

Master of Ceremonies Fundamentals

Thursday, August 8, 2019

Matt Hall & Mark Haward

INTRODUCTION:

The first time I ever served as an emcee or compere for a juggling show, it was at the EJC 2003. I had been invited over as a guest, and Mini Mansell, the British gent in charge of all Renegade shows that week, asked me if I'd be willing to host one of the shows that week. I said, "Sure, why not? How hard can it be?" Later in the week, after much more experienced and qualified comperès like Gregor Kiock and Luke Burrage had already taken care of business, Mini introduced me to the crowd in the following manner: "*Hey everyone, we've got a new comperè up tonight! He's come all the way from America where he just got the silver medal in the IJA competitions. So you know what that means? He's the first LOSER!! Give it up for Matt Hall!!!*" As an added bonus, the United States at that time was also deep into its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, so the crowd of 600+ from 20 different countries around Europe was really happy to welcome me to the stage. I learned a few things that night, and 16 years later, I'm still learning.

FIRST STEPS:

I had never sat down and written out the do's and don'ts of hosting a show, but when Warren Hammond asked me to work with him on an emcee workshop at the 2018 IJA Festival, I started thinking about actual methods and techniques. Mark Hayward, a veteran of the emcee game, ended up stepping in for Warren, and together we shared the duties for the workshop. In preparation, I walked around and sought out as many different comperès as I could find at the festival. I asked them all one question: What are the three most important duties for the host of a show? Their answers are listed below in no particular order. Their answers also reveal several key themes and ideas behind the task facing any host.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

Brevity, Accuracy, & Warmth--*Jon Wee of Passing Zone*

Warmth, Flow, and Humility--*Owen Morse of Passing Zone*

Tone, Energy, & Control--*Bill Olbrisch (Biz the Clown)*

Care (of the performers), Preparation & Professionalism--*Mark Hayward*

Adapt, Improvise, & Overcome--*Matt Hall*

Preparation, Adoration (of the performers), & Comedy--*Rhys Thomas*

Inform, Control, & Entertain--*Luke Burrage*

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Mark had excellent ideas in this area. My experience at being thrown into the deep end of the pool at Renegade notwithstanding, you can get experience by seeking out opportunities at smaller venues and events such as church and school shows. Those shows may lack a professional host, and will be grateful for someone who wants to step up to the job with a smile and with a will.

Workshops are another good source of practice, as they involve communicating with a group clearly and succinctly. In every case, we are talking about a skill set--oratory--and that skill can only be honed through practice. I consider [Toastmasters International](https://www.toastmasters.org/) (<https://www.toastmasters.org/>) to be the finest, world-wide institution for improving one's speaking chops, and I would highly recommend joining a local chapter with an eye to comperè work.

EXTENSIONS/DETAILS

Mark also gave his idea of a host's toolbox, so to speak. In it, he included items such as short tricks, water and mints, and pen/notecards. To these items, I would add a towel, a smart phone (for timing and for flashlight functions), and talc (for yourself or for performers). If we are to be prepared to do our job, then we also need to answer to our own satisfaction, and also to the cast members' satisfaction, the following questions:

1. What is the producer/director's desired run-time for the entire show, including intermission?
2. How will you introduce each performer? Will you write your own intro or will you be delivering the performer's requested/stock intro?
 - a. Tips for getting an intro out of the performers if they don't have one ready:
 - i. Try to get 3 bullet points. They could be: accolades/awards/impressive credits, where they live, how long they've been doing their thing, anything they want the audience to know in advance about the routine (title, inspiration, etc), funny childhood award, unrelated unusual achievement, favorite vegetable, etc
 - ii. Sometimes you can pick a theme for all the intros: favorite vegetable, favorite trick, why they juggle/perform/whatever
 - iii. Thom Wall likes to ask what's going on in the performers' lives. This can lead to great jokes about things like why their dog is on anti-anxiety medication
 - b. For acts with a group name, ask if they'd like they're names announced, usually after the act is over: "The Passing Zone is Jon Wee and Owen Morse"
3. When and How will you handle all the different announcements and thank-you's that every show needs to have made to the audience?
 - a. It can be helpful to plan these out in advance so that you don't do too many in a row, or have to cram them all in at the end
4. How will you enter and exit the stage after each of your appearances?
 - a. You should be back onstage before the applause from the act dies out
5. Will there be a final bow and how will it go?
6. What filler bits will you do? What filler bits do you have in your back pocket in case you need to do more filler?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been lucky to meet and watch many great hosts. Certainly the names listed above (myself excluded) count among some of the very best. Mark Hayward definitely helped push the idea further by agreeing to co-lead the first workshop with me at IJA 2018. However, this workshop is not the first of its kind....far from it. Luke Burrage taught a full length workshop at the British

Juggling Convention in Bodmin in 2006. As it turned out, I was to be the MC for the Gala Show, and I took Luke's workshop the day before the show. Two shows were performed that day, and I had the added benefit of Luke coming backstage between the first and second shows and giving me good feedback and hard truths that I took with me from that day forward. Again, Luke taught a better workshop thirteen years before I sat down and wrote these words, so that should tell you how far ahead of the curve he was (and still is when it comes to juggling). I have yet to see in person, but have heard amazing stories about the prowess of the Cirque du Demain comperè, Calixte de Nigremont, so he bears mention here as well.

FEEDBACK: Please feel free to offer your comments and critiques about your experience during this workshop at: <https://goo.gl/y4BDr7>