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Technology

GEAR | Putting Singers in Control Of Their Sound

March 26th, 2009 | by Greg Barker

My 5 Essentials –with Kim Chandler

I'm a freelance session vocalist doing various styles of live performance and studio singing on a regular basis. Today I'll focus on a live "feature" gig at an intimate jazz venue. It's at this sort of gig that I would generally need to bring my own gear (whereas at corporate events it's generally provided).

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1. Shure SM58 Beta Microphone.

This is a robust, timeless "classic" live mic that happens to suit my voice. I've had my SM58 so long that I actually don't remember when I bought it! There are still times when I don't use my own mic, for example, when there is an in-house PA at the venue. However, because a mic is so portable and 58s come in a nice, soft, easy-to-carry case, there's no excuse to not bring it to a gig just in case. For me, there's also the issue of hygiene. Mics are great carriers of germs and so I like to use my own mic where possible. I have my mic so close to my mouth when I sing that it's full of lipstick and I joke that I'd almost be able to apply my lipstick with it – it's not a good look when it accidentally touches my nose though ("Rudolph, the red nose reindeer...")!

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2. A Mic Lead (...and a spare just in case).

My guitarist husband actually required me to be able to roll mic leads up properly (the alternating "figure 8" method) before he'd marry me – how's that for a pre-nup condition?! How long should these leads be? Not too long, otherwise there's too much left over clogging up the stage unnecessarily, and not too short which can feel even more frustrating to sing with.

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3. Egg/Tambourine Hand Percussion.

It's quite rare that bands can afford to have a dedicated percussionist, so it's very useful when a singer can add percussion to the band – it's a real enhancement to the overall effect (competently played). A small amount of hand percussion is affordable and portable so there's really no excuse not to have it. People do tend to underestimate how difficult it is to play percussion instruments well, especially if you're trying to sing at the same time (you can see me doing percussion and backing vocals on Sky One's top-rating primetime show Don't Forget The Lyrics).

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4. Charts for the Band.

The best charts are those which are affordable, accurately written and easy to read. This is an area where it's particularly useful for singers to be as musically educated as the instrumentalists in their band. If you can't read and understand written music, both chord charts and "dots" (i.e. full-blown notation), then you're not going to know good charts from bad ones.



5. A MiniDisc Recorder

I recommend that people record their gigs in order to perform a ‘post mortem’ afterwards. I use a good ol’ portable MiniDisc recorder – a Sony MZ-N1. The post-morteming process is done by professionals to check the “warts and all” versions of their performances and to learn from them. Many people are shocked when they first hear themselves recorded because it often doesn’t tally with their impression of how they sound, resulting in the standard “That’s not me!” reaction. It’s the sonic version of “a picture paints a thousand words”. However, live recordings can teach you so much if you can endure listening to them. I’m not supposed to mention a sixth item, but I will anyways: a digital camera to capture those special live performance moments for posterity!

Useful Links

[Kim Chandler](#)

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