

The Ultimate Guide to Singing

Gigs, Sound, Money & Health

*Contributions from over 100 Singing Stars,
Producers, Engineers, Coaches, Doctors, Agents,
Managers and Social Media Gurus*



with Gregory A. Barker and Kathy Alexander



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94 The number of Grammy Awards and Grammy nominations received...

193 The number of books...

1,772 The number of albums...

280,000,000 The number of YouTube views...

...by the contributors to this book.

Contents

What We Discovered.....	1
Acknowledgements	3
Getting Gigs	5
1. Getting Gigs 101.....	7
<i>Out of the house and onto the stage.</i>	
2. Getting Gigs 201.....	31
<i>More people, more recognition and—maybe—more money.</i>	
3. Promo and Web Tools.....	53
<i>Use them, own them and unleash the power of your fans.</i>	
4. Take Charge of Your Performance.....	75
<i>Be wickedly cool.</i>	
ENGAGE	98
Mastering Your Gear	101
5. Your Mic.....	103
<i>Find it, own it, love it, trust it.</i>	
6. Sound System Basics.....	123
<i>It's time to "friend" your PA.</i>	
7. Your Live Effects.....	145
<i>Create your signature sound.</i>	
8. Recording Your Voice.....	163
<i>Create magic that will last.</i>	
9. Looping.....	191
<i>Transform your performance.</i>	
LISTEN	201
Technique, Health and Relationships	205
10. Technique in the Trenches.....	207
<i>A voice that's as hard as steel and soft as silk.</i>	

11. Staying Healthy.....	235
<i>Help, my voice is sinking!</i>	
12. The Unforgettable Vocal Connection.....	259
<i>Be remembered after the show.</i>	
13. When You're Losing It.....	277
<i>Because every sane person wants to kill themselves at least once.</i>	
ENRICH	295
Money & Markets	299
14. Making Money in Live Gigs.....	301
<i>Because you need some.</i>	
15. Boost Your Earning Power.....	313
<i>Because you need more.</i>	
16. Markets for Your Voice.....	335
<i>Find your vocation.</i>	
17. Breaking Out.....	351
<i>Find your new vocation around the next corner.</i>	
18. Develop Your Intellectual Capital.....	367
<i>Your uniqueness sets you apart.</i>	
AIM	385
Contributors.....	389
Permissions.....	401
Find the Help You Need.....	409

What We Discovered

We bought—and read—most of the major books available for singers today. In fact, my shelves are sagging under their weight. Two factors quickly jumped out at us:

- Some of these books are excellent (so we asked those authors to contribute to this book!).
- All of these books face huge limitations. (Can you expect a voice researcher to offer guidance on using a sound system?)

We thought: wouldn't it be great to have a book where an ear, nose & throat specialist reveals how a singer can best cope with the flu—and a microphone manufacturer gives guidance on choosing a mic? What about Grammy award winning sound engineer discussing how to get the best vocal recordings at home, a social media guru on how to grow a Facebook page and a voice scientist on healthy vocal technique? Thus, this book was conceived.

Full stop. Who's the "we" that conceived? TC-Helicon. For years they have pursued single-mindedly the mission to bring singers creative control over their sound. This has led to building relationships with more contemporary vocalists than any other company in the world. So, you'll understand my excitement when they asked me to partner with them on this project; they had the resources and connections to produce a truly extraordinary book.

Just to make sure we were on the right track, we polled one thousand rock, heavy metal, R & B, pop and jazz singers from all over the world. What they revealed to us about their struggles and dreams are pivotal to what we decided to address—and you can see the actual results of this survey in every chapter.

Two features we all love in "how-to" books are concrete actions and "frequently asked questions" (especially when these are real). So, we organized our entire work around Actions and FAQs—and ensured that each one was brief, relevant and to the point.

You'll see that the "author" of some pieces is "The Ultimate Team"; these are a group of TC-Helicon employees working in fields as diverse as technological development and artist relations who are in close contact with each other. You can read more about this group in the Acknowledgements.

Nearly every piece we gathered was written FRESH for this book (an exception being the quote in FAQ 4 of Chapter 1—and you'll soon see why we did that). We were blown away by the eminence, professionalism and quality of each contributor—and think you will be too.

