

# Perform to a Five Year Old

an essay by Larry Ajer

*Audiences and five-year olds have short attention spans, so we must commit to holding their attention.*

With all due respect to our audiences, they have a short attention span. Because of that, it is necessary to work very hard to keep the audience focused on our performances, and to ensure that they enjoy what we do. After all, we cannot hope to have a rewarding impact on our audience if they entertained, it is our responsibility to entertain them. It is 100 percent our duty and 0 percent theirs. So, what do we do?

Within our set of resources is an experience that nearly every adult can call upon to keep the audience involved. Have you ever tried to communicate with a five-year-old? If you have, and most of us have, then you know how quickly a child will leave us and stop listening. They really need us to be overly dramatic if they are to stay present and understand what we are doing or saying. The concept then is to perform to an audience as if they were a singular five-year-old who is being constantly distracted by other fun things to do.

When I ask a quartet to perform as if they were trying to hold the attention of a five-year-old, the effect is always dramatic and predictable. The group becomes more animated, more expressive, more varied in delivery, more musical, more of everything. The idea that a contest set, for example, lasts about five minutes, says that we need to be 100% committed to the audience for the full time on stage. It is the entrance, singing, acceptance of applause, and the exit that are measured by the audience, and all of them need the same attention to total detail.

One thing is certain. If we waver in our commitment to the stage at anytime, our five-year-old is gone, out of there, off playing Nintendo, or doing anything but listening to us. That is the way and the privilege of the five-year-old. It is also the way and privilege of our audience. So treat the audience as if it were a five-year-old and you will train your skills to capture the thrill of every single moment on stage and communicate in such a way as to maximize the impact on your audience.