

## Tips for performing kirtan on stage

First and foremost, always remember the purpose of kirtan is not to show off your musical skills (although showcasing your skill is also good!) The purpose is to meditate and dwell on the message of the Guru, and helping others to do the same. Imagine the ten living Gurus saying the exact same words that you are, and enjoy the feeling of being connected to them despite having centuries between you!

Gurbani was made for singing – that is why it has been arranged under raags. Music is a very good way of focussing the mind and creating whatever atmosphere you want, be it meditative, love, longing, warrior-spirit, or something else, which will help you to get in the correct frame of mind to better understand and enjoy Gurbani. Here are some tips for how you can better do this, especially when performing together with other people on stage, as a jatha.

- **Practise**  
Practise is the only thing which will improve your skill and confidence in doing kirtan. By practising, you will be familiar enough with the shabad to be able to focus on the other aspects of the performance. Memorise the words and any taans/alaaps so instead of concentrating on trying to remember and get them right, you can work on making them sound better.
- **Listen to each other**  
Remember that you are performing as a jatha, not as a soloist! By listening to each other you will stay in tempo and in tune, and it will be easier to remember what comes next!
- **Allow everyone in the jatha to shine**  
This follows on from the previous point, but again, this is a group effort, not a solo! You need to make sure you don't drown out the others by singing too loudly, and you should allow everyone to have an equal opportunity when doing taans or other solos.
- **Make eye contact with each other (but don't keep looking around all the time!)**  
Make eye contact to communicate any changes, or confirm what will happen next (such as taans or repeats). However, you shouldn't be looking around all over the place, because that will make it very hard to concentrate and will look unprofessional.
- **Teamwork and communication is key**  
Make sure everyone knows exactly what the jatha will be doing – BEFORE going on stage. This includes things like which shabads you are doing, and in what order, who is doing which taan/alaap, who will be sitting where, how many times you will repeat a line etc. This way there will be less need to talk in between shabads and it will look more professional. If needed, however, it is fine to talk to each other quietly and briefly to confirm arrangements. Anything you need to communicate during the shabad should be through eye contact, unless it is important and can only be done via talking. In this case, everyone else should sing louder to cover for the people who need to talk.
- **Put as much emotion and meaning as you can into your voice/playing**  
Try to find out the message of the shabad beforehand, as this will allow you to really sing the shabad with emotion, and feel the message the Guru is trying to tell us. It will also let the sangat better understand and enjoy the shabad. Be expressive!

- **Be confident**

You could have the loveliest voice and an amazing grasp on music theory, but if you don't sing/play with confidence, it won't be impressive or seem right. The people around you and in the sangat will be affected by the emotions and the mood you express, so if you look worried, they may also not feel at ease. Confidence comes with practice and experience, but you can also take a few deep breaths before starting, and try not to rush into it. Stay calm on stage whatever happens. Stage presence is very important!

- **Don't let anything affect your performance**

Everyone makes mistakes, but good raagis and musicians NEVER let this affect their performance. If you stumble somewhere along the way, just carry on without stopping and definitely do not make a face! Most of the time no-one will have noticed the mistake apart from you, and making a face will only let them know! Stopping, or trying to repeat that part again might confuse you and make you panic. Try not to dwell on the mistake; just move on and focus on the next bit. Remember to communicate with the rest of your jatha to confirm what you will do next.

- **Keep an eye on the time and be flexible**

If you have been given a time slot, always keep an eye on the clock to ensure you don't finish too early or overrun. Sometimes shabads can take longer or shorter than expected because of slowing down or speeding up. In some cases, the stage secretary might ask you to finish earlier than you were told before, or the next jathas might arrive late so you are given more time than you had prepared. DON'T PANIC! If you need to finish a shabad quickly, you can communicate with the others via eye contact, and perhaps do all the rest of the antras together without any gaps or sthai in between. If you need to make a shabad longer, you can repeat antras, and do the lines of the sthai four times instead of twice. Increasing/decreasing the tempo is another option, but can be hard to pull off as a jatha, and may ruin the feel of the shabad.

- **Make sure you genuinely enjoy yourself**

You can pretend, but unless you are honestly enjoying yourself on stage, the performance will not be the best it can be!

- **Smile!**

You will feel more relaxed, and enjoy yourself more. In addition, if others see you smiling, they will too 😊