

## **Big-Picture Performing Tips**

by [Dennis Winge](#)

Have you ever met a musician whose show you just saw and upon complimenting him or her, they deflected your comments with statements about what didn't go as well as they would have liked? How did those comments make you feel? Did you have more respect and admiration for the artist after they said them, or less?

Now here's the real question: have you ever made those types of comments to fans? Many amateur musicians do this, and with time they realize that it actually does an injustice to the fan(s) adoring them because it changes the focus from their positive experience to the musician's own obsessions and compulsions with perfection.

When you play music professionally over the course of many years, you learn to keep your mouth shut about things that went wrong during the performance because either a) the audience doesn't notice them b) if it's a glaringly obvious mistake, most of them will feel uncomfortable talking about it anyway, and most importantly c) focusing on mistakes takes away from what a fan came to feel in the first place, which is an uplifting feeling.

You have a responsibility, it has been said, "to your audience, not for your audience." This means that you are to prepare your performance as best you can, but don't cater to their every whim. Instead, be true to yourself. For musicians, this means giving the audience things they want to hear but also play material you have a deep desire to play. It also means letting go of the results, i.e. the need for recognition from your audience.

As an entertainer, you must recognize that your service is valuable in and of itself, simply because:

a) you have prepared well and practiced hard, and now you are laying it all out and being bold and making yourself vulnerable to criticism.

b) music is not a life or death situation. Unlike a brain surgeon whose mistakes can result in death of the patient, music, as Kenny Werner, author of *Effortless Master* says, "is not that important." No one's day is going to be ruined by mistakes in music (except yours if you let it.)

c) even if you do musically stumble onstage, the audience is with you, not against you. Jerry Garcia, lead guitarist of one of the most successful rock bands of all time, the Grateful Dead, said that on nights the band seemed to struggle the most were the nights that fans most appreciated what they were doing and were the shows they loved the most. This is not because the fans were sadistic and took delight in the misery of another. It is because they already loved the band and were so supportive of their endeavors in whatever direction they took.

You must recognize, further, that your desire to make music goes much deeper than the need for recognition. The adventure, the visceral response, the self-expression, the emotional depth that playing music live offers us, the musicians, can go far deeper than the superficial reasons we play.

When you become self-fulgent, you're no longer dependent on audience response, and can concentrate on the music better. As they say in sales, if you did the best you could,

regardless of the outcome, it was still a good day, because that effort will come back to you in some other way with an even bigger payoff than you had expected, and most likely it will come soon. And with accumulated effort, the payoff is only compounded since the Universe abhors a vacuum. In the end, by focusing only on doing the best you can and letting go, you won't be caught up in the "good gig, bad gig" syndrome that can plague musicians. You'll be at peace.