

Real Talk

Dear Angela: I know speaking to audiences from the stage is important, but I hate it. I always feel stiff and awkward. What can I do to improve?

BY Angela Myles Beeching



First, you're not alone—and the good news is you *can* turn this around. Here's how:
There are two aspects to speaking well from the stage: your **content** and your **delivery**. But everything rides on your *intention*.

So focus on the actual goal: to invite your audience *inside* the musical experience. Help them make personally relevant connections with the works you present.

And that discomfort you feel? It's all about the fear of being judged—worry over how you're being perceived.

The cure? Stop focusing on yourself. You want to come at this from a place of generosity and love. Love for the music, for performing, and for your listeners.

Your open-hearted enthusiasm is the most crucial ingredient.

In terms of **content**, many musicians focus on delivering information. Big mistake.

We “hide” behind facts about the composer or technical aspects of the music. This only distances us from our audience. And it comes from a place of ego and fear—of trying to prove oneself worthy.

So instead of focusing on information, get personal. Think through your relationship with the work anew.

Try this: imagine you're introducing the work to a favorite relative. Your Aunt, a non-musician who doesn't know the piece. Without getting technical, introduce it to her using your most human entry points, such as:

“I first encountered this piece when I was a kid. It's a memory that still flashes in my mind . . .”

Or:

“I was thinking about how I'd introduce this work to you and decided to come clean—it's a piece I've had a kind of love/hate relationship with. It's not just that it's fiendishly difficult. It's also haunted me ever since . . .”

Or:

“There's a bizarre story—a bit of a scandal actually—connected with the writing of this piece. And this has influenced—for better or for worse—how I think about and perform it . . .”

Prompts like these can help pique your audience's curiosity about the piece through your experience. This can create a rapport—the sense that you're in conversation together.

Find your own entry points, but make sure they ride on your fascination with and emotional connection to the music. Think about what still fascinates or intrigues you in the piece.

And in terms of your **delivery**, once you've got a plan for what to say, write it out. Read it out loud and record yourself to make sure it doesn't sound “lecture-y.”

Practice speaking standing up; imagine the audience and project your voice to the back of the hall.

Videotape yourself, review it, and get feedback from others. Practice enough so that you're no longer trying to recall the words and instead you're fully at ease with your remarks—as though you're telling a story over dinner to your favorite aunt.

Angela Myles Beeching is a career consultant and the author of Beyond Talent: Creating a Successful Career in Music. Angela works with individuals, ensembles, and organizations to facilitate positive change.