

What to do when the song is over (by Tom Jackson, August 2014)

The moments after the song is over present a crucial opportunity to build momentum for your live music performance, and it's one that many music performers tend to miss.

Whether you're on the stage alone or in a group, you need to learn how to put pressure on the audience and accept applause. This means that the ending should intentionally ask the audience to applaud – you'll use “non-verbal cues”.

Let's start with what you should not do. Don't do the cutoff and then, as the audience starts to applaud, ignore your audience by immediately:

- backing up
- turning your back on the audience
- going to adjust your gear
- start talking to each other
- or anything like that!

Another thing you shouldn't do is to say “thank you” into the microphone as soon as the song ends and applause begins. You'll kill your applause by doing that.

All of these things are cues that tell your audience you are either insecure, arrogant, or not interested in them.

Applause from an audience is a gift that needs to be received graciously. So let's look at what you should do immediately after the cutoff:

- Hold your ground onstage (at least): don't back up!
- If you want to be bold, take a couple of steps forward.
- Open yourself up to the audience. Pick a few people out in the audience and nod, smile, look at them, pump a fist at them (if it was a high energy song) – the point is, connect one on one with them.
- Depending on the style of music, you can put your palms up and arms out to the sides, almost like receiving a gift from the audience. Everyone in the world knows what they are supposed to do if the artist does this.

A couple of notes on how to handle the mic right after the song:

- Singers should put the mic down to their side if they are holding it.
- If you've been standing behind a mic on a stand, step to the side. You don't want the audience to think you're going to talk.
- If there is no mic in front of your mouth, you can say “thank you, thank you” without it being prohibitive to the audience's applause.
- All of that happens right after the cutoff and as the applause increases and peaks. But you should also be aware that there is what I call an applause cycle, and your non-verbal and verbal cues during the entire applause cycle will help build momentum.

The next step in handling applause is this: You will listen for the applause to hit its peak, and when it is just starting to die down, make the next move. This is where you say “thank you!” into the mic. This is where the drummer starts the beat for the next song, or the guitarist starts the next intro, or... Basically, it's where you lead the audience into the next song.

The idea is to be open and grateful for the audience's applause. By putting pressure on them you are asking them to respond, and you'll begin to lead your audience with confidence and authority. When done correctly, with the right ending on your songs, this will build momentum in the room.

Tom Jackson is a world renowned live music producer, author of the book Tom Jackson's Live Music Method and the All Roads Lead to the Stage DVD series, and master at transforming an artist's live show into a magical experience for the audience. Tom has worked with hundreds of artists in every genre, including major artists like Taylor Swift, The Band Perry, Jars of Clay, and more. He also shares his expertise as a speaker at colleges, conferences, and events worldwide. For more information, go to www.onstagesuccess.com.

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