

A FREEFORM RPG

DO

IT

BY
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BERG 14

FOR

the

MUSIC

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Can play with any number you might want in a jazz-rock band. 3-5 is the norm, but 2 and 10 are also doable.

PLAY LENGTH

Variable. With a small group, if your band instantly coheres, or instantly falls apart, and you play your shows in summary fashion, you could do this in under an hour. With a large group, detailed coverage of each show, and alternating flops and successes, play could take 4 hours. For 4 players cohering quickly but not instantly, alternating summary and thorough show coverage, I'd guess 2 hours.

MATERIALS

One copy of these rules (though giving one copy to every player isn't a bad idea).

One Show List.

One double-sided Character Sheet per player.

Hand the players their materials in CD jewel cases if you want to be extra cool.

You're all in a band, that's already been formed with certain agreements & parameters:

You're all fans of some sorts of rock & jazz to some degree or another, and you've concluded that, while there's no room in your local music scene for another rock band, or another jazz band, the clubs are eager to showcase a jazz-rock hybrid (yes, this is fantasy). You've formed this band with the express purpose of filling that niche; you're all on the same page as far as that very vague musical goal.

You'll play shows of all original material which is still in the works. There will be lots of improv in each performance, as players are moved by the inspiration of the moment. This band thrives less on rehearsed precision and more on spontaneity.

Within that, there will be disagreements, good shows and bad shows. We'll see what "rock" and "jazz" mean to each of you.

We'll play to see if the characters can achieve their personal musical visions, and at the same time, if the band can stay together and forge a sound that will carry them forward.

Hand out the double-sided Character Sheets!

characters

STRIKES AGAINST

Write the name of the player to your left in the “Strikes Against” blank on the back at the bottom. This has nothing to do with your character, it’s just a bookkeeping matter: you are in charge of tracking the Strikes against them, as the person on your right is for you. “Left” and “right” are just a convenient way to divvy this up; there’s no need to worry about actual position at any point in play.

You can roleplay anything you like with the character whose Strikes you are tracking, but you are not allowed to actually show them your sheet with their official tally.

RULES

If players want to know the rules before creating their characters, briefly go over Goals, Flops, 3 Strikes, and the three Endings. Most of this info can be found on the Show Results and last two Scene pages.

DREAM BAND

See the back of your sheet. Everyone secretly fill in the blanks with the band you most want to emulate, plus a band you'd like to inflect their sound with. This is your Dream jazz-rock band.

Your band in the game has agreed, after much early bickering, that no one member's vision is as important as finding a way to cohere together, so none of you know for sure what the others most want to sound like. You might have mentioned your favorite band early on, but by now everyone's forgotten, and they care only how you play.

If you help form a successful band that sounds decently close to your Dream Band, you win the game. Obviously this is subjective.

INSTRUMENTS

Now divvy up the Instruments on the front of the sheet. The order they're listed in will become the picking order for Attributes. Drummer picks first, dancer picks last, etc.

Circle your instrument, and use check marks for others' instruments.

ATTRIBUTES

Go through Attributes in turns, circling the ones you pick and crossing out the ones others pick, until everyone feels done with the list. Three is a good rule of thumb. These will differentiate everyone; you're more a band of misfits than a band of clones. The listed Attributes are just inspiration; feel free to invent your own.

MORE ABOUT ME

On the back of the sheet, add on any additional color you like to flesh out your character, as you see fit – Just don't make a long list of reasons why you're an effective performer; that's what the lists on the sheet are for.

PRIVATELY, AFTER SHOWS

Then make up one activity you tend to do after shows which takes you away from the rest of the band for at least a few minutes. This can be meaningful if you want, but completely mundane is fine. Write it down, and also tell the person tracking your Strikes to write it down.

Characters are done; share everything aloud except for your Dream Band.

scenes

The order of scenes is Pre-Show -> Show -> Post-Show, repeating until play ends. Nothing can change this order, though One-On-One or Sit-Down scenes can interrupt. Start the game with a Show scene.

SHOW SCENE

Begin play with this. Narrate and riff off each other. Have fun! Act, sing, air guitar, just describe, whatever. Go over the Narration Techniques page for ideas. Strive to have the conversation resemble an improv jam, with everyone active and responding quickly to everyone else. When apt, rope in your Attributes to add convincing power to why you're good at what you're doing. Your goal is to play how you want and inspire others to want to fit in with you, rather than just wishing you'd fit in with them.

FIRST POST-SHOW SCENE

In turn, each player cites the private post-show thing their assigned trackee does, says, "While they do that, I say to the rest of you," and then initiates a conversation about how that character performed. These post-show conversations will have more purpose in

subsequent scenes, but for now, just develop the characters. Always let your Dream Band be your guide. When making any judgments on anyone else's performance, that's your #2 touchstone. #1 is the band Goal for the show, which we'll get to next.

A different player should go first after each show.

PRE-SHOW SCENE

Sometime before the next gig -- maybe at rehearsal, maybe at coffee, maybe shortly after last show, maybe right before next show -- the band must vote on how their sound needs to change relative to the previous show. Feel free to roleplay as much or as little as you want, but there's one key decision that needs to be made: what's the band Goal for the next show -- more Rock or more Jazz?

