

HOW TO IMPROVE
YOUR STAGE PRESENCE

SELF- CONFIDENCE ON STAGE

HOW TO STEAL THE SHOW

WRITTEN BY
VERTICAL WISE



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ABOUT VERTICAL WISE

Vertical Wise is an international website working to support and spread the word about the pole and aerial fitness.

Its motto: Get off the Ground, Get Vertical - Get Vertical Wise

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Elli Voulgari is a pole dancer and also the founder of Vertical Wise. Raised in the sunny Athens, Greece, Elli was bitten by the pole dancing bug at the tender age of 26 and promptly left home in search of lust and adventure. Always restless and looking for new experiences, Elli has been strutting her stuff across stages around town as well as working on new and unusual projects. In addition to her solo performances, Elli started teaching pole dance classes in 2012. She founded Vertical Wise on 2015 what she sees as her opportunity to help pole dancers and aerialists worldwide be reliably informed and also get the mainstream closer to Vertical Fitness.

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ALSO BY THESE AUTHORS

How to be a better performer in 10 minutes

CONTACTING THE AUTHORS

We can be contacted at any time by emailing info@verticalwise.com

Please don't be shy about dropping us a line with any questions, corrections, constructive criticism, or offers to adapt our work into a Hollywood blockbuster.

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WHAT IS A CONFIDENT PERFORMER?

**All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.**

- William Shakespeare, *As You Like it*

Those words may have been transcribed centuries ago, but they still ring true. The world is a stage, and to be more precise, it's *your* stage. It's time to own it, and there are a number of steps you can follow to do so. Follow the advice laid out in these pages, and you will be able to conquer the stage as rapidly as you overcome any questions about how to do so.

If you're reading this, the chances are you are familiar with the whirlwind nature of life within the entertainment industry. It's a business model that's built on dreams, and we all know that dreams can be erratic – one moment you can fly and are besties with Angelina Jolie, and the next you turn up to a pivotal audition for the new season of *Orange is the New Black* wearing just mismatched underwear. **The world of the arts can be unpredictable, unreliable and unforgiving, so you have to work on the one thing that you can control – yourself, and your own sense of confidence and self-worth.**

Of course, this begs the question – does anybody actually know what confidence is? The truth is, nobody can be *told*. It's a sensation that needs to be felt and experienced, and as a performer, you'll know that better than anyone.

Ever opened your throat to hit a high note while singing, and just *knew* that you'd nailed it? That was confidence. Ever had a twinkle in your eye while you share an anecdote, planning your breaths during the inevitable raucous laughter that will follow? That's confidence. Ever felt the calming sensation of inevitability that you *will* catch your dance partner when the moment comes, and that they were right to place their trust in you? That is one of the sweetest forms of performing confidence of all, as trust is what the entire construct is built upon. **The sensation that anything is possible**, and you just proved it. Adrenaline will

flood through your body, you will look the audience straight in the eye, and your mind and body will in unity to bring everything you have practiced into perfect clarity.

A confident performer is one that is in full possession of trust – trust in yourself that you belong on the stage, trust in your colleagues that they belong right beside you, and trust in your audience that are prepared to open their hearts and minds to you as an artist.

I've always had confidence. It came because I have lots of initiative. I wanted to make something of myself.

- Eddie Murphy, Actor and Comedian

Confidence is that most elusive of sensations. It can be difficult to gain, even trickier to maintain, and it's oh so very keen to leave us at the first provocation. It's that rare, fleeting but oh-so-beautiful sensation of feeling entirely comfortable within the confines of our own skin. As performers, it's as essential as the very air that we breathe, and that's why we need to learn to trust in ourselves.

Think about why you pay your hard-earned money for a concert, movie or book. You wish to be entertained. You are looking for a fleeting escape from your own thoughts, and to be temporarily taken to another world by an artist – or, indeed, a performer – to the point where, for a couple of hours at least, you're not thinking about how you're going to pay this month's rent, the fact that your other half says *pacific* when they mean *specific*, or that family member is coming to stay next week and you *still* haven't tidied the spare room. Every time we consume performance media, we are entering into an unspoken agreement with those on stage or screen that they actively entertain us, and we will passively allow them to. That's a display of trust in others, and it's **a trust that you need to place in yourself.**

The good news is, **you clearly already have, or you would not be reading the**

book in your hands right now. After all, if you lacked that trust – that confidence – then you would have given up on your dreams a long time ago.

Confidence is the indispensable X-factor that allows us to take up the role of active artist, as opposed to spectator. Confidence is that trust that no matter obstacles are thrown into your path, you will be able to step onto the stage at showtime and deliver a performance that will leave your audience shouting for more – and, in turn, having the confidence that you don't need to immediately deliver that encore, as the phone will ring and offer you another job very soon.

Confidence is going after Moby Dick in a rowboat and taking tartar sauce with you.

- Zig Zaglar, Motivational Speaker.

In a nutshell, a confident performer is someone that can look their audience in the eye at the end of a show with their head high and chest expanded, knowing that they have held up their end of the unwritten bargain we discussed in the previous paragraphs. Although there are many disciplines on-stage that vary wildly in their technique, **the tips for projecting confidence remain the same for all.**

- Always look straight your audience and smile; never turn your back to them, or look downcast to the stage floor.
- If you make a mistake such as forgetting a line, note or step, act as though that was all part of the plan. Clear your head, and concentrate on the next one. The audience doesn't have a copy of your script, sheet music or choreography - they may not even notice your error if you don't draw attention to it.
- If an audience is not responding to your act, don't become deflated and keep giving your all. Every audience is different, and show their appreciation in different ways.

A confident performer is somebody that carries themselves with a poise and composure that suggests satisfaction with the entertaining recreation provided,

but that any feedback will be taken aboard with an open mind and heart. It's a performer that walks off-stage knowing that they have given it their all, and guess what? Their all *is* good enough.

Most of all, a confident performer is someone with a quiet authority that assures their audience that they will take them on an emotional journey. They do not need to shout to be heard, and an audience will willingly remain under their thrall without provocation. Confidence is about a mutual exchange of dynamic energy; an agreement that entertainer and spectator will feed one another for the duration of the show.

These are the nuts and bolts of what makes a confident performer. As you delve further into the pages of this book you'll find more detail on how you can tap into this positive energy of self-assurance while on-stage, and indeed in your everyday life. It's key to understand the nature of confidence, however, and the next chapter will guide us through some common misconceptions that surround this all-important sensation.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CONFIDENCE

Wanting to be a good actor is not enough. You must want to be a great actor.

- Gary Oldman, Actor

As we established in the previous chapter, confidence is not a tangible quality that can be measured, or even fully understood. Confidence is defined in entirely subjective terms that vary wildly from one individual to the next, and one of the biggest misconceptions surrounding self-belief is that it must go hand-in-hand with arrogance. In many respects, the two states are polar opposites – arrogance tends to lead to complacency, which is a kiss of death for anybody with creative aspirations. It's easy to identify what side of the fine line between confidence and arrogance a performer straddles by their reaction to an on-stage setback.

A confident comedian will respond to a joke that fails to raise a titter by quickly moving on, and later contemplating whether it should be rephrased, or dropped from a set entirely; an arrogant comedian will simply assume that the joke was too sophisticated for the feeble-minded audience to understand. A confident musician will respond to a dropped note by upping their concentration and writing off the experience as part of the unpredictable nature of live performance; an arrogant musician, like the proverbial bad tradesman, will blame their instrument, or claim that the drummer must have been half a beat out of time and that affected the rhythm of the recital. A confident actor responds to forgetting a line by improvising a replacement that still feeds their co-star something to react to; an arrogant actor will blame the script, before shooting daggers at the side of the stage, claiming that the backstage team failed to tee them up with a cue. The list goes on.

Overall, a confident performer will take everything in their stride while on-stage, safe in the knowledge that part of the magic of working before a live audience is the unpredictability. We are all human (presumably – no offence is intended to any non-carbon based lifeforms reading this), and that means that we are all

fallible. Embrace this as part of your performance ritual, and take solace and confidence from the fact that anything that fails to go according to plan is nothing you cannot rectify.

I look back on the things that came out of my mouth and I am floored by the audacity and confidence.

- Russell Crowe, Actor

Another common misconception surrounding confidence is that it can only be attained via perfection. Many believe that perfection does not exist. Indeed, if you consider yourself to have attained such a state of pure flawlessness in your performance career, it's probably time to hang up your tights, instrument or microphone. After all, surely from here the only possible way is down?

Some people mistakenly assume that confidence is something that you must be born with. Confidence is not like green eyes, big hands or red hair; it isn't a physical attribute that some individuals innately possess, and others not. There's no denying that life experience can have a varying impact on an individual's sense of self-worth, and that some find it easier to tap into a confident mindset than others, but that can be worked on (see [Keys to Becoming a Confident Performer](#)). **Like happiness, the capacity for confidence is inside every single one of us, but some of us may have to work harder to unleash it than others.**

Think of confidence like a muscle that can be exercised – and indeed must be, lest it erode. For example...

- Muscle turns to fat if not continually worked upon, and confidence turns to self-doubt in the same way.
- If you have a regular cardio routine and take a few days off, you'll find yourself struggling to run long distances without growing short of breath. Stop believing in yourself, and you'll find it difficult to do so again.

- Develop a routine of stretching and exercising every morning, and you'll find that you start your day feeling on top of the world. Stop doing so, and you may find your energy flagging. In the same way, if you stop practicing the art of confidence, your mind will rapidly forget everything that it learned during the intense period of work.
- In order to retain your sense of confidence, keep working at your act in the same way you'd work on your body in the gym. Practice in front of a mirror, perform in front of friends and family that you trust to provide honest feedback, record yourself and study the results... all of these activities will keep your mind and sense of self-worth supple and energetic.

Arnold Schwarzenegger and Woody Allen have wildly different aesthetic appearances, but beneath the skin they are the same. Both have two lungs, a heart, a liver, and a nervous system that keeps all these organs working in tandem. Ultimately, both have enjoyed stellar careers because they had the confidence in themselves, and their ability to overcome the obstacles in their paths (a strong accent and unconventional body shape in Schwarzenegger's case, an unhappy childhood defined by bickering parents for Allen), to acknowledge their strengths and dig deep to find that recess of conviction. The rewards that each man has reaped speak for themselves.

I don't think actors should ever expect to get a role, because the disappointment is too great. You've got to think of things as an opportunity.

- Al Pacino, Actor

Perhaps the biggest misconception surrounding confidence is that it is only attainable through success. In reality, it's a chicken-and-egg situation – do we gain confidence through victory, or does triumph come as a result of confidence?

A mistake that many performers make is defining their confidence on their achievements. As we touched upon in the previous chapter, self-confidence is

like a house of cards; it can take a very long time to build, and the slightest breeze of adversity to bring it crashing down to earth.

Disappointment is part of the rich tapestry of human emotion, and as a performer, you are more than likely more attuned to passionate reactions than most. **The secret is to remember that, when you feel that you have lost your confidence, you haven't; it's just misplaced. Dig deep, dust yourself off and regain that hunger and belief.**

Maybe it's somebody else's turn. Maybe it came down to a 50/50 call where you turned left when somebody else turned right, and on instinct the decision-makers considered that the fastest route. You do not know anybody else's full story, or why they may be awarded something you haven't, but you can know this – they were successful because they were confident enough in themselves and their ability to put themselves forward and risk disappointment.

Keep thinking this way, as it ensures that before long somebody else will be reading this book and taking the same advice after you achieve a target they had set for themselves.

“We are all stars, and we deserve to twinkle.”

- Marilyn Monroe, Actress

You are not your achievements. You are not your number of books or album units sold, auditions successfully converted into job offers, or stage shows completed. Your confidence should spring eternal from the fact that you know you deserve your slot in the limelight, and if things are not going your way right now, there is a reason for that beyond what you can control.

Life in the arts can be difficult, and when you have made your breakthrough it will be because you deserve it. Keep reminding yourself of this; you have earned every opportunity that has presented itself to you, and you have not come this far to only come this far.

KEYS TO BECOMING A CONFIDENT PERFORMER

“Always be yourself, and have faith in yourself. Do not go out and look for a successful personality and try to duplicate it.”

- Bruce Lee, Actor

Think about your favourite performers, and what sets them aside from the pack. Chances are, you'll be able to pinpoint at least one element that prevents this individual from the ever-growing list of identikit celebrities that would seek to attain their position at the top of the tree – or a clickbait article. It may be body language, it could be delivery, or it might even stem from a clear and distinct love for their choice of art form. It all boils down to one factor, however; this performer firmly believed in their ability, and had enough faith in themselves to build a cult of personality around their talent.

“If you're presenting yourself with confidence, you can pull off pretty much anything.”

- Katy Perry, Pop Singer

Looking is a big part of confidence in performance. Dress in what makes you comfortable, and whatever befits a situation. Donning a three-piece suit on a summer's day to dance a can-can is a fast track to make anybody miserable, but turning up to an audition to play James Bond in a tutu and pyjama vest is equally ill advised. Maintain a strong, straight posture, smile often, retain eye contact and keep your body language open and welcoming. Not only will others respond to this, but you'll begin to feel the benefits yourself; mind and body will become one in a poised, self-assured and confident performer that has audiences eating out of the palm of their hand.

"I've finally stopped running away from myself. Who else is there better to be?"

- Goldie Hawn, Actress

Or, as Oscar Wilde memorably claimed, “be yourself; everyone else is already taken”. If you’re to enjoy any success as a performer, you’ll have to be completely comfortable in your own skin. What *possible* reason could you have not to be? You’re fabulous. Which brings us full circle, returning to the opening of this chapter and re-iterating one final point...

“I don't really like to call myself a brand, and I don't like to think of myself as a brand. I'm a singer, a songwriter, a musician and a performer. And an actress, and all the other things that I do. When you add it all together, some might call it a brand, but that's not my focus.”

- Beyoncé Knowles, *Brand*

Excuse the facetiousness above, but it’s undeniable; Lady B is a brand. This isn’t a negative in any way; in fact, it’s essential to achieve success and confidence. It’s no secret that Beyoncé Knowles has been building her career virtually non-stop since she was a teenager, and that hard paid off; pouring her skills and experience into what she loved has left her name intrinsically linked with a variety of industries, and as a result it acts as some kind of official seal of quality.

Think of your own performance style, and your personality. You will have certain characteristics that people respond to – even if you can’t think of what they are, ask your friends what drew them to you when you met. Treat these characteristics as a trademark, and something that you can use to build your brand. Keep it effortless, but distinctive. For example...

- Clothing (chart jazz sensation Gregory Porter is famous for his hat, as is Guns ’n Roses guitar player Slash, while Madonna’s conical bra was a star-maker)
- A signature dance move (Beyoncé brought booty-shaking to the mainstream, and would Michael Jackson have been the King of Pop without the Moonwalk?)
- Trademark delivery (John Wayne had his drawl, Scarlett Johansson’s throaty delivery is immediately distinctive, and Maggie Wheeler – aka

Janice from *Friends* – built a career through her idiosyncratic laugh and “Oh. My. God!” catchphrase)

- Enigmatic personality (nobody knows which version of Lady GaGa will turn up for an interview, for example)

All performers have a responsibility to themselves to seek the same achievement – take pride in your work, build the legend that surrounds your own brand, and create a mutual confidence with yourself and your audience that anything bearing your name comes with a pre-approved sense of superiority. When you are prepared for your name to be used as an adjective (for example, quirky gothic cinema being described as Burtonesque after director Tim Burton), you have achieved a nirvana of branding self-possession.

FAILURE AND PERSEVERANCE

“Failure has to be an option in art and in exploration – because it's a leap of faith. And no important endeavour that required innovation was done without risk. You have to be willing to take those risks.”

- James Cameron, Filmmaker

Despite appearances, 'Fail' is not an offensive word that should be uttered in hushed tones, if at all. A confident performer needs to be fearless and to accept that not everything they attempt will come off. We all learn more from our tribulations that we do from our achievements.

The key to confidence in performance is to swallow down any disappointment and things that do not work out, dust ourselves off, and be prepared to start all over again with an open mind and heart.

Every successful actor or actress will have a story about a major audition that did not work out for them. Every platinum-selling musician will recall the critic or record company executive that suggested investigating a new career might be wise. Every celebrated dancer will laugh off the recollection of a choreographer that told them they were devoid of rhythm or personality. **The key to becoming a confident performer is having faith in yourself, and not taking any kind of rejection personally.** It may be hard to believe during lean periods, but ultimately there is only one judge of your ability that matters – you.

If you find yourself worried that you have been unsuccessful in an artistic endeavour, adjust your thinking to take confidence from the lessons you have learned from the experiences and carry them forward to next time.

“Don't be discouraged, but know that sufferance creates perseverance, perseverance brings character, and character brings hope, and this a hope that will not disappoint us.”

- Jon Foreman, Musician

Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither is a sense of confidence as a performer. Again, think back to your favourite actors and musicians, and trace back their career paths. No actor made their screen debut in an Oscar-winning leading role; they will have kicked off with small, supporting parts, learning their craft as they went. No musician headlined Glastonbury straight after Open Mic night at the Dog and Duck; a variety of smaller shows will have allowed them to grow increasingly content with more and more eyeballs fixated upon them and their art. Set a small goal, make it clear to yourself that you can conquer it, then set a larger target. Rinse and repeat, and before long you'll find that nothing fazes you. Confidence will grow at a similar rate to your career.

"There's nothing better than achieving your goals, whatever they might be."

- Paloma Faith, Pop Singer

A career as a performer is rarely easy. It can involve intense periods of feast or famine, with offers and opportunities flowing thick and fast and necessitating 18-hour working days, or a deafening silence as the phone refuses to ring with a new opening. Despite this, ask yourself one question – is your worst day as a professional performer better than your best day in a more traditional day job?

If you answer yes to this question, you should have all the motivation you need to continue building confidence in yourself and your talent. Be grateful for those busy phases, and acknowledge that they are a result of your ability and hard work. Be grateful for the quieter times, and treat them as an opportunity to reflect and build on your craft. Appreciation breeds affirmation, and ensures that your confidence will grow with your experience.

IMPROVING YOUR PERFORMANCE SKILLS

“Fear paralyses you - fear of flying, fear of the future, fear of leaving a rubbish marriage, fear of public speaking, or whatever it is.”

- Annie Lennox, singer

Can I let you in on a little secret? I’ve forgotten and fudged lines on stage. I’ve missed a cue on a dance number. If I was capable of playing a musical instrument, I can assure you that I’d hit more bum notes than a flatulent orchestra. It felt like the world was going to end, but you know what? The consequences were not as catastrophic as you might think. The world continued to turn, the sun still rose in the morning, and despite my wishing oh so very hard for it to be so, the ground did not rise up and swallow me whole. The only choice was to laugh at the ludicrous nature of the circumstances, assure the audience that no permanent damage was done with an improvised humorous reference, and get on in with the job in hand. The show, after all, must go on.

Glossophobia, or the phobia of public speaking, is a common fear that affects people of all walks of life. Addressing an audience of strangers can feel like some kind of terrifying loop of needing to impress a prospective partner’s parents over and over, where one slip or false word could have disastrous consequences. Now, can you imagine any vocation that plays into this chronic trepidation more than professional performance? Every word uttered by an actor or singer is subject to intense scrutiny, and all those in attendance will not be able to avoid noticing every unsuccessful inflection.

