

Blues Man Takes It To Paris!

Jim Bruce, wandering musician, takes us on a video tour of Paris, where he delves into the local life and [plays blues guitar](#) in a couple well known tourist spots.

The home town of the Eiffel Tower, Moulin Rouge and the Notre Dame Cathedral is also home to an incredibly wide-spread and diverse group of people doing their best to exist and get along in the French capital city.

I've Heard That Some People Play On The Metro

The Paris underground system is the densest on the planet, and the other statistics are equally as impressive. For example, you don't have to look far for a station - there are over 300 places to take the subway and there is no point further than 450 yards from a station! The underground has always been a traditional place for the 'street musician'. As I'm one those people, I thought I'd check it out.

How Does One Go About Playing The Metro?

You'd think that you just go and do it - afraid not, that's much too easy! That simple way of doing things has faded long ago. The operation is very organized now and new performers must go and sit an audition (yes - a proper one!) with the street music guys oat RATP, the authority that manage the metro.

And what's more - every year the very best of the metro musicians are chosen to go to a recording studio and a CD is put out for sale to the public through commercial outlets (that's 'shops', to us simple folk. As you might think, the kind of the music and performers varies a lot, from trumpet players to string orchestras. I've read that some well known recording artists were discovered playing down here. Maybe it's time for [blues guitar](#) man to come back in fashion.

It goes without saying, there are regulations, like 'no amps', 'no album sales', etc. I couldn't wait to break these rules, I'm not ashamed to say. Of course, not many things in life ever work out the way you want them to ... read on. ...

Who's Afraid Of A Little Old Audtion? - Gulp!

I took on North-bound train, suitcase in hand (sounds a bit like an delta blues song , don't you think?) from the southern part of France and several hours after that was sittingsitting in a tiny audition room in the Paris Metro offices, patiently waiting for the thing to begin. I'd I made up my mind to would play 4 stunning songs and sing my heart out - 'got to get this license, must get this license' was my unspoken prayer. It represented the key to wealth beyond my wildest dreams, and my dreams often got pretty wild!

Logically, I mistakenly thought, my talents would be appraised by a team of my peers. This is going be difficult, I knew. I fiddled with my guitar and sat there waiting, almost nervously. Suddenly, someone came into the room,turned on a camcorder and said "Hi - play me a song." Sitting down, he got out a newspaper to read ! Shaken but not stirred, I launched a sonorous version of the classic song 'Love In Vain' by Robert Johnson, at which he raised his head. After inquiring if I played anything at all modern or up to date, to which I said "No", he told me that the audition was at an end and I would get something in the mail in a week or so. Very short and not so sweet.

I caught the Metro to Montmartre, had a meal with my mother-in-law who lives just down from Moulin Rouge , and took the fast train down south again. Funnily enough, some days later I got a license in the mail and organized my first day performing in Paris.

I Love Paris in The Winter, When It Glistens

I hate to let you down, my friends, but that's what the underground experience was - a let down. Well, not exactly true. It wasn't what I thought it would be, that's all. I got there on a cold morning and descended into the nearest station to start my job in the city. That was the first little mistake. There are lots of performers, so you need to be there at the crack of dawn to ensure you get a great spot. Just like real estate, it's about location, location, location.

In spite of that, I saw some wonderful acts during my search, a complete range of musical styles from hip-hop to [delta blues](#). In one station crossover tunnel (these are sometimes enormous!) I came upon 12 Russian classical musicians, accompanied by dancers. As you might guess, the rules laid down by the Metro guys didn't mean much in this underground world. Probably three quarters of all musicians use amps and often sell albums. This makes a lot of sense, as in my town, album sales make up about 50% of my street based earnings.

Never Forget - Sax Sells!

Strangely enough, the musicians earning the most are the artists that don't have a license, and don't bother with playing in the tunnels. This is what they do. These people often play a trumpet, or clarinet, or a saxophone and play to on the people actually boarding the trains. I went with one such musician on one of his journeys and we chatted for a little while, as we were blood brothers, you might say.

He would catch a train for several stops, playing his sax with a backing tape. I thought he was really good at his job and people like him, which is a good trick when you play in a big city. He would then do the same thing in the opposite direction for the whole day, which makes him about 130 euros. This is a decent amount, but I didn't want to do it - I bet the first hour is the worst, after that you just become a little numb. Bravo to anyone that can make money with any musical activity. There's some footage of our short meeting in the embedded Youtube video below.

I was to get back into some (relatively) clean air and daylight once more, fully realizing that the life of an underground blues man is not my cup of tea. I spent the rest of the day looking around other areas parts in this fantastic city, and performing some songs in prime locations above ground. You can see a video diary of my day in Paris underneath the text.