

Musician interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for musician roles usually combine a look at your portfolio or demo material with questions about how you handle the practical realities of gigging: preparation, unpredictable venues, and working with other people under time pressure. Expect a mix of process, behavioural and scenario-based questions rather than a single fixed format.

- **Process:** How you prepare for a performance or recording session, from rehearsal through to load-in and soundcheck.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of adapting to an audience, venue, or collaborator, usually asked as 'tell me about a time'.
- **Scenario:** A hypothetical problem during a live set or session, testing judgement when something goes wrong in real time.
- **Technical:** Questions about reading music, improvising within a genre, or working across different instruments and equipment.
- **Client-facing:** How you handle venue bookers, event clients, or producers when their requirements shift at short notice.

Most interviews open with a look at your recordings, setlist history or reel, move into questions about your preparation process and past gigs, then work through one or two scenario questions about handling problems on the night. Bookers or venue managers often finish by discussing rates, availability and equipment needs.

1. Walk me through how you prepare for a live performance, from getting the booking to walking off stage.

Why they ask

This checks whether you have a reliable process for rehearsal, logistics and soundcheck rather than relying on luck on the night.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through: describe your preparation in order, from confirming the booking and rehearsing the set through to setting up equipment, soundcheck and the performance itself.

Example answer

"Once a booking is confirmed I work out the setlist with the venue or client's brief in mind, then run it with the band at least twice before the date, focusing on transitions and any tricky sections. On the day I arrive early enough to load in and soundcheck properly, checking amplification levels against the room. During the set I keep half an eye on the crowd so I can adjust pacing or swap a song if the energy calls for it."

2. Tell me about a time a performance didn't go the way you expected and you had to adapt on the spot.

Why they ask

Live performance rarely goes exactly to plan, so interviewers want evidence you can adjust without losing the audience or the band.

How to structure your answer

STAR: set out the situation, the specific task or problem, the action you took, and the result for the performance or the client relationship.

Example answer

"I was booked for a private function where the crowd skewed much older than the brief suggested, and the setlist I'd prepared wasn't landing. I quickly swapped in a run of songs from an earlier era that the band knew well, cutting a couple of the planned numbers. The room picked up straight away and the client asked us back for a follow-up event."

3. Your amplifier or a key piece of equipment fails halfway through a paid set. What do you do?

Why they ask

Equipment failure is common in live work, and this tests composure and problem solving under pressure rather than technical knowledge alone.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: state your immediate priority, the practical steps you'd take, and how you'd manage the audience and the rest of the band while sorting it.

Example answer

"My first move is to keep the set moving if possible, so I'd signal the band to stretch out the current song or drop to an acoustic arrangement while I swap in a backup lead or amp. If there's no quick fix I'd talk to the crowd briefly rather than leaving dead air, and get the venue's sound engineer involved if one's on site. Afterwards I'd note what failed so I can carry a proper backup next time."

4. How do you approach playing from sheet music compared to improvising within a genre you don't perform often?

Why they ask

This is a direct check on the technical range described in the role: reading notated music and improvising within genre conventions.

How to structure your answer

Technical explanation: describe your method for each skill separately, then how you combine or switch between them in practice.

Example answer

"With notated music I'll read through it once for structure and phrasing before adding my own dynamics in rehearsal. For genres outside my usual work I listen to a few reference tracks first to get the harmonic and rhythmic language right, then improvise within that framework rather than defaulting to my own habits. Session work in particular has taught me to switch quickly between the two depending on what the chart or the producer wants."

5. A client or venue asks you to change the setlist significantly on the day of the performance. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

This tests how you manage client relationships and last-minute demands without damaging the performance or the booking.

How to structure your answer

Client-facing response: explain how you'd clarify the request, weigh it against what's realistic with the band, and communicate the outcome to the client.

Example answer

"I'd ask exactly what they want changed and why, since sometimes it's one or two songs rather than the whole set. If the band can cover it, we'll run through the new material quickly before doors open. If a request isn't workable on no notice, I'll say so directly and offer an alternative, like adjusting the order or adding a song we already know well that fits their brief."

6. Tell me about a time you disagreed with a producer or fellow musician on a creative decision during a recording.

Why they ask

Studio work involves compromise, and interviewers want to see you can hold a view while still working productively with collaborators.

How to structure your answer

STAR: describe the disagreement, what was at stake, how you handled the conversation, and where the track ended up.

Example answer

"During an EP session the producer wanted a heavier mix on a track than I felt suited the vocal, so I asked to hear both versions side by side rather than arguing in the abstract. Listening back made it clear the vocal was getting buried, so we split the difference: a fuller low end but with the vocal pulled up in the final mix. The track turned out better than either version we'd started with."