That’s not to say that that stage mishaps mean nothing – after all, audiences are paying customers, handing over their hard earned to see a great show. However, put bluntly, nobody’s perfect (but having read the chapter [Misconceptions About Confidence](#) you already know that, right?)

Mistakes will happen, and there will always be room for improvement in your performance skills. The key is to learn from these bloopers, and turn these

misadventures into advantages. After all, as mentioned in the chapter [What is a Confident Performer?](#), the audience may not even notice that you have made a mistake unless you spell it out for them. Even if they do, turn that frown upside-down and make light of the situation with them. **The audience wants to laugh with you, not at you.** Help them do that, and everybody will be more relaxed.

“I love being on stage. I'm completely, totally relaxed. It's the only time in my life when I know where I am and what's coming next.”

- Robert Powell, Actor

One way that you can improve your performance is to simply relax while you are on-stage. I know, easier said than done, right? But ask yourself a simple question – have you ever truly enjoyed yourself while feeling stressed and uptight? And if you're not having fun on-stage, how can you expect your audience to enjoy watching you? **Energy translates in ways that we cannot hope to understand, and our neuroses can rapidly become the audience's hang-ups.**

A smile and eye contact go a long way to assuaging these anxieties. More on body language will come later in the book, but a sure-fire way to improve your performance is to display that most coveted of nominalisations – confidence. Yep, we're back on that again. It's almost as though there was some kind of central theme to this whole book.

One key thing to recall is that the moment that you step out on stage, your own comfort stops being your concern. From the first line of your play, the first bar of your concert, the first step of your dance or the first joke of your stand-up set, you owe a duty of care to your audience. You cease to exist for the duration of your performance, instead inhabiting a new character – your stage persona. Your stage persona only has one concern, and that's ensuring the audience has a jolly good time. If it helps, give your stage persona a pseudonym. Hey, if it's good enough for Beyoncé, it's good enough for you. She's quite the brand, you know.

“The cardinal rule for any performer is that they should know themselves before they enter the spotlight.”

- Neil Young, Musician

The quickest and easiest way of ensuring this is by giving an audience what they want, even if they are unable to verbalise to you exactly what that is. As we touched upon in [What is a Confident Performer?](#), most audiences wish to be taken on a journey, trusting that they will be returned physically safe and sound but potentially emotionally altered. To do this, you may need to move outside your comfort zone. So far outside it, in fact, that you can barely even see it on the horizon. Without doing so you cannot expect to grow as a performer.

Movement will also help. It's no good bouncing around the stage like a pinball – that'll just be distracting – but unless you're one of the Gallagher brothers, standing stock-still like a statue will be a fast-track to a bored audience. If you are lucky enough to still have four functioning limbs, use each and every one of them to move around and own your stage, engaging with the audience, and fully embodying a character that your paying public can engage with. Nobody ever left a Rolling Stones show complaining that they would have enjoyed themselves more if Mick Jagger would just *keep still* for a few minutes.

Learning when not to hog the spotlight is also important, however; your colleagues on stage also deserve their time to shine, and the opportunity to hold the audience's attention. It's a fine line to walk sometimes, but in such situations use your face and body language to *react* to what your colleagues are doing, as opposed to directing all the attention towards yourself. Much like conversing with somebody who isn't truly listening and merely waiting for their turn to speak is infuriating, so is attempting to act opposite somebody only concerned with their own lines.

“Imitation is the highest form of flattery, but clones kind of get it wrong because we are promoting individuality and being proud of being yourself.”

- Brian Molko, Musician

Of course, if in doubt, practice and study. There is nothing truly new under the sun, and there is no harm in watching the craft of past masters in your performance field and paying attention to just what makes them so special. If nothing else, it'll be an excuse to watch Netflix in your pyjamas for an entire weekend.

Don't imitate – no matter how hard many may try, there will never be another Freddie Mercury, Audrey Hepburn or Robin Williams – but treat every influence upon your performance as a tutor that you can take cues from. How else are you expected to learn and improve? None of these shining superstars were born as the fully formed entertainers that we knew and loved overnight. It all comes down to throwing as many influences as you can manage into one giant melting pot, and mixing these inspirations into something deliciously, uniquely *you*. This is how you will find your niche and develop into the best possible performer that you can be.

“Just be confident. I think confidence is the most attractive part of a person.”

- 50 Cent, Rapper

Let's do some role play. You're a bank manager (stay with me here, it gets more exciting), and you have two customers sitting across your desk, both of whom has made an appointment to request a loan. One of them is displaying classic signs of desperation; a sweaty handshake, jittery demeanour, inability to look you in eye, and rapid-fire staccato delivery when speaking. The other is the picture of relaxation, leaning back on their chair, stating their case for what they intend to do with all that lovely lucre when it inevitably lands in their account, and to all intents and purposes treating this as just another administrative task, the outcome of which will not ruin their day either way.

Which of these two customers are you more likely to place your trust into, and feel secure that your investment is shrewd and wise? The same example could

apply to job interviews, to first dates, and – yes! – to performing live on stage. **Convince your audience that they need your talent more than you need their approval**; that is the key to confidence, and confidence is the key to improving your craft.

OVERCOMING STAGE FRIGHT

“If you have stage fright, it never goes away. But then I wonder: Is the key to that magical performance because of fear?”

- Stevie Nicks, Musician

You're standing backstage. The house lights have dimmed, the opening applause is beginning to calm down, and the moment of your arrival on-stage is about to arrive. It's funny; normally you're so nervous, but you feel an unerring sense of calm!

Then it happens.

The *Jaws* theme starts to loop in your head. Your legs turn to jelly. You're *convinced* that every single bully and disapproving teacher you encountered in your childhood is in the front row. There are surely a number of talent scouts dotted around the venue, just waiting to ensure that you never perform again. You'll make an inevitable mistake and ruin your career.

And then you deliver your first line, hit your first note or pull off your first move, and everything evaporates. You are in the moment, and you wonder why you were so nervous in the first place! You've got this (of course you have – you're great, and you belong up there on stage). And even if you don't – stall. Crack a joke if necessary. Change the direction of the song or line, before returning to the status quo and making it all look like a part of the act. Relax the audience, gather your thoughts, and start over. Despite what you may have been told, there is more than one opportunity to make a first impression.

Every performer has experienced this at some time or other, and as the learned Ms. Nicks says above, it never really leaves you. In fact, if ever you find that you no longer experience the jingling and jangling of nerves before taking to the stage, may it's time to pack it all in and become an insurance salesperson. Stage fright is an essential element of performance, and one that can be used as a

hugely potent weapon in your stage presence arsenal. The challenge is to control the syndrome, and turn it to your advantage.

