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My Newfound Respect for the Hard Work Performers do Before Stepping on Stage

By Heather Gibson
UCF Forum columnist
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When I gave the Theatre UCF students 30 days to teach me how to perform a karaoke song, I didn't realize I was also handing over my dignity.

In retrospect, it was a ridiculous idea, but I have no one to blame for it except myself.

I thought it would make a neat publicity project for the School of Performing Arts: In our audition process, all students are required to sing, even if they aren't in the musical theatre program. Substituting a karaoke experience for an audition, I thought we could make a video documenting the process of how a non-singer prepares herself for an audition. Thinking it wouldn't be that hard, I volunteered myself as the subject and put out the call for help.

For the record, I am not a singer. I am not a dancer. I am not an actor. I did play the viola for 12 years, so one could say I have some performance background, but playing in an orchestra isn't relevant to singing karaoke by anyone's standards. I once auditioned for my high school musical, but was kindly told that as the only violist in the school, they instead needed me to play in the orchestra pit. The actual reason was most likely that I had zero performance ability.

So why I thought that one month would be enough time for me to gather the skills needed to perform on a stage is beyond me. This has been much more challenging than I had anticipated.

On day one, I found myself in a studio with three students, a musical theatre faculty member, and a camera in my face, ha-ha-ha'ing and mi-mi-mi'ing up and down the scales for about 15 minutes while they tested my vocal range. (For those keeping score,

my range is a little more than two octaves, D#3 to F#5, meaning I can't sing either high or low.)

Then they unceremoniously plopped me on a stool, handed me a mike, and made me belt "Living on a Prayer" by Bon Jovi.

The decision was unanimous: That would not be my song. We tested a few others (man, it was hot in that room!) and found one that suited me better. Lesson one: Choose a simple song that falls in your range.

A week later, I was dragged into the hallway to practice sassy walks to help me connect to the characters in the song. I slinked like a jazz singer, bounced like a country western star, strutted like P!nk. Well, my student instructor walked like those things. I walked like I had a pebble in my boot and my hip was out of joint. Lesson two: Putting one foot directly in front of the other can give you swagger...or make you look like you had one too many margaritas. Proceed with caution.

Last week, I was instructed on how to greet my adoring audience and when to add some small dance moves to my performance. The audience loving me, I was told, is not about how well I sing, but about how confident I am in my performance. It was suggested that I might need to loosen up a little bit and practice my moves a lot. Lesson three: Use fewer, more dramatic moves for greater effect and less confusion.

Next on the agenda is "proper use of microphones," followed by a visit to the costume shop. And in the meantime, I'm singing my heart out twice a day during my commute. (Go ahead, pity my 2-year-old carpooler.)

All this for a three-minute performance...and a newfound respect for the hard work our performers do before they ever put foot on a stage.

This stuff is not easy, and boy, oh, boy, I am not looking forward to seeing this video.

(For anyone who wishes to have a good laugh at my expense, the video and clips of the karaoke performance will be released in mid-March at performingarts.cah.ucf.edu.)

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