

Sound and Fury

EVERY single person in an audience is important to a performer on stage, and, somehow, he's got to reach each one of them.

Why have I kicked off with this statement? I'll tell you. Because a lot of performers suffer from the mistaken idea that the most important people in an audience are seated in the first few expensive rows of the orchestra stalls. They're wrong—and how they're wrong!

Everyone in an audience is equally important, and a whole lot of times you find that the so-called unimportant people applaud louder than those sitting in the front stalls.

The moral of all this is that a performer has got to project himself and his songs to everyone out front, and, if you aim your voice to the last row of the theatre, you know you're gonna reach those in between. If there's a balcony and a gallery, you've got to make sure you reach the last rows of those too. Your greatest and most devoted fans may be in the back row of that gallery.



WHICH brings me to the point of a lesson I learned soon after I got going in show business.

I always try to find out as much as I can about the physical set-up of any place in which I'm to work, because every theatre, auditorium, or club, has different characteristics, acoustically and mechanically, that can affect a performer's sound.

Your voice can sound different in each place you sing.

This means your performance may have to be slightly varied from place to place—and the amount of projection required from you may have to differ each time.

I bet few of you have realised how important this is.

Too many singers make the mistake of thinking that with a mike just a couple of inches from the mouth, all they need to project is the distance from the mouth to the mike.

When they suffer from this kind of thinking, their performance suffers too, because they tend to sing to the mike instead of towards the audience.

Getting the "feel of a theatre" is absolutely vital, which is why the professional bit known as "band call" is so essential—that's when a performer turns up at the theatre before a show to check orchestrations, timing, lights, movement, microphones, and, above all, sound.

On occasions when I don't get the chance of a band call, my manager always gets as much advance information as possible on any theatre or hall in which I've never played before, so that we know exactly the amount of projection that will be required.

If you stand on the stage of an empty hall, your voice



can be heard at the back with comparatively little projection. But, as soon as you fill the hall with an audience, you have to project ten times harder, which is why it is essential for the amplification and microphone set-up in each place to be carefully checked before every performance. Even then, accidents can happen, as it did with The Searchers when they appeared on their first Ed Sullivan show in New York and the socket of the lead guitar came loose.

The studio audience and millions of TV viewers watching their performance, still thought the boys were great, but I know they nearly felt like crying after the show because they knew their sound had lost its lead guitar impact and could have been so much better. But that's the way things go sometimes—all of us in the business worry about our sound all the time, and we're entitled to.

We feel that the fans buy our discs, in the first place, because of our sound, and are consequently entitled to get the sound they expect from us, when they pay good money to see us in person.



A singer with just piano or single guitar accompaniment, can hear himself very clearly. But, add a driving beaty group, or a great big orchestra, and he is liable to find himself projecting a whole lot harder—even to be able to hear his own voice.

Have you ever tried singing in a dance hall without proper amplification? I wonder how many of you realise that the noise of shuffling feet on a dance floor can drown the sound of the singer—and the band—if they're not sufficiently amplified.

Of course every different place in which you perform is liable to have a different type mike, which means the tone of your voice is also liable to vary with each mike, which is why so many artists carry around their own sound equipment. But you can't do this everywhere, and have to adapt yourself and your voice to the circumstances you run into.

If an amplifier is a cheap one, and the amplifier's gain is turned up too much, you are likely to get a whistling feedback sound. A more powerful amplifier can give you great volume, which, in turn, governs how much voice you need to give.

Sometimes you can run into terrible trouble from theatre ventilation fans which have a great knack of whirring away noisily in the middle of ballads. It's always a good idea to get noisy ventilator fans switched off—at least during quiet numbers, otherwise bang goes your effect—and performance.

A lot of singers and groups don't bother to hump around their own complete sound systems wherever they play because then it involves such a lot of fiddling setting up at each place, with often, insufficient time to do so efficiently. But most of us do carry our own mikes which we connect to the public address system at wherever we happen to be working.

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USING a mike, I get closer on low or soft notes, but step back an inch or two for loud notes. Unless I'm using a travelling mike, that is, a microphone I can detach from the stand, I don't move more than a few inches from the mike because I know that if I do, I won't be heard, I also make certain to keep the mike down below my chin so that it doesn't cover my face.

I can't overstress how important it is to check your own voice on the loud speakers before the actual performance. If you don't hear it, you can't know how it is coming over, and are unable to regulate the volume or expression you need to put into a song.

I always ask for the volume to be high enough so I can hear my low notes perfectly. I have known some artists refuse to perform until they can hear plainly and distinctly every word they sing.

The important thing is not to listen to yourself at the mike, but to *listen to the loud speaker*.

Every note I sing is aimed at *someone* in the audience, even though I can't actually see them. This really helps. It makes the performance, and the song, more personal.

When I sing—when I have something to say with a song—I always *give* the song to my audience.

I never make them reach for it.