



OPEN LETTER TO MUSICIANS ATTENDING THE HVBS JAMS:

The great thing about how the HVBS blues jams is that it brings a lot of people out who haven't experienced open jams. One of the not-so-great things about it is that, well, it brings a lot of people out who haven't experienced open jams. With that in mind, let us offer a few suggestions:

1. **FOLLOW SONG LIMITS.** Three songs means just that. Be respectful of those waiting to play.
2. **KEEP YOUR SELECTIONS TO A REASONABLE LENGTH.** Most songs performed live last an average of 5-7 minutes. Many songs in collections of '50s blues averaged just 3 minutes apiece. Not saying you should stick to 3-minute tune, but if Sonny Boy Williamson can say what he wants to say in several songs in a 33-min. album, it shouldn't take 15 minutes for a single song. Each jam set is 3 songs, or 15 minutes.
3. **GET ON AND OFF THE STAGE QUICKLY.** Be prepared with both your equipment and your material. Be in tune and be ready to play. People are not there to watch you taking your time setting up your equipment or listen to you noodle. Then when you're done playing, get OFF the stage quickly so the next performer can play.
4. **THIS IS A BLUES JAM (Pt. 1).** That means you should go there prepared to play blues, not classic rock, not hardcore country, not jazz fusion. Those styles are great, and there are places to play them, but this ain't one of them. It won't get boring; blues styles are varied enough to survive a full night honoring those styles. The idea is for others to play along with a song they may not be familiar with; don't make it un-fun for them to do that. Bottom line: if you need to constantly shout out chord changes, it probably isn't the right song choice. Choose a different one.
5. **THIS IS A BLUES JAM (Pt. 2).** This time with the emphasis on "jam." We all have people with whom we love to play and with whom we're comfortable. But the whole purpose of these jams is the chance to network, to play with new people and to try out new ideas, not for showcasing your band's tight arrangements. Be open to jamming with whoever gets put on the bandstand with you. While we're on the subject...
6. **THIS IS A BLUES JAM (Pt. 3).** It's not a personal showcase, nor is it an audition (although it can serve as both if you do it right). Be sure you're playing together. Listen to what's going on around you and don't fight with the rest of the band, not musically and certainly not in terms of volume. In the words of a late great bass player from Boston, "Ninety percent of playing is listening." While we are on the subject...
7. **BE VOLUME APPROPRIATE.** This is advice all too often ignored at all performances, but for some reason it seems to happen at the jams even more. Usually it starts out at a reasonable level, then by the midpoint of the jam set, it can get loud. **Blues ain't loud!** Keep in mind that the drums are usually un-amplified (except occasionally the bass drum). If you're having trouble hearing the drummer and the others onstage with you, then turn down your volume. Be cognizant of that (and the drummer will be thankful for that).
8. **BE OPEN TO CRITICISM AND ADVICE.** Jams offer incredible learning opportunities and constructive criticism could help you sharpen your listening and playing skills.
9. **RESPECT THE VENUE.** The venue is allowing us to play there. They supply everything we need to have a great time. As a patron, you should buy something to eat and drink. They have to make a living too.
10. **HAVE FUN.**
11. **See all of the above.**