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IMAGINE THEY ARE ALL NAKED: THE ART OF PERFORMING!

Rule Number 1: Be yourself

- ♪ *Be yourself – everyone else is taken! And it's easier than pretending.
Or ... be your ideal self; create a stage persona. Many introverts become extroverted on stage; it's role play.*

Rule Number 2: Think about the audience

- ♪ *The key to performing effectively is thinking about the audience's perspective
What do you have that at least some people will enjoy?
That may be material (covers or originals), or it may be what you do with that material (great voice, brilliant instrument playing, presentation).*

Rule Number 3: Play to your strengths and work on your weaknesses

- ♪ *We all have certain strengths and weaknesses as performers*
- ♪ *In the short term, play to your strengths and avoid your weaknesses*
- ♪ *In the long term, develop strategies to overcome your weaknesses (practice, lessons, accompanists, choice of material, choice of key, etc.). See below for some ideas.*

Rule Number 4: Develop strategies for dealing with nerves

- ♪ *Some nerves are good, to give that adrenalin 'high' that can bring out the best in you. But too much sends our brains go into fight-flight mode. Our reptile brain perceives a threat that isn't actually there. Our body releases hormones, like adrenaline or noradrenaline, which tends to:*
 - Speed up our breathing and heart rates*
 - Make it harder to remember things, such as words, chords and amazing guitar licks*
 - Constrict blood vessels, reducing fine motor control, therefore making it harder to play instruments.
Reduce peripheral vision, making it harder to read any lyrics or music you have as prompts (which you should avoid anyway)*
 - Give you a dry mouth, making it harder to sing and talk*
 - Halt digestive processes*
 - Cause sweating*
- ♪ *Nerves never go away for most of us – even very very experienced performers. Nor should it: being nervous, but not too nervous, keeps you on your toes!*
- ♪ *But there are things you can do to deal with the specific physiological effects of nerves:*
 - Try breathing techniques, meditation, visualisation ... Experiment to find what works for you.*
 - Warm up before you go on stage if possible*
 - Remember that the audience want you to succeed. They want to have a good time. Most of them have come to hear you do something they can't do, and those who can know what it feels like and will be wanting to support you.*

- d. *This is where the old adage of imagining the audience is naked comes in: It's about realising that they are vulnerable, they are people just like you.*
- e. *Look for a person in the audience who is most obviously enjoying your performance and feed off of them. If you can't see the audience because of lighting, make such a person up! Look out there as if you were looking at someone who was smiling at you, and smile back!*
- f. *When on stage, slow down. Many of us rush when we are nervous. Slowing down our talk and actions will help hide our nerves and actually help overcome them by calming us.*
- g. *Appear confident (even if you aren't). Confident body language can trick your brain! But don't be arrogant. When a performer shows they're nervous, audience members feel sorry for you, feel distracted, and don't listen to the song!*
- h. *Don't be too ambitious with what you do till you have a good sense of what you can and cannot do on stage: e.g. avoid really hard songs/tunes, leave those hard to get high notes and too-fancy licks or songs with very difficult lyrics or melodies until you are sure you are ready*
- i. *Good choice of first song (easy, crowd pleaser) helps you relax confidently into the set*
- j. *If you do have any prompts, make them very BIG so you can see them even with your restricted vision*
- k. *Being well prepared (see tips below) will make you feel more secure, therefore less nervous*
- l. *Always have water with you on stage (or another drink, but water is by far the best). And a drink bottle is better than a glass so that if you knock it over in your nervous clumsiness, it won't spill.*
- m. *Don't eat much before a performance.*
- n. *Have a handkerchief to wipe away the sweat if necessary.*
- o. *The more performing you do the easier it becomes for most people.*

Rule Number 5: Practice

- ♪ *Practice, practice, practice. Then practice.*
- ♪ *Practice like you are playing. If you stand on stage, practice standing up, etc. If you're a band, practice in the positions you perform in.*
- ♪ *Run through the set list as it will be performed. Practice things like instrument changes, re-tuning, song introductions, etc.*

Rule Number 6: Be organised

- ♪ *Get to the venue early and be prepared*
- ♪ *Have everything handy (picks, capos, water, etc.) Don't fiddle around looking for things.*
- ♪ *Have your set list worked out (see below) — but be prepared to change it if the vibe demands that*

Rule Number 7: Enjoy yourself

- ♪ *We perform because it's something we want to do (nobody's forcing you!) — so enjoy it, and show you are enjoying it. (Even if you do sad/serious material there are ways of showing you are getting pleasure from the experience). The audience will take their cue from the performer.*
- ♪ *Accept and enjoy applause when it comes. It's satisfying to the audience, and don't be embarrassed to take the time to soak it in, or to tell the audience how much you appreciate it.*

