

TIPS FOR A BETTER PERFORMANCE

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WHAT IS YOUR TALENT?

Do your friends flock to hear you or see your work or do they run for the next room? We are often the worst judges of our own talents. Sometimes we think we suck when others are dying to hear or see our works. Sometimes we think we are great when the rest of the world doesn't agree. If you want to monetarily support yourself with your work, others need to believe you are worthy. On the other hand, if you are willing to live in relative obscurity to follow your dream and have some other means of covering food and rent, then what others think doesn't matter a whole lot. According to the Van Gogh Gallery, "Van Gogh only sold one painting during his lifetime Red Vineyard at Arles. This painting now resides at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow. The rest of Van Gogh's more than 900 paintings were not sold or made famous until after his death." Van Gogh's painting Sunflower sold for a record \$39.85 Million IN 1987.

HOW CAN YOU BEST EXPRESS THAT TALENT?

Are you a singer? What do you sing? What do you like to sing? Does your voice match to the style you like? Can you growl the notes required for rock and roll, or slide to the notes required for blues and jazz? Can you belt well or need to sing sweet?

Are you a musician? Are you better suited to the strict regimen required for the symphony or are you best at the on-the-spot creativity of jazz. Can you rock it when necessary?

Are you a visual artist? As a visual artist, what calls to you, the permanency and forgiveness of oils and acrylics or the transparency and unyielding demands of watercolor? Do you like scrounging pieces of junk and scraps for your collage or sculpture or do you like clay and natural rocks for pottery or jewelry?

Are you a dancer? Do you prefer ballet and classical to modern dance? Do you like creating your own moves or do you prefer mastering classical steps?

Only you know what you want. Only you can establish the right direction. But . . . and this is a big but . . . you can only like what you have experienced. If you have never heard a symphony or witnessed ballet or listened to the blues, how do you know? Schools used to provide all the experiences necessary to know what you like, BUT no more. School funding only has room for education that makes better workers, not artists. There are lots of low-cost or no-cost ways to discover the art best for you. Educate yourself by experiencing them.

CAN YOU LEARN OR IMPROVE YOUR TALENT?

If you want to learn the guitar but only know three chords, there is lots of room for improvement. With work or instruction or both, improvement is likely. If you are not willing to put in the time or cannot afford instruction, you can still be happy playing in your room, but you will never be a Vegas performer. Getting personal or group instruction will probably shorten the timeline, but there are many successful musicians and artists who are self-taught. Unfortunately, very few dancers have learned their chops by themselves. Learn from other artists. Go to shows, especially the free ones. Learn what they do right and what they do wrong. We have attended literally hundreds of performances. We have witnessed artist forgetting their stuff or neglecting their audience. Steve is a Willie Nelson fan, but one of the worst concerts he saw was Nelson's performance at the Hollywood Bowl. Willie spoke to the band and played very well, but turned his back on the audience. That deadened what otherwise was a stellar performance. More like listening to a CD than paying for a show. Watch others perform for free on YOUTUBE. Hang out at Guitar Center and other music stores. Look for websites specifically devoted to artists. Learn without having to make the mistake yourself. Learn what works with your style and talent. Discover that you can't be all things to all people.

HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU HAVE?

If your time is limited, you have to limit rehearsal and performance to the time you have available. Many artists forgo family and friends, fun and quality time for their craft. That may work but it also makes for an unbalanced and eventual unhappy life. That is one of the reasons drugs and alcohol is so prevalent in art. Without support and release systems, life can be lonely and unfulfilling. Art should be a part of your life, not your whole life. On the other hand, if you find you have the time, but avoid rehearsal or practice, your art is not your primary passion. You should be honest and practical with your ambitions.

IS TIME ON YOUR SIDE?

If your art is intended for twenty-something or younger your time and style may be relatively limited. The young associate with the young. Though they may follow an artist all their lives, they generally select them while the artist is as young as they are. However, if your art is ageless, a genre beloved by all, there is no hurry. There are several good, popular Southern California performing artists in their late sixties. Picasso painted his last work at the age of 91, mere hours before his death.

HOW COMMITTED ARE YOU?

