



# How to Handle Musical Mistakes With Grace

Everything's going great, the music's flowing through you, the audience is enthralled, and then "Argh!" You played a wrong note...

What do you do in that moment? How do you handle the mistake with grace and recover in the best possible way?

**The secret lies in *preparing* for the unexpected...**

## 1. Prepare your *music*

This is what most of us think of when we're getting ready to perform. Preparing the music itself is of course very important. But as far as mistakes on stage go, one wrong-note-moment can throw you off track and seem to blank out hundreds of hours in the practice room.

So how to be ready for when the performance goes wrong?

## 2. Prepare your *mind*

### - Flip your perspective -

In our own memories our mistakes tend to loom large but in the overall scheme of a musical performance from the audience's perspective they are just momentary blips - easily forgiven, easily forgotten.

Keeping this in mind while performing will help us to turn our attention back to what really matters: the musical performance as a whole.

### - Remember it's only natural -

Mistakes are part of what makes your performance human, organic and unique - and it's no lie to say that audiences often enjoy, appreciate and remember performances more when they had a few rough edges to keep them interesting.

## 3. Prepare your *skills*

**The best skills for dealing with a mistake in performance are *not* the same as what we need in the practice room.**

To navigate this more "high-stakes" territory, we need...



## - A Trusty Map -

One of the greatest fears we have of mistakes is the terror of being knocked completely off course. But if you have a clear map of where you're going, it's much easier to hop back on course. And your most powerful map-making tool is "audiation".

**Audiation** is imagining the music in your head. By practicing audiating the music we are going to perform, we build a clear mental image of the notes and how we're going to play them and in what order. We also build up the mental concentration that will enhance our performance and our own enjoyment of what we're doing.

So when you have this mental map and a mistake happens, it's much easier to get back on track since you have such a clear picture of where you are and where you're going.

Even if you're performing with written music, having a clear mental picture of the music to rely on can be a lifesaver when your eyes lose track.

## - Off-roading Skills -

So now that mistake has knocked you off your route, and you have a good picture of where you want to hop back on. But how do you get from here to there?

**Improvisation** means spontaneous composition and even if you're performing a pre-composed piece of music, improvisation provides crucial "off-roading" skills that will keep your performance moving forward until you make it back to the planned path.

Even if improv is not your "thing", it doesn't take much to prepare your emergency 4-wheel drive:

- **Practice improvising with the scales, chord tones, and rhythms in the piece.** Simply knowing your way around the predominant musical structures of the song will help you create a good-sounding "detour" should you find yourself off course.
- **Practice improvising with the piece you plan to perform.** If you're trying to prepare improv skills for the performance situation, why practice anything else? Improvising *around* the music you plan on playing will not only prepare you for possible "surprises" in performance, you will also deepen your understanding and your feeling for the music you love. So mess around with the piece on purpose and see what comes of it - the rewards of creativity and inspiration will not be lost on your audience!