



# **SECRETS**

of Successful  
Festival  
Entertainment

**BY SHELBY BOND**

Over the past fifteen years I have been traveling the world performing at festivals and events. I have done shows at Conventions, Renaissance Faires, Theatre Festivals, State Fairs and pretty much any other type of venue.

I learned my show, my skills and exactly what I could offer a job well before I set out onto the road to make my living this way. What I learned over the years, however, is what these events can offer me. That is, how what I bring to the event and what the event has going for it can combine to make the most successful production.

I have done shows indoors, outdoors, on the ground, in the grass, in warehouses, TV studios, halls, lodges, hockey arenas, stadiums, restaurants, boats, casinos and even palaces. My shows are a time-tested commodity. I know where a laugh is, what the audiences want, and how to whip a crowd into a frenzy of laughs and riotous applause. Why is it, then, that the show can go so well at one event and not have nearly the same success at another?

That is what I plan to explore in this article. Based on the thousands of shows I have performed I have devised these eight tips to help you help the performer do their best to make your event a hit.

### Shade

I often tell an event that if there are plenty of people at the occasion I'll fill as much shade as you give me. People will not sit in the sun. Not for long at least. If it's hot outside, shade is the number one thing to provide to get a big audience. Even if it's not hot, people don't want the sun in their eyes.

### Stage

If you have the performer on a designated stage instead of simply in the street on a "pitch" (space in street with adequate traffic flow that is open enough for the performer to do an impromptu show) the stage should be elevated. It should also be offset from the walkway a bit but always facing it. If there is a turn in a street, placing a stage at the bend is great placement. If it is a prefab stage let the performer know this. If you are constructing one then wood is always preferable to cement. Brown is better than black paint and, if the stage is outdoors, mix some sand in the paint and it will create a surface that will be much less slippery, especially in the rain.

### Sound & Light

Let the performer know if you are using your own sound system or if they need to provide their own. Will there be sound/light technicians on hand during the show? If so, let the performer know how to contact them and if there will be time for a tech run-through. If there is no projected sound then set the stage a little more off the street and, if possible, build or use natural sound walls.

### Stairs

If the stage is raised there should be stairs at the front of the stage so that the performer can quickly go from the audience to the stage. This is also so that they can bring audience members up onto the stage. An added point: if you do not want the performer to use a volunteer or if you have a specific person you would like them to use let them know in advance.

### Seating

If the performer is in the street in an open area, this is a non-issue. However, if you would like to set out seats, this is what you need to take into account. After you tell the performer how many people you expect to attend you can ask them how many seats they feel they will need. They may have a request as to the seating lay out, as well.

It is best if a seating area is not open on all sides. Using natural or created barriers at the rear and sides of the theatre helps to designate more of a stage area and help to siphon an audience out, which is ideal.

### Lodging

Ask if the performer would rather stay in a host home or a hotel. If they would like to be hosted, find someone in the community that would like to share their home for a few nights. Generally, both parties feel this is an enriching experience. The house should be within walking distance of the site and have Internet and a washer & drier. The performer will not expect to be fed. They may, however, need to be taken to purchase desired groceries. If a hotel accommodation is desired it should be at a reputable hotel (i.e.: Holiday Inn, Ramada, or any major chain).

### Pass the Hat

Many performers request donations at the end of the show, which is called "Passing the Hat." This composes a large percent of their income. When you are scheduling shows, ask the performer if they have included their crowd gathering time and hat

pass into the length of their performance. You should also ask them how much clean up time they need. It is best to leave a bit of a gap between shows for the audience to clear out. Try to never put two "Pass the Hat" shows back to back. If you do there must be adequate time for the entire audience to leave and regenerate.

You can listen to the end of their show to decide if you feel their request is too pushy, but most performers are knowledgeable in keeping it causal and friendly. If you are opposed to a "Pass the Hat" show and the performer is used to this as part of their pay, you may request to "buy out their hat" which would mean you would pay an agreed upon amount to have them not request these tips.

### Flights and Transportation

In most cases, it is the festivals responsibility to provide travel whether it be air, ground or otherwise to the performer. In many instances, the festivals have many performers to book and arranging for all the travel can be a logistical nightmare, and as such, many festivals simply give the performer a travel budget. This must be sufficient for round trip airfare and basic ground transportation. Remember, if you choose to book the travel yourself it must include round trip airfare, ground transportation to and from the airport and ground transportation to and from the festival site.

I hope these points help you understand a performer's needs so they can assist in making your event a success.

**Shelby Bond** travels internationally performing as "Cowboy Max" in a comedy, audience participation show with trick roping and bullwhips. His shows have been an international hit in front of over 700,000 people. He received his training from "The Second City" conservatory program as well as The Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London and has been brought in to many events to instruct in interactive theater and improv. In addition, Shelby works in film and television and has numerous credits, including many national commercials, appearances in *Mona Lisa Smile*, *"Home Improvement"*, *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*, *I Am Sam*, and even guest hosting *"Love Line."* You can hear more about Shelby and his shows at [www.cowboymax.com](http://www.cowboymax.com).