In case of a tie vote:

- For the first vote, Rock wins.
- For subsequent votes, the Goal stays the same if the last show was a Success, and changes if the last show was a Flop.

If you're not playing out the next Show right away, and might forget, note the Goal in pencil somewhere public, like on the Show List.

SUBSEQUENT POST-SHOW SCENE

When you have a private conversation about another band member, always vote on whether they succeeded in abiding by the band Goal. Did they contribute to the band playing with more Rock / Jazz (whichever the Goal specifies) than it did in the previous show? If not, they earn one Strike. Vote thumbs up / thumbs down, majority wins; a tie means yes, they earned a Strike.

Whoever's responsible for tracking that, make a mark on your sheet and in the appropriate box on the Show List.

If the character doesn't earn a Strike, someone can opine that their playing was Exceptional. This is not subject to a vote unless someone ardently disagrees, in which case majority wins; tie means yes, it was Exceptional.

The player who brought it up then makes a mark in the appropriate box on the Show List.

Then invite the absent member back, and vote on the next person.

Yes, the first votee will see their marks on the show list. Oh well. That's why a different person starts the Post-Show Scene each time.

When done with everyone, see the Show Results page!

ONE-ON-ONE SCENE

After the first Pre-Show Scene ends, any player who wants more fictional traction may request that someone play a short on-on-one scene with them, to develop the characters and their relationships and any musical tastes and desires that don't come up in the regular scenes.

The requested someone always has the option to decline.

You can have as many requests and One-On-One Scenes as you want, until someone requests a Show, Pre-Show, or Post-Show Scene. When that happens, no more One-On-Ones until after the next scene.

SIT-DOWN SCENE

This is a band meeting, and occurs when a player gets a third Strike.

The band's rule is "three Strikes and you're out". At this point, the player with three Strikes must choose whether to leave the band, or change. If they leave, narrate however you want, and reveal your Dream Band however you want. It's your scene! Just don't kill anybody. If they change, reveal your Dream Band to everyone at the meeting and obey their instruction to abandon it. You can no longer win the game, but you can still help the band succeed.

show results

Once all band members have been voted on, look at the Aided Goal and Exceptional columns for that show.

FATE OF THE SHOW

If more than one third of the musicians earned Strikes, the show did not cohere, and it was a Flop. Otherwise, a Success.

If the show was not a Flop, and at least one third of the musicians earned Exceptional marks, the show was Hot.

FATE OF THE BAND

3 straight Flops = no one will book this band again. It's over.

3 straight Successes = your band has established its sound and will survive on that. You've got a decent run in you and you won't go broke in the process.

3 straight Hot shows = your band has established its sound and will thrive on that. Your visions of success come true!

narration techniques

ZOOM OUT - with some orienting intro like “after the chorus” or “after the applause ends”, begin describing your playing for entire songs or sequences of songs in summary fashion

ZOOM IN - with some orienting intro like “after that song” or “after the chorus”, begin describing or acting out a specific part that you’re playing

HANG BACK - pantomime holding your instrument ready, waiting

CUE - make eye contact and nod to someone who’s hanging back, thus cueing them to start playing

HEY - signal everyone that you’re about to do a count

COUNT - count “1,2,3,4” (or “1,2,3” for a waltz) aloud in the middle of a song to cue people who are already playing to change to a new part after “4”

BACKGROUND - can do the next 3 while other people are talking or soloing.

AIR - air guitar, air drums, etc. move your arms to indicate the rhythm, tempo, and attitude of your playing

RHYTHM - tap or drum on yourself or a convenient object, or quietly make consonant sounds with your mouth, to indicate the rhythm and tempo of your playing

SING - do your best vocal impression of your instrument

show list

AIDED GOAL EXCEPTIONAL

show #1			flop	success	hot
show #2			flop	success	hot
show #3			flop	success	hot
show #4			flop	success	hot
show #5			flop	success	hot
show #6			flop	success	hot
show #7			flop	success	hot
show #8			flop	success	hot
show #9			flop	success	hot

character FRONT

INSTRUMENT

drums (sticks)
drums (hands)
lead vocals
bass
marimba
xylophone
keyboards
trombone
saxophone
trumpet
clarinet
flute
oboe
violin/fiddle
mandolin
accordion
concertina
acoustic guitar
electric guitar
harmonica
theremin
dancing

ATTRIBUTES

Playing:

lightning-fast fingers
can change styles on a dime
master of effects pedals
powerful lungs
perfect breath control
monstrous strength
piercing shriek
booming growl
rhythmic precision
pitch precision
schooled in many styles
improv mastery
keen listening to bandmates
funk
soul
•
•

Showmanship:

epic hair
huge / tiny

crazy piercings
immaculate suit
shredded jeans
polished dancer
hyper athleticism
mastery of striking poses
pimped-out instrument
hot body
tattoos
trampoline
acetylene torch
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Equipment:

beautiful tone
abrasive tone
giant full sound
fuzz box
talk box
echo mic
venerated instrument

character BACK

MY DREAM is to play in a band that sounds like _____
REAL-WORLD BAND

with a little bit of _____
REAL-WORLD BAND

(Make sure this includes both rock and jazz!)

MORE ABOUT ME:

PRIVATELY, AFTER SHOWS I:

STRIKES AGAINST _____ :

AFTER SHOWS THEY: