

Chapter 2 – Beyond Basic Writing: Creating an Effective Song Delivery

1. Your Target Audience: This chapter focuses on learning who you want to play to, as well as how you can get the most from your song delivery. Often you'll find yourself with a completed song that begins collecting dust because you aren't quite sure who would want to hear it. It doesn't matter if a song contains 3 chords or 30 chords, with this chapter you'll learn how to effectively deliver it to your audience without the fear of rejection - and that's with even the simplest of songs!

There are a few simple things to keep in mind when you are performing in front of an audience – and this audience MIGHT just be one other person.

You know the song – they don't.

You know where you screw up – they don't.

They know what kind of music they like – you don't.

They know whether or not you are 'visibly' nervous – you don't.

These four 'knows' will go a long way both for your personal sanity and performance anxiety. Let's look at them separately.

You know the song – they don't.

Even if you are playing a cover song, you can make a song sound different by simple personal inflections you apply to it. You can speed up a song or slow it down, change the key, and even turn it into a completely different style of song. I've played countless rap songs on acoustic, and have had tremendous success with them. It's something different, and it's something the RIGHT audience will appreciate. (more on the right audience in a moment.)

You know where you screw up – they don't.

Don't make it obvious unless it is. A missed chord or a nasty clunk might be obvious, but a simple word in a lyrical line might NOT be. WHATEVER you do, don't stop. Just push through it. Maybe you switch around an entire verse by accident. If you do, and it's an ORIGINAL composition, have no fear. It's your song. If it is a cover version, DO NOT try to go back and fix it. Just finish the song and consider that cover an abridged version.

They know what kind of music they like – you don't.

Don't try to please every single person in the crowd. Everyone has different musical tastes, and their outward appearance will NOT show you what music they like. At the time of writing this, I'm 31. I listen to Dave Matthews Band, Blue October, Jimmy Buffet, Foo Fighters, Frank Sinatra, Tom Waits (LOVE Tom Waits!) Led Zeppelin, Ben Folds Five, The Beatles, Nirvana, and Stone Temple Pilots. That's a big diversity, and obviously it's nowhere near all the bands I like, but I might be a different case. Either way, the key to performing music the crowd likes is to mix it up. Even if you are playing in a piano jazz bar,

there is absolutely nothing wrong with a neat rendition of “Smoke On The Water” as long as you make the song fit the context of the scenery. Slow it down, add a little vocal gravel, and you’re set. Give it some neat picking or little fills (runs) and you might find yourself the talk of the town.

They know whether or not you are ‘visibly’ nervous – you don’t.

The important thing to realize here is that I’m not referring to whether or not you ARE nervous. I am referring to whether or not you LOOK nervous. Everyone gets nervous. You’re in the spotlight. However, it is imperative to play it off. Limit your talking at first. Talking makes you feel even more nervous. Just play two or three songs before you speak a word. By then your comfort level might get better.

a. Personal Pleasure - Maybe you just write songs to know that you can. Maybe you secretly want someone to hear it, but you're afraid. The absolute first and most important technique you'll need to learn is how to target your own song to yourself. If you don't love it, then odds are the listener will hear it and feel the same. This tutorial will show you how to play a song back to yourself to decide whether it should be a work in progress or a masterpiece for the masses. Think of those B-side songs you've heard that have become hits. Why weren't these songs on official albums? Odds are the artist wasn't ready to develop them. These are the songs that need a little personal reflection. Thousands of artists find themselves revisiting a song that is originally just a 'personal pleasure' that turns into a hit. (Example: Subterranean Homesick Blues by Bob Dylan was originally a joke!)

When playing back a song, do you REMEMBER why you wrote it? If not, do you remember why you put it away?

b. Presenting Your Story - This tutorial isn't about the song. It's about you. If you play live, the audience needs to know a little bit about you, but too much about yourself can lead the audience to draw conclusions that you don't want. Here I'll show you some of the 'right' things to say as well as how to get a good laugh or a good cry from your audience. It may seem that this tutorial isn't important - but it truly is. Perception is reality and reality is what the audience sees, hears, and feels from you. Avoid looking and feeling like a fool when the song ends and you need to speak. (Example: Who doesn't love "Storytellers"? You get a glimpse into the world of a song. It's the perfect way to allow the audience to get to know you!)

There are various things you can say that will allow the audience to understand you without the use of your music.

One thing I HIGHLY recommend is letting the listener know what a song is about BEFORE you play it. I’ve seen performances before when they explain it after, but to me it loses the feel of the song. Let the audience know what to expect at the beginning, and they probably won’t be so hard on you.

If it’s a sweet song, don’t say “This is a sweet song for my loved one.”

c. Live Gigs - The fear sets in now, because the live gig is nerve racking. It doesn't matter if you've performed for 20 years or more, butterflies are always present. This

tutorial provides a ton of useful tricks that will help you overcome your 'stage fright' and finally showcase your talent for what it's worth. (Example: Jim Morrison used to sing with his back to the audience due to his fear. After he got a little more comfortable he began turning around. You KNOW where that led!)

Here I discuss stage fright ideas such as “looking past the audience” or “focusing on ONE person”