Initially, no aspiring artist makes enough to live on. Many wait tables or work in grocery stores to make ends meet. You cannot achieve your dreams if unwilling to do what it takes. If you have the choice of finishing school first, FINISH SCHOOL. The odds are much higher that you will stay alive with skills you learned in school than skills you learned on stage. Improve your odds of survival by learning what is needed in the non-artistic world. Many rock musicians in the sixties and seventies lost millions because they didn't get enough education about contracts and business. You don't have to give up your dream. This is not an either/or proposition. Learn what you need to know AND work on your craft. If you are one of the talented and lucky few, your art will prevail. If not, you can still be happy, creating and performing in the time you have. Satisfaction cannot be measured in dollars or filled stadiums. It is doing what you love regardless of scale.

DON'T GIVE UP, DON'T GET FRUSTRATED

Making it in the art world, whether musical, performance, dance or visual, is a one in a million or more. Keep yourself afloat by working in another field. Steven Colbert (The Late Show) waited tables. But, just like the lottery, someone has to win. You may never perform to 56,000 at Dodger Stadium, but you may find success at a local stage or pub. That is a victory. Only a talented few even get that far. Frankly, most things in life are a long shot. Celebrate every win. The most important thing is having fun. If you aren't having fun, neither is your audience. They will pick up on your desperation or frustration so have fun.

ALWAYS BE READY

When someone asks you to perform the answer is always YES. Opportunity is fickle and happens infrequently. Be ready. We were attending a Frank Sinatra tribute at Pala Casino in San Diego County. We know both the stage manager and Entertainment Director. They have seen Kat perform. Twenty minutes before the show Kat noticed that the stage manager looked stressed. Kat asked him what was going on. He responded that his Sinatra impersonator had been in an automobile accident and was going to be 10-15 minutes late. There was already a full house of 650 or more impatient seniors and it was almost show time. He asked if Kat could do a few numbers to kill time till his Sinatra showed up. We had just loaded several Linda Ronstadt practice tracks to her cell phone to prepare for a MERC show. The stage manager said he could work with that. Kat ended up doing 45 minutes till their Sinatra arrived. The audience cheered and asked when she would be back with her own show. The casino was appreciative and actually paid her. All good. All possible because she was prepared and could say YES. Put your stuff on your cellphone. Put your instrument in the trunk and stash with it a change of clothes suitable for the stage. Seize opportunity.

IT ISN'T JUST ABOUT THE MUSIC OR ART

Your artistry may be great. Your talents may be as good, or better, than Lady Gaga or Mikhail Baryshnikov. Talent alone may be good enough if you are striving for classical venues or if your goal is to be a backup. It is not enough if you hope to be the diva or front man or woman. Audiences want to see a smile on your face. They want you to talk to and engage them. They want to be entertained, blown away. They want costuming, fireworks, a look, and talent. You need to be an actor or dancer in addition to being musically talented. You won't always feel it. Something bad may have happened on the day of your performance. You have to act as though it didn't. When hurting, you have to learn to power through it whenever possible. You have to act excited and hot even when you are not. The show must go on is more than a motto. Painters and sculptors must also learn to be more than they are. Make sure your cover story is real, but juicy enough that patrons want to back your desperate soul.

DRESS THE PART, ACT THE PART

If you are in a grunge band or are a rapper, jeans and hoodies may be appropriate. Study what others in your specific genre are wearing. You don't have to mimic them, but you may want to be close. If you are trying to send your own sartorial message, think it through and be consistent, but be prepared to change your costuming concepts if the audience isn't buying it. Part of selling followers is selling your image. Even visual artists should dress appropriate to their style. There are more painters with goatees than business suits. When someone asks what you do, answer that you are a musician, actor, dancer, artist, or vocalist. If you don't believe it is true how can you expect that others will? You have talent. Don't be afraid to talk about it. You are what you think you are. It is admittedly not PC, but advertising experts will tell you if you are cute or handsome you are easier to sell. Use what ya' got. If you are under the age of 21, sleazy is probably a bad plan. Cute, pretty, handsome, clean cut, rocker, grunge all sell best, but only if they match to your performance style. Obviously dancers will not dress the same as a band or comedian or painter. Use common sense. Shock attire may work with a younger crowd but it won't necessarily help in competitions or venues run by older managers and owners. If you are not the Beauty you don't have to be the Beast. Own who you are. You can make who you are work. Confidence sells. Talent sells. Style sells. Dark, angry, foreboding or dissident also sells, but only if it matches you and your style. Look at Gene Simmons. He did pretty well as The Demon with KISS. Keith Richards (Rolling Stones) and Bob Dylan are still big on stages after fifty years. Aretha Franklin is nobody's super-model, but you can't beat her hot soulful style. Your physical attributes shouldn't limit you. Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder performed blind. Beethoven was deaf. You can still kill it. Talent and determination will win out.

