

Pitch It: How to make it as an up-and-coming musician

Although the instruments have stayed the same, the way bands produce, market and sell their music is ever-evolving. Kids are making albums in their bedrooms on laptops and tablets; bands are amassing national and international fans on Twitter and Facebook before they're even signed to a label, and some artists are choosing to forgo record labels all together. Like the keyboards and guitars they play on, some aspects of the music scene have remained intact and face-to-face networking is still the key to many bands getting gigs. To grasp the idea of what it's like to be an up-and-coming musician in the year 2016, *Savvy* spoke with two bands and two solo artists:

The Cold Weather Company is a folk band from New Jersey made up of guitarists Brian Curry and Jeff Petescia and keyboardist Steve Shimchick. The band formed in 2013 when the guys were still in college. After releasing a series of demos, **The Cold Weather Company** put out their first album in 2014.

Will Miller is the percussionist of the North Carolina-based funk and jam band **Supatight**. The band was formed in high school by bassist Tyler Mack and guitarist Mikey Damonico. They have since cycled through several different lineups before rounding out their numbers with singer Josh Bertram and keyboardist Matt Powers, and hope to put out their first album with this lineup (but second as **Supatight**) sometime this year.

Colton Kayser is a singer-songwriter from New Jersey. Mixing rock, folk, country and pop styles, and with a focus having great lyrics alongside strong melodies, **Kayser** put out his self-titled debut album in 2013, which is out on Spotify, iTunes or anywhere else you'd like to pick up some new music.

Terry Moore is an Amsterdam-based musician whose current projects include the band Koala Ghosts and his solo songs under the name In The Raw. **Moore** first picked up the guitar at age 16 and has been in various bands and music project since the 1980s. While he hasn't officially released any singles with either of his current albums, but Moore is optimistic about their future.

GIGS

Proficiency playing live is an essential part of any great band. Moore describes live performance as the most rewarding part of being a musician. Playing in the right venue and to the right crowd is equally important as the show itself for up-and-coming bands. Sometimes, finding that venue can be a struggle.

Coming from the Jersey area, Cold Weather Company is not overly fond of playing gigs in New York City. They say the city is oversaturated with venues and one show doesn't get very much attendance. Instead, they have set their sights on college towns.

"When it comes to the music scene around the country, colleges are the arteries that you can get to and spread it out to the rest of the people," says Shimchick.

Kayser echoes his sentiment saying, "The more I tour, the more I find that there's places that you'd never really hear about if you weren't from there that are absolutely phenomenal.

One of Kayser's strategies is trading shows with people. For this, he'll meet up with other musicians, usually being introduced by mutual friends or going to their shows. Then, when that band is in his hometown, he can give them a place to stay and help them book a gig. In return, when Kayser is on tour, he can pull from his network of musician friends to find a couch to sleep on or a basement to play in.

Trading shows also help get more people in front of a band. The friend helping out in another town will invite all of their friends to the gig, which is often a crowd of people who may not have otherwise gone to the show.

“You’re playing for a crowd that you wouldn’t normally get because it’s all their friends. They understand that it’s their friends, and they listen and pay attention. They don’t talk over you. It’s an easier way to get an attentive crowd than playing in a club where no one knows you,” says Kayser.

Curry says for up-and-coming bands, bars and other small clubs are not the ideal place to play when you’re looking to get the word out.

“A lot of times at bars, unless you’re playing loud or heavy music, people are just there to drink and don’t really want to pay attention to some folk band,” he says.

Shimchick says, “The biggest support for the local scene is the house shows and the basement shows.”

At these sorts of shows, among friends, it’s easy to get a crowd invested in the performance and the music. Having a good network of bands trading shows also helps to line up basement gigs.

“Some of your favorite bands could be playing in your town, and you’d never even know it,” says Shimchick, explaining the network of underground shows put on by music lovers, often not even marketed by the bands themselves.

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-Steve Shimchick
Pianist from Cold Weather
Company

Supatight also gets gigs by trading shows. Some friends of the band are popular enough to get them exposure beyond house shows. This can mean traveling long distances and not making much, if any, profit.