In short, you own your stage fright; it does not own you.

“In my opinion, the only way to conquer stage fright is to get up on stage and play. Every time you play another show, it gets better and better.”

- Taylor Swift, Singer

The old saying claims that if you practice anything for 10,000 hours you become a master of the art form, but this doesn't apply to emotions. Stage fright is a primal reaction from within ourselves as every audience will react differently, and it's human nature to live in fear of embarrassment. Ask yourself this, though – isn't that all part of the fun? The magic of live performance comes from the ability to freewheel, improvise, and feed from that mutual energy exchange with your audience that you have been reading so much about. Apologies to any insurance salespeople out there, but I'm about to insinuate that their vocation is not a rollercoaster ride of merriment once more. All I'm saying is, it's probably safe to wager that they do not experience the same butterflies in their stomach at 8.55 on a Monday morning as you will five minutes before the curtain raises on a show.

The more you perform, the more you will learn you conquer these fears, especially when we consider that everybody has different techniques to becalm their thundering heartbeats. For example...

- Some performers are superstitious, being sure to wear certain clothing on stage, carry a good luck token of such description, or follow a very strict set of pre-performance rituals.
- Some performers find solace in their pre-show preparation – and I include myself in this category. Standing in costume, undertaking vocal training exercises and physically limbering up alongside my colleagues

helps me feel as though I have already begun the show, and by the time I strut onto the stage I am in that fabled 'zone'.

- Some people need silence and solitude to mentally prepare; others draw comfort from the presence of a crowd.
- Some performers like to cram in one final look at a script, set list or choreography; others find that doing so will make them second guess themselves on-stage, applying the theory that what they do not know now, they never will.

Find what works best for you (silence in an empty room? Coffee and chatter with your cast mates? Removing yourself from the immediacy of the world with a good book or a pair of headphones?), and apply these techniques to your stage preparation – and, in turn, learn what works best for your colleagues and partners, and respect their process too. No one performer's needs or wants can supersede those of another; stage fright affects us in different ways, but had has a similar impact. Tap into that trust and comradeship with your cast mates to ensure that everybody is comfortable by the time they cross the line onto the stage.

"I get stage fright and gremlins in my head that say, 'you're going to forget your lines'."

- Alan Rickman, Actor

Stage fright is an unfortunate occupational hazard, and has to be dealt with one way or another. If you are really struggling, you can turn to science of spirituality to assist you in your quest for confidence. Investigate alternative remedies such as meditation, or look into popular Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques such as mindfulness to calm your nerves and you'll be a zen performer in no time.

You may scoff at the suggestion of meditation, but it really works. Sites like YouTube are stuffed to the brim with guided meditations that can be followed by even the most inexperienced budding Buddha. Guided meditations can calm the

heart rate, increase confidence, relax the body and mind and much, much more – if your overactive brain refuses to pipe down and allow you to enjoy your time on-stage, it really could be worth investigating. Think of it as a complimentary hypnotherapy treatment to restore your equilibrium before taking to the stage and allow you to focus on your own performance, not the reactions that may or not come from the assembled audience.

CBT, as a form of talking therapy, is a little more complicated and would require the assistance of a trained psychiatric professional. However, anybody can practice mindfulness, or the act of living in the present. All it entails is clearing your mind of all unwelcome and unnecessary thoughts and distractions, and simply enjoying the moment that you are experiencing *right now*. This is a valuable mindset to enter while performing, as it will prevent you from panicking about the tricky monologue or high note that will be rearing its head in twenty minutes.

Once you've finished with this chapter (and not a moment before) pop this book down, find something close by that you find aesthetically pleasing, relax your body, and look at it for a while. As you do so, let your thoughts go. Stop fretting about the past, worrying about the future, or allowing arbitrary thoughts and questions to run through your mind. You're feeling calmer already, right? Well, that can be invaluable before you step on-stage, ensuring that those frantic nerves are no longer playing your innards like a xylophone. Just don't get so mindful that you forget your lines, steps or notes.

“A little bit of stage fright, then I'm ready.”

- Faith Hill, Singer

Experiencing stage fright does not make you an inferior performer, or an unconfident one – it merely makes you human, and shows how passionate you are about your craft. Embrace the nerves and make them work for you, turning the emotional adversity into an advantage. The adrenaline that such a syndrome produces *can* be helpful if channelled in the right direction.

TIMING AND MUSICALITY

“I think I always had a musicality, and I think I could tell a good song from a bad song.”

- Paul McCartney, Musician

Musicality is one of the most important skill sets that any performer can master. An all-encompassing master term for the art of ‘being musical’, it taps into the ability to use musical beats to bring essential and structured timing to your own performance. Musicality is obviously essential to anybody seeking a career in an orchestra or dancing, but it can also be every bit as important to actors and comedians. Musicality is intrinsically linked with movement and timing on stage, which is the beating heart of any form of performance.

Musicality should not be confused by musicianship – you don’t need to be a jazz maestro to lay claim to possessing innate musicality. All you need is to *understand* the nature of melody, hence why some of the most successful music journalists in the world have about as much tuneful talent as the Spice Girls. Put bluntly, anybody capable of expressing his or herself through music possesses musicality.

If you are pursuing a career in music, there are more elements to this than any other style of performance. Those blessed with musicality will have the ability to improvise on stage, jam with band mates, learn to play and imitate notes simply from hearing them, and most importantly of all, perform by instinct as opposed to following a rigid set of notes in time. If you are an actor or dancer, you could follow similar rules to master your timing – be it comedic or dramatic. If we were to boil musicality down to its most base level, it describes an ability to hit very necessary beat and rhythm at the moment that will provide maximum impact to the audience.

The good news is, much like confidence, musicality can be taught to those who consider themselves to not possess it. Much like confidence, it all begins with you

as a performer and your willingness to express yourself. All kinds of external influences such as teachers, coaches and colleagues can play their part, but the hard work has to start with you. Think of musicality as a wick that we all possess within ourselves; You need to find the ignition point in order to truly light the inner candle.

Acting is all about timing. I mean, who has better timing than the MCs?"

- Coolio, Rapper and Actor

Musicality comes down to timing, and timing is everything in performance. Time for another little exercise. Think about a movie or television dialogue exchange that never fails to make you laugh. Now, replay the scene in your mind and have the punchline delivered half a beat sooner or later than the way it appears on-screen. The mirth is suddenly in shorter supply, right? That's the essential nature of comic timing. To use a celebrity example, Jennifer Aniston has built a stellar career on the basis of this. Well, comic timing and an array of unique hairstyles.

