Claudia Hommel's Patter Matters and Working the Room – (October 2026)

For our workshop, bring a few songs from your repertoire. You'll describe your song; try on some patter and we'll see what fits.

Building a relationship with our audience begins with the room, then the repertoire, and then the patter. We're here to break down the fourth wall and "work the room". Before the show and even at the top of the show, let's walk through the room and take it in.

Taking in the environment: the architecture, the layout, the seating, comforts, acoustics, spatial relations, configuration, staffing, table settings, the bar, ability to move through the space, windows, lighting, curtains, florals, signage, artwork and objects, views, and visual history of the venue... where's the focus, how does the audience see you and see each other?

Context of venue, time and day: History of the venue. Theme of the event, its historical or community. Prior notions of Kabarett, Moulin Rouge, spectacle, pin spot, theatre, jazz lounge, recital hall. World events taking place outside the doors. Surprise or routine.

Expectations by the public (because it always changes): their reason for coming, food, drink, conviviality; culture, music, sonority, repertoire; personas and personalities of the performers, the host, the club owner, the maitre d'. How does the public expect or want to be treated, how does it expect to treat the performers? Are they coming to listen or is the music in background as ambiance or in between. Equality or separateness; celebrity awe or accessible pal. The public wants to know YOU. Audience members become a community. The purpose of coming together this evening. Closing with acknowledgments and thank yous.

Repertoire: You are the tour guide to a place and time. How much "history" of the song, of the singer, of the place does the audience need in order to follow you on this journey? Elucidating the song, its context, its personal connection. Why THIS song? Why this moment? We need not say the obvious. Sometimes a translation is required. Juxtaposition of songs provides new meanings. Taking songs at "face value" vs new values. Hearing an old song in new way and what does that say about the performer and about us in this moment?

Taking in changes over the course of the evening. Be aware but when things go awry —bad sound system, rowdy customer, bad news outside, good news, new audience arrivals —but you need not speak of it to your audience. Never apologize for your sniffles or sore throat, costume problems, miscues or missed lyrics. On the other hand, if you want to start a song over again, do it with aplomb. The audience appreciates knowing you're human!

Revealing yourself to the audience removes the "fourth wall":
Before entering the room or stage, bear in mind the Barbara Cook quote: "You're fabulous and you're here to take care of us, the audience." Mabel Mercer said, "It's not what I'm feeling, but what you are feeling".

This requires **inviting the audience** to look at you. I quote: "Whether your audience is one person in an audition or five hundred on opening night the first thing you should do is mentally invite them to look at you. Eventually the invitation will become automatic and that will improve your overall performance." Steve Ivcich – The Green Room Studio and Collaboraction --Chicago

Make the song yours (not Aretha's nor Callas')? What you bring to it that is vivid and specific pushes all other versions out of the way. We want to MEET YOU, to know what makes you tick, how your heart works.

Persona is a choice; what you choose to reveal about yourself on stage. How you dress, how you introduce yourself, what you talk about, a creature of your own making. Are you an equal to your audience or separate? Persona can be used by an introvert to perform broadly. You can be extravagant, authentically so!

Patter is totally integral to Working the Room. We are prefacing rather than explaining.

- Establish at the top of your show your theme or where you're going. "I was French in another life…" "Remember Rosalind? the girlfriend who was left behind Romeo and Juliet"
- Beware of Too Much Information. The confessional show needs to be balanced with taking care of your audience.
- No need to tell the audience how the song will make them feel. You can evoke the experience that leads you into the song, as a brief anecdote or a question to the audience of their own experience.
- Instead of "I would like you to get to know my mother through this song", you can evoke the moment: "There's a picture of my mother.." Or ask the question: "How do you feel about the dating scene?" Everyone leans in, everyone can relate.
- A sad song can have a light-hearted introduction and vice versa. "My father would say, you have your health, as if <u>that</u> were enough!"
- Know as much about the song as possible, who wrote it why, who sang it why. You may serve as tour guide to that song. Why sing this song in this moment to this audience? But there's no need to recite the facts.
- No need to speak to the obvious, the title, the show it came from unless germane to the show as a whole.
- What about you does your version of the song reveal? What do you need us to know about the song in order for it to land?
- **If you don't need to say anything, don't.** A song that's very clear in the moment may not need any patter. The reason why you chose it need not be explained. We don't need to pontificate.
- A song can be the response to the previous song. If the song before is filled with struggle and strife, the next song may be the solution. A song can provide relief without patter.
- Within your show, the audience loves to hear the naked voice, who you are without being "The Voice".
- Patter becomes essential when setting up a song in another language. Briefly give us the character or the context. When it's specific, the audience finds the comparison. Translate a few words that we will recognize when sung ("Parlez-moi d'amour… speak to me of love" – don't we all need to hear those three supreme words I love you, je vous aime?)

Remember, this is a practice and gets better and more comfortable over time! Take the risk. Try it out. If you fail, how fantastic. Do it again!