

EPISODE 034

# How To Crush It As A Support Act - The Do's and Dont's!

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**[00:00:00]** Hi, this is Melanie from Stories in Songs - Writing the Lyrics.

In today's episode, I want to talk with you about the great opportunity some of you have, had, or will have about being a support act to another great artist. And I want to talk with you about this topic because recently, I watched two support bands: one of them wasted their opportunity to get people excited for their music, and the other band got me so intrigued I literally checked out their music the next day, analyzed all their single releases, only to get hooked by their most powerful song that I know of yet. And now I keep listening to it over and over again.

Well, not all of you might analyze the lyrics of a band straight away if you get to the point of wanting to check them out. I know I'm a nerd in that way, but that's just me.

Nonetheless, if their lyrics speak to you, your relationship moves to a whole different level instead of just liking the music. There are so many artists who play in all of those main music genres and sub-categories. And there are certainly the ones who own a category or have that unique style, but man, the lyrics create the connection and start a relationship between the artist and the listener.

After all, it's all a question: Will you sing their lyrics back to them, or will you not?

For me, yes, I'll definitely shout back: Viva La Victoria!

Now what that means and how you can get people excited as a support act – even if they didn't come because of you – you'll discover that in this episode. We talk about how you can hook, captivate, and keep the crowd's attention and awaken their interest in you and what you have to say.



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I'll share with you some of the DO's and DON'Ts of how you can crush it as a support act. And I'll even tell you a secret way that will ensure that people start singing along to your songs even if they have never heard your songs before.

Sounds good? So stay tuned.

## TEASER

### The Opportunity of Being Hired as a Support Act

**[00:02:40]** Now, here's the story.

Recently, I went with my family to Prague to see My Chemical Romance. At the time of this episode's release, it's already been two months.

Time flies.

But I gotta tell you. I had tickets for their two shows in Bonn. I had even paid for those VIP tickets to avoid the hustle of being crushed. Actually, when I bought the tickets back in 2019, the tickets were sold out so quickly that VIP was the only option left. Well, and finally, this year, I could see them live after so, so many years. Some of you might know that the two shows in Bonn got shifted to an earlier date a month prior to that. And dang it, I couldn't make it. Had to return my tickets. Luckily, Prague isn't that far away from where I live in Germany, and in that stadium, there was still a seat left for me.

So, I and my family made a weekend trip to Prague. We had a hotel right next to the O2 arena. The Stages Hotel is awesome. Felt like a rockstar because we were living in one of those suits because with our two kids, we needed two bedrooms so that we could all sleep better. Anyway. When we walked past the O2 arena, my little girl (16 months) walked straight at some MCR fans that waited in front of the venue (one day before the concert), climbed up the stairs, and waved hi to them. It's truly fascinating that she gets pulled to where the music is every time. It was great talking with them about what MCR means to them, ... brought back some old memories as to when I was once camping out in front of the show in Dortmund back in 2007. Kinda glad I don't have to do that anymore, although it was strange to be confronted with that memory and knowing it's been over 15 years. Guess we are the Kids from Yesterday after all.

Now, if you haven't heard me talking about this before, I became a fan of MCR when I was 18, back in 2006, and their single "Welcome to the Black Parade" was played on one of the four channels in New Zealand. NZ didn't have more channels, so the music channels were always on when we weren't working. I will never forget how I was staring up to that TV that



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hung from the ceiling in our little shed on that Apple Orchard in Meeanee, and how the Patient in that music video was staring up at the TV too.

And now, 16 years later, I'm going to one of their shows, family attached. It's amazing to think about it all.

But their music has stayed with me over the years because their songs and especially their lyrics are so powerful.

But there are more artists besides My Chemical Romance. They are amazing, yes, and they have figured out how to use the power of storytelling for their lyrics, but still, there's room for other artists in my life.

Like many people still have room left to let a new artist in – that they may listen to more or even become a fan of.

But how do you, as the artist, actually get people interested in your music and songs?