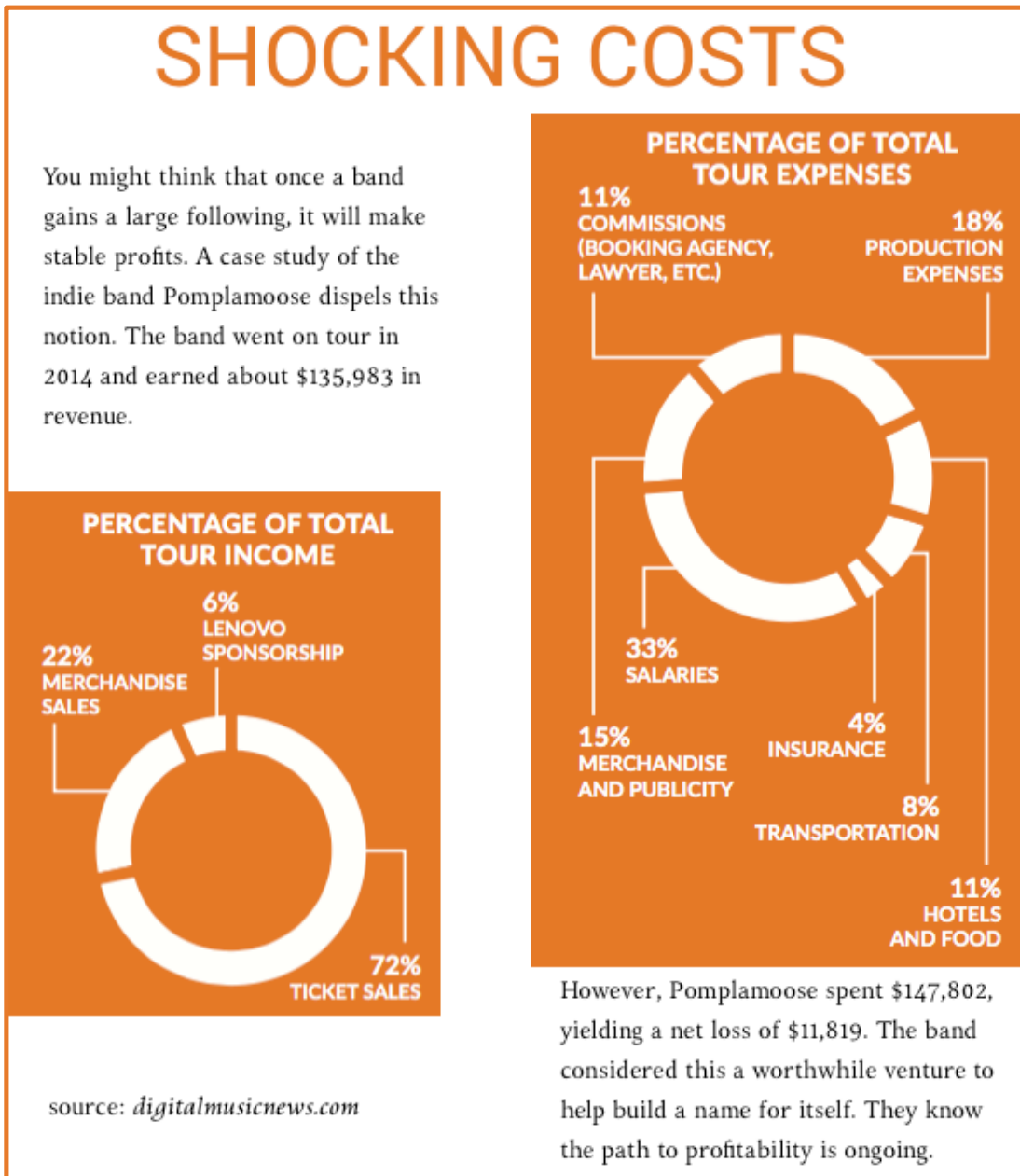
“The band operates like a democracy, says Miller. “So if it’s a 3-to-5 vote, then you play the gig, and most of the time it works out for the best.”

Supatight describe their schedules as “weekend warriors.” The band plays shows Thursday-Saturday and then everyone goes back to their day jobs the rest of the week. Miller is the only member who is a full-time musician. The guitarists are servers, Powers is a cook and Mack makes hummus for a living.

This can lead to some crazy and bleary-eyed mornings. If Supatight plays a gig in Blacksburg, Virginia (another college town) on a Saturday night, they could be playing until 2

a.m., then hang out with their friends until five or six. If someone has to be back for a Sunday afternoon shift, this could mean high-tailing it back to North Carolina early in the morning, often with little to no sleep.

Miller says that you just have to think: “Is it worth it? Is it really worth doing this? And then we would play the shows and be like, ‘Hell yeah! This is awesome.’ It’s definitely worth it.”



SOCIAL MEDIA

For Cold Weather Company, social media has become so ingrained in how they operate as a band that it's difficult to imagine life without it.

Their foray into the world of Internet promotion started shortly after the founding of the band. The band formed in November, but that upcoming January, Petescia left to study abroad in New Zealand for six months.

Fortunately, the band had written several songs and recorded most of Petescia's parts before he left. Over the subsequent months, Curry and Shimchick finished recording and mixing the songs and released them periodically online, usually via SoundCloud.

The cycle of announcing the release of a song, building up excitement, releasing the song, and then announcing another release helped the band gain momentum, even while they were separated and limited in their ability to perform live.

"It was a blessing in disguise, me going away," says Petescia.

Curry says, "Before this band I was always in the mindset that if the music is good

enough, we're going to make it. If we play enough shows and we go to the right places, we're going to find the right venue and somebody will be there, but you always have the opportunity to get the right person to listen to your songs as long as you have the Internet."

