

## Rebecca Kemp: Queen Of Logistics

If you go to a lot of music gigs that are held, away from the Arena's and football stadiums, in a multitude of small venues and festivals around the world you may wonder who that person is flitting between backstage, tour van and merchandise stall.

Well I often have and eventually took the sensible step of asking one of these people about it.

I was fortunate in my choice by picking the very charming and attractive Rebecca Kemp, who has arranged a couple of artist interviews for me in the past, who I knew would have the answers.

I kick off with the issue of job title. "I guess Tour Manager would be the simplest one, but booking agent Bob Paterson calls me the 'Queen Of Logistics'. Whenever I am at a venue the person in question appears to be all things to all people, whether that is the artist, the promoter or even the audience (and of course journos like me wanting that Pulitzer winning interview of course!) "In a nutshell, my global vision is to enable musicians to concentrate on music, so whatever that entails is my job description" says Rebecca "The artist will have contacted the booking agent to say they want to tour, then the Agent will get in touch, or the artist will book me directly."

There is no massive organisation or retinue behind this particular lady (although I assume the likes of Coldplay etc will utilise organisations within organisations, but we are talking halls not stadiums here!) as Rebecca notes "I work completely freelance, there is just me. So after the agent contacts me – a few logistical questions may come up such as 'can we book this gig after this one, I check to see if its geographically feasible, especially if it involves ferries."

But once contracts are signed then the work really starts and this is obviously many months, and often even longer than that, before the shows are due to commence, of course." I have a list of the venues and promoter contact details etc. and I will start booking hotels where necessary, vehicles and ferries. It's like putting a big jig saw puzzle together"

I always had a feeling the role involved more than standing next to the merchandise stand flogging a few CD's! "I have a lot of contacts, and its very useful knowing other tour managers that I meet on the road, particularly if I am unable to do a tour myself and I am asked to recommend someone else. But they also pass on tips which is helpful". There isn't a "union" of Tour Managers but Rebecca finds my suggestion that she sets one up rather amusing" well all of us managers are working for the same reason and end... so we try and help each other out"



When the first day of the tour arrives the work of management really starts. "I will pick up the rental van, drive to the airport to meet the artist. Then we will set off to cover the gigs. Depending on the band, will determine how long I take to get from A to B. Some artists will just fall asleep until we are there, some will stop for the toilet quite a lot, which is totally fine, generally if I have more girls than guys, we will have more toilet breaks! Some artists just want to get to the hotel and rest, but others are up for an adventure. Like today (Rebecca is currently looking after Sam Baker on his UK tour) we took our time and took in a few things on the way up, had a meal and that. But with bigger bands it can be like being a teacher on a school trip, counting how many got off the van and how many got back on" I imagine guys with guitars being left at Watford Gap services but apparently not by this lady "I haven't left anybody..... yet "(with a smile and laugh – hinting at some close shaves)

"Then when we arrive at the gig I will sort out arrangements and unload gear and set up" at this point I wonder if the Queen Of Logistics becomes a "Roadie" but that already seems to be the case". At this point we all muck in. There is usually only – in this case – the three of us. As artists at this level rarely carry around surplus people due to the extra costs involved. Then after that we may eat depending on what the band want to do. That's what keeps it fresh and interesting, the fact that everyone is different. It's a new challenge each time I go out with someone – in a good way. They keep you on your toes as there is never any time to be complacent or twiddle your thumbs!"

If you are wondering how to get into this business I am afraid there are no university courses or apprenticeships for this job as I wondered how Rebecca came to be doing it "Well, I had a friend who I was at Art School with. Her sister in law was touring and she needed a hand with some accommodation, this was Alana Levandoski from Canada. We met up in London and just clicked. We became good friends and she introduced me to her booking agent at the time, Bob Paterson who was based in Ipswich and since I am from Norwich, there was an instant rapport. He sent me an email a few days later with a business proposal. He has a lot of musicians on the road, and he worries about them, as he can only do so much. So he had this idea that musicians could hire me independently to look after their logistics and practical details. So I just started out doing it from an administrative point of view. But... I ended out going on the road being a Tour Manager, not having a clue what I was doing...but learnt very quickly and found that I loved it! That was four years ago." Considering that Rebecca started out as a children's worker at a local church it was a large step to doing what she does now where "I am on the road more than I am at home, but so far so good."

On the hardest part of the job, the answer is pretty clear "It's time, always having to keep an eye on the watch. I am also thinking about two or three tours ahead, so creating time for myself is really difficult". I wonder if Rebecca needs to enjoy the music of the artist to do the role "....well...part of me sees the person first, regardless of what they do or what they sound like. But I am in the fortunate position that everyone I work with I have been able to value their music as well" As someone who has seen Rebecca with about three or four different artists over the years I can vouch that she does get into the music." One of the greatest privileges is to be able to listen to the music each night, even though I usually have a gazillion emails to be replying to" she explains. On making real friendships with the musicians I put forward that her and Gretchen Peters appear to be close (based on the Twitter traffic between them) "Yes, it feels like touring with friends, when you get on really well and she is such a pleasure to work with. I remember after the first tour we did in Europe Barry, (Gretchen's husband) jokingly said 'thank you so much... I just wish we could pay you!' To be honest even if I wasn't getting paid I would still enjoy it, it is so much more than just a job. Its nice to know that if a crisis happens, or something wonderful happens I can share it with other musicians. It's more than just touring. So yes, it does go a lot deeper (than a job) with some of the bands I work with."

I enquire as to the funniest thing that has happened while on the road – and hopefully name names – "Oh... where do you start! There are several things. I am quite good at getting lost and get myself locked out of buildings quite often, and scenarios where musicians have managed to get themselves locked

out of radio stations. Or in one case where a musician was locked between the stairwell and a fire exit, no mobile phone, with people searching for him everywhere" Missing gear can also be an issue "I recall picking one band up – and I wont say their name – driving into London and realising that they hadn't got one of their guitars. It turns out it had been left on the aeroplane. It was the first time I had worked with the band and they felt so awful and apologetic, but it was easily sorted. I am sorry - I wish I could come up with some catastrophes, but I can't!" Maybe that is an indication of just how good Rebecca is at her job.

What about the rare occasion that she does get some free time? "I am learning to play the banjo, but I tend to do woodcarving – sometimes with a chainsaw – as well as some charcoal drawing. I also find that drumming is a great release!"

Finally I ask what does she consider to be the key attributes to doing this job. "I think the main thing is being sensitive to people's needs, and realising that it's not about yourself. It's about serving others, without the thought of getting rewarded - and doing it with all your heart".

I then switch off the recorder as Sam Baker enters the room and asks Rebecca for some throat lozenges and she has to switch back into being the Queen Of Logistics again.

Many thanks to Rebecca for giving me an insight into her world.

John Jobling

(This interview originally appeared in the July/August Issue of Maverick Magazine. Some factual and contextual corrections have been made from the printed article. JJ)