

I thought you might enjoy and appreciate this brief memoir of Bo Diddley.

“Bo Diddley Story - Cash money ‘up front’.”

True story:

About 35+/- years ago my wife & I were sitting backstage at a “major” Northern California blues festival with other performers/musicians, their families & invited friends/guests. We were seated on folding chairs arranged in a big circle while enjoying refreshments & each other’s company. Bo Diddley was present, ‘holding ‘court’, & in a cordial mood to all who cared to ‘approach’ him. The producer/musician/MC of the event was/is a well-known blues musician who shall remain nameless in this anecdote. When the time grew near for Bo Diddley to perform the producer/musician/MC came backstage to get Bo & his band ready to go on. The producer/musician/MC told Bo it was time to go on & he requested that Bo & his band please accompany him to the front stage area and prepare to be introduced.

Bo Diddley remained seated, as he looked up at the producer/musician/MC, & he responded quite calmly: “I need my money in cash before I get on your stage.”

The producer/musician/MC responded:

“Bo, there are thousands of people out there who paid to get in to the festival & who are waiting to hear you perform. Don’t worry, you’ll get your money as soon as you get off the stage, I promise you.”

Bo Diddley responds without hesitation & still calmly:

“I need my money in cash before I go on stage.”

Producer/musician/MC:

“Bo, I’ll gladly pay you your money, in cash, the minute you get off stage. While you’re performing I’ll go to the gate/ticket booth & get the cash for you, & be back in time to hand it to you when you finish your set.”

Bo Diddley, firmly but calmly:

“I ain’t going on your stage without my cash money ‘up front’.”

Producer/musician/MC, exasperated, & anxious to get Bo on stage at the appointed time:

“Bo, we’ve known each other as good friends for 20 years or more! Don’t worry, I’m not going to rip you off. You’ll get your money, in cash, as soon as you get off the stage.”

Bo Diddley then quite calmly says to the producer one of the heaviest & most truthful, telling, & historically revealing things I’ve ever heard, & I’ll never forget, as Bo looked up from his chair & calmly but firmly said:

“It ain’t **you**. It’s the ones that came & went **before** you!”

The producer/musician /MC paused briefly & thought about what Bo had said to him.

Producer/musician/MC then says quickly with a reassuring tone:

“Don’t go anywhere, Bo. I’ll be right back with your cash money.”

And so it was.

Within a few minutes Bo got his cash money “up front,” went on stage & he put on a great show.

I’ll never forget Bo Diddley’s singular convincing reason for getting his money in cash “up front.”

That one brief sentence encompasses a history & ‘education via experience’ in the music business for a Rock & Roll Hall of Fame member & one of the seminal musicians in the history of R&B/Rock & Roll:

“It ain’t **you**. It’s the ones that came & went **before** you!”

Everyone present backstage that witnessed that happening got a life’s lesson in the history of Bo Diddley and the music business.

If I’m lying’, I’m dying.

- Michael “Hawkeye” Herman

12/29/21

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Addenda:

Here’s a Duke Ellington quote that I believe relates to, and further ‘illuminates,’ my story: “Bo Diddley “Cash money ‘up front.’”

In a long ago magazine interview (as in late 60s?) with Duke Ellington, in which the interviewer remarked on how “... Wasn’t it great that people like himself (Duke) and Count Basie were finally getting through to

white audiences, and of course, there was the money.' They were making more money than ever before, right?"

And Duke Ellington replied, "They don't have to pay me to play. They're paying for what I've had to go through to get here."

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Here attached is a very brief and interesting/informative selection from the book "The Real Frank Zappa Book" in which Zappa describes his witnessing "Duke Ellington begging - pleading for a ten-dollar advance" from a promoter's assistant, and Zappa's reaction and resulting actions.

THE REAL FRANK ZAPPA BOOK

Jazz: The Music of Unemployment

The first time we played with Rahsaan Roland Kirk was at the 1968 *Boston Globe* Jazz Festival. After his performance, when introduced to him backstage, I said I really liked what he was doing, and said that if he felt like joining us onstage during our set, he was more than welcome. In spite of his blindness, I believed we could accommodate whatever he wanted to do.

We began our set, wending our atonal way toward a medley of 1950s-style honking saxophone numbers. During this fairly complicated, choreographed routine, Rahsaan, assisted by his helper (can't remember his name), decided to join in.

In 1969, George Wein, impresario of the Newport Jazz Festival, decided it would be a tremendous idea to put the Mothers of Invention on a jazz tour of the East Coast. We wound up working in a package with Kirk, Duke Ellington and Gary Burton in Miami at the Jai Alai Fronton, and at another gig in South Carolina.

The touring package did not carry its own PA—we had to use whatever speakers existed in each of the venues we were booked into. The hall in South Carolina was rigged with small jukebox speakers, set in a ring around the building. Useless, but there we were—we had to play the show.

Before we went on, I saw Duke Ellington begging—pleading—for a ten-dollar advance. It was really depressing. After that show, I told the guys: "*That's it—we're breaking the band up.*"

We'd been together in one configuration or another for about five years at that point, and suddenly EVERYTHING looked utterly hopeless to me. If Duke Ellington had to beg some George Wein assistant backstage for *ten bucks*, what the fuck was I doing with a ten-piece band, trying to play rock and roll—or something that was *almost* rock and roll?

I was paying everybody in the band a weekly salary of two hundred dollars—all year round, whether we were working or not, along with all hotel and travel expenses **when we did get work**. The guys in the band were pissed off—as if their welfare had been canceled—but at that point I was ten thousand dollars in the red.

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As you know, there's a goodly variety of stories about Chuck Berry refusing to play without cash in advance, but none that I know of, include any reason/justification for it by Berry given to anyone. I know quite a few older/our age musicians all over the US, and even in Europe who played with Berry and/or Diddley and most of them have a story in that regard about Berry. Sure, Berry used pick-up bands almost exclusively, and due to his unbelievably long and prolific performing career there are hundreds of 'local' musicians who worked with Berry. No rehearsals. "You know the tunes." is the most frequently quoted Berry line to the pick-up bands in terms of pre-show rehearsal or instruction.

Bo sometimes used a local band, as well, but less frequently than Chuck

Some of the stories include the aspect of Berry not only insisting on his money up front, but he also insisted on an extra \$500 cash 'security deposit' on the quality of the pick-up band who were to back him up. If the promoter complained and tried to refuse Berry's demand, he would hear from Berry, "Pay me all the money now, or I might get sick and have to cancel the show." That was a tough thing for a promoter to risk/refuse with the audience out front waiting for the performance.)

If Chuck didn't like the band's work, he kept the \$500.

One musician told me that his band considered it a great unspoken compliment that after the gig they saw Berry return the \$500 cash 'deposit' to the promoter. I'm sure there are some others who were/are proud to have received that unspoken compliment from Chuck, and others who might not have received that unspoken compliment ... and perhaps don't tell that part of the story.

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