Rule Number 8: It's more than just the songs

- ♪ *Performing is a whole package: the songs, the order in which they're presented, and what goes between them*
- ♪ *If people just wanted the music they'd listen to recordings. A live performance gives people a chance to get to know you as a person and maybe the story behind the songs. Some performers are more memorable for the stories/introductions between songs than their actual songs/tunes*

- ♪ *Try to build a relationship with the audience, whether through your body language (including smiles or other expressions), your talk, or strategies to get them to engage, such as chorus singing, clapping, laughing or other participation (but don't force it)*
- ♪ *Don't be afraid to entertain the audience. It's not 'cool' to bore people who have given up their time and money to watch you.*
- ♪ *Make eye contact with the audience (not your instrument or shoes), or your audience will find it hard to connect to you. If you close your eyes the whole time you lose the exchange of energy that is the essence of performance*
- ♪ *Try to keep your body relaxed so it moves with the music in a natural way, not stilted. But too much movement may be distracting (that does depend on the music).*
- ♪ *Standing tends to make it easier to engage with the audience (especially short people!), and is better for singing. Feet are best slightly apart (relaxing), head up, confident. For instrumentalists, there may be technical reasons for sitting down.*
- ♪ *Most audiences hate the idea of sing-alongs until they're actually doing it, so you may have to trick them into it, with something easy and fun first off, such as a sound, or a response. Once you've broken the ice, they really feel part of the performance.*
- ♪ *Be IN the song while you are performing it, not thinking of how you look or what song is next or that guy in the audience. That's how your performance can become lack-lustre, and how you can forget words.*
- ♪ *Never blame the audience if things aren't going well. If they are talking, it may be because it's that sort of venue (such as a cafe or a non-paying venue where they're not there primarily for the music anyway). If not, it's really up to others in the audience, not you, to ask them to be quiet – audiences hate performers telling them to be quiet. Try dynamics: an acapella or very quiet song, especially if it has silences, can really shut people up. Remember that it may only be 5% of the audience talking – and 95% listening.*
- ♪ *Enunciate lyrics clearly. Even if your focus is "music" people in the audience love to understand any lyrics they are hearing. If you are singing in another language, tell them what the words mean.*
- ♪ *Make sure your instrument playing is not too loud for your voice. Use dynamics, and if you're going to play loud, do it when there's a gap in the lyrics. When you ARE singing, pull the guitar way back, soften it up, make it weave around your lyrics. This help your lyrics stand out as well as creating dramatic effect.*
- ♪ *Match the emotion you are showing to the emotion in the song/music. If it's a happy song, smile. If it's a sad song, don't smile! You need to 'be yourself', but performance also involves some acting and consciousness of the mood you are creating in that space and time.*

Rule Number 8: Pay attention to how to build a set

- ♪ *The first song is really important, both for creating the impression you want, and because it's when you'll be most nervous. Pick something with impact, and that you feel very confident with.*
- ♪ *Think of the set as a journey you are taking the audience on: with twists and turns, tension and release, varying views, mood changes, climaxes, quiet time, surprises – all the things we delight in on a physical journey.*
- ♪ *People's attention span is only about 5 minutes, so to keep their attention you need to keep changing what they get, so don't do two songs that are very much the same (key/rhythm/mood), unless you've got some very interesting talking (story?) in between.*
- ♪ *Watch how people are responding and be prepared to change strategies if things aren't working.*
- ♪ *If you use different tunings, construct the set to minimise re-tunings.*
- ♪ *Keep sets short. Leave them wanting more.*
- ♪ *Never ever exceed your allotted time. If you want to do an encore, finish early.*
- ♪ *The final song will also have a huge impact on how they remember you, and whether they'll be wanting more.*
- ♪ *Because of this, you need to have a 'drop zone' – a song or two towards the end (but not at the very end) of your set list that can be in or out depending on how time is going.*
- ♪ *Encores: in some settings these are the norm, in others they are rare. Work this out before you do your set list, as it may affect what your last song will be.*

Rule Number 9: Remember the talking bits

- ♪ *Banter can be as important as the song. Prepare what you're going to say and practise it like you practice songs. Avoid umms and ahhs, and keep it snappy.*
- ♪ *Introductions: don't tell the story of the song. "This song is about..." doesn't add any value. Tell them something else about you or the song, such as how you wrote it, or an anecdote related to the song's theme.*
- ♪ *Introductions can be as important as the song — if you're good at it they may be the highlight (Martin Pearson, Colum Sands, Kristina Olsen)*
- ♪ *Use humour if you're good at it. Be human and approachable in your talking style. If you're not comfortable with these, a light touch is good.*
- ♪ *Steal other people's patter*
- ♪ *Speak clearly and not too fast*
- ♪ *It can be good to start straight off with a song and not talk till after your first song.*

