

---

# Fret City Music

## The Band Manual (Forming and Playing in Rock Bands)

By Rob Forsyth  
Fret City Music  
Rev 2 July 2009



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	2
What's a Band ? .....	2
Forming your Band .....	2
Gear .....	3
Auditions .....	3
Selecting Material .....	4
Facilities .....	4
How to Play Well Together .....	4
Dealing with Conflict .....	5
Gigging .....	5
Promotion .....	6
Recording .....	6
Conclusion .....	7

---

## Introduction

Forming and playing in a band can a fun and rewarding experience.

This free e-book from Fret City Music is a guide to anyone interested in playing in a band or forming a new band.

We try and cover a lot of topics from the perspective of different roles (Drummer, Bass, Rhythm, Lead and Vocals) in a typical 3 to 5 piece rock guitar band setting.

We don't pretend to have all the answers, but there is some good information here based on our personal experiences that will help make your band experience a lot more fun and help you sound better as a unit.

## What's a Band ?

Maybe this sounds stupid, but let's start with the basic question. What exactly is a band ? A band is a group of more than one person playing music in unison. Key word here is UNISON. If some members are playing off-tune or off-beat you'll have a huge lousy sounding mess. More about this later.

Hopefully all the members get along, and have similar musical goals and interests. That makes things a LOT easier.

A typical Rock Band consists of :

1. A Rhythm section containing Drums, Bass and Rhythm Guitar.
2. A Lead Section containing a lead Guitar or Keyboard.
3. Vocals usually consisting of lead and backup vocals.

The above is typical but you can form your band any way you like – no rules.

Some bands are created to perform in front of an audience. Some bands are formed with a primary goal to create music to record. Some bands simply like to play in

the basement. Some are formed for all of the above reasons.

## Forming your Band

There's a few ways to become involved in a band.

The first way is to start a band from the ground up. The advantage here is that you can start off on an even footing with the rest of your band-mates. An added advantage is that it can be easier for the band to evolve as a unit. Typically in this scenario you will all be starting off with similar musical skills, but also you will also be learning and growing together.

The second way is to join an existing band. The advantage here is that the band is likely to be already established and you can get off to a fast start if your skill sets match the band's requirements. The band may already have gigs (performances) lined up and contacts. The disadvantage is that you will be the "low" person in seniority and you may find you need some time to establish your credibility with the other band mates. You'll also have some work to do catching up, and learning material.

There are some effective ways to find other musicians to form or join with. Here are some suggestions :

1. Many local music stores have a bulletin board where you can find "Musician wanted" ads, or place your own ad.
2. The Internet is a great way to "network" with fellow musicians. Web sites such as [www.torontomusician.com](http://www.torontomusician.com) (if you are not in Toronto – there's an xxxmusician.com for most major cities) are helpful resources for advertising yourself, or to look for bands meeting your specific skills or interests. Other web sites such as [www.kijiji.com](http://www.kijiji.com) also have categories

---

for musicians seeking musicians and allow you to focus on a city-specific search.

3. Ask around at your school or work – you’ll be surprised how many people play music, or knows of someone who has like-minded interests.

## Gear

A little bit about gear here. Being an online Guitar store we like to talk about gear, and of course we feel our J&D Brothers brand are excellent instruments for all levels of players. But really, the bottom line is – get the best gear in your price range. This does not mean spending a lot of money.

Beware of the marketing hype – you are paying a premium for “brand names” when in reality, often you can buy the same instrument with a different label for hundreds of dollars less.

Companies like the Canadian based Fret City Music ([www.FretCity.com](http://www.FretCity.com)) are great sources for good instruments that don’t break the bank. Fret City sells guitars that are built by a manufacturer that builds guitars for the big “name-brand” companies.

Don’t be afraid to be different. We can’t believe how many novice players are sucked in by the shape of a headstock or logo.

For Electric players, amplification is more important to shaping your sound and being heard in the mix. Guitar players should think about volume and basic tone shaping capabilities of their amps (Tone controls, overdrive, and reverb).

Bass players should think carefully about the band situation and requirements for volume and tone. Avoid under-powered amps because you will not be heard in your band’s live mix. Rule of thumb (in our opinion) is to invest in Bass Amplification at least double in wattage of your Guitar player’s amp. If you don’t know and you are just starting out,

we suggest an amp of at least 100 watts so you have an amp you can play in a practice situation and smaller venues. In the Bass world, the more power (usually) the better. The used market is an excellent way to find a higher powered amp if you are on a budget.

Keep in mind – music is 98% “you” and “2%” gear. An expensive Guitar or Bass does not make you a better player. Effects pedals do not make you a better player. What makes you a better player is a combination of Practice, Attitude, Listening and Feel. More about these topics in the “**How to Play Well Together**” section.