Dramatic timing is every bit as important. If it took Clark Gable a second longer to decide that, upon reflection, he didn't give a damn where Scarlett O'Hara would go and what she would do, one of the most iconic moments in screen history would be robbed of much of its power.

Musicality and timing are so closely linked because a script reading can be broken down into the same 4/4 time signature (four beats per measure) as a conventional pop song hook. Next time you find yourself tapping your fingers to a catchy beat, do the same with a monologue from a movie. You'll see that the same rhythm can apply to acting, and ensure that you deliver lines slowly and clearly, by simply tapping out the beats in groups of four.

Clear as mud? Then see the table below for an example, which compares the beats of a recognisable song with those of a famed soliloquy.

	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4
SONG	Hap-	-py	Birth-	Day-
SOLILOQUY	To -	Be -	Or -	Not -
	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4
SONG	To -	You -	Hap-	-py
SOLILOQUY	To -	Be -	That -	Is -
	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4
SONG	Birth-	Day-	To -	You -
SOLILOQUY	The -	Ques -	Tion -	For -

If you tap out each beat with your fingers as you sing/speak, you will see the similarities in timing. Granted, you may look a little peculiar playing a drum solo on your thigh while performing Shakespeare, but that'll just make you all the more unique (all the same, it may be worth finding a way to memorise the timings some other way before your curtain rises). Using this timing technique ensures that you will always be able to communicate your message to an audience.

- If you are a dancer, using timing to know when to make your steps, when to move across the stage, and when to match your cue for a stage position, in addition to knowing when best to pull out major manoeuvres such as splits.
- If you are a singer, you can use timing to nail exactly what beats you should start or finish with, when to rise and drop your tone, and when you can pause and take an all-important breather.
- If you are an actor or comedian, counting out the beats will ensure that any dubious acoustics will be compensated by a clear and methodical delivery – as well as allowing you to count out how many beats you should wait before delivering your next line, allowing for a pause for laughs, gasps or, if you're *that* kind of comedian, good-natured groans.

Musicality and timing are not the easiest techniques to learn, but they are essential instruments in any performer's repertoire. There is an undisputable science to these methods, and as such they will assist anybody struggling for confidence by helping them focus.

APPEARANCE AND BODY LANGUAGE

“Glamour is assurance. It is a kind of knowing that you are all right in every way, mentally and physically and in appearance, and that, whatever the occasion or the situation, you are equal to it.”

- Marlene Dietrich, Actress

Appearance is oh so important on stage. *Oh* so important. You see that? I italicised the second oh. *That's* how important appearance is.

Here's the flipside, though; appearance when performing is not all about aesthetics. Sure, as per the quote above, throwing on the right clothing and make-up can be helpful. Ultimately, though, performance is defined by the appearances of confidence, enjoyment and professionalism. If you appear like you deserve to be on stage – which, lest we forget, *you do* – then the audience will accept you whole-heartedly.

Nobody whose opinion should be treated with any relevance enters a theatre, concert hall or recital with their arms crossed, daring the performers to prove pre-conceived notions wrong. Audiences want to be fooled and transported to another world, and to buy into a performance whole-heartedly. This is where you, as a performer, have a responsibility to project this appearance and maintain the illusion.

“What a costume designer does is a cross between magic and camouflage. We create the illusion of changing the actors into what they are not. We ask the public to believe that every time they see a performer on the screen,

he's become a different person.”

- Edith Head, Costume Designer

As the late, great George Michael informed us in *Freedom*, clothes do not make the man, woman, animal, mineral or vegetable. Costume *helps* though and we must buy into that philosophy if we are asking our audience to believe that, as performers, we are different people to the individual they see pushing a trolley around the supermarket on a Sunday morning.

We'll touch more upon how rehearsing in costume can be helpful in [Preparation Through Training](#), but the impact of a dress rehearsal should not be underestimated. The more time you spend in character, the more that character will inhabit you – and, in turn, you will find it easier to project the appearance of your character being a living, breathing three-dimensional being to your delighted audience. Regular dress rehearsals also minimise the risk of wardrobe malfunctions; heaven only knows how much Janet Jackson must have wished she had a handful more before the infamous SuperBowl XXXVIII half time show.

Another way to think of it is this. Take a train during the rush hour one morning, and when you've finished weeping gently, feast your eyes upon your suit-and-tie-clad fellow passengers. Nobody dons a three-piece because they are seeking comfort; somebody heading to work in the corporate environment is playing the role of businessman or woman every bit as much as an actor, musician or dancer. It's highly unlikely that they'll still be sporting Armani while they roll around on the floor playing with their children or taking the dog for a walk. It's a power play to help somebody feel the part during their working day. As a performer you will be doing the same on-stage, regardless of whether your suit substitute is a pirate costume, a pair of tap shoes, or spandex trousers.

“She can kill with her smile, she can wound with her eyes.”

- Billy Joel, *Always a Woman to Me*

Somebody wise once claimed that relationship between performer and audience

member is one of trust. I'm not sure who that was, but you should listen to them, they sound like they know what they're talking about.

Moving on... smiling and making eye contact is one a universal sign of gaining and transmitting trust that humans have used since time immemorial. There's a reason why we ask somebody to look us in the eye which discussing something important, as it forges a bond. Next time your phone rings, smile as you say, "hello" (following up with "it's me, I was wondering if after all these years you'd like to meet" in the style of Adele is optional), even if it's a double-glazing salesman at the other end of the line. It may sound like the deranged ramblings of a hippy, but that beam will translate to the other individual, and they will feel the energy that crackles with such a simple movement of mouth muscles.

The same goes for performing on-stage. Looking an audience in the eye and smiling (where appropriate – use your judgment, as if you're enacting a funeral it may be deemed in appropriate) will show that you are confident and enjoying yourself. Audiences can smell fear and discomfort in performers like a shark scents blood, and anything that breaks the illusion will impact on their pleasure. Smiling is also a way of disguising any kind of challenge while singing on-stage – that small flexing of your mouth will have a huge impact on your throat muscles, and if you're struggling to reach a note, a grin will push you that key octave higher.

Of course, in order to make eye contact and smile, you need to be *facing* your audience at all times. When focusing on your movement, it's sometimes tempting to patrol the stage and spin on your heel, but turning your back on an audience is one of the cardinal sins of stage performance. The human brain struggles to multi-task, so if it has to focus on two sounds simultaneously (say, dialogue or song lyrics and a musical cue), not being able to see the mouth of one of the performers makes for an unnecessary challenge.