And about one of those ways, a very powerful one actually – is by being a support act to a well-known artist. What's better than actually getting on stage and playing your songs to a huge crowd and getting them excited for your music?

It hurts me to say... but not everyone seems to really appreciate or see the amazing opportunity they've been given.

So let's talk about that.

Now, after I got my obligatory tour shirt, I headed straight to my seat at the first level. It was 7 pm, and the first support act entered the stage. Finally, after COVID and being only a stay-at-home mom for the past years, I was back in my element and at a concert. I was so excited to just hear live music again.

But guess what happened?

The first band started their set with an instrumental song. I mean, you guys only have about thirty minutes to find your people in that crowd. Thirty minutes. You weren't booked if the host didn't think that your music would fit the crowd. So, when you are a support act for someone like My Chemical Romance, should you start with a slow, instrumental song? The audience kinda waited for something to happen. But nothing did.

I tell you, I watched the crowd for those thirty minutes. They were not interested at all in that band. The people kept staring at phones, talking, or quietly watching without reaction. Some



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seemed like they were falling asleep with their head in their hands. Others were playing games...

## Getting a Chain Reaction in the Audience & Making Them Feel Something

**[00:07:38]** That's not the audience reaction you want now, is it?

You want a chain reaction. If people love and cheer, and are enthusiastic, then all the other people around them will pay attention. After all, if something is going on that excites those people, then I should figure out why so that I have the same feeling.

It's all about how you want to make people feel.

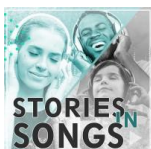
It's the same when you are writing the lyrics. I recently saw a lyric draft on Facebook where one guy blamed his bad childhood on his father and said how he is still followed around everywhere by their father's shadow.

I mean, you can write for self-therapy reasons. If it helps you, then that's great. But if you want to share your songs with an audience, you need to consider what you want to make them feel. Shall they feel as depressed as that character in that song? Or do you want to make them feel empowered that even though they might have gone through a similar situation, you help them cope and show them the next step? Let them feel better at the end of the song. I go for those songs every time.

And when you are a support act, your job is to make your audience feel something too. And preferably... I mean, if someone invited me to do an interview about storytelling in songwriting, I'm so excited to share my passion with them that that excitement spills over to the audience.

And just think about it: Being a support act for a great band that's exciting. Being able to share your music and let thousands of people hear your songs that's even more exciting. There's so much potential to make them fall in love with you ... or at least get them intrigued enough that they wanna know more about you.

Gosh, it just hurt to watch that first act perform, and they got some polite cheers from the first rows after each of their songs, but they didn't get the attention of all the other people in that stadium.



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For sure, it's hard when it's a constant coming and going. People leave their seats to go to the bathrooms, get food or drinks or are trying to find their seats blinding other people with their phone flashlights... cuz, honestly, you'd fall down those stairs if you wouldn't... but again, there are already so many people waiting. Even if only half the venue is full, people want to be entertained. That's why they come to a concert. They wanna have a good time.

## The DONT's of being a Support Act

**[00:11:01]** So, when you want to make them excited, let's start first with what you shouldn't do. And a disclaimer here: That's my personal opinion. You can do what you want but it's just what I had observed by seeing the differences between the two support bands before MCR hit the stage.

- So first off, don't start the set with an instrumental song that doesn't even reflect on the music the fans of the main act love. A slow instrumental song that makes some sway to the music isn't exactly what fits an MCR crowd.
- Secondly, don't just do your thing without addressing the crowd once. It seemed like they were in a training practice. I mean, this is your big performance opportunity. There are so many things that one performance can do for you, so treat it as such. Don't ignore it.
- Thirdly, don't leave the stage without thanking the host for having you. I think that's kinda rude and doesn't show the kind of appreciation you should have for that opportunity.

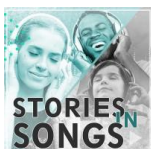
I wanna leave it at that because there's so much to talk about actually to make people excited for your music and your songs. So let's talk about that.

