Jam Etiquette - Rules To Pick By...

The Ten Commandments of Jamming (with a few apologies to the Old Testament)

I  Thou shalt not come to the jam to impresseth others with thine own talent for this is an abomination. The music shall be the star around which all musicians rotateth and not viceth-verseth! Attempts to make thine own star shine, shall surely lead thee into darkness!

II  Thou shalt not forsake the beat. Thou shalt not speed up nor slow down accidentally when playing a tune for this shall be considered an abomination.

III  Thou shalt arrange thyself in a small circle so that thou mayest see and mayest hear all the other musicians. Thou shalt listen with thine ears to the songs and shall attempt to play in one accord with the group. Also, thou shalt lift up thine eyes to look about thee, lest there be some visual sign that someone endeavoureth to render unto thee.

IV  Thou shalt play softly when someone lifteth his voice in song, when the guitar taketh a break, and when thou knowest not what thou art doing.

V  Thou shalt play in tune! Tune thine instrument well and tune it often with thine electric tuner lest the sound that emanateth from thine instrument be unclean!

VI  Thou shalt commence and cease playing each tune as one, so that the noise you make be a joyful noise and is not an abomination. Whencodever a musician sticketh forth his foot, as though he were afflicted with a cramp in the fatted calf, thou must complete the rest of that verse and then cease. Thou shalt stick out thine own foot or else lift up thy voice, crying, "This is it!" or "Last time!" if thou hast been the one to begin the song and it hath been played sufficient times over. If the one who beginneth a tune, endeth it not by one of these signs, then the music goeth on in repetitious fashion until the listeners shall say, "Hark, it all soundeth the same!"

VII  Thou shalt concentrate and shalt not confound the music by mixing up the "A" part with the "B" part. Most songs, but not all, proceedeth by the ancient law: "AABB". But, if thou sinneth in this regard or make any mistake that is unclean, thou mayest atone not by stopping, nay, but by reentering the song at the proper place and playing on. Thy fellow musicians will support thee in this regard.

VIII  Thou shalt be ever mindful of the key that the dulcimer is tuned in, and shall play many tunes in that key, for the dulcimer is but a lowly instrument and must needfully be retuned every time there is a key change.

IX  Thou shalt speak gentle words of encouragement to those nourished on the milk of folk, gospel and bluegrass music, but not the meat, lest a harsh word turn one again to the darkness that is pop music.

X  Thou shalt not, by thyself, commence noodling off on a tune that the other musicians knoweth not, unless asked or unless thou art teaching that tune for this is an abomination, and the other musicians shall not hold thee blameless, and shall strike thee from their computer lists, yea, unto the third and fourth generation.

- Author Unknown (credited to initials L.P.)
Some tips in plain English (from one of Peter Wernick's most excellent music books)

More Etiquette Stuff...

* Some key participants may have main influence over the choice of songs and who gets to do what. Be respectful of the situation. Fit in as invited.

* Instrumentalists, be mindful of when others want to solo or do featured backup. Give them space and take turns being featured. Don't compete!

* Regarding tuning: Wait your turn. If someone is tuning, avoid any playing, or perhaps (if you're sure your instrument is in tune) offer notes matching the open strings of the other person's instrument.

* In more advanced jams, often the "classic" arrangement of a particular number is followed, including choice of key, which instrument solos when, harmony parts, etc. However, if the classic version is in a key that doesn't work well for the lead singer, the singer calls the key and the others adapt although the key chosen should work for the dulcimer.

* If you don't fit into one jam, look for another or start another, or just stay and listen. (Note if there are already enough of your instrument in the group, or if the speed or difficulty of the material is out of your league.) In some situations it's OK to play quietly in an "outer circle", not trying to be heard in the inner circle.

Pay attention and learn from experience!

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The above was borrowed almost 100% from Pete Wernick, “Dr. Banjo,” who wrote the guidelines using a banjo rather than a dulcimer. You can find the original guidelines at Pete's website with info on his appearances, products and a more detailed bio:

http://www.drbanjo.com

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