

Center STAGE Hired Guns

BY JAMES ALLSON

From airport Hiltons to weddings and playing "a million gigs" in blues, jazz and rock bands, David Santos combined his years of experience with a positive mental outlook and ended up with a gig as Billy Joel's bassist on the current world tour. This Tampa, Florida native chalks up his good fortune to playing and practicing and constantly learning new styles. He is also an aspiring producer with a new album by artist Lisa Stewart. Gig caught up with Santos before a concert at the Hartford Civic Center, and got the real story of how he got the gig.

So how did you go from hotel bands to playing bass for Billy Joel?

Let me lay some groundwork so it all makes sense. I was in New York City and I was at the top of my game, practicing and playing with a lot of great musicians. But at the time this was all beginning to happen, I was unhappy with my musical life. I was playing a million \$50 gigs and had a lot of really stressful situations. Even though I'd already toured successfully with artists like Phoebe Snow (1989 world tour) and played gigs with Patti Austin, Tommy James and the Shondells and many others, I was doing plenty of gigs where you'd rehearse all day long and not get paid.

Then your luck began to change?

Yes! Believe it or not, this tour originally came out of a wedding gig, and one thing led to another. I was playing a live gig at The Bottom Line with a woman named Cindy Bullens and after the show, a sax player came up to me and asked if I'd be interested in playing weddings. Even though I'd vowed never to do that kind of work, I said, "Oh well, I'll check it out. I'm broke."

I got to the gig and I was playing and I thought to myself, "I should be smiling. I'm going to turn this around." I was outwardly emoting good vibes and the sax player looked at me and saw the smile on my face and smiled back.

Fast forward.

Two years later, the phone rings: "Hey, this is Mark Rivera. I met you on a club date about two years ago, remember?" He was the sax player from that wedding gig. He told me that he had just gotten off the road with Ringo Starr and the band was reforming with Liberty DeVito on drums and they wanted me to play bass. It was a wonderful gig! There I was, standing with all of these heroes of mine, making the best money I'd ever made in my life. And the music was incredible!

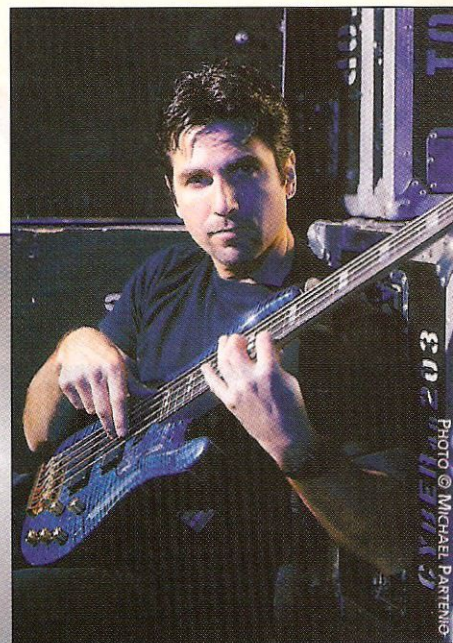
Then, one day, Mark, Liberty and I were talking and they said that Billy might tour next year. I took this to my hotel room and I thought, "Billy Joel is one of the biggest gigs in the world. Man, I sure would like to have

Name: David Santos

Instrument: Bass

Recent Gigs: Billy Joel

Quote: "I didn't know what was going to happen but I was prepared, just like the Boy Scouts motto."



Minimum Wage Set for Festival Musicians

Noise Action Coalition (NAC), profiled in the March '98 issue of *Gig* for its efforts to get giggers paid at a popular Manhattan nightclub (Arlene Grocery) took its efforts to the Texaco-New York Jazz Festival at the Knitting Factory and got an agreement establishing a minimum wage scale for festival musicians. The campaign was also supported by the Black Rock Coalition, AFM Local 802 and its Jazz Advisory Committee.

Knitmedia promoter Michael Dorf and representatives for the NAC and Musicians Union Local 802 set a minimum scale for this year's event of \$75 per musician for bands with six or more musicians and \$100 for smaller ensembles, and \$200 per musician for the 1999 festival. They also agreed to continued discussions regarding working conditions at future festivals. Anita Culp, NAC acting secretary, estimated that the low end of previous pay rates had been closer to \$40 or \$50.

"There were several musicians playing this festival who came to us saying that they had been offered what they thought were substandard fees," Culp explained. Noting the festival's corporate sponsorship, NAC circulated a petition among musicians playing the festival and presented it to the Knitting Factory.

"The Knitting Factory is just a downtown music club," Culp said. "If they were paying people \$40 to \$50, many people would be pleased with that. What really tipped the boat for us was they had this major corporate funding. They bill themselves as a world-class jazz festival. If you're a world-class jazz festival and you're getting these huge chunks of money from Texaco, why aren't you paying the musicians?" So that was why we started the petition drive. Many of these people play the Knitting Factory all the time. And sometimes you play for the door—but the Knitting Factory does pay, as opposed to Arlene Grocery."

NAC made news in the spring when it started encouraging patrons of Arlene Grocery to only drink water because the showcase venue doesn't pay musicians playing there, regardless of bar sales. That situation has not changed, Culp said, so NAC will refocus its efforts there now that the festival agreement has been reached.

Based in New York City, NAC is a grassroots organization working to maintain industry-wide standards that determine the value of musicians and their work. Contact: 212-592-3677; Email: nac@webcom.com. Web site: www.webcom.com/jimp/nac.html

—Bliss