxation, merchandise, and commissions. This book contains everything—and I mean *everything*—you need to know to get your show on the road.

Please do not feel you have to read the whole book straight through to get your show on the road. The subject is far too expansive for that. Instead, use *The Tour Book* as a reference and dive in and out to the parts you need. Think of *The Tour Book* as a manual. Write in it, doodle on it, make notes, fold down pages, and leave it in the bottom of your guitar case.

To help you get the most from *The Tour Book*, I have divided the information into four parts:

Part I: The Live Music Business. This Part covers how it all works and who does what.

Part II: How to Get Your Music on the Road. This Part describes everything you need to know about a live show—equipment, rehearsing, sound checks, marketing, getting paid, getting more shows, and more advanced information for when you have made it big!

Part III: Working in the Live Music Industry. This Part provides a more detailed examination of how to gain and keep a successful career in live music.

Part IV: The Future. This Part discusses your future and the future of live music.

And who am I to tell you all this? Well, read on. . . .

Me

By the time I was 14, I was besotted with music and the idea of being in a successful band. At 16 I was in bands with friends, knocking out Beatles covers and trying to write prog-rock epics. I am not saying I am a brilliant musician—I really only wanted to emulate my heroes.

My devotion to and obsession with music was noticed by the head of my year, who advised me to go to art college. That way I could meet other rock-star wannabes in the same way that John and Paul and Mick and Keef did. (My parents were less than impressed with this career advice.) I did go to Art College and the advice paid off, as I did indeed meet other like-minded people—people who also happened to be musicians.

I left the college after a year to pursue a career as a rock star.

Rock stardom initially passed me by, and while writing and rehearsing my own music, I learned how to record and mix on four-track Portastudios. (These were revolutionary cassette tape-based devices that enabled anyone to do multitrack recording at home. They must have been good, because Sting had one.) My first recordings were awful. The whole process seemed so complicated! Busses, auxiliaries, signal path, drop ins—there were all these new terms and technologies to master! At the same time, though, the process was fascinating. My friends and I could not help but marvel at the fact that our own bedrooms were now more powerful than Abbey Road studios at the time of recording the first Beatles albums!

Wanting to understand, I went away and read magazines and books and persevered until I really understood audio engineering. I gained part-time engineering jobs in local professional recording studios. Other local musicians, sensing I had good ears and some engineering skills, would ask me to come to their shows and mix the live audio.

I soon learned there is a *huge* difference in mixing recorded and live audio. I also learned to love the one-shot take of mixing live show audio and the instant reaction of the band and audience when I did a good job.

I did not really tout myself as an engineer because I was still plugging away, trying to be the next John Lennon/Kurt Cobain/Madonna, but I would take live sound engineering jobs for the money. I also did some work for local sound rental companies, setting up, running, and tearing down the PA (public address system) at shows. During this time I built up some experience regarding how shows work and, more importantly, the importance of a positive personality in this job.

At some point I finally accepted that the world was not ready for my music (you fools!), but somehow I had a new career, and one that I really enjoyed. Around this time, I met a tour manager who needed an engineer for an upcoming tour.

That was the start of it, really. I loved it. I was getting paid to make really loud bands even louder, travel the world, and have a bloody good time. I toured as an engineer for about five years, learning all the time. Although I had played as a musician and I thought I knew about equipment, while touring I also involved myself in setting up the bands' equipment in order to learn backline skills. I watched other touring engineers and asked lots of relevant questions. I read more books about audio engineering and even learned rudimentary lighting skills.

After a couple of years of touring I began to get slightly bored. (I know, it sounds stupid now, but you know how that goes.) I was mixing audio for a lot of punk/rock bands, touring around the same old venues, meeting the same “don't give a

f**k” local crews, and generally feeling a bit understimulated. Long travel days (especially in the US) also meant I was not busy for 8 to 10 hours of the working day; I hate not being busy.

I began looking at alternatives and realized I loved the life; I just needed a better job on the road. I looked at the tour managers because they seemed to be permanently busy during the show day and able to change situations that were not right, whereas I was just the “noise boy” who had to put up with it (whatever “it” might be in any particular case).

Tour managers also got paid more than me! So, while on tour, I began asking questions, volunteering for tasks, and generally making myself useful. My break came when a band I had worked with for years as an FOH engineer announced a tour but had no TM. I really wanted to get into tour management, so I came up with a proposal: I would be TM for the tour. I knew the band really well, I knew their personal style and we were all great friends. Great, right?

Wrong! The band flew in from the States, and that first day was a disaster. Everything that could go wrong did go wrong. I had not anticipated the sheer amount of advance preparation that needs to go into any kind of performance tour, let alone a full-on alternative rock band tour!

I was grossly unprepared. It seemed to me that I knew nothing, and there was *so* much to do on a day-to-day basis.

After that first show I was ready to go home. The band, sensing my disillusionment, took me to one side and helped me to see the positive side of what I had achieved. They also told me that I should carry on as tour manager. I took that encouragement and advice, and the band and I continued to tour together for many years after that. Thanks to that one completely challenging situation, I gained both experience and confidence. I was now a band tour manager!

I have been touring successfully now for nearly 20 years. I work on an average of 200 shows every year as a tour manager, audio engineer, or a combination of both. I know a vast number of amazing musicians, road crew, artist managers, promoters, booking agents, and record label people. I have interviewed and asked them for their hints, tips, and advice because, like me, they want to teach you about working and performing live shows and, in so doing, share the vast amounts of information and experience we have all gained.

I have seen hundreds of bands, musicians, and artists perform live. I know what it takes to perform a good show, to connect with an audience, and to win them over. And I have seen musicians (and crew) really mess it up for themselves by being unprepared, unprofessional, or ignorant. It always strikes me as a shame when artists and crew act that way. Surely this is the dream you have been working toward, so why throw away the chance of a lifetime by being unprepared?

You

The motto for *The Tour Book* is “Get your show on the road.” I do not necessarily mean taking a band and going on tour. I mean kick-start your career in the live industry. You could be a musician looking to perform a better show, get more shows, or get more money for your performance. You could also be fantasizing about working for a rock band on tour, experiencing the travel, the “glamour,” and the free deli trays. (Some people do fantasize about free deli trays, you know.)

You might be looking at setting up as a concert promoter or a live booking agent or building a rehearsal studio. Whatever your fantasy path—performer or behind the scenes—I can help you get your show on the road.

One final thought: If you cast your ear beyond the iTunes/MTV/FM radio sphere of music, you will hear impassioned music from around the world that has nothing to do with four white kids in a garage dreaming of sex, drugs, and rock ’n roll. With my experience, it is easy for me to get into the “Western rock” mindset. Obviously that is where most of the music industry does its business, and certainly that is where most of my experience lies. The examples, hints, and tips contained in this book are mostly based on modern rock or electronic music tours and events. Live music is live music, though, and you will be able to apply the examples to any live performance situation in which you may find yourself.

Andy Reynolds, June 2007