"I have a genuine love affair with my audience. When I'm on stage they're

not privileged to see me. It's a privilege for me to see them.”

- Ozzy Osbourne, *Rock Royalty*

We've also touched upon the importance of movement while on-stage in previous chapters, and that is a difficult but essential skill to master. There is a fine line between staying in character and stealing the limelight from others, so think of some subtle physical actions that prevent your performance from becoming static. This could take the shape of facial tics, such as raised eyebrows and shocked reactions; if your character is portrayed as vain, you could pull a hand mirror from your pocket, for example. Sometimes it may even be appropriate to exit stage left and return at a more appropriate time.

Just remember, it's not all about waving your arms and pumping your legs. The understated impact of a facial expression can be *huge*; after all, the first rule of acting is reacting, and that also applies to dance and other forms of performance. When not an active part of a show but remaining on-stage, don't simply stand with a blank look and wait for your moment to come around again – become a member of audience, and respond to what your colleagues are crafting before your eyes as well as theirs. Your body language and facial expressions will play a major role in achieving this.

PREPARATION THROUGH TRAINING

“The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is practice.”

- Vladimir Horowitz, Classical Musician

Failure to prepare is preparing to fail. That may be an infuriating cliché, but it’s undeniably true; no successful performance outside of an improvised comedy troupe has ever transpired without a great many hours of preparation and rehearsal.

This chapter is almost a combination of the many subjects already discussed within this book, and preparation, training and rehearsal are essential components for any performer. They help build confidence, trust and chemistry with co-workers and audiences alike.

Preparation, of course, goes further than simply turning up to rehearsals and waiting instruction. As performers, we all have an obligation and duty to ourselves, and those who pay to watch us, to remain in the optimum condition to give an audience the show they deserve – both physically and emotionally.

Elements of preparation that should never be overlooked include taking care of our bodies, so that we are ready to hit the ground running when rehearsals start in earnest. Whether singing, dancing, acting or playing an instrument, performance takes a physical toll on the best of us. Unless you have somehow managed to forge a successful career as a professional Mannequin Challenge representative, you’re going to need to ensure you have the breath in your lungs and the sharpness of mind to face up to the rigors of entertaining your adoring public. Stay in shape, get plenty of sleep, and do your warm-up exercises.

Yep, warm-ups are *hugely* important. This chapter may be causing unwelcome flashbacks to traumatic gym sessions and school PE lessons, but trust me, pulling a hamstring on-stage and hopping through the rest of the show while suppressing the urge to scream profanity is even less enjoyable than ten minutes

of stretching before you pull on your tights. Vocal warm-ups are also essential; such exercises will open your throat and make it considerably easier to project your voice or use your full lung capacity. As touched upon in [Overcoming Stage Fright](#), these measures can also help relax your body and mind, and boost your confidence – think of them as the start of the show and an opportunity to bond with your fellow performers, without the eyes of the audience boring a hole into you.

In summary, if your troupe does not currently have warm-up coaches among their number, it is well worth investigating. An experienced dance teacher can be invaluable in teaching stretching exercises that will limber up your back, arms, legs and thighs (providing a useful workout for general fitness as well as stage preparation!), and a vocal coach capable of taking you through a full range of notes – from soprano highs to baritone lows, via melodies and strange accents – will help open your throat and lungs to capacity fully, and minimise any risk of damaging your vocal chords while performing.

“The process of rehearsal means you learn so much and really get the chance to develop your work on a character.”

- Adam Garcia, Actor, Singer and Dancer

Of course, all of this relates to showtime – the real magic takes place in rehearsals. Now, there’s no denying, sometimes rehearsals can feel like a real pain. The preparation period of every performance goes through a similar timeline; bustling excitement at the potential to begin with, a steady increase in exhilaration as scripts start being dropped, routines amended and enhanced, and ideas exchanged. Then, we get to the moment that we all dread. The Wall Rehearsal.

The Wall Rehearsal is an inevitable phase of any production, which occurs around two-thirds of the way through the build-up. It’s that one rehearsal where everybody is tired and grumpy, some kind of minor sickness bug has flooded the camp and knocked everybody sideways, a behind-the-scenes issue has reared its

head and threatens to make all of hard your work pointless, the director has turned into a flouncing diva and is biting heads off left, right and centre for no reason, and every single performer is wondering just why they are putting themselves through this torment. This Wall is something that cannot be scaled, or walked around, and most of all, it must not deter you and convince you to walk away.

When faced with The Wall, take a breath, give yourself a few days, then charge headlong into it at your next rehearsal, reducing it to the pile of rubble that it should be. Treat The Wall as another opportunity to bond with your colleagues. You are all fabulous, and the way you felt that day is the way that many nine-to-five wage slaves feel about their jobs *every weekday*. Never forget how privileged we are to do what we do; there are infinitely worse ways to make a living.

Dress rehearsals are a fine way of upping your training and preparation to a new level. It's important that, the closer you come to performance night, you begin to live and breathe your character or role. Now, don't take that too far and remain 'in character' twenty-four hours a day; you're not Daniel Day-Lewis (unless you are, in which case thanks for reading - big fan by the way). Just train your brain to associate your dress with your performance, and you'll find it much easier to slip into the appropriate mindset while on-stage, as well as helping calm your nerves on the night. After all, it's not you that's out there being judged – it's the character that you are portraying.

“You need to make mistakes in rehearsal because that's how you find out what works and what doesn't.”

- Clarke Peters, Actor

The final important thing to note on training and preparation is that rehearsals are also an opportunity to give and receive constructive feedback. There has to be an element of ego involved with any performer – after all, why else would we place ourselves in the spotlight? – but remember that your colleagues are all in the same boat. Every one of you is determined to put on the greatest show you

can, and it will be worth listening to advice from the people that see your act most often. Between listening to your fellow performers, and recording yourself if you can tolerate to watch your rehearsal back, you will have all the tools you need to take to the stage full of confidence.

Here's a timeline of a typical eight-week rehearsal run to give you an idea...