How to Read This

You can read this book straight through or choose a chapter that interests you.

We've laid it out so that the content follows a singer's life from getting gigs (Section 1) to working with gear at those gigs and at home (Section 2), to improving technique, health and relationships (section 3) and, finally, by looking at money matters and markets for one's voice (section 4). After each section you'll find an essay that summarizes all of the wisdom shared, relating it to a single, powerful word.

Or, just choose a topic you want to work on: vocal health, looping or how to handle money at live gigs—there are 18 focus areas, covering all of the challenges facing today's singers.

Now, I'm looking over at that huge stack of books for singers on my sagging shelf and feeling just a little jealous of you. After all, you now hold a world of insights from singers, doctors, media consultants, coaches, producers and sound engineers—and it fits in your hand.

*—Gregory A. Barker Editor, with Kathy Alexander,
The Ultimate Guide for Singing: Gigs, Sound, Money and Health*

Acknowledgements

At the heart of this book are the insights of 135 of big-hearted industry professionals and specialists who care deeply about the challenges facing vocalists. The best way to thank them is to point you to their Bios in the final pages of this book. You'll see how their insights emerge from years of valuable experience.

But I'd like to take you behind the scenes. This book is the result of three and a half years of glorious arguments. Anyone can have a fight, bruise some egos and walk away. What made these arguments special were that a team of gifted people haggled, fought, laughed, tweaked, fought some more, had another coffee—and didn't get up from the table until something incredible had emerged.

This could have never happened without the vision (and patience) of TC-Helicon and their generosity in sharing industry contacts built over many years. In particular, Kevin Alexander, CEO, championed this project, offering the rare kind of wit and grace that put "glorious" into all of the fights.

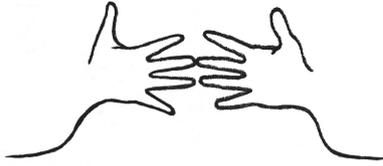
This project was also made possible by a team whose knowledge spans from singing in pubs and stadiums to designing the latest technology for singers. Tom Lang is a phenomenally gifted singer-songwriter who is also the consummate communicator of leading edge technology. We simply couldn't have addressed vocal effects and looping without him. But we had so many areas to address, even after consulting 135 experts, that we needed a team to check details, fill in blanks and tweak text: a heartfelt thanks to TC-Helicon staff David Hilderman, Laura Clapp Davidson and Craig Fraser. Joey Elkins offered important advice when we first outlined the project and Jes Vang and Tobias Weltzer made invaluable connections to accomplished contributors with something to say. Thanks too to Carri-Lynne Eldergill for making connections to artists. We appreciate the careful work of Christopher Ashton and Aled Thomas in looking over (and over!) the manuscript before publication.

There is one person who fought beyond all others for this book to be rooted in relevance and depth: my co-editor, Kathy Alexander. Kathy spoke with leading professionals all over the world, transformed complicated ideas into compelling text, and tirelessly presented strategies to make this book even better—even after we *thought* we were done. She also spent hours pouring over one thousand survey responses, ensuring that each chapter stayed on track with addressing

4 *The Ultimate Guide to Singing*

what singers most want to know. This book is at the heart of her vision for singers and her personal stamp on its contents is a major reason why it turned out so well.

—G.A.B.



Getting Gigs

CHAPTER 1



Getting Gigs 101

Out of the house and onto the stage.

*“Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.”*

—Goethe

*“I still keep asking myself—why am I doing this music?
And the answer still comes loud and clear: ‘because I want
to hear it!’ That’s a way better answer for me than
‘because I want a contract with Sony.’”*

—Judge Smith, founder member of
Van Der Graaf Generator

Getting Gigs 101

Out of the house and onto the stage.

