

music blog - Open Mike's Manic Manifesto

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Category: [Music](#)

The following "Blog" is an excerpt from an interview I did for Slim Critchlow's running Open Mic Documentary at www.theopenmic.net. This website and the work Slim puts into it, filming, posting performances and artist interviews (FOR FREE!!!!) are HUGE contributions to the Open Mic community and I recommend visiting the site often- and buying Slim a beer (or an herbal tea), whenever you see him!!! I have significantly increased the word count of the following manifesto to make it more beefy and blogg-ish, (and quite frankly because I just can't shut up)...

My name is Open Mike. Chances are you have heard of me; if not, welcome to Planet Earth- we are called Humans and are carbon based, so go easy on the magnetic tractor beams, and no probes, please! I have been performing since the dawn of Popular Music. I have become so immensely popular and incredibly famous, that I have shows booked every night, in almost every city, **all over the world**, from now until the end of time!!!! In fact, I can honestly say, completely free of conceit, that I am the most famous solo performer that has ever lived. Due to inept management and my inability to understand Calendars; I am hopelessly over-booked. I am so over-booked, in fact, that I can't possibly perform at all of my scheduled engagements. So, a while back I sent out an open invitation to

local musicians near all the venues, or visiting from afar, to come and perform a song or two to help me meet my commitments- so I don't lose the confidence of the fickle and unforgiving gig-bookers! The bad news is; I usually play for free, and often even pay the venue a small cover-charge to encourage them to keep booking me...

...Anyway, the point is, I am VERY famous, so you should listen to me and respect my words- a lot! You may even want to "be" me, and that's okay too, it is a privilege I share with all the Mike's of the world, because I am also a VERY generous person (aren't I wonderful?!)- I will let you in on a little secret, "Shhh", come close... I am not even the ORIGINAL Open Mike. The title was passed on to me by the former Open Mike in a sacred and extremely clandestine ritualistic meeting of the Mikes (NO MICHAELS ALLOWED!) We Mike's don't have a lot of "name-perks" to speak of, other than the feelings of camaraderie that come with never being the only "Mike" in any group of more than 5 men, and the freedom from feeling obligated to remember other peoples names (It's pay back for having to hear the Life cereal catch phrase for our ENTIRE lives, and yes, we DO like it, by the way...) So I'm sorry; Alexs, Bobs, Carols, Daves, Eds, Freds, Gene's, Hilarys, Ikes (Wait! That one might actually work...), Judys, Kellys, Leonards, Marks (Mmmm, that one might work to...), Nancys (that's you, Mason), Oliveres, Penelopes, [If you have caught on to where I am going with this list of names, you may want to skip-ahead, you wont miss much...], Quentins, Rogers, Sarahs [If you haven't caught on to the format of this list yet, I want some of whatever you're smoking...] Tonys, Ursulas, Victors, Wendys, Xans, Yannis, and Zoes- You cannot be me. [If you would like to have your name substituted for the name currently representing your letter of the Alphabet in the previous list, send me a message and I will personally write back to inform you that you are out of your fucking mind!].

And now, I step up on my Soapbox...

There is a single unifying factor that makes an open-mic great, wherever it may be held, and that is the "audience". The audience at an open-mic is predominately made up of the performers who have signed up to play. Here are some things that I have learned over the years that can significantly increase an open-mic audience's enjoyment of your performance:

1. Brevity is the highest open mic virtue!!!

This is a plea; *please keep your song short and sweet, but mainly short!!!*. If you play a song that is more than five minutes long at a "single-song" open-mic, then you are simply being self indulgent and inconsiderate to those playing at the bottom of the list.

If you are actually still reading this, then it means you really do care about the open-mic culture and the enjoyment of your open-mic audience. Please remember that your open-mic audience is comprised of; 88% musicians waiting to play, 2% musicians who have already played, and the remaining 10% are most likely the significant others and friends of yours or the aforementioned 90%. I know you believe that you are paying the highest tribute to the original composer by playing every single verse line and stanza; or that you have written the most deeply felt, meaningful song EVER composed, and that the 12th verse really emphasizes the singular poignancy and ultimate truth in the cadence of your musical odyssey- but remember, you are performing for musicians who have equally poignant and amazing songs to perform, AND, most importantly, who can be instrumental contacts (pun intended) for shared billings* - But only if you don't irritate them. (*=*GIGS!!! Where you can have a WHOLE 45 minute set to perform your full Rock Opera with complete Overture, Underture and Sideways-Down-erture- [I will by a drink for anyone who caught that last reference!!!]*).

