



Q&A: Jason Crane Takes *The Jazz Session* On the Road With The "Jazz Or Bust" Tour

By Steven Thrasher

Published Wed., May 30 2012 at 11:00 AM



Jason Crane is the creator, producer, distributor and host of [The Jazz Session](#), an excellent in-depth interview show. This summer, Crane's taking the show on the road with the ["Jazz or Bust"](#) tour, a jaunt that, he told SOTC, was inspired by his wandering spirit, his desire to see jazz musicians in their homes, and his facing homelessness

in New York.

What is *The Jazz Session*?

The Jazz Session is a free, online jazz interview show, and it focuses on conversations with jazz musicians. As its heart, it's a show about the creative process as seen through the jazz world, because that's the world in which I worked. But it's really about how people create, and what inspires that.

Talk about the economics of making the show. I've noticed [on Twitter](#) that you're like your own one-man NPR pledge week.

[Laughs]. Indeed. I started working in radio in the 1990s, and I worked for a number of NPR affiliates, and for NPR itself, when I worked for *Morning Edition* in Japan. When I came back to the states, I ran a community jazz station in upstate New York, in Rochester.

Through several things, I stepped down. I had run for office, and we had had our first child. I had wanted to stop running the station, but I wanted to do a podcast. I started reaching out to people in the jazz world, and I told them, "Listen, I have no budget, I have no audience. I can't promise you anything, but will you be a part of this? Will you send some artists my way? I can't promise you anything, but I'll do my best to make this work."

[Our third show was with John Abercrombie](#), a well known jazz guitarist. That was five years ago. Enough people listened to that show that it started to take off. Five years later, 1.8 million shows have been downloaded. There are over 370 episodes online now—375 or 376, I think.

In the beginning, it wasn't funded. I did it all myself, and I had other jobs. I worked in PR and with labor unions, and I did *The Jazz Session* on the side. When I moved down to New York last year was around the time that I decided to see if I could fund the show, or earn enough pay to justify doing it. It took a lot of time. I tried to get to 100 sustaining members by the 300th show, and I did, and it's continued to grow since then. There are monthly and yearly memberships, but you can listen for free. Most of my life I've been fairly poor, and it's important to me that people without money can access and listen to *The Jazz Session*.

Are you using any tools like Kickstarter to do this?

I've done all of the memberships using PayPal, and the funding for the tour through a PayPal account. I have a pretty good email list, and the show, right from the beginning, used it. When I started, there was no one else doing this kind of show. If people wanted to listen to long form interviews with jazz musicians, I kind of had a monopoly. So I quickly built up a listener base. Now there are some other similar shows from people with a much larger megaphone than I have, doing a similar thing, but it's not the same. I built the membership up using Twitter and Facebook and my mailing list. And I literally did it face to face, too—I've have some live versions of *The Jazz Session* which have helped support the show.

Tell me about the tour. Why head out of town when you're in New York, and a lot of jazz musicians come through here?

One of the real reasons I decided to do the tour was that I was going to be homeless. The place I was living fell through, and I couldn't do anything about it, and I live so close to the vest financially, I didn't have the savings to put down on somewhere else.

I was sitting in a park with a friend, and I was talking about how I was going to have to crash on some people's

couches, And we discussed how, rather than crash on couches in New York, I should just go on tour with *The Jazz Session*. I had always wanted to take this show on the road, and I just like to travel. I have moved more than 30 times in my life. With that in mind, we sketched this idea, and I went back to my apartment, and emailed a few people in a few places, asking "Would you house me for a little while and help me come up with people to interview in a few places?" And they all came back positive.

Within 24 hours, the tour started to become a real thing. Two weeks ago I announced it publicly, and eight days later I bought the two Greyhound bus passes.

Are you going through the Mississippi Delta—where the Lomaxes recorded *Land Where the Blues Began*? I went through that part of the country with the StoryCorps Griot tour.

Yes. The first stop will be Wilmington, Delaware, going down the Eastern seaboard. I'll hit most of the big cities in Tennessee. The tour will be two things: interviews with musicians everywhere, and the other thing is I'm a poet, so I'll be doing readings, too. I've got about four readings booked. So I'm going down the East Coast, and then inland—Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, winding up in New Orleans.

I've been thinking about leaving New Orleans on a boat, and going up the Mississippi. A lot of people along the interior, near the Mississippi river, are helping me. Then I might go into Texas, into the big cities, across the Southwest, up the West Coast, and across Canada. I've only booked the dates for the first half of the tour, because I don't know how long I'll want to stay in New Orleans, there is so much there to cover—but that is only the half-way point.

When I worked for StoryCorps, I became a big believer in the power of the face-to-face interview. I interview people on the phone all the time, but I prefer talking to them in person whenever possible. Can you talk about why you think it's important to interview people in person, as you will on this tour?

Yesterday, I counted that I've done 517 jazz interviews. I am not sure what percentage were face to face, but I think it's at least half. I talked to people a lot on the phone, and it's very possible to have a very meaningful conversation on the phone, without being able to see them. But with *The Jazz Session*, when I interview someone in person, I am usually in their home. There's a way in which someone is so much more relaxed in their home, surrounded by their things, sitting on their couch and drinking tea. They feel more comfortable, and they're more likely to forget that there's a microphone in their face recording their every word.

Another way it helps is to see someone's body language. A deadpan comment can mean one thing, but if I can see someone's body language, I can tell that they're joking. People are so much easier to read in person. Not to mention that I just love being with these people. Someone said to me about being starstruck, "These people put their pants on one leg at a time, just like everybody else." But I think, "Yeah, they do that, but then they make the most amazing music in the world." Plus, I'm not concerned about fashion—I am interested in their creativity! I still get giddy when I am in a room with these folks. Many are older than me, but I've been doing this long enough that some are younger than me now. Still, when I meet someone I've been listening to since I was little kid—well, that never gets old.

Will you come back to New York at the end of the tour?

I don't know. It would make sense with my work, but I can't predict. I am not planning that yet. We'll see where the journey takes me.

[The Jazz Session Tour](#) starts June 1.

[[SOTC homepage](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Letters](#)]

Showing 0 comments

