

Helpful Tips for Singers

Guidelines for how to dress for auditions and performances

by [Suzanne Lukather](#)

With all eyes on The Royal Wedding - an event of world-class celebrity fashion - it seems “fitting” to discuss the guidelines for “what to wear” for auditions and on-stage appearances. It's always been my observation that the British never fail to wow the world with breathtaking gowns and formal suits that rival any Hollywood red carpet event. Why?



What made Meghan Markle’s gown so stunning? And even more stunning, the dress she changed into for the evening reception? What made Prince Harry’s appearance so commanding and regal? It’s not just what they were wearing, but *how* what they were wearing *fits*. Meghan’s wedding gown was perfectly plain, simple, with classic lines that were tailored to fit her body perfectly. Prince Harry’s uniform was ornate in detail, but not visibly distracting. In fact, his uniform was less ornate than his brother’s. No gold braid.

#1 is Fit – over fashion, style, color – it’s fit. An artist gives the best first impression of his or her performance even before reaching down-stage-center and singing the first note, by what he or she is wearing.

At the [NATS National Vocal Competition Finals](#) in Colorado last summer, the level of singing was world-class. But as a teacher and audience member, I couldn’t help being distracted by the young men who wore suits with slacks that were too short and jackets that were too tight, young ladies whose dresses were unflattering with colors and designs that didn’t take into account their body type, and most importantly, with clothing that didn’t take into account that the audience is often looking up at the singer, not straight on.

This includes the issue of shoes. There were more scuffed up shoes than polished shoes, more shoes that not only didn’t coordinate with the outfit in style or color, but were distracting. Budgetary issues are something we, as artists, must face all the time. The tendency may be to consider good looking, well-fitting shoes as something we can’t afford. But truthfully, they are an investment in your career. My grandmother used to say that you can always tell a lot about a man by the condition of his shoes.

And when you are performing on-stage, remember, the audience is looking up and a prominent thing they see are your shoes. **#2 is Distance** – Fashion designers will tell you that each one of us has an optimum distance at which we look our best to others. That’s what designers and make-up artists do - they make us look our best at whatever distance we are going to be perceived, whether on-stage, on-camera, or in an intimate setting. I was fortunate to watch the commentary of the Royal Wedding on Britbox (which is British TV) – and there was much talk about Meghan’s make-up – showing how it had been softened, comparing it to cut-aways of her red carpet and TV appearances. What a different impression her make-up made.

As students and emerging artists, there’s a tendency to leave “what I’m wearing” to the more final stages of preparation, when it would be advantageous to treat what you are wearing with the same care, time and investment that we treat mastering phrasing, dynamics and ornamentation. These are the crowning touches that makes what we sing musical. What we wear tells the judges and audience that we understand the medium in which we are performing, and are comfortable and prepared in projecting the right image.

A few tips for ladies:

- High heels give the leg a long, appealing line. They also serve to align your spine when singing because your weight is thrown into the ball of your foot.
- Always wear panty hose.
- Hemlines should be to the middle or just below the knee or longer. Above the knee hemline is never appropriate unless it is a costume in a show.
- The display of cleavage is inappropriate.
- Hair should be styled away from your face.
- Red lipstick is the only color that reads on-stage. It is important to wear make-up, otherwise your face will look “washed-out”.
- Loose fitting knit dresses do not hide extra pounds. The best way to hide extra pounds is to wear a very tailored outfit with waistband, tailored shoulders and perfect hemline proportionate to your height.
- A flattering neckline and earrings frame your face.

You can sometimes find wardrobe at high-end resale shops. But a good resource for selecting wardrobe can be found at department stores like Nordstrom’s, where they have fashion consultants who will take you through the store and consult with you on what looks well and advise you on what is suitable for the occasion. It’s a free service which you can ask for at the customer service desk.

A few tips for men:

- Put a spit shine on your shoes. Socks should match your shoes, not the hemline of your pants.
- The hemline of your slacks should be at least a half-break or full-break. Most men’s stores offer tailoring services when you purchase.
- A long sleeved light-colored dress shirt and tie is as acceptable as tie and jacket.
- Get a hair-cut.

Congratulations to all the wonderful singers who bring their artistry to the world. We are blessed by your talent and dedication and look forward to seeing you on-stage!