## Auditions

Auditions are important because it’s the only way to identify “candidates” who look like they have the right skills and personality to fit into your band. Yes, we use the “candidate” because in a sense auditions are very much like job interviews. Auditions are not a sure thing, but they are a necessary evil. Keep in mind an audition is a 2 way event – it gives you a chance to check out potential members, and it also gives the candidate a chance to check you out. Here are some suggestions for a productive audition :

1. Before you get together, set up a phone call and talk to each other over the phone, or in person over coffee on neutral ground. Find about candidate member’s musical interests, their hobbies and lifestyle. Try and get a sense if there is common ground, and identify any potential conflicts. Many times you can tell in a few minutes if there is a “fit” or to move-on.
2. Once you establish the player is a potential “fit”, agree on 3 songs to play for the audition. Ask for suggestions and perhaps there are 3 songs everyone already knows.
3. Set a time limit for the audition (example : one hour) and make it

- 
- clear no decisions to be made right –away.
4. Make your candidate comfortable as possible, try and put yourself into that persons' shoes and how they may feel coming into an audition situation.
  5. Take note of how prompt the candidate is, and also leave a few minutes at the end of the session for everyone talk for a few minutes about common interests.
  6. Try and avoid the temptation of making any commitment before have a chance for you, your band, and the candidate to reflect on if there is a potential fit.
  7. Make sure you thank the candidate for coming out to audition, and also make sure you do follow up with a quick call or e-mail on your final decision.
  8. Talk to your band-mates and get everyone's feedback. Make sure you listen and address any concerns about the candidate.
  9. Once the decision is made, ask the selected candidate how they would feel about joining your band – and start working on plans for your next get together !.

## Selecting Material

Selecting Material that pleases everyone in the band can be very difficult. It depends on how well your group can come to consensus on the music you want to play. We all have different tastes. The more members there are in your group, the more challenging it will be to find material that everyone agrees upon. Keep an open mind and don't be afraid to try something new. Some compromise is required. Try and keep an open mind and try new things. There needs to be something to interest and challenge every member of the band. Make sure that you are considerate and respectful of your band-mates suggestions.

## Facilities

Practice facilities for group rehearsal are important. You need to have a place where the group can get together on a regular basis with minimal setup and be able to focus on your music. Drummers typically have more physical challenges involved with moving and setting up their kits, so a place where the drums can remain setup is preferable. Many cities have rehearsal studios you can rent, check the internet for a list of local studios. Some studios also provide gear on-site (drums, amps) making it even easier to rehearse. A lot of the decision rests of budget. Don't rule out an "unplugged" practice if a regular rehearsal facility is out of reach for your group. This could be as simple as your drummer bringing his/her Snare drum, and other members using acoustic Guitars or small amps as practical.

## How to Play Well Together

A whole book can be written on this subject alone, but here are the key points to remember :

1. Learn how to set the intonation on your Guitar or Bass. A Guitar or Bass that has poor intonation will not sound in tune with itself all the way up the neck.
2. Make sure everyone is in tune ! Use a digital tuner and tune to the same tuning standard (eg 440 Hz). Don't be a hero and think you can tune by ear. It's worth the effort to get all instruments into the same tuning.
3. Play in time !! Listen to the Rhythm section and play in time. Practice with a metronome. The drums lead the rhythm.
4. Don't overplay ! Leave holes in your music to let other instruments shine through. Less is more.
5. Listen ! Be sensitive to your fellow players and listen to what they are

- 
- playing – compliment them and don't complete with them.
6. Feel the song – put some emotion and feeling into your playing.
  7. Take it easy on effects. For example too much reverb will put your instrument to the back of the mix and make your instrument sound weak.
  8. Watch your levels ! You don't need to be loud to sound good. Hint : Set your sound levels based on the drum levels as a start point. Have your drummer play some riffs and set the bass level so it can be heard over the drums, then add rhythm guitar then lead, then vocals.
  9. Use Dynamics. Avoid playing monotone levels. Decrease and increase your levels where appropriate in the song to give it more impact, emotion and make it more interesting.
  10. Mike the bass drum for some punch. Miking the Bass drum and then playing along the kick with the Bass Guitar produces a nice punch. Note, the bass does not need to be really loud for this effect.
  11. Acknowledge your fellow players. Make sure you compliment your band mates when they have done a good job, provide constructive criticism when appropriate.
  12. Don't be a show off. Good musicianship doesn't mean playing fancy riffs and showboating – it's all about playing what's appropriate for the piece.
  13. Practice ! Set a daily schedule for practice. Even a short 10 minute session each day will increase your musical skills. Practice with recordings if possible.

## Dealing with Conflict

Sooner or later most bands experience conflict. The conflict may be as simple as disagreement about songs, or as complex as personality differences. This is a very

complicated subject, but in the end the best way to deal with conflict is to communicate.

Remember that communicating is a two way process – it involves “transmitting” (talking) and “receiving” (listening). Listen to each other, talk about solutions and respect one another's opinions. Hopefully you can work things out. Don't be afraid to come up with creative solutions – sometimes you will have to compromise.

## Gigging

“Gigging” is the act of performing music for money. Hopefully you are considering performing in front of an audience, it's a lot of fun (usually) and even better when you get paid for it. Scale of payment is another story altogether., some comments below on that topic.

