

The Basics of Sing-along

Part 2

In the last issue, we took a quick course in the basics of hosting karaoke. However, there's more to karaoke than the space the editors at *MB* allow me at any one time, so this issue's article is a continuation.

OK, we've already covered vital aspects of karaoke, including knowing your audience, establishing a routine, getting the audience warmed up, choosing the right music, and how to keep the energy level up. What else is there? Plenty.

SONG BOOKS

To start with, it's important to have professional-looking song books. These books should be categorized by artist and title. Most often the guests will not remember song titles, but they usually do remember the artists. Sometimes it's reversed. Either way, if you have the books organized by artist *and* title, anyone will be able to find a song easily.

Naturally, your song books should look good. If you work at a club, your song books will probably be trashed beyond sticky and grody. My solution is to have two sets. One set for private gigs and one set for clubs. This way you always have one set of clean books ready to go at a moment's notice.

Your song books should be printed with at least a laser-quality printer and should have your business name, logo and telephone number on the front. If you



really want to extend the life of your books, have them plastic-coated so you can wipe them clean. This also prevents tearing.

WIRELESS MICROPHONES

You must have a system with at least three microphones. Wireless mics are a basic tool that encourages audience participation beyond the DJ/KJ booth. They are the number one tool for an interactive karaoke show.

By having at least three mics, you are covered for any scenario. You are never left without a mic. If one breaks, there's no need to panic. And if two people want to sing a duet you can accommodate them.

Wireless mics also provide a way to give the shy, seated types a chance to perform without being on stage. It's only a matter of time before these shy first-timers become regular stage hounds. Part of your job as a KJ is breaking them in.

How do you justify to your clients the higher fee charged for karaoke parties versus standard DJ gigs? Just give them the facts:

- It's an additional service; naturally it costs more.
- It requires additional, costly equipment.
- It takes more work. You are required to be three people: DJ, KJ and MC.
- To perform effectively, you may need to contract or employ additional talent.
- Karaoke is more than a service; it's a performance and requires more from you.

BY ROBERT TAYLOR

SOUND AND MIXING

Your guests obviously want to sound their best. Whether they're good or not, you can help them sound better. Spending an extra minute to adjust your system and the music makes everyone look and sound good, including you. This will help make your performers comfortable enough to concentrate on more important aspects of their performance and vocal styling. If you don't take the time to adjust your system, your good singers may not be so inclined to sing later, when the additional energy is needed.

GOOD ASSISTANT

Part of the "equipment" you need for a great karaoke party is a good assistant. It is a definite bonus to have someone to help with various chores, like looking up songs people request. Oftentimes at a private gig, you, as the KJ/DJ, do not have time to be an entertainer *and* a librarian. (At a nightclub the guests already know to look up their numbers and song selections.) Being a librarian at a private gig handicaps your ability to entertain. Your time and talent is best spent on effective timing, presentation, entertaining, announcements and introductions. As a professional KJ, you must create the karaoke fun zone that your clients expect.

TO SING OR NOT TO SING?

Your successful demonstration positively reinforces the audience's desire to participate. The old adage that you'll scare people away with your good voice is a fallacy. What if your group needs a little help getting the song back on track when they're mules off? Believe me, they'll welcome guidance. It's not much fun for you or the audience to have a lot of three- to four-minute bombs during a show.

If hosting karaoke, you don't have to be a fantastic singer but, you should be able to carry a tune. If you can't sing at all, hire an entertainer or assistant who can. Or take some voice lessons. If you explain to people you are a singer in training, it might spur other vocally-challenged souls to take a chance with the mic.

Karaoke is about giving everyone who wants to be able to sing like Celine Dion or Harry Connick Jr. a chance to have the time of their life. As a KJ, it's your responsibility to give everyone that chance and to make it an awesome experience. If you incorporate all the basic pointers I've provided you with, your DJ/KJ company will transform into a full-service entertainment company in no time.