BLUEBIRD: A STRONG VISUAL



To make touring easier, the guys from Cold Weather Company bought themselves a bus, painted it blue and hit the road. After they removed some of the seats from its previous life as a school bus, their new transport (affectionately dubbed "Bluebird"), now comfortably fits the band, all their gear and even a friend or two.

Beyond simple transportation, Bluebird has taken on a life of her own. The bus has a section on the band's website and is frequently featured on the Instagram of each band member. When marketing the band, Brian Curry emphasizes the importance of having an aesthetic, something visual to complement the music. For Cold Weather Company, Bluebird is just that.

Shimchick is the social media wizard of the band, constantly finding new people to follow, replying to messages and sometimes earning new fans from social media alone. But his is not a solo endeavor, and each member contributes uniquely to their collective online presence.

Curry went to school for landscape architecture and has a background in design. With that, he is able to design posters and promotion images for the band and keep the website looking good.

Petescia has a background in advertising that at one point had him running the official IHOP Instagram.

Cold Weather Company has found that having distinct personalities is key to their social media success. Each member has a distinct posting style: Petescia talks about soccer, Curry likes the outdoors and Shimchick favors puns, and they each make sure to sign all of their posts.

"You always have the opportunity to get the right person to listen to your songs as long as you have the Internet."

-Brian Curry
Guitarist for Cold Weather
Company

Kayser has a similar take on all things Internet. He says, "Being good is a prerequisite. You have to be able to use the tools available to you."

Aesthetic is also key. Kayser ensures that all aspects of his marketing, from his logo and the colors of his t-shirts, to the images on his website, reflect the type of music he plays.

For Supatight and Koala Ghost, Facebook is their primary form of social media. From there, they are able to link to other content like YouTube videos and pictures from live shows.

Miller says sometimes when booking gigs, a Facebook page or other social media accounts can substitute for a formal press kit. If an artist has enough likes, they can almost guarantee booking certain gigs. He says it's probably easier for booking agents as well, only having to click through a few links instead of dealing with numerous packages from bands.

There's generally a correlation between gigs and social media as well. After a particularly good show, Miller says he can watch their Facebook likes and YouTube views go up.

Even with all their strategies, Shimchick says, "A lot of what we had was luck too."

MUSIC

Making the music itself is obviously the most integral part of any band or solo career. For these musicians, a combination of new technology and old-fashioned hard work has allowed them to release music almost totally on their own.

Supatight is finishing up work on a new album and couldn't be prouder, but it's taken a lot for them to reach this particular mountaintop.

"We've struggled getting our name out there," says Miller. "We've literally had to turn down gigs because we couldn't afford it."

Miller says that these struggles have helped them grow as a band. They've had to be entrepreneurial and learn things the hard way, but it's created a sense of camaraderie between the band that makes it worth it at the end of the day, and makes it feel a lot better now that they're "finally starting to get off the ground."

During early gigs, some of the venues were small, which left them cramped on stage, or unable to fit in a horn player. Now, their album is going to feature a horn player who has played with Prince.

Supatight's music has gotten more serious. Early songs like "Sugar Tits" and "Vape that Dank" recall memories of the teenagers that wrote them. The band has evolved and gotten older, especially since Mack is now a father. This is reflected in their lyrics that have gained a social conscious, but, as Miller is keen to point out, not lost any of their goofiness.

"We've literally had to turn down gigs because we couldn't afford it."

-Will Miller
Drummer from
Supatight

Their upcoming album is called "Does This Work?" and features Mack's baby son Theo on the cover wearing headphones and holding an unplugged guitar cable.

Miller spends much of his time working in the studio. Because the band members are spread out across the state, they have to record individually, but Miller says he likes it better that way, modeling themselves after the greats like Steely Dan.

Cold Weather Company records most of their songs either in one band member's bedroom or in one of two cabins. They like the intimacy of these recordings so much, that the bedroom version of their song "Horizon Fire" made it onto their album as the opening track.

For both bands, trust and transparency are huge. They pool most, if not all, of the money made after shows into a band fund, and use it to pay for gear, gas and studio time. The guys from Cold Weather Company joke that this sort of budgeting scenario would make a great board game.

Moore also works on his music full time, but notes that "if I am unable to earn a living, I will need to return to work."

This is a pattern mirrored by Miller who has gone back and forth from saving while working in the service industry to doing music full time on several occasions.

While Miller likes the democratic aspects of working with a band, Moore prefers writing alone.

"Logistically it's far easier to write, arrange and record solo," he says, going on to say that while he prefers guitar, he plays all the instruments needed in a band. He adds that live shows do benefit from the styles of other musicians.

Moore and Cold Weather Company find SoundCloud to be the preferred place to put their music online. It has more of a community and interactive aspect than other services like Bandcamp.

Koala Ghost doesn't have any recordings now, but plans on recording and releasing an EP this spring. Moore hopes to get radio airplay from his contact in Dutch radio.

For all these artists, the most important thing about being in a band is the love for the music. Without a constantly burning passion, it's not worth all the late nights, long drives and questionable sleeping arrangements.