

Things a Karaoke DJ (KJ) May or May Not Tell You

Each Karaoke show is different, run by many different kinds of people, but the person behind the show (the Karaoke host or Karaoke DJ — commonly called a KJ) is always consistent.

Here are things the Karaoke DJ may or may not tell you, based on my many experiences and (gasp) talking to some of them:

They Love Regulars

Some establishments start a Karaoke show in order to draw in more people. This sometimes works. Sometimes it fails miserably.

However, a good Karaoke DJ has a following. If they happen to start a new show in a place hardly anybody frequents, it's a gamble. The KJ doesn't necessarily expect the normal restaurant patrons to get up and start singing away (although that would be nice).

Sometimes the KJ is limited to just singing a few songs, waiting for singers, and playing DJ music the rest of the night (boring!).

A good KJ will have a social media presence and announce venues and times. And if the KJ has a nice following, their regulars will (gasp) show up.

The appearance of regulars at a dead show is a godsend. The regulars show up, eat (if there's food), drink (and tip), and sing. This looks good for the KJ who is just starting out at a new venue. The KJ gets singers (win) and the venue gets drinking and tipping customers.

So ask any KJ: do they like regulars? The answer will most likely be a yes with conditions (nobody likes an annoying regular — you know, the one who drinks water all night, doesn't tip, and sings nothing but George Strait all night).

They Love Tips

KJs make a living on having the most songs, the best equipment, and having a good fan base. They might probably net \$100-300 a night at best. Sometimes the venue supplies free food and drinks, but that is in a best-case scenario.

KJs still have to purchase the songs, buy equipment (if the venue isn't supplying it), drive to the actual venue (gas money, hello?), and then put up with insanely drunk people who think they sing like Mariah Carey but actually sound like Rebecca Black.

Most KJs have some kind of tip jar, but (sadly) some venues don't even allow tipping.

Well, here's a secret: KJs LOVE tips. I mean love them.

Even if the venue doesn't allow them, I've never seen a KJ turn them down.

So what'll a tip get you?

Let's say Nothing... so no one is offended... but... Well, a \$10 tip might get you a significant boost in the rotation if it's a long one. A \$20 tip might get you the next song or the coveted Last Song of the Night.

Most KJs appreciate a \$1 or \$2 tip per song. It helps pay the bills.

One of my KJ friends had a 40+ person rotation where new singers had a very small chance of getting a chance to sing. In walks a wedding party who wants to sing. They decided to tip their way in to the rotation. And it worked.

So sure, you can *not* tip and wait your turn, or you can see how a tip will get you special privileges (if the KJ is being amenable).

Note: This part of the article seems to be the most controversial. I say, tip what you like (a good rule of thumb is \$1-\$2 per song). It never hurts to ask the KJ if giving a big tip will get you special treatment. The worst they can say is no. And if the KJ says no, it's probably to protect the regulars, so just sit down and wait your turn like everyone else.

Some Things are “Broken”

Have you heard the stories about bartenders pretending their blender is broken? It's because bartenders absolutely hate making blended drinks when they have a full house. It's a waste of time, they usually don't get any extra tips out of the drinks, and it prevents them from honoring other tipping patrons who have more reasonable drink requests. So yeah, bartenders will lie that the blender is broken. KJs do the same thing. If a group of girls wants to sing “Girls Just Want to Have Fun”, the KJ might pretend their extra mic is out of batteries or is broken. Why? Because nine times out of ten, the two mics are given to the loudest non-singers of the group who belt out three to four minutes of horrible, gag-inducing vocals.

One evil trick KJs do is pretend a song is corrupted.

Want to sing “Strawberry Wine” by Deana Carter? “I'm sorry, the version we have is corrupted and/or missing lyrics.” Why would a KJ do this? Probably because at every single show they do, somebody wants to sing *that song*. And hearing the same song sung horribly every other night can be a real downer. So yeah, KJs do pretend some songs don't work or they'll just say they don't have the song. Bummer for you, but joy for the rest of us.

Drop a Mic or Place Your Drink on their Setup, You're Cut Off

Want to piss a KJ off? Drop the mic. It's a quick way to get you booted out of the rotation. It's either a sign that you're too drunk to sing, or that you are not capable of holding an expensive object for three to four minutes.

An honorable mention is when someone tries to place their beer onto the KJs setup. You know, the setup where there's a computer, audio controls, and the like?

Yeah, not cool. It's a quick way to piss a KJ off. Don't do it. You could get dropped.

One other thing KJs can't stand: smoking while singing. What's the point? You can't go three or so minutes without taking a puff? It's not like you can smoke and sing at the same time. Just wait until after your song is over.

They Don't Care If It's Your Birthday

"Oh, it's my birthday! Let me sing a hundred songs!"

Yeah, wait your turn like everyone else. Unless you're a regular who tips, then all bets are off.

Group Songs are ALWAYS Horrible

You always have the same white girls who think they can sing "Baby Got Back" and utterly destroy it. I mentioned "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." Yeah, I've never seen a good version.

