

November 1, 2009

In light of increased demand and looking over business expenses (particularly within this past year), the time has come to officially state my minimum rates for each area I work within. As much as I enjoy helping others and gaining exposure, I can no longer work for less than the rates affixed to the accompanying price list.

This is for several reasons.

First, when I play without compensation it actually costs me money. At the rate which I burn through guitar strings, wear and tear on my instruments (requiring mid to upper three-figure fret jobs, saddle work, and additional adjustments every couple years on primary guitars), amp/tube life, batteries for effects pedals (Eric Johnson is not out of his mind, they do affect the tone significantly), and simply the cost of gas and car maintenance, I have recently taken a closer look and realized just how much all those [free performances, rehearsals, and sessions are paid for out of my own pocket](#).

Second, playing without a pre-arranged price list creates opportunities for misrepresentation, miscommunication, and bargaining at the end of the rainbow. This is the antithesis of fostering mutual comfort and respect; critical cornerstones in the process of providing one's best work (in any endeavor). This concept may be further illuminated by comparing the artistic realm to other areas of employment (sole proprietorships or not).

Surely few individuals would suppose that a doctor ought to render his services for free in the interest of attaining lucrative surgeries and procedures in the future, that a young lawyer would render services for free to get a foot in the door, or that a mechanic would fix one's car based upon similar reasoning. Examples abound in all areas of employment outside of the artistic realm (a professional plumber surely could not afford to fix a problem in one's house solely for the inherent joy in performing his/her occupation).

Without *thoroughly* expounding my personal views on this paradox (symptomatic of a deficiency in our current culture, which has by-and-large accepted the notion that artists of all kinds, but especially musicians, are expendable. As musicians and artists, we live in a creative reality that is the envy of those living arguably much more stable 9-5 lives. The importance of this demographic which kindly marvels at the romantic quality of a life in music cannot be underestimated. It builds audiences, establishes rapport, and transcends barricades. However, the truth is that this creative zone does not come without some sense of responsibility and mindfulness, in the artistic *and* financial sense. Throughout the course of history, some of the greatest musicians have been some of the poorest businessmen and women, easily susceptible to manipulation and accepting sub-par compensation for their life's work), the bottom line is that quality of any kind is rare, which is true in any field, not just in medicine, law, and labor.

Quality thus dictates that musicians should be compensated according to their abilities and demand. Perhaps talent factors in as well (okay it does), but talent can be latent or fostered and this is not the forum for musings on nature vs. nurture. Few ever heard the hours, days, and years of practice leading up to Chet's ['golden age' in his early '20s](#) or the time Robben Ford spent practicing and leading up to his mind-boggling phrasing, tone, and note choices evident as early as the [Charles Ford Band](#) LP. These men didn't accidentally become great musicians (and financially well-off). Aspiration and healthy-discontent fueled their lifelong dedication to being musicians who play guitar instead of guitarists dabbling in music.

That sort of devotion *is* work, regardless of the reality that many of my own heroes accepted less than what they deserved for the work they put in. Good musicians have a tendency towards insecurity, as we all do at one time or another (and one thing I can tell you as a Hendrix scholar since the age of twelve is that behind the fame, Jimi was a highly insecure and vulnerable human being). If anything, this humility is far more endearing than a self-righteous, pompous ‘lick slinger’ who has no idea where it’s at ([and it ain’t in] ‘the ones who jump on the wagon just for a while ‘cause they know it’s in style, to get their kicks, get out of it quick and make all kinds of money and chicks’ – from Bob Dylan’s poem, not song, *Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie*).

But the reality is that good musicians DO work hard, even if it’s not as outwardly obvious as a doctor spending eight years of intensive study in medical school. The song may only take three minutes, and yet when a great player delivers, ultimately what’s being heard is a lifetime of attention.

Yes, Larry Carlton rightfully earns every cent he charges to play on someone’s project -- something every guitar player with more than a passing interest in their craft can attest to. To say one does not wish to employ his services is perfectly acceptable, but to say he isn’t worth the price is uninformed and borderline offensive (when such a claim is made to *anyone* who has worked hard at the craft behind their occupation).

Of course the reality is that most of us are simply not as original, innovative, and spontaneous as Larry Carlton or Jeff Beck, but both (musical heroes to yours truly) can teach us something more than their brilliant musicality. That is, this central “lifetime of attention” theme; and that establishing minimum requirements for lending their talents is not remotely incompatible with maintaining humility, graciousness, and being a team player.

So as a lifetime musician with an active interest in less-than-rich and famous blues and folksingers, there’s no small amount of understanding on my part concerning the paradox of art and commerce. Self-importance is a drag. It kills the creative spirit and poisons relationships.

This informs my rates (many well below union scale), while maintaining the need for a roof over my head. Many struggle to make ends meet while realizing their own aspirations, an admirable part of the journey and the proving ground where ‘those who don’t like the danger soon find something different to try’ (to quote from the indelible Mark Knopfler, or the Scottish Bob Dylan in my quite humble opinion as an admirer of both’s breadth of work and influence).

At the end of the day, financial arrangements between respectable parties ultimately serve as an outward expression of appreciation; which makes it every bit as much (if not more so) an issue of respect as a means of covering day-to-day expenses and monthly bills. That anyone in a creative endeavor must do things as a labor of love, if they’re any good, is indisputable. Past that, the difficult bit is having to take a stand for our own selves and establish what we’re willing to do as right-brained free lance musicians attempting to keep a roof over our heads as sole proprietors.

For in art, love, friendship, and rock and roll, the whole had better equal more than the sum of the parts, and mutual respect comprises a critical cornerstone in accomplishing such ambitious pursuits.

Accordingly, the time has come to avoid further miscommunication by clearly outlining what makes far more sense from a business standpoint, thus ensuring the best for myself and clients alike.

Effective immediately, my minimum rates are as follows. In events of higher budgets and those who have exceeded these rates in the past, I truly appreciate the work and continue to thank each and every one (you know who you are). I cannot stress too much that 99% of those I have worked with, including friends I have given entirely free work to in the past, have shown nothing but appreciation and kindness in return. Many have even mentioned on multiple occasions how much they hoped for me to hearken this occasion long before now.

These minimum rates are compatible with those provided in more specific areas of this website, with recording rates well below union scale. Most have not changed from years past. While I appreciate opportunities to work for less, expenses and my own musical ventures dictate the need for me to devote such times to continued personal practice, private teaching, writing, beginning my forthcoming record, and booking more of my own shows.