



Melbourne's Award Winning Singing, Music & Entertainment School

PERFORMANCE TIPS 2

What should you do on stage while you're singing? How should you stand? Do you use your hands? How about facial expression? There are many stunning singers in the world, but fewer performers who know how to present themselves naturally on stage.

If you've ever got up in front of an audience and felt awkward and uncomfortable with your body and face, think about rehearsing your performance stance, gestures and expression as much as you would your singing. Stagecraft and natural movement is essential for a polished performance, and learning the tricks is not as hard as you might think...

Observation

All songs are a communication to an audience and a dialogue with other musicians on stage. Take some time watching people talk to each other. Look at what they do with their hands and facial expressions: humans are generally animated and physical when they are trying to share stories and ideas with others.

Practice the lyrics of your song as spoken dialogue in front of a mirror, and try out some natural hand gestures to illustrate what you are saying. Don't do anything that looks choreographed and careful – try to keep it as natural and spontaneous as if you were simply talking to someone, and go back and observe some more if you find the movement getting stagey and looking false.

Eye Line

Eye contact is important in communicating to an audience, whether it's a small audition panel or a crowded arena gig. Some directors will tell you to look above people's heads when performing, but if the song is about making a connection with your listeners, take time to look out into the crowd and focus on faces throughout the venue.

Closing your eyes when you sing prevents you from using your greatest asset in winning over an audience and showing emotion and expression: use it rarely and for specific effect, otherwise it becomes self-absorbed and can make your performance seem self-indulgent.

Using the Stage

Standing still on stage can be extraordinarily effective in an emotional song, and few people can do it well. Stand or sit comfortably but with poise – keep your head high, your back straight (but not stiff), and use your face for expression, not your body. Standing in a loose, relaxed version of the third position of ballet, with toes pointing more to the front, gives you a lovely line on stage – standing feet straight together can look very military, and standing with legs apart can look messy.

A microphone is like any other stage prop: it takes practice to look comfortable singing into it on a stand or when holding it. Treat a microphone just as you would a prop, and change the way you use it for effect during the performance. Leaving it on the stand means having your hands free for an animated song, taking it off and holding it suggests a more poignant or showstopper number, while holding a microphone in both hands suggests the song will provoke a more subdued and intimate emotion.

Moving to the music can be a natural action for more upbeat songs: enjoy just relaxing to the beat rather than choreographing anything complex. Dramatic moments in songs can be a good motivation for more significant movement – a change of emotion, melody, or story-telling is a good point to stand if sitting, walk a few steps, or gesture, but keep focusing on it being a natural progression of what you're saying, not a static dance move.

Analyse the Performance

Rehearse in front of the mirror and look at what you're doing physically when you sing. Are there any little nervous habits to avoid? (ie. stooping, fidgeting, repeating movements) If there's a particular gesture or travelling move you know you especially want to use, do it over and over until it looks and feels like second nature.

Record a performance and look at what you do on stage. Keeping a performance visually interesting can be as significant as singing well: move to different places on stage for key songs or dramatic moments, use different levels by standing, sitting, or leaning, and give yourself time to just stand still and be looked at and listened to. Check you are connecting to your audience emotionally with eye contact and facial expression.

Natural stage movement is an art – it develops and evolves every time you rehearse and perform, and thus becomes easier and easier to do well without thinking. No matter what the singing gig, performance, cabaret, or musical theatre show, be sure to practise what you're going to do on stage physically as well as vocally. Watch other artists for inspiration, and don't be afraid to experiment: anything professional, polished, controlled and thoughtful is far better than amateur, awkward, nervous, unnatural behavior when performing. Enjoy yourself!

