



5 THINGS ALL SINGERS MUST DO BEFORE PRESSING RECORD.

1. SONG CHOICE (OR A&R):

A&R is a term used in the music industry that stands for **'Artist and Repertoire'**. An A&R rep's job is to find songs and 'place them' with singers. **Finding the right song for a particular singer**, or the right singer for a particular song is an art unto itself. These days, every singer has to have a bit of A&R savvy about them when choosing material.

The first step is to consider **who you are as an artist**. You might call this your **'musical branding'**. Think about how you are different from other singers and what message you'd like to communicate. Often it can take as much time and creative energy choosing songs as it does singing them! **It's important to sing songs you love and that you can relate to.**

Remember; whatever you sing – you've gotta love it! When you're singing a song you love, the audience always knows and this makes it easier for you to express your feelings. **Choosing songs that are appropriate to your age and experience is important too.** No one wants to hear an 8 year old singing 'Wrecking Ball' by Miley Cyrus!

If you write your own songs, try to ensure that there is **something unique about your song so that it stands out amongst songs by other similar artists**. If you're not sure, get help! Find a **professional songwriter and ask if you can co-write with them**, or even if they would be willing to help you find that unique edge in the song you've written.

2. CREATE YOUR VOCAL ARRANGEMENT:

When the 'record' button has been pressed it's too late to decide **how to perform your song**. You need to know exactly what you're going to do BEFORE you do it! Some people like to think they can 'fluke' it – and whilst that CAN happen... (rarely) – no professional would ever rely on chance. This is what makes a professional, a professional.

PREPARE your performance by creating your vocal arrangement. Decide what areas of the song you will sing loudly, and what areas you will sing soft; what type of voice

will you use for the chorus as opposed to the verse – will it be ‘chest voice’ or ‘head voice’ etc. Create dynamics and try to use a variety of vocal tones or ‘timbre’. Also, avoid being overly dramatic.

It’s a good idea to **get a vocal coach to give you feedback on your vocal arrangement**. A great vocal coach knows the potential of your voice as well as its limitations. A great vocal coach will encourage you to showcase your strengths in a performance, and build on your limitations in practice. A good music producer can also help with this kind of feedback. He/she can give you clear and precise direction on your vocal arrangement in order to achieve the best performance in the Studio. **So listen up if your producer is talking to you.**

3. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE:

It’s too late to practice once you’ve pressed record; and no Music Producer wants to sit around while you do. In your practice time, sing the song with all the tones, inflections and dynamics again and again **until those elements become habits**. Practice until the difficult sections don’t require your focused attention, this way when you go **into the studio you can concentrate on the emotion of the performance and allow for the spontaneity of expression** to come through without knocking you off key or out of time. If you’re recording in a studio this is even more important; you don’t want to waste time and money paying for studio hire and having an ever increasingly grumpy engineer or producer watch the clock while you practice.

If you are recording at home this will ensure you **capture the best performance while you are still interested in the song** instead of taking months and months to get the perfect take after you’ve exhausted your inspiration, ending up with a sterile performance.

4. VOCAL WARM UPS:

Always warm your voice before a recording. Ideally, this should be done in the studio space for at least 10-15mins prior to you recording. This allows you to acclimate to the studio environment, and can also help you shake off some of the nerves you might be experiencing. Short of that, **do your warm up exercises between 1 hour and 30 minutes before you record**. On the way to the Studio you can keep your voice warm by gently humming some scale work or a nursery rhyme.

You should ensure your warm up includes exercises that; **wake up your lungs; lubricate your vocal chords; loosen your lips, jaw, face, neck and shoulders**. Include stretches and star jumps if you like.

Don't spend the first hour of recording time singing your song over and over again to warm up your voice. This can wear down the very part of your register you will soon be relying on to perform your song, and it can also kill some of the potential spontaneity you'll be looking for in a recording. Put simply, you'll be bored before you start!

Relaxing is important. Trying to sing with a tense neck and shoulders will usually result in a 'stiff' or strained sounding performance. **Breathe big long breaths, let go of your expectations, shake out all your doubts.** If you've done your practice and gone through your warm-ups, it's now time to consciously relax and trust in your preparation.

5. RECORDING PSYCHOLOGY:

This is a big one, can could probably take up several entire blogs... or books even! In fact, there are several excellent books written on performance psychology. Having said that, here are a couple simple tips that might help.

You might notice that when you record **you become aware of the power of your attention.** Some people focus on each and every sound they make, whereas some people just zone out. Your attention will wax and wane, and **part of the art of being a professional recording artist is the ability to manage your attention and focus.**

You need to get into a 'zone'. **This 'zone' is the place where your attention is perfectly balanced between 'relaxed' and 'focused'; aware – but not worried.**

One way to manage your attention is to **focus it on one point in the room.** Another might be to **imagine yourself performing to an audience of adoring fans** – and that might be the kind of performance the song needs. **Don't be afraid to get lost in the music.** Pretend that every take it is the first time you have ever sung the song. **When the record button is off, focus on relaxing and tune out your brain – unless your producer is giving you feedback.**

But... When the record button is hit, get into your 'zone', listen to the music and sing in that beautifully balanced place!

LIVE THE MUSIC,

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