WEEK ONE	How exciting – it’s time for meet and greets! I’m excited to work you! No, no I’m excited to work with <i>you</i> !
WEEK TWO	OK, now we’re starting to cook with gas. We’re getting an idea of everybody’s strengths and weaknesses, and we can work together to create something special. We’ve all had time to take in the script in full, and made our suggestions as to how it can be adjusted, and we have rounded the corners from most of the working relationships.
WEEK THREE	Scripts down, moving forward – this show is going to run like a well-oiled Swiss watch! Let’s start thinking about the creation or purchase of props and mastering our stage presence – we won’t be in the rehearsal space forever, and need to work on our movement.
WEEK FOUR	Let’s try on those costumes and make-up and see what works, and what needs to be amended. A few mishaps this week, but that’s to be expected – plenty of time yet, and it’ll all be alright on the night; make a note of what we’re all struggling with, and really focus on that this week, helping one another wherever possible.
WEEK FIVE	Uh-oh – it’s The Wall. The costumes are a little <i>wrong</i> somehow, but nobody knows why. Two key performers are sick. The venue has changed their mind about hosting. The sound technician has dropped out. Why are we doing this? What’s the point? Can we go home yet? What’s the meaning of life?
WEEK SIX	Hey guys, remember last week? That wasn’t great, was it! Glad we’ve had a week to take stock and remember why we’re so passionate about this project. Time to get our wheels back on! The costumes have been amended, and we’ve all ironed out the creases in our acts. There’s a renewed confidence in the camp, and we’ve just laid on our best rehearsal yet. That’s a relief, as next week we need to <i>really</i> start taking this seriously.
WEEK SEVEN	Oh boy, it’s so close that I can smell the grease paint. Time to start fine-tuning and confirm that we’re all happy with our acts – making changes now could lead to confusion. Let’s treat this as a formal dress rehearsal, and imagine that the audience are right there in front of us. By this point, the show needs to be in place and run without a hitch, but nobody can afford to slip into complacency.
WEEK EIGHT	Almost showtime! Costumes fit perfectly, The make-up artist is happy with their work. The choreography has been finalised and confirmed. Several dress rehearsals have taken place, and seem to be running without any calamities and we have our cues and timing down to a fine art. We’ve got this – time to put on the greatest performance this audience have ever seen.
POST-SHOW	Well, that was spectacular, and now we’re all bereft. When can we work together again? A positive audience reaction has wiped every negative memory of the experience from our minds. Seriously, what are you guys up to next week?

HOW TO BE A PROFESSIONAL PERFORMER

“Professionalism comes from what I've watched people do on the set. I'm just trying to be as respectful to the environment, as they have been.”

- Haley Joel Osment, Child Actor

By its very nature, all you need to do to be considered a professional performer is turn up, do your job and get paid right? Well, that may work for in most vocations, but there is more to being professional in the field of performance than matching a dictionary definition.

This chapter will not focus on advising how to get that elusive big break, or first job. That is a journey that differs for everybody, as do the results, and it isn't my place to say how you should or should not go about such a task. What I can advise upon, however, is how to conduct yourself afterwards, as that's where true professionalism becomes important.

Talent is obviously hugely important when seeking work as a performer – only a brave soul indeed would claim otherwise. Ultimately, however, it isn't enough – you will also need to be easy to work with. History is littered with gifted individuals with... shall we say, *creative temperaments*, and in an industry that's built around trust, an unreliable performer is frequently an unemployed performer. Sometimes it isn't necessarily the best that find their phones ringing off the hook, but those who are easiest to work with.

It's not difficult to be professional as a performer, and it should come naturally – just follow these commandments and you'll be fine...

- Turn up for rehearsals, and generally be where you'll say you'll be
- Be punctual, and warn in advance if circumstances dictate that you won't be
- Take direction and feedback on board – you can debate without an

argument by speaking clearly, passionately and returning to the conversation at a later point if necessary

- Be polite and pleasant to *everybody*, not just those above you in the pecking order
- Always perform to your highest ability, regardless of whether you are not in the mood
- Leave all drama on the stage, where it belongs

“I think you should take your job seriously, but not yourself. That is the best combination.”

- Dame Judi Dench, Actress

Case Study

Let's take a look at the career of Tom Cruise. Arguably the biggest movie star in the world for over three decades now, why is this? Sure, he boasts a fine bone structure, but there is no shortage of handsome leading men in Hollywood. Cruise is undoubtedly an excellent actor, but it's unlikely that he'll be spoken of in the same breath as the likes of Laurence Olivier and Katharine Hepburn years from now. Cruise is, however, often described as the consummate professional. Investigate any interviews with fellow performers or technicians who have worked with him, and you'll find nothing but tales of unwavering dedication to the project, and effortless respect and pleasantness to everybody involved with a production – from the director right down to the catering staff and janitors.

Meanwhile, contrast this with the careers of other performers who seemed destined to truly great things on the back of their talent but appeared to fall short of the prominence that looked likely. Obviously, I won't be naming names – you'll have to try harder than that to sue me, Hollywood lawyers! – but nobody wants to work with somebody they cannot rely upon. As performers we like to keep a little mystery about ourselves, but don't make the mistake of thinking that failing to arrive at the airport in time for a flight, or missing three rehearsals in a row without saying a word, qualifies as fascinating. It's just – well, it's just *unprofessional*.

This isn't to say that all life must go on hold in favour of career commitments. Nobody has ever lost a job worth having because they missed one rehearsal at short notice when their grandmother fell down the stairs or their cat had to be rushed to the vet, but it's only common courtesy to say something and inform your director and colleagues. **Good reputations are a lot like confidence - they can take quite some time to build, and can be almost impossible to restore once damaged.**

SUMMARY

Thank you very much for reading this book – I hope you’ve enjoyed it!

Everything should be clear, but just in case, here’s a summary table of what has been discussed in the form of an easily-digestible dos and don’ts that can apply to any performer, of any discipline.

See you on the stage!

Elli + Dora

ALWAYS...	NEVER...
Look straight at your audience; make eye contact, and smile	Turn your back on your audience, or stare at the floor while on-stage
React to mishaps with a smile and a laugh, clear your head, and move on	Dwell on a mistake and allow it to ruin the remainder of your performance
Trust your colleagues – and yourself – to work together to be the best	Try to do everything yourself in an ensemble show – you’re a team
Practice, practice, practice! There is always room for improvement	Consider yourself perfect – nobody is beyond reproach and learning
Take inspiration from performers of the past	Imitate performers of the past – take their influence and use it to innovate!
Embrace stage fright, and use it to your advantage – it shows you care	Allow stage fright to consume you, and prevent you from performing
Use musicality to master the art of timing – whether singing, dancing, acting or speaking, timing is everything	Ignore timing – your colleagues on stage will be relying on you to follow your cues
Move around on stage when not directly under the spotlight	Hog the spotlight! Everybody deserves an opportunity to shine
React to the performance of others, using facial reactions and gestures	Simply wait for your opportunity to speak or act again
Be polite, reliable and professional at all times	Be flaky – it will endear you to nobody, and cost you work
Keep on following your dreams	Give up – ever