Actions:

1. Pursue What You Love

2. Prepare Your Product

3. Rehearse the Smart Way

4. Make Performance Connections

5. Take Almost Any Chance to Sing

6. Prepare Promo Materials

7. Practice Good Gigging Etiquette

8. Have a Plan for Your First Fan

Frequently Asked Questions:

- » *How can I get money out of this and how much should I charge?*
- » *How do I know if a song is right for me?*
- » *How can I stop listening to that inner voice of doubt?*
- » *Can you tell me the most important secret to a successful singing career?*
- » *My rehearsal time seems frustrating, a waste of time. Help.*
- » *There's a venue I want to sing at, but I'm not getting responses to my emails and phone calls, should I just give up?*
- » *Is it OK to perform with karaoke tracks?*
- » *What songs should I sing?*
- » *Can too much rehearsal kill the passion?*
- » *How do I find musicians to back me?*
- » *What's the most important stuff to bring with me to my first gig?*
- » *People aren't responding to my singing—what do I do?*
- » *Crisis: I can't make a cold call ... help!*
- » *My gig flopped. I want to die.*
- » *Can I improve my musical abilities without going to college or university?*
- » *A band that needs a singer just asked me to audition—what do I do?*
- » *I just don't know where to look when I sing! Nothing feels comfortable!*

Action 1: Pursue What You Love

Look in your life for the passions that are already there—and we aren't only talking about music.

When the day comes that you need an arena to hold all your fans, you'll be standing on that stage because of one reason only: you were courageous enough to remain true to yourself during those years that nobody knew your name. Flash back to today. Your goal as a performer isn't to please everyone (that's impossible), but to present yourself in a crystal clear way so those who are like you can recognize the connection.

A gig is a one-way conversation; it's like posting a Facebook status—you have to put it out there and see if there are any "likes." Hopefully, you will be making a unique statement that allows people to give you a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down. In a live setting, that response is known as applause. When people who have similar values see you pursuing your passion they will "like" you—and even help you go viral. Why? Because they think you're like them. We love people who have similar values to us. Don't worry if it seems there are just a few new fans at each gig. Believers have more energy than non-believers.

If you were a new client of mine I would ask, "What music do you really like?" If you gave me some bland answer such as, "Well, I like all kinds of music ..." I would say that's bullshit because you don't pay for much of what you download—so there's no emotional connection. I want to know the music you actually pull your wallet out for. This is the music you should be singing. You'll be asking your fans to put down their own cash for your music—so make sure it's stuff you'd pay for yourself.

Making sure you clearly represent yourself applies to other things too. Your clothes, your hairstyle and your general appearance are a billboard for your values. Think back to your early teen years when your parents would want you to wear certain clothes and not wear other clothes. I bet you had a line that they couldn't cross—a line that you'd fight back on. That line is YOU, your statement. So, make sure that your songs (whether they are originals or covers), your clothes, your appearance and your style represents what you're truly passionate about.

—Mark Baxter: acclaimed vocal coach with Aerosmith, Journey, Goo Goo Dolls and many others

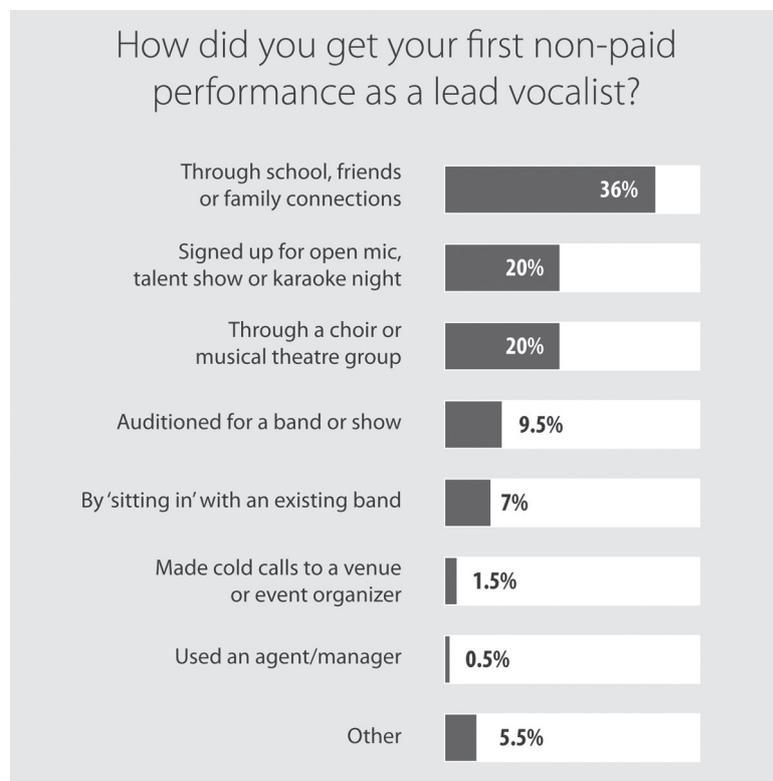
Action 2: Prepare Your Product

*Every singer needs a song to sing.
We'll show you how to choose the right tunes for you.*

Work out where your true passion lies and your unique selling point.