Rule Number 10: Look good

- ♪ *Performing is theatre. Appearance is part of the package. Think about the image you want to convey about yourself, and dress accordingly. Only wear 'casual' clothes if that's your deliberate image, not just because you haven't put on something special.*
- ♪ *Practice in front of a mirror.*
- ♪ *No music stands and lyric/chord sheets. These are for practices. If you don't know your material well enough to do it without these, you are probably not ready to perform it.*

Rule Number 11: Deal with mistakes

- ♪ *Avoid drawing attention to mistakes. So don't mention them or apologise, and don't grimace. You'll be amazed how people don't notice them, even if they seem glaring to you.*
- ♪ *If you're competent, the occasional mistake can be a bonus – they make the performer human, and people empathise with you. (If you're just not good enough and make mistakes all the time you need to re-think what you're doing and/or how you're doing it – see Rule Number 3)*

Rule Number 11: Suck up to the sound guy (and other ways of dealing with PA)

- ♪ *Performing with PA is something that really takes some getting used to. If you get a chance to practice with a sound system off-stage, take it.*
- ♪ *The foldback sound does affect how well you perform, but it's generally more critical in a band than solo*
- ♪ *Learn what sound (levels, EQ, voice/instrument balance) you want and ask for it clearly, beforehand if possible*
- ♪ *What you hear in stage isn't necessarily what audience hears (either can be good while other is bad)*
- ♪ *Issues: balance between inputs; EQ*
- ♪ *Always be nice to sound crew. Learn the sound guy's name, use it, and thank him/her/them on stage. Some are dickheads, some are lovely, but in either case they have ultimate power!*
- ♪ *With sound checks, there's a balance between good sound and good relationship with the sound crew, and set time. Poor sound does affect your performance, but it's only one factor. In the end you just have to trust the sound technician.*
- ♪ *Observe other performers and listen to what sounds good in terms of PA and analyse why*

Rule Number 12: Be nice to your microphone (but not too intimate)

- ♪ *Don't ever hit microphones when testing. It's bad for the mic and assaults the audience. Just talk into it. (And don't say 'is this on?' say something clever or interesting - you can repeat it later if the mic is off)*
- ♪ *Keep your mouth a couple of inches from the mic. Listen to what's coming through the monitors, and adjust your position if necessary when you sing louder/softer. If you are too close, your Ps will pop.*

Rule Number 13: Learn from others... and yourself

- ♪ *Observe other performers – not just their material, but how they do all the things covered in these notes. What can you learn to develop/avoid?*
- ♪ *Listen to recordings, and watch video of your performances, and think about what is good and what is improvable. It can be excruciating but it's by far the best way to learn!*
- ♪ *Be prepared for some unresponsive audiences. Where this occurs try to analyse why, and what was different from successful performances (yours or other people's)*

Tip: Getting gigs: Starting out and getting 'real' gigs

- ♪ *Start with small, friendly audiences. Walk up spots at folk clubs are usually the best – really supportive.*
- ♪ *You can join in sessions, especially the sort where people go around the circle and take turns in 'leading' an item. These are low pressure and supportive, and may bring you to the attention of helpful people.*
- ♪ *Open mic's are good but can sometimes be difficult. Much of the audience may be there to see 'their own' person, not you. Well, that at least makes them a good challenge!*
- ♪ *You gotta pay your dues, so do as many gigs as you can. Start small (you will probably have to) and get yourself seen and heard, put yourself out there.*
- ♪ *Make contact with people who might book you. They are often looking out for new acts. But don't be pushy.*
- ♪ *The more often a venue operates, the more likely they will be open to booking you (so a 5-night-a-week café or a weekly music venue are likely to be your best chance.*
- ♪ *Most festivals have an application process (usually on-line). Check out a few and get a sense of the type of information they ask for and put together a publicity package that highlights your strong points.*
- ♪ *A good publicity package will include:*
 - *A captivating, punchy description of you act and why people would want to see it*
 - *High quality, eye-catching photos*
 - *Links to sound recordings and/or videos*
- ♪ *Music festivals are really competitive, so don't have too high expectations of getting booked. But go to festivals (maybe as a volunteer) and do as many chalkboard spots and join in as many sessions as you can.*

Getting paid

- ♪ *You will rarely get what you are worth, but the economics of performing is a fraught issue.*
- ♪ *A door deal (\$x per paying audience member) is often the fairest way of sharing the risk and the bounty.*
- ♪ *Often the venue has a standard fee. If you have to quote a price (eg. In festival applications) ask other comparable acts, and even ask the festival themselves for guidelines – some give these on the application sections of their websites.*



"This next song's about multitasking. So, sit back, sing along, clap in time, light a candle, make a request, think of a loved one, give them a call and enjoy."