HAVE RESPECT FOR THE TALENTS OF OTHERS

You may play a mean sax. Your lead guitar licks may be off the charts. Your Adagio may be sublime. Without support troops, your act will not make it. You need stagehands, roadies, sound engineers, and business savvy professionals. Singers without songwriters would have nothing to sing. Musicians are neither superior to vocalists nor arrangers, even though some believe that to be true. Frank Sinatra couldn't play an instrument, but was one of the most popular performers of all time. He knew his stuff. Listening to old rehearsal tapes, you can hear Sinatra telling the band when to retard, when to come in and when to get hot. He was almost always right. He was a musician even if he couldn't play. Every type of performance or genre is the equal of any other. Respect the abilities of others. Even more importantly, make friends with other performers. We have gotten many gigs by referral from other performers and have gotten gigs because we could bring in a sax player when needed. Paraphrasing Forrest Gump, performing is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna need. Besides, at some point, they may need you. Play nice.

WHEN YOU GET A GIG

Be professional and respectful. Be sober and on time. Show up early enough to setup and be ready at show time. Start on time but be prepared for an encore or two. There is nothing better than an audience begging for more. Give thanks to the venue and staff over the microphone. Remind the audience to tip. The staff often has influence on who will return. Thank the audience often during performance and tell them where you will be next or when you will be back. Before making this announcement, inform the decision maker (if they are there) that you want to promote the next show and need to know when you will be back. If they have no answer for that, tell them you would like to announce the venue's next upcoming entertainment event. This shows you are a team player. Avoid uncomfortable situations and don't promote events competing with the venue where you are presently performing. In advance, ask if the venue has a special drink or meal or snacks they want to promote. Cheap drinks and food are an attraction, even if it is just one. Promote these on your flyer and during your performance. Create professional marketing materials weeks in advance (if possible) and distribute them both at the gig venue and surrounding area. This benefits you as a performer, telling everyone around that you are somebody. Besides, most venues want a full house and will ask back the acts that put butts in seats. Bring friends and family. If you can't attract them, you need to revisit your act.

RESEARCH YOUR AUDIENCE

Visit the venue where you will perform. The owner and staff will appreciate your patronage. Watch the audience and see what they react to, good and bad. Judge the average age of those in attendance. In general, people want to hear and see what was popular when they were sixteen. Do the math. If the average age of an audience is 60 then they want to hear songs from 2016-60+16, or 1972. Obviously original songs are the exception, but this described audience is more likely to respond to songs arranged as they were in 1972. If you can adjust, do so. If you can't, se la vie. Visual artists have no choice. They have to create in the style and fashion that is theirs alone. Dancers and actors too are somewhat limited in choices. They must do the moves as choreographed and say the lines written, hoping to perform them better than anyone else.

DO WHAT THE AUDIENCE WANTS

If creating in your style is more important than earning a living, don't worry about the likes and dislikes of others. Live the dream, man. But if you hope to do better economically, you will have to appeal to an audience. While "going commercial" is the Bane of artists everywhere, art and music must be marketable to make money or earn a living. Musical performers must vary their act to avoid yawns and cellphone doodling, and must include audience favorites. Don't leave out what the spectators are looking for simply because you are tired of it or because you consider it too commercial. Joe Walsh of the Eagles was once asked on television, "Is there anyone who doesn't like Hotel California?" To which he responded, "Well, the band's kind of sick of it." Yet, they played that song at nearly every concert because that is what their fans came to hear. Play 80% of what was or is popular, 20% new or different material. That applies to cover songs written by others. Unless you are the Eagles, with a big name and millions of dollars in record sales, limit originals to ten percent of your act. Instead of doing more originals, remake songs well known to your audience, in a style that is your own. Sing what you want in the shower, but perform what sells on stage. Linda Ronstadt, the highest paid female performer of all time, performed 95% covers and 5% originals. Her covers were so good that many sold better than the original. Buddy Holly's It's So Easy didn't make the charts. Ronstadt's version went to number nine in the U.S. and number five on the British charts. Desperado, written and performed by the Eagles, didn't make the charts. It was Ronstadt that popularized the song. You will have to rehearse a cover more than an original. Original songs already contain your artistic twist. Covers do not. It takes dozens of tries before you get a feel for a song and can do it your way. Recording a cover is not as tough or as royalty expensive as you think. Ask us how.