Here are some guidelines that will make you a huge open-mic success, like me:

- Skip the solos: If you normally have someone else playing a solo on your song, and they are not with you- skip the solo!!! **Do not** just play the entire chord progression that normally backs up the solo, and think that your audience wants to imagine their own mental solo to your song. Likewise, if you *are* a soloist, keep your solo short and sweet. Remember you are playing for an audience comprised of musicians; many of whom know all your tricks and more, so the quicker you get to the point; the more your audience will appreciate and enjoy your performance.
- Tune BEFORE you go on stage: The "Tuning Song" is one cover that *nobody* likes to hear at an open-mic. If at all possible, tune up *before* taking the stage, and be ready to walk up, plug in, and play.
- Love your mistakes: Even the greatest virtuoso makes mistakes; grin and bear it and power on through! If you are playing your own song, no one will even know you have made a mistake unless you "out" yourself with a comment, or by stopping, grimacing, etc. If you are playing a cover, mistakes can be magical moments- IF you can roll with them. Here is an open-mic "secret truth" that only the most devout and ordained open mic-ers know: *People will love you **even more** for your mistakes, and your gracious acceptance of them, than they will for a flawless performance!* It's crazy, I know, but it's true. It's all about being Salieri and not Mozart. Most open-mic performers are NOT virtuosos; they work their ASS off, practicing and STILL forget lines and fuck-up the bridge; just like you. (And as a side note- We all LOVE [and secretly HATE...] you virtuosos [just kidding... a little bit]. Keep making our jaws drop in awe- but try not to alienate us, (your audience)- too much. Remember, we are a community; and

as musicians, we need each other- our peers- [GIGS!!! Remember?!]). It's hard to share a bill with someone who is way out of your league. On the other side of that coin, it's rare that a "virtuoso" even considers themselves to be a virtuoso, or even considers themselves to be as good as **you** may think they are. Musicians are the most self-critical creatures on the planet; so don't be surprised if they are suspicious of admirers being TOO complimentary; it may make them suspicious and uncomfortable, but then, all musician's are addicted (no surprise there...) to the ultimate drug; the acceptance, admiration, respect and appreciation of their fellow musicians (YOU!)! There is nothing bigger than a musician's ego- so go ahead and stroke it for them, (but like you would pet a cat, not a dog). It's just one of the many Iron Knees that exists in the musical community (*Damn! I'm good!!!- Remember-you saw it here first!- But alas, as a musician, I must face the fact that someone else MUST have thought of it before I did*).

2. SHUT-UP!!

You never know when you will see the next great star at an open-mic. I have discovered some of my favorite musicians and songwriters of all time at open-mics, but you will never experience this magic unless you are listening to the performers instead of talking. If it is absolutely necessary for you to have a REALLY LOUD conversation, or catch up with a friend you haven't seen for a while, please move [far] away from the stage area!!! I have never been to an open-mic where there was not an area for conversation at a respectful distance from those performing and those trying to enjoy the performance. QUIET(!) comments to friends about appreciated moments during a performance (ie: "Awesome line there," or "Great chord change," or "She is SO hot and conflicted!") are acceptable; but don't get too "chatty" or loud, unless you are cheering at the end of a performance; "YEAH!"

3. Have fun!

Remember performing is fun! Being nervous is a natural and necessary part of performing, so learn to relish it- to love it- to use it. Your audience can definitely tell if you are having fun performing for them and if you're not having fun performing for them, it's a safe bet that they're not having fun watching you. I know of one regular Open Mic performer who can't complete a song without making a blunder and a comment (or several), which makes their performance so likeable and endearing, it's simply brilliant- Purely because the FUN and enjoyment the performer is feeling about simply performing, shines through every time! (Unfortunately if someone told this performer how brilliant their performance was with all the mistakes, blunders and comments- They would become aware of it, try to do it on purpose, and sadly, fail miserably- another iron knee of performance).

~ Okay, that's it- Stepping off of the soap-box now- Thanks for reading my rant and helping to make your local Open-Mic a more enjoyable experience!!!! See you at an Open Mic somewhere soon...

Stay tuned for my upcoming blogs, entitled: "How to get musicians you admire, to play on your demo" (one of the shortest blogs ever written) and "How to write a great song even though everything has already been thought of and done before by someone more talented than you."

Open Mike signing out. For now...