

SVSA Pic & Bio Workshop

Opportunity- your pic is the first thing the public sees – on a poster, in an ad, on FB or elsewhere the internet, and so forth. It is often the DECIDING FACTOR in whether a person comes to see you play or not. Before you take the pic:

1. Know your **identity** as an artist. Ask: Am I mostly funny or serious? What is the theme of most of my songs- love, death, getting through life, political views, quirky observations, or...? Am I part of a genre that dictates a significant portion of my identity? Do I have a certain personality or style that shines through my music?
2. Know the genre **expectations**. Are there certain styles of clothing that most people in your genre wear (such as country artists often wear farm, or cowboy, type clothing)? Is it best to follow the norms? Can you bend these expectations, while keeping key components, to fit your personal style?
3. **Dress better in your pic** than your audience. If you were to give a business seminar, people would expect to be in a suit. Not a cheap, or even adequate suit, either. But a nicer suit that what your attendees wear, that sets you apart as a leader. You are a leader on stage. You don't have to wear a suit (and, in most cases, shouldn't!), but choose clothing that conveys that you deserve to be on stage. Even if you are a t-shirt and jeans sort of guy, add something unique to distinguish your look- a vintage fedora, a quirky tie, a pendant, etc. Solid shirts, or consistent prints, look better than printed t's for pictures.
4. Choose a **background** for your photo that says something about your personality or style of music. Try to avoid your living room, a cluttered office, standing on the street or in a random snapshot location. Instead, pic an object to focus on: an antique car or truck, a round hay bale, an ornate doorway, part of an old building, a train engine, and so forth. Additionally, brick walls, barn sides, an animal, and natural settings (such as a large tree trunk, mountain creek, or large meadow) work well. The idea, again, is to find something that the average person doesn't have daily access to. That makes it interesting. Lastly, remove any clutter or average-person stuff from the background. Cars passing by a field behind you, for instance, ruin the background for this kind of photo. Toys, bikes, trash, boxes of junk, clothes cast aside, and such, have a similar effect.
5. Choose an **angle** for the shot and get in **close**. The industry standard is a headshot. This means head and shoulders only. Occasionally, more of the body is included, but it is not advised for the main picture. The reason for this is distance. The more of your body and background shown, the smaller you are in the pic. If a promoter wants all pics to fit on a poster in equal proportion, a full body 2x3 pic may leave you head to measure ¼" across. But a 2x3 headshot will often allow your head to measure 1", or more, across. If the other artists have bigger faces on the poster, the public will be drawn to them more and you will, most likely, be overlooked. When are full body pics appropriate? When you are the only act, or main act, and the poster is big enough to have your pic cover half, or more, of the page, as a general rule.

6. Decide whether you should pose **with, or without, instruments**. This often has a lot to do with what you want, or need, to convey. If you are playing a lot of general festivals where people need to connect your name with your act (music), then an instrument is advantageous. Likewise, if you are an unknown in a niche where the instrument may draw fans in, or show that you fit in to their preconceived notion (such as bluegrass fans may accept you better, as an unknown, if you are holding a banjo, mandolin, or fiddle, rather than a guitar- which could go many directions), you may wish to include the instrument. If your instrument is odd and might increase draw out of curiosity, consider including it. But, as a musician, you are not obligated to pose with an instrument. This especially applies when you are better known in your area or genre. The instrument become unnecessary and, even, redundant. "I play guitar". Fans you play guitar. Why waste that space to insult them with facts we already know. Give them something more interesting to draw them in. Likewise, you are not obligated to use a "performance shot", although you can if it says what you want to say.
7. **To smile or not to smile...** That depends on the message you want to convey. If your music is dark, smiling may not be what you want. If your music is funny or light, definitely smile. Your pic should be a "freeze frame" example of what they might see or feel at your show. If you have a blend of funny and serious and you're not sure what to do in your pic, think about who you want to attract. If they are happy people, smile. You will look like you're having fun and convey that they will have fun at your show, too. If your following is dark, speak to that group in with your serious, or troubled, expression.
8. Check the **lighting** and weather conditions. Avoid shadows across your face or dark, dull photos. Some things can be enhanced in editing, but you should try to set it up right from the start. Grey days can be good for outdoor shots because no shadows are cast. Dark areas, woods or alcoves, are often cool to look at but don't capture well in photos.

Step 2: Shoot the picture

1. If you have a good quality camera, and an eye for a good shot, you can complete the photo shoot **on your own**. Put the camera on a tripod, or mark the right place to stand to take the shot, then ask a family member, or friend, to push the button. Likewise, a person can often be replaced with a timer, if your camera has one. Do not use a cell phone (unless it has the same resolution as a pro-grade camera) or a cheap snapshot camera. The pic may look ok to you, initially, but won't reproduce well on posters and professionally printed items. You may think that doesn't matter now, but, having a quality photo that can be used anywhere will keep you from the last minute scramble when time is running short. If taking your own, prepare to take several exposures (at least 5) of each pose.
2. If you don't have the right equipment, or are not confident in taking your own shot, **hire a professional**. You will still need to follow all of the pre-photo guidelines, as most pro photographers will shoot you as you present yourself. Don't expect them to tell you what to wear, which props to bring, and so forth. Pros typically have good ideas on locations, or can provide a studio backdrop, however, you will still need to tell them your theme and style choices. For instance, a "blue-sky school picture day" background is not terribly useful for your musician's photo (and, you might need to tell some of them that!) A professional will

also, most likely, be able to manipulate the background and add effects that you may not have the ability to do on your own. For instance, a pic could be taken here, on your lawn in VA, but the Rocky Mountains could be Photoshopped in behind you.