## Eclipse - The band that truly got the crowd excited.

**[00:12:29]** First off, let me name the band that helped me work out those DO's.

MCR's second support band was Eclipse, a metal band from Sweden. Luckily, they were one of those metal bands that actually didn't scream the lyrics but sing them. So much appreciated, you guys.

When Eclipse entered the stage, they were right there. In the moment. There was nothing else more important than delivering a good show. And you could feel their excitement. They were so fired up, so ready to give you the time of your life.




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They started playing, and they woke up the crowd and let them know that the show was not just about to begin, but it has already started! The singer was as excited as his bandmates. They all wanted to play and sing and just perform. There was no instrumental waiting list, but they entered the stage, and the show began.

They animated the people to clap and cheer and start singing along with them. They threw the question “Are you still out there” at the audience to let them participate and join in on the performance. They started a conversation, and the crowd responded.

They even shouted “Spela Shoreline!” at them – as you can read on Eclipse’s Instagram profile. They say that in Sweden, this is a thing. It means that somebody wants you to play the song Shoreline by the band, Broder Daniel. And the singer of Eclipse, Erik Mårtensson, fulfilled the request by singing two short lines of that song. I loved that interaction.

And now, Eclipse keeps remembering that moment. Isn’t that wonderful? It’s like a two-way transaction. You give the crowd a great time, and the audience will give you a night to remember.

I just love to think about it this way.

Anyway, all that means is that the crowd ain’t no silent observer. The crowd wants to join in.

And what I also liked about the way Eclipse owned that stage was that they said thanks to My Chemical Romance for having them. And that’s actually a powerful tool. I mean, the audience came to see the main act. They are so excited to see them. And you can use their excitement to get them even more fired up. Just by naming the main act, they start cheering and screaming. We were all lit up in joyful anticipation.

Eclipse thanked MCR two times in their thirty minutes on stage. And another time, they just asked the crowd if they were ready for My Chemical Romance. And the response was even louder. The crowd was in the moment with them. So excited. So full of energy.

The only thing that wasn’t so great was that the sound wasn’t too great. The music overshadowed the vocal lines. So that made it really hard to understand what they were singing about. When I put my hands on my ears, I was able to make out the vocal lines better, but that’s something that other people are paid for. So I just wanted to add that so that you always ensure that the crowd can also understand your singing. Because if people like your lyrics, your connection grows beyond a thumbs-up for your music, but it goes deeper than this.



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## When you are booked as a Support Act, DO this:

**[00:15:40]** So, to wrap things up, here are some of the DO's that should help you get the crowd excited, keep them excited, and give them and you a great time.

After this wrapup, I'll let you in on a secret way of how you can get the crowd to sing along to your songs even if they have never heard them before. And the answer is probably not what you think. So stay all the way to the end.

For now, here are some possibilities that you can make use of when you are hired as a support act:

- First off, you gotta get those people out of their stasis. You gotta get them to wake up. Remember, it's like that one symphony. I can't remember if it was Beethoven or Mozart, but they had this very slow music, and then suddenly, a loud bang interrupted the flow. And he got everyone to pay attention to him. So you gotta be that big bang. You enter the stage. Here you are. And as soon as the music starts, you gotta blow them away. Wake them up. Shake them up. Let them know the show starts with you.

Of course, you can't keep that moment of awakening up the entire time you are on stage. Once people pay attention to you, another big bang won't do that much anymore. So won't the third or fourth. So you need to find other ways to keep them excited and engage with them.

- So, you could welcome them. Just say hi. Don't just stand there and do your thing. Welcome them. Let them know that you have noticed them! Because they have noticed you. So give the courtesy back to them. Then play another song of yours.

If you have a song that's special to you and that you want to share with them, you can say: *"The next one is really important to me or us..."*

But people don't know why that might be. And somehow, there's nothing in it for them if you introduce a song this way.

- But there's a powerful 6-word formula that gets people's attention every time. Wanna know what it is? No pen and paper are necessary. I'm confident you'll remember those six words that get people to listen up. And those words are: Let Me Tell You A Story.