MARKETING

CD's and YOUTUBE are marketing materials. An audience likes musicians, bands and vocalists good enough and professional enough to cut a CD. Many higher quality venues will ask for either YOUTUBE or a demo or both. YOUTUBE is a great way of demonstrating your performance abilities and costs you nothing. Create a video and upload it. Phone video is an acceptable norm, though a produced and edited video is preferable. If you have only music but no video, create a Photostory (software available for free from Microsoft) and upload to YOUTUBE. Make a CD. Get a website and make it easy to access with your phone quickly.

WATCH WHAT YOU POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA

While you have the absolute legal right to say what you like, be careful what you say. At some point you will direct potential employers and fans to your Facebook site. If you post politically charged or controversial opinions, it could hurt your entertainment career. In today's highly divided America, almost any stand will offend half of your followers. Start a separate political blog or guest blog on other's sites. Developing a fan base is tough enough without risking political boycott.

DON'T PREPARE TO PREPARE TO PREPARE

Know when good is good enough. Rehearsal is great, but it cannot teach you what performance can teach you. When you are good enough to do three numbers or so without messing up, you are ready for open mike night. Get out there and learn what works. Go to different venues with your three songs so you don't bore the audience. By the time you have done this for a month, you should have three more ready. Oil and acrylic painters, collage and decoupage artists . . . it will never be perfect. When done, wait a week, then go back and make last minute revisions, then STOP. You can overwork a piece to the point it no longer communicates what you intended. The same is true of original music.

YOU GOTTA HAVE GUTS AND QUICK WITS

It takes intestinal fortitude to perform. Fear of performing, fear of dropping a line or a step, fear of forgetting a note or chord cannot even enter the thinking process, yet all those things happen. We taught choir and drama in Sunday school years ago. We told our kids that, at some point, something would go wrong. The mistake is not critical. How you respond to it is. When mistakes are made, move on as though nothing happened. Only 10% of any given audience can even follow lyrics, dance moves, or composition. Moving along preserves the performance for the other 90%. We were playing Grandma and Grandpa in a stage performance that we were also directing. The lead, whose character had burned his hands in the previous scene, apparently missed his cue. He was late coming on stage as grandma and grandpa sat on a bail of hay, awaiting his arrival. We started making stuff up to cover otherwise dead air. We talked about the crops and weather till the lead character came back on stage. The look of panic on his face was unmistakable. He was supposed to raise his gauze-banded hands to the sky and deliver his line. Instantly we saw that gauze was caught in his lapel mike. Not only could he not raise his hands, gauze was stifling the mike. Grandma quickly walked up to him, put her arm around him so he was close enough to use her lapel mike. He was able to deliver his key lines this way for the whole scene. Quick thinking can overcome error most of the time. Our choir and drama kids in the audience gave us thumbs up. We had practiced what we were preaching. They knew what was going on, but the rest of the 700 attendees did not. It takes nerve to go to a restaurant and ask them if they need performers. It takes courage to follow up. Success goes to the brave. Don't be the squeaky wheel that stops the wagon train, but do be politely persistent. The same thing is true of auditions. Make every audition you can. Show up at open mike nights. The more you perform the more you will learn about your act and the easier it will become to adjust on the fly. Watch the audience. See what works and what does not. Treat the audition or open mike as a real performance. Dress right, practice so you can perform well, and don't waste time on stage. Tune up off stage while waiting. The audience wants to hear and see you perform, not watch you fumble with your equipment. The secret formula for success is positive self-talk combined with adequate rehearsal to assure fulfillment of the self-talk.

You have what it takes. Now, go get 'em.

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