

Objectives: Students will be able to

- Express what it means to have “stage presence”
- Distinguish between the presence of a modern stage performer and an SCA bard
- Explain how preparation as a performer enhances power and presence in front of an audience
- Identify 2-3 areas of their own performance they wish to strengthen, and next steps to consider for each

Introduction: What is Stage Presence?

- Confidence – communicates to an audience that they are in good hands, conveys power and warmth
- Engagement – connection with the audience, and including them in the experience
- Enjoyment – enjoying your own performance is contagious to the audience
- Authenticity and vulnerability – performance is powerful when it feels real; bring yourself to the work
- Inspiration – know and share what inspires you, be open to inspiring others (your “authentic best self”)
- Uniqueness – know what it is that makes you distinct, and lean into it
- Larger than life / intimate – Taking up just the right amount of space

Stage Presence for a Bard

- It’s right there in the name: be fully present, with your audience, and the emotions you are conveying
- There is no fourth wall in bardic; this is an intimate experience
- Your audience is your community; relate to them that way
- How you present yourself (your garb, your stance, your voice) creates impact
- Expressing your personality and your persona in performance
- Preparing the proper introduction and dismount for a piece
- Recognize how much space each venue and piece calls for
- This is a process, not a fixed point. There are safe places for you to perform as you develop your confidence and your presence. Valuable for all bards trying out new skills, no matter how seasoned

Presence as a Function of Preparation

- Confidence comes from competence – when you know what you’re doing, you can focus on the audience
 - Powerful performances happen *inside your comfort zone*
 - To create powerful performances at a more challenging skill level, you have to *expand your comfort zone*
 - Develop short, medium, and long term goals and plans
 - Deliberate practice – conscious, intense, mindful practicing of specific skills to improve them
 - Rehearse until your performance is a part of you
 - Identify your discomfort and prepare through it
 - Take breaks and time away to avoid burnout
- Balancing relaxation and excitement
 - A certain amount of nervous excitement can fuel your performance
 - Bring yourself into a state of relaxed comfort before you greet your audience
 - Doing this requires that you practice self-care when preparing and when performing
 - Eat well, hydrate regularly, practice breathing
 - **DO NOT FORGET TO HAVE WATER WITH YOU WHEN YOU ARE PERFORMING!**

- Physical and oral presence
 - Plant your feet and claim your space
 - Project your voice using your body
 - Move deliberately (which can be an on-the-spot choice), in the manner of your persona
 - Choose where and when to focus on which sections or individuals in the audience
- Use the audience – clapping, call and response, joining you for the chorus
- Business – using props, making jokes, picking up or putting down instruments, introducing other performers
- The enemy of stage presence is *choking*
 - Mastery and excellence involve taking key parts of a performance and burning them into your muscle memory until they run somewhat unconsciously
 - Choking is what happens when you engage your conscious thought into a muscle memory process, and suddenly it becomes much more effortful
 - Stage fright is often a generalized fear of choking
 - When you identify a choke point, develop a plan for working through it, especially in front of critical audiences (step by step, gradually, with the help of friends and mentors)
- Handling flubs without apologizing
 - It is okay to make mistakes; it is *not okay* to make the audience worry for you
 - You are carrying the audience with you on this journey; they want you to succeed
 - Being authentic and vulnerable is a conscious choice to make at key points in a performance; dropping your persona and being apologetic is *not* a conscious choice, but a fear reaction
 - If you share your negative feelings about performing with them, you're making them responsible for your happiness
 - Experienced SCA performers will be *more impressed* by how you recover from a flub
- Stage performance
 - Prepare your set list
 - Time your pieces
 - Think through your transitions
 - Be prepared to drop or add a piece depending on the time
- Not being "on" all the time
 - Saving your energy for when you're performing
 - Being approachable, warm, and present when you're not performing
 - Being attentive and supportive of other performers at different stages of their growth
 - Knowing when you're not in the right headspace to be around performers

Identifying Areas of Focus

- Competence – expanding your comfort zone, intensity, level of difficulty, control, effortlessness
- Vocal technique – breathing, projection, enunciation, pitch, tempo
- Body technique – stance, agility, endurance (how long can you perform before fatigue sets in?)
- Being comfortable with an instrument
- Collaborating with other performers
- Seeking out feedback
- Recording your performance and reviewing it critically

Next Steps in Your Journey

- What is your persona, and how does it express your personality?
- How can your persona and personality create a memorable performance?
- What do you want to make your core strengths as a performer? What can you do to build on those?
- What are some flexes that will impress an audience, build on your core strengths, and make you feel good? What is your timeline for developing those?
- Reach out to performers you respect and see if they'll geek out with you about performing
- Find or engage with your mentor, and make sure your mentor is open to you learning from other people
- Learn how to psych yourself *up* with positive self-talk (fake it til you make it, as long as you're prepared!)

Additional Resources

(AKA, tell the students I googled "Develop Stage Presence" without telling them I...oh, shoot. Nevertheless, I did find some helpful pointers in some of these articles and listicles that helped me round out the ideas for this class.)

- 13 Stage Presence Rules that Capture & Enrapture Your Audience (LedgerNote) <https://ledgernote.com/columns/gigs-live-performance/stage-presence/>
- Stage Presence: What it means, why it matters, and how to improve it (KD Conservatory) <https://kdstudio.com/stage-presence-what-it-means-why-it-matters-and-how-to-improve-it>
- How to Develop Your Stage Presence (String Ovation) <https://www.connollymusic.com/stringovation/develop-stage-presence>
- 10 Tips that will Significantly Improve Your Stage Presence (Musician Port) <https://musicianport.com/stage-presence-tips/>
- A guide to cultivating charisma and projecting clear confidence on stage (Speakerhub) <https://speakerhub.com/skillcamp/guide-cultivating-charisma-and-projecting-clear-confidence-stage>

A tiny, very incomplete sampling of bards worth watching or learning from, who model stage presence:

- Marian of Heatherdale (Ealdormere) <https://heatherdale.com>
- John Lyttleton (Trimaris, teaches master classes on performance and stage presence at events)
- Efenwealt Wystle (Atlantia) <https://camelot-treasures.com/efenwealt/>
- John Inchingham (Midrealm) <https://tilted-windmill.com/midbards/bards.html#34>
- Kenneth MacQuarrie and Adelaide de Beaumont (Ansteorra) <https://www.ravenboymusic.com/>
- Aneleda Falconbridge (East) <https://mbouchard.com/aneleda/>

You can find more of my musings at <https://drakethebard.com>

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