

**Get Me to the Show On Time:  
Being a Traveling College Performer in a Post-September 11 World  
by Del Suggs**

The events of September 11, 2001 have touched all segments of American life. From postal workers dealing with the possibility of anthrax-tainted mail and taxi drivers being blocked from airport terminals to Arab-Americans being viewed with suspicion and prejudice, many of us have been affected by the terrorist attacks a number of ways. Not even "show business" has been sheltered from the impact. It's not surprising, then, that the college entertainment industry is also dealing with the aftermath of the 9/11 assault on America. And, like most modern professionals, the major repercussion involved centers around travel.

Travel has always been a primary component of campus entertainment. Touring artists are the lifeblood of college programming. In fact, touring performers are one of the very reasons that the National Association for Campus Activities was formed. NACA assists schools in getting better acts and reduced fees by encouraging the block booking of traveling acts. So, when travel becomes more difficult, it echoes throughout the campus activities industry.

#### Dealing With Increased Airport Security

Without a doubt, the increased security at America's airports is the biggest burden borne by the touring artist. Closer scrutiny of baggage adds an increased onus on an already stressful hardship. While it may be relatively simple for a stand-up comedian to clear the metal detectors and X-ray machines, it can be a different matter for other performers.

Take for example Lester, the clown and balloon artist, who is represented by Everything But the Mime. While traveling through the Milwaukee, WI airport, his bags were

X-rayed to reveal a balloon pump. Lester wears this in a fanny pack around his waist to inflate the balloons he twists into latex animals. To airport security, the motors, wires and batteries looked like a bomb, and Lester had to explain exactly what he was packing in his bag.

Or consider this illustration from Bill Fry, a juggler and comedian who is also represented by Everything But the Mime. "When my bags are pulled for inspection, I send my clothes through first and then explain to the X-ray tech that I have some unusual objects in the prop bag," he says. "I warn them that the ones that will look strangest are the balls. I have professional juggling balls made of pure silicone, and they show up like they are radioactive!"

Despite his explanation, every time this happens, the security guard points to the X-ray screen and excitedly asks what the round objects are. Fry pulls them out and tells them yet again that they are silicone juggling balls. The guards look at them, bounce them, put them back and pass him on through the security checkpoint.

Yet, unfortunately, both of these incidents go on to make an even more telling point about the airport security procedures involved. Lester reports that even though the guards check his balloon pump and accept his explanation, they never even ask him to inflate a balloon and demonstrate the mysterious machine.

And, according to Fry, the guards pass him through security after determining that the round silicone objects actually are professional juggling balls. But, they are so distracted that they unwittingly ignore the sickle, machete and meat cleaver he uses in his act that are still in the bag!

With new carry-on rules that are in place in American airports, many performers now have to check a bag when they never did before. Psychic entertainer Craig Karges of Karges Productions (WV) did some sobering calculations, comparing checking a bag to just having a carry-on. He finds that it takes about 30 minutes to get his bag at baggage claim. Add to this the extra half-hour early that he now arrives at the airport, and he's got an extra full hour of airport time every day he flies. And he flies about 100 days a year. That's 100 hours each year of extra airport time-- two and a half average work weeks!

#### Facing More Travel Hassles

The biggest problem for performers now with respect to air travel is that it takes more time and, therefore, more planning. Some airlines now require you to check in an hour before your flight. Gaye Adegbalola of Saffire: The Uppity Blues Women, represented by EastCoast Entertainment, Inc. (VA), says, "By having to get there an hour earlier, we often leave home when it's still dark. That missed hour of sleep makes a difference in the energy level of the performance that evening. So, occasionally, I feel the audience is a tad cheated. Without a doubt, we always give the audience everything we have. It's just that due to security, our 'everything' is a bit diminished."

Problems with time can affect agents as well as performers. Michele Scherdin of BCA's Comedy Warehouse (LA) experienced a major hassle at the Hartford, CT airport due to an arbitrary deadline. At her hometown airport in New Orleans, security changes didn't affect air travel. Even in May, Scherdin could arrive at the airport about 30 minutes before flight time, use curbside check-in, and walk onto the plane.

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Not so in Hartford. After getting lost on her way back to the airport after a Carrot Top concert, she turned in her rental car and got to the gate at 3:10 p.m. for a 3:35 p.m. flight. A new FAA regulation required that all bags had to be matched with a passenger, and that required 30 minutes. The computer wouldn't even print out a claim tag for her suitcase. So, she had to sit and watch her fellow passengers board her original flight, while she was rescheduled on another flight three hours later.

#### Round Trip Purchase Required

An additional difficulty for performers involves new airline ticketing procedures. It's always been problematic, as most airlines require Saturday night stays for the least-expensive tickets. "Open-jaw" tickets are becoming more difficult and expensive, too. These are tickets allowing the traveler to depart and return to the same city from two different locations (for example, flying from Atlanta to New York, and then returning to Atlanta from Boston). Open jaw tickets may be necessary to get to the beginning city of a tour, use a rental car to travel to multiple cities, and then fly home from the last city of the tour. Also a problem now are so-called "Circle Saver" tickets. These are the tickets that allow the traveler to go to multiple destinations, for example, traveling from Chicago to Philadelphia to Orlando to Atlanta, then back to Chicago. Sometimes these tickets will show up (to whom or what??) as one-way tickets. That draws suspicion, and, according to Lester, "You will be body searched before you board at every single location-- and that's lots of fun."

