

## Tools of the Trade

### Etiquette in the Realm of Jazz

By Chris Buono

For this installment, I'm gonna ask you to put down your axe for a second—you probably need a break after the Flintstones arrangement [*Aug. 05, No. 52*—and have you read for a hot New York minute (words, that is). There's a certain tool we all need in our arsenal that goes far beyond our playing ability, our tone, or our Real Books. It's the tool of etiquette. The way we present ourselves in a jam session, the way we interact with other musicians (guitarists especially), the way we *play* with people.

For some reason the jazz culture inspires the worst in some. Whether it's casting judgments or purposely showing someone up on the bandstand; too often I've witnessed ill moments of senseless jazz bravado. I can't tell you how many times I've seen the frowns around the room when the guy with the Kramer takes the stage or the scowls at the very site of his/her distortion pedal or whammy bar. What's the difference what another guitarist uses to get his groove on? If it sounds good, it is good. Right?

The truth of the matter is this: when you are in a position of knowledge [i.e. musical power], in whatever form that may be, you have the ability to control the dynamics of whatever environment you're in. Be it a jam, a recording session, a lesson, even hanging out in a guitar shop; you can control the room. Good etiquette to me is to open your arms to anyone who wants to talk or play music. If they're not where you're at, lead them to the water and give them a taste. Pay it forward. For example, if you're playing with someone who has limited phrasing, celebrate it by comping their rhythmic motives or playing chords that really make their melodies stand out. If you're hanging with someone who's never heard, say Jon Damian play for instance, make them a compilation of the tunes from him that really speak to you. A positive and polite vibe from you goes far beyond the notes. As a matter of fact, it could make all the notes in the room sound better.

Ever go into a jam session blind and get that feeling in your stomach that says, 'I'm gonna get creamed'? I know I have. If you remember how that felt you might be quicker to ease up on a newbie and let them find their way by laying back, easing up on the extensions, or soloing with more flavor than chops. Anything to make someone else feel like they're part of the gang so they can experience the same nirvana you do when you pick up the old wood & steel is good etiquette. Remember, you were there once too.

When I was in college at William Paterson University (just a College back then) in the early 90's I was introduced to an entire world of new things—both good and bad. There I learned of a thing called 'the music business', as well as other things

like Bitches Brew, flatwounds, how to network, Path train schedules, and the power of a Discover card. While all these things were good things, I ran into a bad thing—the Jazz snob. Some students had already achieved some level of proficiency on their respective axe and knew a thing or two about playing jazz. The problem was they flaunted it like a peacock wherever they went making those who were not quite there yet feel insecure. Insecurity is the number one killer of creation and no one has the right to hamper anyone's creative mojo—no one. What I found was those certain few were so insecure about their playing they were quick to unleash the jazz fury on anyone they could to protect the existence of their own weaknesses. Funny, every major jazz guy I've ever played with was a sweetheart.

I believe if you practice good etiquette where ever you go it will come back ten-fold. If you step aside to let a lesser player shine or if you politely offer to show another guitarist some new techniques and/or concepts, the goodness of your actions will come back to you. Everyone loves to work with a nice person, while *no one* likes to work with a not-nice one.

Just some thoughts from someone who never forgot what it's like.