

Kevin Genus May 5, 2002

Ask an artist about his latest tour and you'll get pretty standard replies: "Things went great. The crowds were wonderful. It was a lot of hard work but we'd do it all again tomorrow." You know the deal.

If you really want the dirt, you've got to find an insider.

Kevin Genus is a Stick player from the Washington D.C. area. He also ended up being the jack-of-all-trades for Greg and the rest of the Greg Howard Band on their most recent Eastern U.S. tour.

I tracked down Kevin and managed to get the inside story about life on the road with an independent alternative/progressive/experimental/improvisational jazz/rock/fusion group.

Whether talking about bass sounds or colorful additions to his vocabulary from any one of the languages Greg's European bandmates spoke, Kevin tells a good story. While reading, feel free to insert uproarious laughter at just about any point from either Kevin or myself.

Jim Reilly: Tell me how you got hooked up with Greg for the tour?

Kevin Genus: I had some time at work, basically forced vacation. If you didn't use it by the end of March then it was lost. I had about three and a half weeks that I had to use and I was complaining to Greg about it. He said, "Why don't you go on tour with us?"

I thought he was joking, but he made it pretty clear that he wasn't, so I used up my time.

JR: What was your job on the tour?

KG: The way that he defined it was: "We need somebody to get us some coffee, to make some phone calls..." It sounded like everything except for 'gear schlepper.'

JR: Did you end up schlepping gear anyway?

KG: Yea, we all did. The places they played at were always, it seemed like, tight little corridors and they had so much equipment. We all did our fair amount of work.

JR: Take me through an average day on the Greg Howard Band tour.

KG: You wake up at the hotel, load the vehicles up. Greg was pretty adamant about not leaving any gear in the vehicles, so we unloaded everything every night. After we loaded everything up we got into the vehicles and drove to whatever venue we were going to.

The drives were something else.

There were three people in Greg's car and two in my vehicle, we had a station wagon and a pickup. At some point in the game I bought some little two-way walkie-talkies so we could talk back and forth. A large portion of the drives was a lot of me learning how to speak several different languages, all inappropriate things.

We would normally show up at the venue, the unload portion would usually take about 30 minutes, assuming we got there on time. Getting everything set up was usually about 30 minutes and the majority of that was getting everything in. Getting Wolfkamp's kit set up was something else. He's got an array of everything, I just couldn't believe it. It's a really nice acoustic and electric set. The way that he had everything set up, you could literally break the set down in about 15 minutes but to put it all together took some time. While Greg and Hubert were getting their stuff taken care of, both Jans (Wolfkamp and van Olffen) and I were constructing Wolfkamp's little cage thing. That took up a lot of time in terms of set up. Once that was done, it was just your standard soundchecks.

Now the soundchecks, we had everything. There was one, I can't remember her name but that's the woman I would marry. I don't know how she did it, but from the time she started to the time that they played, it was perfect. I've never heard any sound-person do that. We had that level straight to the guy who didn't know how to work his own board.

JR: How were the crowds? People were into what they were doing?

KG: Yea. If had to give credit to any of the crowds, the one in Michigan was pretty nice and Cincinnati. Cincinnati was a different kind of audience. They came and they listened but it was more of an art nouveau club. It was almost like, you know how you watch some of these movies and they have these places, take a Starbucks and yank out all of the coffee. That's really the way it was. Those people were there to listen and that was pretty cool. That place was packed. I don't know how many people were there but it was one of those large row homes that they had refurbished and everything. It was just an amazing spot.

We never had any problems with the crowds. They were always really into what these guys were doing.

The first time I saw Greg play over here at Iota, it was not the same. It was the same music, but the style was drastically different. The show that he did this time, to me, had a lot more funk than I had heard previously. For me, that made it. Hubert joked while we were driving, that "We're going to bring some funk to the show (insert poor Dutch accent)."

JR: And they brought some funk to the shows?

KG: Yea, after that, I knew there wasn't going to be any problems.

After the shows, it would usually be about 3 o'clock before we got out and we'd go straight back to the hotel, go to sleep, get back up and do the same thing.

JR: Any Spinal Tap moments, other than watching Spinal Tap, which was Jerry Marotta's answer when I asked him that question?

KG: Honestly, I really can't recall any. Everything was not planned out perfectly but Greg had enough planning going on that there were no real hiccups.

The one Spinal Tap was, I've got a really nice conversion van that we wanted to use but unfortunately my van had been stolen. I had gotten it back but I couldn't get everything done in time for us to use that vehicle. It would have been much better on all of us if we had used that vehicle.

And some of the guys from Holland got sick as we got near the end of the shows. They were just totally exhausted and wanted to get home to their own beds.

JR: How were they with the language? Are they English speakers?

KG: It really amazes me. For people who have only been to the U.S. two or three times, they speak fluent English. They explained it. They're speaking seven or eight languages, they drive an hour and they're in a different country. So I guess for them it was really nothing to learn English. They didn't have any problems with it.

JR: And you got to learn some nasty words in seven or eight languages. I won't bother asking for those. I'm sure I wouldn't be able to spell them.

KG: I don't know if I would call them nasty. I'd call them very nice adjectives.

JR: Any moments stand out? Any big highlights from the tour?

KG: The one moment that stands out for me really has nothing to do with any of the concerts. We were driving down the road and Wolfkamp was intent on getting on video everything that was happening. So we're on this bridge in New York and two cars in front of us literally just stop. We were so busy talking, we didn't notice they had stopped. We had all this heavy gear in the back and there was no way we were going to stop in time, I don't now how we got out of it. But he got this whole thing on tape and that tape has followed me around.

I would also say the Iota (Virginia) crowd was something else. I don't believe I've seen Greg's family since he got married. It was great to see his whole family come out and support him. They're something else. They're just brilliant people. Greg, I think, is the only musician in the family but they're all just very successful people. It's just great to see that.

JR: And what about your playing? What are you doing these days?

KG: I've got two bands that I'm working with now. I'm not supposed to call it progressive rock. We're doing some good stuff. It's odd meter and everything.

The other band I'm in is an R & B house-type band. The goal for that band is to replace some of the DJs in the DC/Baltimore area. We've got a couple of shows lined up for September and I'm looking forward to that.

JR: Any last thoughts on the tour?

KG: I was so happy to get back to work. I enjoy my day job now.

JR: How come?

KG: There are certain things that you know are going to happen everyday at work. On tour, things just happen. You have two options: worry about it or forget about it and just keep rolling. The motto on that tour was 'just keep rolling.' You really can't afford to get caught up in some of the junk that happens.

When I did return to work, that was one of the most difficult things for me to get over. It's like you get sucked back into this world where you have to be cognizant of those concerns but, to get away from that for while was great.