What is it you do better than other singers/performers? My advice is to lengthen your long rope—make the most of those talents you have in abundance rather than trying to be good at absolutely everything. If you have an extraordinary vocal ability, show it. Sing songs in which you can show off your vocal athleticism. If you have a talent to connect to text and engage your listeners emotionally, sing repertoire that allows for this. If you have charisma and energy and are fit and good-looking, the more commercial market might suit you.

Your choice of songs is vital. If you choose to sing covers rather than write your own material, work out which songs you really care about. Look at the text and establish whether you can relate to the song emotionally and in terms of your own experience. There are so many thousands of songs, there is no point in singing something you do not resonate with.



—from the 2012-2013 TC-Helicon survey of 1,000 singers

A great song does not necessarily have to be technically difficult. It is important to choose songs that you can sing successfully given your vocal ability at any given time. This means your songs should be in the right key for your voice and the rhythmic and harmonic complexity should be manageable.

It is a good idea to think carefully about your program/sets. You may want to start the evening with some up-tempo songs to get the audience going then sing some ballads that allow the audience to connect to you as a person. Use YouTube to explore songs and other artists and, if you write your own material, play this to your friends and ask them which songs are their favorites. Time will tell you which of your songs will last, and which ones seemed like a good idea at the time but are not really that interesting. Your songwriting craftsmanship will take years to develop, practice and perfect.

You go to two performances. The first features a singer who is technically exquisite, but demonstrates little emotion. The second has a singer who doesn't demonstrate great control, but makes something move inside you. Which would you go back to see?

—**Simone Niles:** leading vocal performance coach, author and singer

Here are a few warnings: your audience will not want to see a victim on stage. Vulnerability and honesty, yes, but not endless negativity. They want to see a person who faces challenges and makes an emotional journey. Emotional repetition is boring. Beware of using songs as a cathartic experience only for yourself. You are singing for your audience. It may feel good to wallow in your own negative experiences but once you lose the audience, it is difficult to win them back.

Many famous artists present their concert to a small circle of friends and invited guests before embarking on a major tour. This is an excellent idea and one that I highly recommend. Accept constructive criticism and know what you stand for.

—*Leontine Hass: Artistic Director and founder of London's Associated Studios*

Action 3: Rehearse the Smart Way

A “bits and pieces” approach to practicing will strengthen your memory and improve your recall.

We have been learning so much recently in the field of voice science about effective practice. In fact, several time-honored ideas have now been turned on their heads.

The first thing we have learned is that it is better to distribute your practice time throughout the day rather than do it all in one chunk. In the old days you might have spent two hours working on a chromatic scale without a break. Now, we know it is better to practice 15 minutes here and

30 minutes there and then to put it aside for a few hours before taking it up again. This distribution of practice time has two benefits: first, your voice does not get fatigued and, second, it creates more recall of the motor patterns—this means your “music memory” will improve.

