

Bobby Owsinski

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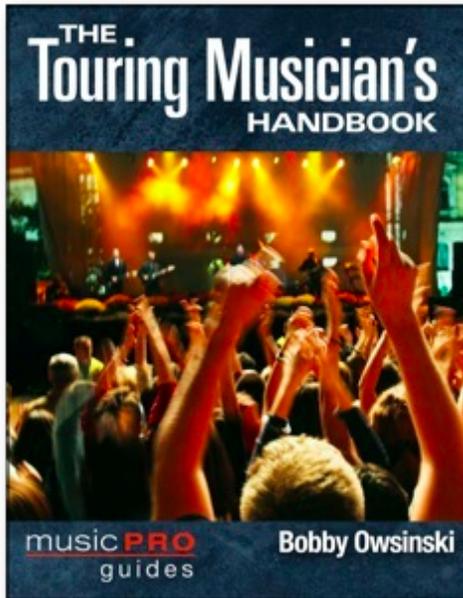
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U2 Keyboard Tech Terry Lawless *Interview Excerpt*

Terry Lawless is one of the premier keyboard techs on the road today, having spent the last nine years with superstar band U2. They're not the only elite act that has utilized Terry's expertise though, as he's also been out with Don Henley, the Doobie Brothers, Bruce Springsteen, Cher, Phil Collins, and David Bowie among others. Terry is also a great keyboard player himself, and you can find more info about him at terrylawless.com. A fountain of useful information, Terry has an abundance of useful tips and tricks thanks to his many years of road experience.

What do you take out with you in your work box?

We're lucky enough to have a bench tech on our crew, but when I'm going out myself as a keyboard tech I take a laptop because there are a lot of programs for MIDI analysis or libraries that come in handy. I'll take some rudimentary tools. You have to make sure that you have a spare internal battery for every piece of gear that you have, a compliment of short to long audio cables, some really long MIDI cables (up to 50 feet it really doesn't matter if they're short or long because they'll work fine), cleaners for the keys and tops of keyboards, and some extra



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lightbulbs.

In my workbox I also carry a really good soldering station because bad soldering jobs are as good as no soldering jobs sometimes. I keep a spare MIDI and a spare USB keyboard around, a headphone amp for troubleshooting, a good pair of isolated headphones so that you can hear no matter what level the band is playing on stage, an assortment of hand tools because you have to crack the chest of a keyboard quite a bit. If you're on a show that uses a predominance of Roland keyboards, you try to carry an extra set of Roland keys both weighted and unweighted. You carry extra power cords. You carry a supply of every battery that you're going to need in the show, because why would you put a half a million dollar show on the line for a 99 cent battery.

I also carry an assortment of regular wireless and MIDI wireless systems as well as some MIDI long transmission gadgets that will let you send MIDI to the front of house if you need to. I carry the manual for every item that I take on the road. If you're carrying something unique like a Fender Rhodes piano, you have to carry parts and tines for that. If you're keeping a Hammond organ running it's a good idea to keep a spare Leslie around. If you can't, you need to keep a full assortment of tubes, belts and O rings. In my work box, because I've gotten a name as Hammond person, I carry a Trek Hammond preamp that will accept any pinnage of cable out of the back. I also keep a variac in my workbox just in case the voltage gets weird so you can bump the voltage up or down as necessary if you don't have an electrician on hand. That's one of the staples of my workbox.

You try to have a spare for everything that you have on stage, and if that's not possible, you have one generic keyboard crammed with every program that you use in the show just so you can slide it in as a replacement for any keyboard up there.

You carry a lot of space blankets and plastic sheeting that you can toss up at anytime. One of the most important things that you can carry in your work box is a hair dryer. We built a unit out of a piece of PVC pipe that you can mount a hair dryer to that has holes drilled in it. You can then mount it over a keyboard just to have some warm air blowing out there. Sometimes it's good to keep a big pop-up umbrella in the truck.

After you set up a show and have everything working, you go through a series of "what if's." You go through every piece of gear and say to yourself, "What if this goes down?" This is very important - when you back up programs on a synthesizer, you have to do it on at least two different media. You may have them backed up on your computer, but what if your computer goes down? You may have them backed up on a MIDI data filer with a floppy disc, but what if that goes down? Whenever possible, you have everything backed up on RAM cards because that's the fastest thing you can use to restore everything. The important thing is to have backups of your backups in different media if possible just so you can cover you self.

You also take a multimeter so you can meter the power before you plug in because sometimes it's not right. Even the simplest little 3 pronged polarity tester will tell you whether things are wired correctly. That's a ten second test that can save you thousands of dollars.

What's the most difficult thing you have to do?

The most difficult thing is making sure everything is the same on stage every day regardless of the situation you're in. Depending upon the size of the act, the bigger the stage, the more you're going to be able to make it the same every show. The most difficult thing is working with a smaller act in smaller venues and still trying to make it feel the same and be comfortable for the player. You just have to get creative about it sometimes.

Other than that, the hardest thing for any tech to get down is the hang, because the hang will make or break you in the business. You have to be able to work with other people and do your own work without stepping on anybody's toes and making them upset. That's what the whole touring world relies on and that's why it's mostly the same people doing most of the jobs, because people that don't fit in get weeded out quickly and people that work well with other people get asked back.