

DRUM!

Don't Take Your Eyes Off The Ball

By Andy Doerschuk Published in the October 2008 issue of DRUM! Magazine



I knew last Saturday's gig was doomed from about a mile away. After exiting the freeway, I saw a swarm of flashing lights about six blocks ahead, in what appeared to be close proximity to the club where I was booked. A couple blocks later traffic slowed to a crawl and I realized that the mass of police cars, ambulances, and fire trucks were indeed amassed directly in front of my gig.

Police had set up orange cones on either side of the street and were diverting traffic away from the block in which the club was located. A police officer allowed me to drive past the roadblocks so that I could load in my equipment. Upon arrival I learned that there had been a fatal hit and run accident outside the venue, and the entire block had been designated a crime scene. A pair of shoes still lay in the bloodstained street. It was a grisly tragedy, to be sure.

Despite the fact that there were literally only five people in the club, and little possibility of attracting a bigger crowd, the owner still wanted us to play until 1:00 in the morning. I dutifully set up my drums.

Truth is, this was destined to be a strange gig. A guitarist had hired me with whom I had never played before. He didn't bother to send me any mp3s of his material until the morning of the show, although I knew I could wing it. He had fashioned himself against Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan, and I could cut either style in my sleep.

My kit was set in short order, and we got on stage to start the show, which began with the guitarist adjusting his tone controls for literally ten minutes while he played a single note – very loudly. And he remained inappropriately loud for the entire gig, which would have been okay, except that he kept gesturing for *me* to turn down.

Even though his guitar was quite literally blaring, it seemed that he was never satisfied with my volume level. It finally pissed me off. So I began to barely touch the drums, playing only the straightest 4/4 with no fills or embellishments. I virtually disappeared in the mix. It didn't seem to matter under the circumstances.

We finished the set and as I stepped offstage a familiar looking person walked up to me and said hi. It was Rick Alegria, a local drummer who has worked with Paul Williams and Bo Diddley, among others. Suddenly embarrassed, I began trying to explain why I hadn't been giving the gig my fullest effort.

But even as the words tumbled out of my mouth I realized that there was no excuse for my halfhearted performance. The old adage – you never know who will be out in the audience – came true in the most vivid manner. Rick graciously stuck around for the second set, and I was able to recoup a modicum of dignity. But I still felt like an idiot.

So again, dear reader, please don't do what I do. Even if the show is empty and police have set up roadblocks, even if it seems ridiculous to expend an ounce of energy, always try your best for the sake of the few audience members that bothered to come, and for your own sake.