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- And we are ready. Yes, bring it on. We are always ready to hear a story. Because stories are not only entertaining, but a good story teaches us how to survive, thrive, or derive meaning in this world. And when you have a song that provides a meaningful message through the narrative journey you take your audience on, the crowd will love you for it.
- So when you say: “Let me tell you a story”, you don’t tell them the story. You use that six-word formula to steer the attention towards what you’re about to sing. So just say: “Let me tell you a story. Listen to this.” And then you start. Maybe you start only with the vocals first. You don’t need the big bang. That one can come later again if you want to. If you really wanna hammer home the story, maybe you have a song that starts with a narrative opening or even the words that introduce a story and let the audience know it’s storytime.
- And just a note here: I don’t mean you tell them a complete story in your song. Using the craft of storytelling in lyric writing ain’t about one full story. It’s about using the tools to hook and engage your audience, excite and captivate them, and deliver that meaningful message without preaching it.
  - So letting them know you’ll tell them a story in one of your songs (even if your other songs have narratives, too) is a great way to get them to listen up.
- Another great way to get people excited for your next song is by addressing their desire. Address what they want: For example, you could say: *“I know you are here because of...”* [And you name the main act - because we know that gets them excited every time].
  - And you show your appreciation in your words and voice. But then you take it a step further. Your goal is to create a connection between the stuff that they like about the main act’s music, songs, or lyrics. And so you tell them that ONE THING that connects you to the main act’s music, you say it out loud. Let them know you are one of them and you appreciate it too. And then you tell them that ONE THING inspired your next song. Or whatever it is. This all serves to let the audience know that you are no stranger to the main act’s music but that you have that connection too.
  - I know this one might be a little hard, but it’s worth it. So take some time to think about it. I don’t want you to copy their sound or anything, but just letting them know that they inspired you or the ones they looked up to inspired you, too. Just to show that connection. It’s quite beautiful.
  - And say it because they won’t be able to figure it out on their own.





Another note here: You don't wanna stand there talking the whole time. As in lyrics, brevity is the key. So that your point gets across quickly, and then you continue with the music. After all, that's why the people came. They wanna listen to the music and not to someone talking the whole time. So when you plan your stage time, be aware of when it's okay to talk to the crowd and when you should just keep playing after finishing a song. This might take some trial and error, but you just observe the crowd each time and see how they react. Then make in-the-moment decisions.

- And last but not least, you gotta make sure that the sound – the combination of music and vocals plays well together. People won't like it if they can't make out the words because the music is too loud or vibrates and almost hurts in the ears. So always make sure, or if possible, have someone in the crowd that keeps an ear out and checks if everything works smoothly.

## The secret way of how you can get the crowd to sing along to your songs even if they have never heard them before.

**[00:22:40]** Lastly, let's continue with the secret way of how you can get the crowd to sing along to your songs even if they have never heard them before.

You might be thinking you could teach them a strong refrain line before you start the song. And this might work, but it can be hard to pull off – especially when the line's not that easy to remember, and people don't know when they are supposed to sing it.

But let me rewind shortly to WHY having people sing along is so great. Well, you might know that one already, but let me just say it out loud.

So, having the people sing along to your lyrics word for word that's an amazing feeling.

And of course, the main act will be more successful in accomplishing this because people know their lyrics, and they can participate and sing along.

I mean, come on, even people who can't sing, shout the lyrics back to their band because those words mean the world to them. Look at me, I can't sing at all, but when I'm at a concert, nothing's stopping me from joining in and singing along because this is my moment too. I just wanna be a part of it all. I wanna use that one chance and sing the words together with thousands of people and, most of all, with the artist that brought those amazing words into my life.



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But when you are the support act, people don't know your songs and lyrics. Heck, they might not even know who you are. By the way, you should introduce yourself – the name of your band or, when you're a solo artist, your name. You should let them know who you are. Just a side note.

