

KEEPING YOUR INSTRUMENT IN GOOD WORKING ORDER

You will need to invest time and a bit of money to keep your instrument in good condition - this may involve buying a flight case, new strings, or just keeping it clean. Below is a list of routine maintenance tasks. For anything other than this you should seek specialist advice.

HOW OFTEN?

Every time you use your instrument you will need to think about some or all of the routine maintenance tasks listed below. If your instrument has not been used for a while, regular check-ups will ensure no decay or damage occurs.

CLEANING

All instruments will suffer in varying degrees from dirt, such as dust, grime and grease. Try to keep your instrument as dirt free as possible at all times. How you clean your instrument will depend on what it is made of and you should seek specialist advice before you do anything. As a general guide, electrical equipment and string instruments should be kept dry and dust free. Brass and wind instruments will need more thorough cleaning after each session. Clean your strings with a tissue after every gig, it removes the sweat and grease from the string and it keeps the strings sounding livelier and brighter for longer.

TUNING

Learning how to keep your instrument in tune will not only help keep it in working order, but also stop you from getting thrown out of the band. Electronic tuners vary in price, (and accuracy), from about £20 - £100 and are very useful if you're having to tune up in a noisy venue. String players usually use a tuning fork. Many instruments, including stringed, wind and brass instruments will not work well if they are not tuned to the correct pitch. Guitars and stringed instruments should be stored with strings in tune. Percussion instruments such as bongos and congas need to have their skins loosened when not being used. Pianos need to be tuned by a specialist on a regular basis.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental influences such as climate, humidity, weather and central heating can all have an effect on the working condition of your instrument. Some people say that wood is a living, breathing material and therefore should be treated with a bit of T.L.C. A change in humidity can affect the tone of wooden instruments and the dry air caused by central heating can cause untold havoc, such as warped necks and broken bridges - you can prevent this by using a specially designed humidifier, available at most specialist shops. Temperature changes will affect the tuning of all wind, brass or stringed instruments so it's worthwhile making sure your instrument is acclimatised before you go on stage to perform. For example, the increase in heat caused by stage lighting will make these instruments go sharp.