3. **Shoot more than one** location or pose. Change your outfit, sit a different way, stand by a different area within the location.

Edit the pic:

1. **Look at the digital proofs** and decide if you like the shot or not. All modern cameras have a screen for viewing the pics just taken. Check for lighting, angle of your head/shoulders, open eyes, smile (or facial expression), any non-flattering marks/angles/clothing issues, background, and overall appeal. Most of this can be checked in thumbnail size, and large issues can be noticed immediately. Eyes, skin, and small details may need to be zoomed upon. If your location is close to home and the pic is easy to re-shoot, you may prefer to load the pics onto your computer and proof that way. If it is a difficult shoot to recreate (or a pro is involved) be sure you like your proofs before you leave the location.
2. Load the pics on your computer, or meet with the pro to view the real proofs, and **choose the best shot**. If editing, cropping, or other manipulation is necessary, do this before making a final choice. When you are down to your final choices in each pose, or location, ask yourself “What does this picture say?” “Does it go with the standard caption (John Doe, Singer-Songwriter)?” “Does it challenge the standard caption (in a good way that might increase curiosity or draw)?” “Does it say anything about me I don’t like or would rather people view differently?” (Such as: he’s a slob- because of the ketchup stain on his shirt, or he doesn’t know what he’s doing- his guitar is strung backwards!) Do you look awake and able or tired and disheveled? Did you, or the photographer, capture your style and uniqueness? If you were going for an experimental or odd effect, did you get it? Will you be ok with hundreds of people seeing this picture and making inferences about you based on it?
3. **Crop** the photo to center the head and shoulders. Make sure the pic is bright enough. Often, brighten it just beyond what looks good on your computer. Check for clarity. Sometimes cropped images become pixelated if the subject started out small.

PART II: BIO

1. **Brainstorm** about your top attributes as a musician and artist. People will scan rather than read, so you want to have easily understood facts that speak to your accomplishments, experience, and style. Simple facts about birthplace, hometown, and influences are also common.
2. **Write** a paragraph (target 5 sentences) including the info in step one.
3. Know your target **audience**. Local? Regional? National? Adults? Children? Teens? Families? Special interest group? Your bio may be slightly different if speaking to one audience or the other, depending on what moves them most.

4. **Cull** out unnecessary information and order lists from greatest accomplishment or event to smallest. Do not make up facts or put an unbelievable spin on things.
5. If you are not a great writer, a **common format** is:

John Doe is a folk singer-songwriter from Roanoke, VA. Heavily influenced by the sounds of Pete Seegar and Bob Dylan, his songs speak to social, political, and environmental issues. His CD, "Directions", won SVSA Album of the Year in 2011, and he was featured on "Good Morning Roanoke" in 2012 and 2014. John's songs have been played on Roanoke-area radio shows from 2010-present. His smooth vocals and passionate delivery captivates audiences up and down the east coast.
6. **Proofread.** Cut out extra words and explanations. Remove any apologies or excuses. Think like a newspaper reporter. Make sure you didn't cut too much – meaning, you still hit all the important points. Check your spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Edit for typos and spacing errors.
7. **Read it out loud** for oral flow, as if someone was introducing you with it on stage.
8. Think about **who this speaks to**. If the person it speaks to is not part of your ideal audience, think about what words or images could be changed to make it more appealing to them.
9. If you haven't already, type it in a word document on your computer.

Saving & Sharing-

1. **Save** your bio as a standard word document (.doc, .docx) and your photo as a j-peg (.jpg).
2. Keep it in a **folder** of it's own on your computer (copy it to a flash drive or send it to your phone if you communicate from more than one device). Name the pic "John Doe Singer-Songwriter" and the bio "John Doe Bio" (obviously substituting your name for John Doe). Name the folder "John Doe Pic and Bio". If you have more than one pose or a local and national bio, number them after the above labels.
3. **Update** your pic yearly and your bio as information changes.
4. Always supply venues with your **latest** pic and bio. Do not let them use last year's pic or bio if you have updated since. Be prompt and brief in your communications.
5. Send a pic and bio, often along with an mp3 clip of, or link to, your work upon **initial inquiry**, and the pic and bio **again, upon acceptance**. (Often different people handle the booking process and info is lost or in another committee members email folders).
6. **Follow up** on your own to see if your pic and bio are being used as promised and if your info is displayed accurately. Check the festival website, drive by the venue and look for the poster, ask to be tagged on FB when the promoter posts. Even for little gigs, this is important. If there are errors, or your info is not up as promised, contact the person who booked you and correct the situation.