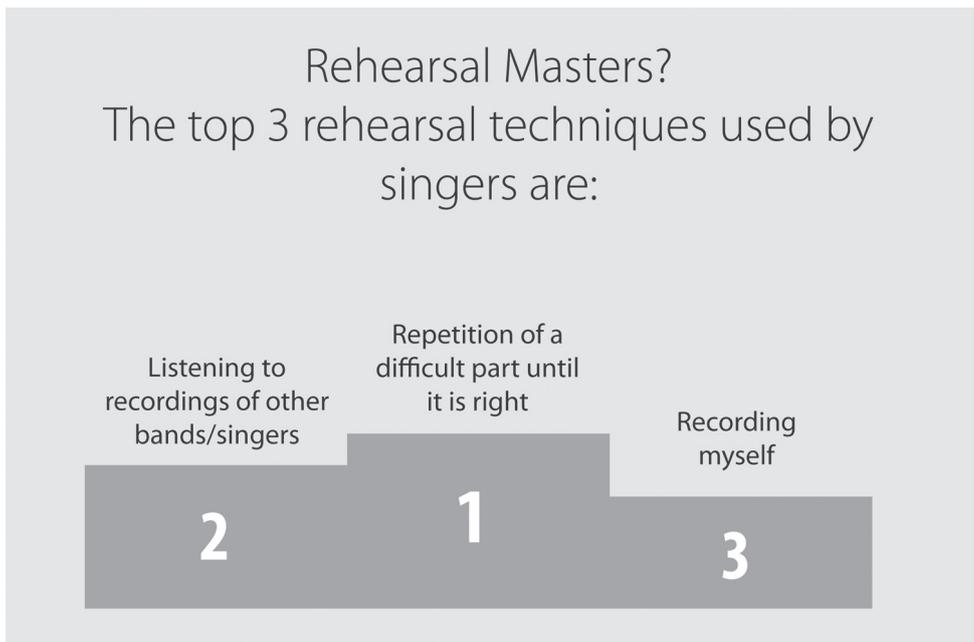
So, if I am going to give a performance at night, I’ll begin in the morning with a light, 15-minute warm-up. Then I will do something completely different—have breakfast, read, work on a paper, etc. I will have another warm up around noon and one later on before my performance.

As for all rhythmic training the metronome is your best friend (and sometimes, your worst enemy!)
—Daniel Zangger Borch, PhD: one of Sweden’s most established vocal coaches, Head of the Voice Centre

The next thing we’ve learned is that it is far better to practice songs, parts of songs, and exercises in random order than in the same order. So, instead of running through each song from beginning to end, you start at the end of the song—and just forget the intro. Then, you may work on a passage from the middle of a song and then on the intro. Short vocal exercises in

between the songs are also helpful. This “bits and pieces” approach to practicing is yet another way to strengthen your memory and improve your recall.

Finally, we have learned that it is great to practice with interference. In the standard model you ran through things several times in a row until your singing teacher said “well done.” Then you might step on stage and blow it! The problem with the stage is you don’t get to try your song five times. Why might singers blow it after so much practice? Because of interference: the curtain,



—from the 2012-2013 TC-Helicon survey of 1,000 singers

strange equipment, noise from the audience—all kinds of sights, sounds and interruptions that weren't present in the rehearsal room. You need to bring this interference into your practice. If you are rehearsing and the phone rings, keep singing. If you are in the middle of a song and someone knocks on the door, resist your temptation to stop and keep singing as you open the door. Keep going and don't let the interference stop you. This is excellent preparation for live performance.

—Ingo R. Titze, PhD: one of the world's leading voice scientists and Executive Director of the National Center for Voice and Speech

Action 4: Make Performance Connections

From bulletin boards in guitar shops to your vocal coach—find performance opportunities you may have never considered.

Recently, one of my students sang at an open mic night at a club in Hollywood. She was asked back several times by the venue and, after the fourth time, they asked her to do her own show—cover charge and all. You can find open mic nights at clubs, coffee houses and even guitar shops in many cities. All you have to do is sign up. Singing at an open mic is a great way to get experience, get heard and get to know a venue owner.

If I had to do my career over, the one thing I would do differently is to wake up every day that I didn't have a gig, and make it my job, 10 hours a day, to find my next contact. You ask someone, "Where can I find opportunities to sing?" If one person doesn't know, they will connect you to someone else—and it goes from there. Even once you've got your website, demo, headshots and resume ready, you must still be willing to put in 100 percent to finding performance opportunities.

I tell my students to look for every possible opportunity to sing. Sports events need someone to sing the anthem. Workplaces need music at their staff parties. Singers are needed for weddings and funerals, and the pay is usually good for these. Singing at a religious ceremony introduces you as a singer to a whole community of people, and one of them may connect you to your next performance opportunity.

Don't forget that taking a class or joining a choir are great ways to make connections. Here in LA, singers can make valuable connections to agents and contractors who come as guests to vocal workshops and sight-singing classes. By joining a choir, you'll make valuable connections with singers and music supporters in your community.

By getting involved in your local music scene not only will you gain experience through "paying your dues," but you will also be getting your personality out there, so people know what you are like to work with. Most people I know who are looking for a singer would be more likely to book