#### Making the Best of Delays

No matter what difficulties may have evolved from increased airport security, artists and agents are finding creative ways of dealing with

travel delays. Meleia Day, an agent for G.L. Berg Entertainment (MN), recommends planning for the extra time you'll be waiting at the gate. "I always have a book or things to work on, and just about everyone carries a cell phone," she said. So we are all equipped to make use of any spare time we might have should we get to our gate early."

Bari Koral, a New York City-based performer represented by Wally's World of Entertainment (TN), found a great way to kill time during a recent flight delay. While sitting out a weather delay at the Dallas, TX airport, she ended up talking with the pilot. He saw the guitar, and, she said, "He begged me to play a few songs and just entertain everyone to get their minds off of being in the airport. So, I did. And I sold like seven CDs right there in the terminal! The pilot was so excited he said, 'Wow, today you're in Terminal C, but someday I'll get you booked in Terminal A!'"

#### Maintaining Our Priorities and Values

While the performers among us may complain about the problems caused by increased travel security, it's vital that we understand both the cause and the effect of such new procedures. Higher security doesn't have to mean a loss of liberties and constitutional rights, but governmental actions, such as the profiling of passengers, and widespread xenophobia caused by terrorist attacks may ultimately be more damaging than the attacks themselves.

Consider this caution from Jack Levin of Northeastern University (MA). He was flying from Boston to Kansas City to speak about hate crimes at a university in central Missouri. Anxious about flying, he eyed his fellow passengers with suspicion and was startled to spot what he thought might be a

"potential terrorist" in the seat next to his own: a tan-skinned man with a foreign-sounding accent. "He had that Middle-Eastern look [many] have come to identify with suicide bombers and people who send anthrax through the mail. The only problem was that my fellow passenger/[potential terrorist] wasn't from [the Middle-East] but from San Diego; he was a Latino-American, not an Arab," said Levine. "I had committed the sin of profiling, and I should have known better," he continued. "There is no such thing as a 'Middle-Eastern look. Or, put another way: Half the people in the world look like they might be from the Middle-East!"

Lester feels strongly about the effect of increased security. "I really hate seeing the National Guard and the Army doing police work. If you want that you can go to Central America, or to hundreds of other places and see uniformed men with M-16's standing on every corner," he said. "If they put us through hell every time we travel, then the terrorists have won. That's what they want us to do, live in terror."

#### Travel Like the Pros

Here are some tips from experienced travelers Craig Karges and Del Suggs. These suggestions can help you get to your destination with the least amount of hassle.

1. Always take the earliest flight available. If it's delayed or cancelled, you'll have priority on the next flight. You can always catch up on your sleep on the plane, or when you get to your destination.
2. Use curbside check in for your bags. The line is always much shorter. You can then go directly to your gate and get your boarding pass. But make sure you have a receipt and copy of your itinerary in order to get through security. You need printed proof that you are flying that day.

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3. Use e-tickets whenever possible. Most airlines have installed e-ticket kiosks at airports where you can check yourself in electronically. It's much faster than the regular line, although more people are starting to use them and the lines are getting longer.

4. Keep your ID handy when making connections. Karges keeps his in a display wallet around his neck. You have to show it so often, you may as well keep it close by.

5. If you have "elite frequent flyer" status on particular airlines, you generally get to use a special (and speedy) line to check in. Try to fly on those airlines as much as possible.

6. Put all your metal objects (change, belt, wallet, etc.) in your carry-on bag before going through security. This also keeps you from setting off the metal detector and getting "wanded."

7. Don't try to carry on too much luggage. You'll be forced to check it at the gate, delaying you and your fellow passengers.

**Dealing with Security: Comments  
from Performers and Other  
Associates on How They Are  
Coping**

"I'm asked to remove my shoes literally every time I go through security. I've learned now to wear slip-ons" Bari Koral

"Be aware of what are the heavy travel times. Friday afternoons and Sunday afternoons and evenings are usually heavy with business travelers. Monday mornings are always busy." Also, "Don't harass the security personnel. Once in a while you'll run into some security folks who are on a power trip, but for the most part, if you have a pleasant and cooperative attitude, then so will

they. And they do have a rotten, thankless job." Meleia Day

"I get to the airport 90 minutes ahead of time. I very rarely need this amount of time. I'm usually through in 20 minutes and have over an hour to killóbut you never know." Craig Karges

"While the increased security has been a pain ... , I welcome it. I want everyone to be checked thoroughly, even if it takes forever. I say 'thank you' when the agents really check. Sometimes it's too cursory." Gaye Adegbalola

"We prefer just getting in the motorhome and driving from place to place." Lester

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