

How to Eat and Drink on a Gig. (Sometimes).

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Is there really such a thing as a free meal? On a gig the answer can vary from 'sometimes', or 'maybe' to 'absolutely not'. A strange topic, where there is not much to go on, so I have decided to throw my hat in the ring and let loose with my personal nuggets of musical gig wisdom.

While most events and gigs stipulate on the contract what will be provided, I have found the reality to swing wildly. Experienced musicians learn to tread carefully as eating and drinking can veer from supposed perks of the job to professional minefields that can cost you a residency, loss of band members or unexpected bills. So how can you pig out, and enjoy unlimited free alcohol while avoiding uproar and a sorry mess of misunderstandings? The answer is by advancing with the utmost caution.

Ask upfront questions such as :-

- Whats the formality rating of the gig? Deluxe black tie or scruffy jeans chic? Eating and drinking will probably follow suit.

*When and where do the musicians eat? No matter what is said, expect changes. Be prepared for meals to take ages to turn up, and then be given 10 minutes to down a three course dinner. Or dinner never to arrive, and be tossed spare hors d'oeuvres. Or alcohol to replace dinner. Or to be gifted with extra dinners. Or freezing cold dinners. Or even, the same dinner as the guests, Hallelujah. Every gig will tell its own tale.

*What can the musicians drink, and how much? Is it actually free, (the crucial one).

Rows can explode about food and alcohol and this can backfire on a gig, to your own detriment, so walk this tightrope with aplomb. If the gig is super-formal with crowned royalty, heads of state or other bigwigs, touch

nothing without permission. Casual affairs, inquire discreetly. Guest buffets should be left well alone, until a green light appears. It is certainly reasonable to ask if musicians can at least enjoy one beer to get into the swing of things. Special note: if drinks are offered by the public, make sure they actually are paying for them, I have been presented with a drinks bill the next day after a gig, demanding I pay for offered drinks, and the drinks of the offeree. Similarly, check the liberality of bar staff, and make sure drinks are free. I have seen so many rows over alcohol, I usually do not drink at gigs anymore.

Free dinners can range from delightful gourmet treats, a beautiful finale to the evening, to feasts of culinary death. Cold unpalatable offerings, served through gritted teeth by harried staff are best avoided. Make friends as soon as you arrive, or be super-friendly to caterers, and usually you are rewarded with meals later, especially if any are enjoying the music or giving you the eye. Remember, the musician is everyone's friend and proceed from there.

Do get all info ahead of time, in case of disputes later on. In horror cases of unpaid gigs, help yourselves liberally to everything on offer, taking away as much as humanly possible.

For further reading.

<https://www.learnjazzstandards.com/blog/5-keys-to-proper-gig-etiquette/>