In my experience, a group song announcement is three to four minutes of disaster waiting to happen. It's what most regulars would call a "time to smoke outside" break.

Even KJs make their trip to the bathroom during these songs.

The songs are fun for the group. Nobody else.

One KJ in Alabama absolutely refused to do group songs, so really it's up to the KJ's discretion. It's their show after all.

There *ARE* Songs KJs Hate

The song "Picture" by Sheryl Crow and Kid Rock? It is the [w·o·r·s·t s·o·n·g e·v·e·r.](#)

Every KJ I know hates it. The original song sucked. There's not much you can do to redeem it. "Friends in Low Places" by Garth Brooks? A close second.

Show tunes (including Disney)? Save them for the shower.

Sing a Song Longer Than 4 Minutes and Everyone Will Hate You

You know what sucks? A long rotation when you're trying to get a song in.

You know what sucks worse? A long rotation and someone decides to sing the *VERY LONG* song, "You Can't Always Get What You Want" or the detested, "Freebird."

There was one KJ in Austin who cut off a girl singing "Freebird" after 2 minutes. She was furious, but the KJ was actually applauded for the decision.

Country Gets Old Really Fast

Most KJs I know love all kinds of music, including country. However, after twenty straight country songs, the genre kinda gets on your nerves.

Win the KJs favor and shake it up with some pop, rap, or alternative. The crowd may hate you for it, but the KJ will appreciate the change up.

When Am I Up Next?

You put in a song, buy a few drinks, listen to a few people sing...

All of the sudden you get the urge to see when you are up next. **Please don't.**

I've never met a KJ who wasn't annoyed by the inevitable, "How long till I sing?" question. Keep in mind, if it's a long rotation (20 or more), they have people constantly nagging them for updates and to change their songs. You are not helping. Especially if you do it over and over and over and over and over again.

When they put your song in, look at your position in the rotation. Keep a mental view of your status and wait your damn turn. If you can't see your position, ask how many people are ahead of you. They'll usually tell you. Please don't keep bombarding them with questions. They have better things to do, like to make the next epic group song sound amazing.

Yes, Your Mic Could Get Turned Off and/or Your Song Cut Off

Some KJs operate in family friendly venues. And unfortunately, the KJs do not know the lyrics to every song in existence. So when you want to sing Eminem's Superman where there are kids present, or you are singing in a church environment, etc., the KJ might cut you off in order to save face.

Some KJs have a no cussing policy. Ask before singing. If a song is inappropriate, let the KJs know and ask if it's okay to sing it. They'll give you a yay or nay immediately.

Some KJs and restaurants have an after 11pm policy (because honestly, all kids should be put to bed by then). If it's after this magic hour, anything goes.

Regarding getting your mic cut off, it happens. If you're really drunk and really loud and spouting nonsense, the KJ might lower your volume or just plain turn the mic off. You're probably so drunk you won't even notice.

It's Their Show

In the end, it's wise to remember that it's the KJ's show. They should be given the alternate title "Drunk Singing Moderators."

If a KJ wants to squeeze a new singer in ahead of you, that's their decision. If there's thirty people left to sing with only twenty minutes to go, they might pick and choose singers (maybe based on tips).

If you're obnoxious and get booted, whining to the bar manager or waitress will not help.

So, keep this in mind: it's their show. It's up to them how to manage to get as many people singing as possible.

Practice, Practice, Practice

If you go to Karaoke occasionally, then this tip might not apply to you, but...

It helps to know the song (and even the version) you're singing.

You might have a vague recollection of Selena's hit "I Could Fall in Love", but then totally forget there's a Spanish part, and you don't speak the language.

At best, research the song on YouTube. Look at the lyrics. Try your best at singing it. If it's passable, attempt it. I've never seen anybody get booed at a Karaoke show (with one exception, which I'll keep to myself).

And sometimes, no matter how much you practice, the song comes out awful.
Live and learn.

But Remember, KJs Love You

The point of Karaoke is for a bunch of amateurs to go out, have a good time, and sing songs they love. Karaoke generally isn't a contest (although some treat it like one) and nobody expects you to sound perfect (except maybe you).

KJs will welcome all...

- *Have an eight-year-old girl that wants to sing some Kesha or Lady Gaga? Go for it!*
- *Love Frank Sinatra? Annoy everyone with your talent!*

Just show up, sing, (ahem) tip, and leave the world a better place than you found it.

KJs love it when you show up, because without you, the show wouldn't be possible.

Please read a follow-up post: [***Tips for a New Karaoke Singer***](#)

Disclaimer

I do not speak for all KJs or people that go to Karaoke shows. A lot of these "opinions" and observations are from speaking to actual KJs, reading list article after list article, and going to my own shows.

Have I made some of these mistakes listed?

Absolutely. Have I learned? Kinda.

Karaoke is immense fun when you have a group of regulars, a great and attentive crowd, and a great KJ.