

How to Keep Your Music from Ruining Your Performance

By: Keith Watson

As a past competitor in both the AJA and IJA I know just how much pressure there is in a competition. It doesn't matter how many hours you perform in front of an audience, competitions are different.

You have practiced months and spent countless hours on every detail of your tricks, transitions and costuming.

You have only minutes to impress the judges and audience. A drop rattles your focus and you pray that it won't throw off the rest of your performance.

A music miss-queue can throw off your routine just as much as a drop.

Wouldn't it be great if there were a list of the common music pitfalls so that you could avoid them?

I'm one of the people who runs sound for the AJA competitions and have compiled the following list of common music problems:

1. Provide your music as an MP3 or WAV file on a FAT32 formatted USB thumb drive, as an MP3 or WAV file on a data CD, or on a music CD.

We use a Windows laptop to play the music. If the music is an MP3 or WAV file we copy it from the USB drive or data CD and add it to the queue. If you provide a music CD we rip the track to a WAV file and add it to the queue.

It is safer to bring your music on a thumb drive as they are less likely to be damaged in transit. If a CD is scratched we may not be able to read the files or rip it.

If your thumb drive is not formatted FAT32, we probably won't be able to read it.

You should also consider bringing two copies of your music, one on a USB thumb drive and one on a CD data disk. That way if you lose one or it gets damaged you still have music for your performance.

2. Don't ask us to play your music from your phone or MP3 player.

This is the most common cause of music miss-queues. You may think your phone/player is the easiest thing in the world to use, but there are hundreds of devices and all of them have different menus and player applications. We have never used your device before, don't know the application, and have no idea what the name of your music is or where it is stored on your device.

We may have an audio adapter that will connect your device to the sound board and then again we may not. Also, if your device runs out of power, we don't have the power adapter for it.

When the screen saver starts, it usually locks the screen and we don't know how to unlock it. Once it is unlocked the player app may no longer be displayed and we have no idea how to get it back. It will really throw off your performance when you are all set to start and you have to run off stage and get your player working. This really doesn't look good to the judges nor the audience.

3. Make sure your music is appropriate for the audience.

We have children in the audience. If your music contains adult themed lyrics you will have to perform without music.

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4. Edit your music before you get to the competition.

If you have adult themed lyrics in your music and you still want to use it you can edit the music using tools such as Audacity to mask the offensive language. A common technique is to reverse the audio of the offensive parts. Short pieces of reversed audio are usually undetectable to the audience. Edit your audio before you get to the competition. We will not do it for you.

Don't expect the sound board operators to follow a complex mix of multiple tracks from multiple sources. If you have multiple music sources mix them yourself using a tool like Audacity and save them as a single file before you get to the competition.

5. Drops happen, plan for them.

If your routine is timed to the music, plan ahead for drops so that you know how to get back in sync with the music.

For routines that are not synced to the music you can compensate for drops by having a little more music than you actually need for the routine. If your routine finishes before the music the sound board operators will do a graceful fade. Be aware that some competitions are very strict about running over time so this will not work in all cases.

6. If you don't follow any of the above advice the sound board operators will try to accommodate you. Just remember they are now a partner in your show and they have never practiced your routine. Your juggling could be flawless and your new partner could unintentionally ruin all your hard work.

References:

USB Thumb Drive

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USB_flash_drive

CD (Compact disc)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compact_disc

FAT32

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File_Allocation_Table#FAT32

WAV

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WAV>

MP3

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Audacity

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Audacity_%28audio_editor%29 <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

Essays: Juggling Music

<http://www.juggling.org/help/essays/music.html>