

Elevate Your Performance Consciousness (without substances)

by Dennis Winge

Forget the fallacy that illegal substances or alcohol can induce higher states for more creative performing. Not only is this not true, but it obviously leads to a whole host of other problems, such as addiction, recovery, etc. There are many simple and natural ways of expanding one's consciousness for highest performance.

By higher consciousness performing, I mean expanding one's awareness of the collective being of everyone present during the performance. Music has long been known to be a catalyst that induces a higher sense of community, purpose, and the expanse of individual and collective consciousness. Music is used in virtually every religion toward this purpose. Too many performers, however, are self-obsessed with the delivery of their own music.

We must remember first that audiences have never heard the material and are not judging us. Second, if they have heard it before, it means they have come back for a second time because they like you. Audiences are for you, not against you. Even in the case where someone is hearing you a second time not by choice it is always possible that the delivery of the material may suddenly heighten their level of interest. After all, how many times have you ignored a song until you heard a wonderful reinterpretation of it by another artist? Every time you perform your material, it is a reinterpretation that taps into that same potential.

Having said all this, it is not up to the performer to be attached to the results. In other words, the number of people who come out to hear you and the amount of response you seem to generate are beyond your immediate control, and thus should not influence your performance. It is only your job to do the best you can and to appreciate the opportunity to perform in whatever context is possible for you in the moment. That is the first step toward higher conscious performing: it is not all about you. Yes, you may be the one leading the band or even performing solo, but it's not really about how well you perform. It's about how good of a time your audience has.

Let's take it one step further. Imagine that you could tap into the collective mind of everyone in the room focusing on the same thing, i.e. your music. Instead of feeling nervous or self-conscious about this, you are able to use that awareness to really propel your performance in ways that are extremely powerful and compelling. That would be really cool, right? So how do you expand your awareness while performing?

- **Prepare your material well.** Internalize the material you are going to play, whether it's memorized or you're reading, whether it's your own material or someone else's. Make it feel like you wrote it, and you are debuting it for the very first time. Tap into the magic that audiences feel on their first time hearing it. We will talk about listening as though you were an audience member later, but this first step of preparation is obviously very important.
- **Be ready for anything**, meaning to adapt to the needs of the moment. Perhaps you or a band-mate messes up and goes to the wrong section of a song. Instead of getting embarrassed and frustrated, simply roll with the punches and be in the flow. Perhaps half or even more than half of your audience will never even notice. Smile and move on. Or perhaps your song is simply not going over the way you had intended. Perhaps you can find a way to cut it short and move on to the next one. It's not a big deal.

- **Take a moment to silently love your audience.** I know this may sound a bit new-agey to some of you. Just take a moment before or during your show to think the words, “I love you” to yourself, your fellow musicians and your audience. This easy and short practice can work wonders for setting the right mindset for stellar performances.
- **Pretend you’re in the audience.** What would you think of yourself if you just happened to walk in and hear yourself? Listen attentively, but also with detachment while playing. You can also achieve this after the performance if you record yourself and then wait a few weeks or months before you listen back to it, and then take notes on what you like and dislike.
- **Have a higher purpose,** or at least to know what your purpose clearly. Even if your purpose is to make your paycheck and get out the door as soon as possible, you can still choose to enjoy the performance and do it with gusto rather than as a means to an end. Surely the time will go much faster if you do so. However, having higher purposes clearly established in your mind before you perform will make the possibility of such inner conflicts, such as using music as a means to an end, disappear. Brainstorm on why you want to perform. What is it you really want to share with the world? Why is making music fulfilling for you? How in your highest ideal is your music fulfilling for your audiences and making the world a better place?

There are many more ways to learn to elevate your performance consciousness, more than can be packed into a short article. Someone could write a whole book on this topic. If you have ideas on this subject that you would like to share, or comment in any way, contact me.