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[Tips for Being a Better Bluegrass MC](#) ^[1]

by: Nancy Cardwell

As the owner and manager of Classic Country Radio stations WBZI, WKFI and WEDI in Xenia, Wilmington and Eaton, Ohio, renowned banjo player Joe Mullins broadcasts classic country and bluegrass music to thousands of listeners in the southern Ohio, western Indiana and northern Kentucky area, 24/7--in an area bordered by Cincinnati and Columbus, Ohio and Lexington, Ky., and including major markets in Dayton and Middletown, Ohio. Known for previous appearances and recordings with Longview and The Traditional Grass, Joe fronts his own band now, The Radio Ramblers, and he also produces the Southern Ohio Indoor Music Festival in Wilmington (March 27-28, 2009).

Following in the footsteps of his late father, Paul "Moon" Mullins--a legendary radio broadcaster and band leader/fiddler himself--Joe has learned several tricks of the trade, when it comes to being a professional, engaging master of ceremonies.

Mullins' primary piece of advice for a Master or Mistress of Ceremonies--the announcer and presenter of stage entertainment who informs the audience and keeps the event moving as scheduled--is to be prepared. "If you fail to plan, plan to fail," he states simply.

It's important to know the expectations of the event producer. Specifically, how strict is the timetable, are there sponsors to recognize, and are there any rules or audience guidelines to communicate? Mullins sees the MC's chief objective is to know the information that will allow the audience to experience and the artist to present the best performance possible. An MC and stage manager are not the same, he points out, but many events require the MC to do both jobs. Joe suggests that artists have accurate load-in, sound check and stage time information at least 10 days in advance. "It's also important to create a schedule that allows the audience time to plan their other activities for the day or the weekend--including jamming, eating, vendor visits, etc."

The MC should find out who has the responsibility of keeping the backstage area quiet and organized, and assist if necessary. "Do create and maintain a courteous relationship with the sound and lighting technicians," Mullins emphasizes. "Everyone at the event relies on them, and you can assist them by being an effective communicator."

Joe offers the following list of "Do's & Don'ts" for being an effective MC at a bluegrass event:

DO?

- Speak clearly and confidently into the microphone and with an element of authority.
- Ask the sound technicians to designate a microphone for your use during the event.

- Present an act with a respectful, welcoming introduction.
- Determine if an act will end their set after a certain amount of time if you have that flexibility, or if you should give them a cue in time for two more songs.
- Allow the audience an honest opportunity to demand an encore.
- Give quick, pertinent information the audience may need following a band's performance, and then allow the sound crew a little quiet time to set up the next group.
- Insert tasteful humor.
- Dress appropriately.
- Engage the audience.

DON'T?

- Mumble in monotone, yell into the microphone or speak uncertainly.
- Park yourself center stage or fight with Larry Sparks over which microphone to use.
- Recite a band's entire biography and call out the title of every song on their new CD.
- Walk onstage during "Get Down on your Knees and Pray" and tell Del McCoury to wrap it up?.
- Scream, "You wanna hear ONE MORE by the Sound Check Mountain Boys!"...while Doyle Lawson is waiting to go onstage 15 minutes late.
- Keep talking the entire time between bands, never shutting up even while four or five pickers are saying, "Check, test, one-two, one-two."
- Tell every tired, corny joke no one wants to hear.
- Go onstage in shorts and a t-shirt looking like you just crawled out of a wet tent on the back side of the campground after jamming until 4:30 a.m.
- Yell, "IS EVERYBODY HAVIN' A GOOD TIME!?"

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