

## It's about the song, not the singing by Chris Standring

I watched a fabulous master class recently on PBS hosted by a vocal teacher at a music school. The host had each of her students sing a song and then commented on their performance. One particular student sang and her immediate response was *"We know you can sing well, but if you could just get past the singing we might all have a connection with you!"* What an amazing insight. This is something I come across all the time listening to singers and musicians, but never have I heard it put so articulately. Let me explain exactly what she meant by this.

Many artists may be technical experts (vocalists able to do all the acrobatic licks, guitar players able to sweep arpeggios up the yin yang). But at the end of the day, these are merely tools. Too many musicians have a desperate (and very often subconscious) need to show their peers that they are great and that they can compete with the biggest stars. However, many struggling artists get caught in this trap and this competitiveness can be a major stumbling block on the road to success.

Why do we have to *"get past the singing"*? Because we need to *live* the song. This means literally forgetting everything you ever learned (yet having trust and faith in your abilities) and becoming vulnerable and giving in completely to the song you are singing. Deliver the song with honesty and open yourself up to the soul zone, that "other place" we all want to get to when we get lost in a performance. That place doesn't always materialize and it is usually because we are too "conscious" of our surroundings, our audience and our insecurities.

It is a tough thing to *"get past the singing"*. How many singers have you heard that want to sound like Aretha Franklin? Or Ella Fitzgerald or Chaka Khan? They have learned all those stereotyped R&B licks and they can kick butt with the best of 'em. But listen to Aretha, Ella and Chaka and there's simply never a contest going on. They are not trying to compete. Why? Because they are simply doing what they do - and boy can they do it! Of course, there were years of practice, no one can simply sing like that without some degree of work, but when you hear them it's *about the song - not about the singing*. There's something else going on - something from within.

Artists want to communicate - that is what we are on this earth to do. There are a million great singers, guitarists, sax players. But not so many true artists. It is also important to remember that the general public has not, for the most part, had a musical training. They do not hear harmony. They simply respond to what they like. And what makes them respond is that little bit of magic that emanates from a vulnerable artist delivering a song - telling a personal story.

And with this new approach I believe comes a true uniqueness as the artist explores his or her own inner feelings, qualities and life experiences and forgets about emulating heroes. Heroes are important; after all, they are what initially inspired us. But if we want to be artists, we have to move on and discover ourselves. And at the end of the day this is what all record companies are looking for. Unique and great artists.

*Chris Standring is the CEO and founder of A&R Online. He is also a contemporary jazz guitarist presently signed to Mesa/Bluemoon Records.*

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