DISCLAIMER : My Opinion only here folks \*\*

Most of us started off playing local clubs and bars (many of us are STILL playing local clubs and bars) – and the goal of the bar is to make money selling drinks and food. The more patrons in the club buying drinks, the more money the bar owner makes. You'll find that your scale of payment and frequency of gigging has a direct relationship to your popularity and how many customers you can “draw”. When you are pulling in customers, you often get invited back and have lots of repeat work. At the other end of the scale are concert gigs, those where you are providing the sole form of entertainment (no booze). Those are great gigs too, and usually have larger audiences. Either way, playing in front of an audience is a blast, it gives you some feedback (from the audience), hopefully some money, and inspires you to play better – it gives you experience. So gigging is cool. How do you start ? – visit the next section on “promotion”.

---

## Promotion

If gigging is the “Chicken”, then promotion is the “Egg”. Promoting is really the act of marketing your band. Marketing is a fancy word for selling using various tools. Lets take a look at the basics of marketing (selling) your band, so you can start gigging.

1. **Take stock of your Band.** Who are you, what music do you play, what is your target market? Knowing this information will help you target clubs you can approach.
2. **Network.** Contact friends and fellow musicians who know club owners you can approach to get a gig. Ask everyone you know if they have a contact in the business. Word of mouth is powerful !
3. **Prepare a Promo-kit.** A basic promo kit consists of a sample set-list, sample recording, Business Card and Band profile document you can deliver to potential employers. (The clubs where you want to play). Using a small budget and common tools available to you (digital camera, computer and printer) you can create a promo kit that will tell the story of your band, and give something for the club owner to review. Remember, at this point the club owner doesn't know you, what your band is about, and how you sound. Put yourself in his/her position. You can borrow or buy a cheap Digital Recorder, record at least 4 songs onto a CD as part of your promo kit. Don't be afraid to submit a less-than studio quality recording – but make sure the quality of your playing is there! Another element of a promo kit is a short (MS-Word) document describing your Band (BIO), the kind of music you play, and some sample set lists. You may want to develop a poster for your band that you can also hand in with the promo kit. Business card kits are available at Computer / Office Supply stores so you can cheaply create your own cards. Another approach is to create a Band web site with the above materials to augment the printed promo

kits. Lastly, make sure your contact information is plastered all over your promo material – the CD, the Bio, and the set list. A promo kit requires some effort, but it doesn't have to be expensive. It just needs to prove you are organized, give the club owner a sense of your skills and sound – it's your resume. And make sure once you hand it in, follow up on a regular basis with the club owner – be persistent and don't be afraid to ask for the gig!

## Recording

There are many good reasons to record your band :

- Preparing a demo recording for promoting your band
- Hearing how your band sounds and improving your musical abilities.
- Posterity.
- Song writing
- Commercial release

In the heyday of 50's rock, when some of the greatest music in history was recorded, most recording studios used 2 track tape recorders, and in many cases recordings were done in a single pass – the entire band simply playing the track live “off the floor” with no overdubs. In those days of early rock, every instrument was placed strategically within the studio to obtain the correct mix (or as close as possible to one). If a mistake was made, they either left the mistake “in” the final version or re-recorded another take. The equipment was simple and technically crude compared to the equipment that the average 21<sup>st</sup> Century hobby musician has in his/her bedroom.

Musicians today place a lot of emphasis on the recording methods, quality, effects, number of tracks etc. (Perhaps too much emphasis.) The point we would like to make here again is to try and place the music “above” the gear. It's nice to have good gear, but a great recording is more than

---

equipment. More important is for your energy, attitude, and enthusiasm to shine through onto the recording.

### **Recording on a Budget**

If you are operating on a budget, there are a lot of options for making good quality recordings.

1. PC Recording – Computers such as Apple have some great built-in software called “Garage-Band” will allow you to make some good recordings and actually do over dubs. You can purchase modules from companies such as M-Audio that allow you to record up to 8 tracks simultaneously.
2. If you have a Windows based PC, you can download some great software off the web, for example AUDACITY <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/> that allows you to make multi-track recordings with your PC. Best of all this software is free.
3. Cheap Analog tape cassette decks are easily found at Garage sales, with a couple a cheap mikes you have a 2 track recorder capable of making good recordings.
4. Cheap digital recorders capable of excellent quality sound reproduction are available – try the Samson H2 Digital recorder.
5. If you are on a really tight budget Sony’s **ICD-UX71** is a great cheap digital voice recorder capable of 40-20,000 Hz response and records in MP3 stereo for around a hundred bucks.
6. Used 4 track units such as old TASCAM or FOSTEX recorders are available cheap on EBay or local buy/sell web sites. Beware some of these older units may require repairs, belts replaced etc.

### **Conclusion**

Thanks for reading this booklet, and we hope it gives you some ideas to help you play in a band. There are no hard and fast rules for playing in a band, and everyone’s situation will be different. The best advice we can give is to keep an open mind, and best of all have fun.

Best of luck !

Rob Forsyth, President Fret City Music  
Richmond Hill, Ontario July 2009.