



How to Make an Unforgettable Impression on Stage

A Step-by-Step Guide for Singers

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Ever since you began dreaming of being a singer, you imagined yourself on a stage. The spotlight is on you, your very presence is riveting, people listen while you sing and applaud wildly when you're done. In your mind, your mere presence drove your audience wild with adoration. But reality is a different thing. **In the real world, a singer's ability to grab an audience's attention exists on a continuum – from enthralling to insignificant.**

To be fair, a tiny fraction of people are just born with charisma and magnetism. Unless people predictably fall all over themselves every time you sing, you're probably not one of those people. But even if you're not that person, **most singers are naturally charismatic.** Most singers are good looking and talented. And most singers could benefit from applying intentional work to improving their stage presence.

Different styles of music have different conventions and aesthetics. I mean, you can't get away with a nipple ring just anywhere. The rules for cabaret are different than the rules for metal, hip-hop different from rock, punk different from jazz.

You want to rock your stage presence in your genre. Since every genre plays by a different set of rules, you'll have to do some research on your own. But that's ok. It'll be fun! Just follow these steps; as long as you have access to videos on the internet, you can apply this process to any kind of music!

STEP 1: **GET YOUR HEAD RIGHT**

Singing is a performance art.

That's the most important thing to remember. It shouldn't be embarrassing; it's not a conceit.

It's a fact.

Singing is in the category of "performing arts." That means that you, the singer, are a performer. It means that when you sing, you are, by definition, performing. **If you get that one fact you're already halfway to making a killer first impression on stage.**



Getting your head right means looking at yourself from a distance. Be dispassionate and try to separate yourself from your own feelings about your self-worth, musicianship, or anything else hanging you up. This is a task. You're a singer and you're working on your stage presence. **Keep your head in the game.**

Also, this is your deal. You're owning this. Don't wait for someone to ask you to do your best. Don't wait for permission. Don't wait for someone to notice the intrinsic sparkle in your spirit. Show it to them! This is about you, not about them.

STEP 2: FIND YOUR MODELS

Ever taken an art class? Ok...

Ever seen a movie in which someone was in an art class?

There are art classes in which an instructor puts a bowl of fruit or a naked person in the middle of the room and all the painters will render the same object in the same style - the style they're presently studying. *And yet, every single painting is different. Not only different from one another, but different from every painting ever painted. Ever.*

Remember that analogy. I'm presenting that analogy so you don't freak out about **Step 2**. This step is about deliberately copying, just like those artists.

For **Step 2**, find two or three singers who sing the same kind of music you do, and whose performing you love or admire. It has to be two or three singers that make you think, "I could do that". It can't be someone who's not like you at all.

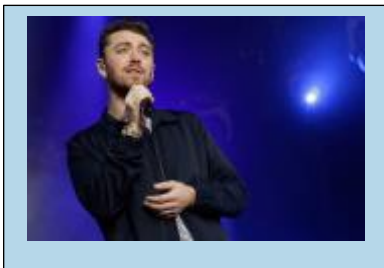
Now watch videos of those singers. Do it with pen (or tablet) in hand, and note the things this person is doing that you like. **For an example, I picked Rhianna and Sam Smith.**

Rihanna:

- great posture and a lot of swagger when she walks
- creates a lot of space around her mic
- movements mostly really tight, not wild
- like the way she combines really loose clothing and really tight clothing
- like when she wears flat shoes
- doesn't touch the mic much when it's in the stand
- interacts with the audience almost always, the band almost never
- like the big false eyelashes.



Sam Smith:



- Dresses really nice; hip suits, sometimes silk shirts.
- Wears "statement" jewelry (like Christian cross as earring)
- Has really confident posture
- Smiles at audience a lot
- Almost always starts with mic in stand
- Holds mic in right hand only
- shows the lyric on his face, and gestures for the lyric (as opposed to beating out the groove like some singers)
- Doesn't dance
- Moves his body to the music a little but mostly either stands or walks
- Focuses on his audience; like he's seeing people he knows and is happy to see

- Talks to audience a lot; invites them to sing

STEP 3: ANALYZE

Look at your lists and notice the similarities.