So, people don't know your songs or you, for that matter. But there's still a way to get them to sing along. Of course, some of you might think that's impossible. But remember, it's not helpful to say: This doesn't work for me because of X, Y, and Z. Instead, ask yourself: HOW could this work for you. And if you don't know the HOW, find the person, the WHO, that can make this work for you and figure out the HOW.

So here's what you could do:

So when you are at a venue that uses screens – and this might only refer to bigger venues – but you can make use of those screens.

Remember, like in school in music class, they gave you the lyrics so that you can sing along. And that's what you can do too. You can use the screens to put the current lyric line on. You can show them every lyric line as you perform that song.

I mean, don't put the entire lyrics up there. No one will be able to read it. But show it line for line as you sing that song. Similar to when you sing karaoke. You don't have to highlight the words. That might be tricky, but you can show the lines.

You could even use the stage's background and project the lyrics on it. Maybe you have someone who knows your songs well and could click through as you sing so that the projection and what you sing always fit together. After all, you don't want to confuse your audience by not being able to follow, or they jump ahead.

And there are two huge benefits if you let your audience see the lyrics:

Firstly, whoever wants to sing along, starts singing along with you. They got everything they need in front of them, and they can just join in. Even if they have to learn the melody first, most of them learn quickly. They will recognize patterns, lines, and the refrain and join in... from mumbling to singing loud at the end of the song.

You can even invite them to sing along - before you start that song. Tell them where they can find the lyrics, point at them, and invite them to sing with you. What's a better way to get the energy up than actually to get them to sing your words with you?

And secondly, even if people don't join in, they can't help themselves. People can't help but start to read to keep them entertained. They watch the screens, read the changing lines, and you got their attention on your words. And if your lyrics use the craft of storytelling – taking



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the audience onto a narrative journey that gives them a meaningful message they are able to figure out on their own – well... then my friend, you have created a connection. If people can see your lyrics and follow them through all the way to the end, you will not only hook them with your sound but also with your words.

So think about this and HOW or WHO can help you make this possible.

But be aware that you don't do this with every song. Or that might feel like it's forced, and it takes the fun out of it. Do it with only one song. Choose that song carefully. Find the powerful one. That has a great refrain or chorus that has an empowering line or message.

And use the song that shows best who you are and what you are about.

If the people in the audience like the words and emotion that the song makes them feel, they are more likely to check you out. And that's the whole purpose of being a support act, right? Not just have a good time. But get more people interested in you and your music. Otherwise, what's the point?

## Summary of Do's and Dont's

**[00:28:00]** So here's a little summary of the Do's and Don't we've talked about.

So some of the Don't were:

- Don't start with an instrumental song. You want your music and voice to be present right from the start.
- Secondly, don't ignore the audience.
- Thirdly, don't leave the stage without thanking the host for having you.

Instead, do this:

- start with a bang and wake them up
- own that stage and have a good time
- welcome the crowd and show them that you've noticed them
- when it's appropriate, say "Let me tell you a story. Listen to this." before you start a song that means a lot to you
- find a way to create a connection between you and the main act. Show that appreciation and let the crowd know you are one of them because you love the main act too
- most of all, lighten up the crowd by naming the artist they've come to see. People love to hear their artist's name and react with joyful anticipation



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- and don't forget to say thanks to your host and to the crowd. Show your appreciation and gratefulness. That goes a long way.
- and lastly, make sure the tech works and people can understand the vocals and not get blasted away by the music without being able to hold on to the vocals.

And if it's possible, find one song and project the lyrics on the screens or on the stage's background. And invite people to sing along.

Most of all, have fun and use that amazing opportunity wisely. Something like this doesn't come around too often.

Now, if you've liked this episode, tell your fellow musicians about it. You can do that by taking a screenshot of this podcast, share it on your social profile, and tag your friends in it.

I'll look forward to seeing you next week for a bite-sized episode when we address the question: Can A Song Save a Life.

Until then, bis bald und auf Wiedersehen.  
Melanie

## Show Notes

- Check out Eclipse from Sweden - <https://www.eclipsemerch.com/>
- Listen to "Viva La Victoria" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-EvFAX00sE>



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