The artists on these two lists, for instance, have some things in common. They're both very audience-focused, have a very confident physical presence, and dress in a unique and stylish way (e.g., they're neither wearing ripped jeans and t-shirts, nor are they Lady Gaga).

You could look for more things you like, or you could start with just a couple of skills and performance choices to learn from. The point is to look at these singers not from the perspective of the fan, but from that of a fellow singer. **They're the teachers. Watch and learn.**

STEP 4: MEET MR. MIRROR

Time to see what you look like. Use either a full-length mirror or video, get out your Karaoke, and start copying. Sing songs you know well, and incorporate the performance elements you liked as you observed your favorite singers. **Do what they do and give yourself the visual feedback so you know what you look like.**

Often things that feel really weird to **do** actually **look** really good.
Your body tells you “no,” but your eyes tell you “yes.”

I know this is hard for most people. Not because they don't understand or can't do this, but because they feel funny paying that much attention to themselves in this way. You may be one of those people, and your inclination may be to skip this whole project now that you've read this far. But you've read this far. I think you're ready to up your performance game.

Remember, this isn't about your self-worth or what people will think of you, this is about the impression you make as a stage performer. Going back to our example, some of the things you love about Rhianna may make you really uncomfortable when you apply them to yourself. But some won't. So identify what she's doing that you like and try it out yourself.

Don't worry about copying. Remember the analogy of the art class and the fruit bowl? You couldn't be Rihanna even if you tried.

When you do it, and especially when you work on it with the mirror or a video, you're going to change what Rihanna is doing to make it your own.

For instance, in my example, I said I liked the way those performers had very confident posture and stride. So that's what I'll do; practice walking up to my reflection in the mirror. Once I get something that looks good to me, I'll practice

it without the mirror, then go back to the mirror and check again. I want to make sure that what I feel is an accurate reflection of how I look.

I also liked that they're very focused on their audience. Time to get out the video camera and karaoke.

Hmm..I noticed I have a tendency to look at the floor between the phrases I'm singing. Good catch. That's not audience-focused, and I don't like the way that looks. I also don't like that I tend to use the same two gestures with my hands.

Great. There are two things to practice – stop looking at the floor and do some different gestures with my hands; things that look good to me and that I feel I could get used to.

STEP 5: SET THE STAGE

Once you've figured out the performance elements that matter to you, have practiced with video or a mirror, and are feeling a little more comfortable with your updated look, you can bring it to rehearsal.



If possible, create a performance area that feels good to you and supports the new moves you've been practicing. That may involve mic placement, guitar stand (or other instrument) placement, or expanding your performance area.

Tell your band or accompanist what you're up to and what you're working on. Don't be shy. The odds are they'll admire you for understanding that **performance is part of your job.** They'll definitely appreciate that you're working to raise the bar; a singer that performs well makes the band look good.

Once your people (band, accompanist) know what you're up to they'll probably respond either positively or impassively. Hopefully you'll feel confident enough to act your new part.

Singing is a performance art. You need a performance persona.

If your on-stage persona is flashy, or vulnerable, or aggressive, that doesn't mean you have to be that way off-stage. **It's not possible to completely be someone else on stage; you're you. But you can be a different version of you** - one that's awesome on stage but would probably seem really weird at a restaurant. You know the difference between how you behave in different situations - between home and work, between being with friends and being with strangers - and **this is the same thing. But on steroids.**

STEP 6: **PRACTICE FOR REAL**

Have someone video your performance at your next several gigs (hopefully with *your* device so you won't have to worry about any unauthorized uploads).

Analyze what you liked and what you didn't like, and do it differently next time.

This change in your performance is going to occur both deliberately and organically over time, because you've made the decision to be conscious and intentional about your presentation. You've wrapped your head around the reality that singing is a performance art, that people are looking at you, and that it's your job to make them see what you want them to see.

Go show 'em what you've got!