

DUELING PIANOS CONVENTION SCHEDULE

BOBBY MCKEY'S NOVEMBER 3-6

MONDAY (Nov 3)

6 PM Meet and Greet at **BOBBY MCKEYS**
 172 Fleet St, Oxon Hill, MD 20745
 Name badges. Appetizers provided. Cash bar

7 PM Club is open to public

8 PM Dueling Pianos

TUESDAY (Nov 4)

10 AM Doors open. Brunch provided

10:25 AM **Keynote** Drew De Four

10:30 AM Presentation #1 - **Origins of Dueling Pianos** Van Walraven
 As told by a Dueller from Alley Cats

11:00 AM Presentation #2 - **"You're on Stage, Damn it!"** Danny Korzelius
 Theater in Dueling Pianos

11:30 AM Presentation #3 - **From Berklee to DP** Rachel Solomon
 Musicality in Dueling Pianos Nate Hopkins, Steve Savage

12:00 PM Presentation #4 - **Tipnique** Jimmy Ross
 Sharing the best techniques for healthy tip soliciting

12:30 PM Short Break to finish off the brunch

12:45 PM Presentation #5 - **Sound and Lights** Ronnie Smith
 Basic facts and common mistakes

1:15 PM Presentation #6 - **Being a Great Partner** Drew Tepe
 The dos and don'ts of being a good Dueling Pianos partner

1:45 PM Presentation #7 - **Mental Health in the Music Industry** Kin Curran
 Knowing yourself and your team on and off stage

2:15 PM Presentation #8 - **Dueling Pianos Cheat Sheet** Drew De Four
 Very quick, helpful tips on Dueling Pianos

2:45 PM Short Break

3:00 PM **OPEN FORUM**

4:30 PM **AGENTS CALLING CARD**
 Agents and EDs from around the country present their opportunities

5-7 PM Free Time/Dinner in the Harbor

7:00 PM Club opens to DUELERS (Cash Bar) and general public

8:00 PM Dueling Pianos - McKey's regulars warm up the crowd before...

9:00 PM **AUDITIONS**
 Sign up list on clipboard (available Monday evening and all day Tuesday)

~10:00 PM Dueling Pianos

WEDNESDAY (Nov 5)

****WEAR MONUMENTS WALKING CLOTHES TO THE CLUB****

10 AM Doors open. Brunch provided
10:15 AM Presentation #9 - **Owners and GMs Round Table** Bob Hansan
Attending Owners and GMs invited to discuss DP industry
11:00 AM Presentation #10 - **Marketing and PR** Beth Ketchum
What's working? What's not working?
11:30 AM **CLOSING FORUM:** The Future of Dueling Pianos
12:00 PM RANDOM SELECTION FOR 4-WAY COMPETITION
12:15 PM Quick break to finish off brunch, freshen up, use restrooms
12:30 PM Meet down the street at Water Taxi - \$35.20 Round Trip (buy tickets prior to)
12:55 PM Water Taxi Departs for The Wharf (Stops briefly in Alexandria)
2:05 PM Arrive at The Wharf in D.C.
Walking Tour of Washington, WW2, Vietnam, Lincoln, Korean War, MLK (with view of Jefferson) Monuments

Water Taxi Tickets:

<https://www.cityexperiences.com/washington-dc/city-cruises/water-taxi/washington-dc-water-taxi/?date=11/04/2025&endDate=11/04/2025>

Walking Route:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/AjjV2guXhq8CWULc6>

5:45 PM Water Taxi Departs for National Harbor
6:50 PM Water Taxi Arrives at the National Harbor
7:00 PM Dinner in the Harbor/Get Ready for Night
8:00 PM Dueling Pianos - McKey's regulars warm up crowd before...
9:00 PM **4-Way Competition**
MC: Matt Tobin
Judges: Eric Scott (Indie Artist)
D-Smoove (Hot 99.5 Radio)
Alison St. Clair (Former DP GM)
John Luskey (Indie Artist)
Prizes: 1st: \$200 cash per Dueler
2nd: \$50 cash per Dueler
3rd: \$25 cash per Dueler
~10:00 PM Closing Remarks followed by Dueling Pianos

THURSDAY (Nov 6)

-Duelers Depart!

ORIGINS OF DUELING PIANOS

From Ragtime to Showtime

Setting the Stage – The Precursors to Dueling Pianos

1854 *Werlein's for Music* opens on Canal Street in New Orleans and becomes one of the nation's largest publishers/sellers of sheet music. Over the next 150 years, *Werlein's* remains the cultural hub for New Orleans musicians. The store sells musical instruments, provides music lessons and is patronized by a clientele that included **Louis Armstrong, Fats Domino, Dr. John, and Harry Connick Jr.**

1865~1940 When men are scarce after the Civil War, *Werlein's* begins hiring female **sheet music players** to demo songs for the store's customers. It is said that many men without pianos would buy the sheet music, merely for the opportunity to hear the ladies play.

“A lady should never be overtly eager to play (the piano), but should accept an invitation gracefully. She should ensure her posture is correct and should avoid dramatic or whimsical tricks.” (*American Heritage Book of Etiquette*, c. 1900)

1920s–1940s Cutting contests become an attraction among ragtime, stride, jazz and blues pianists, including **Fats Waller, Jelly Roll Morton and Art Tatum**. Pianists would compete for speed and musical supremacy. Although contests were held on one piano, they nevertheless suggest a precursor to Dueling Pianos.

1933 **Pat O'Brien** and **Charlie Cantrell** open *Pat O'Brien's Place* on Royal & Bourbon Streets... two days before Prohibition ends.

1937 After witnessing her impressive impromptu performance at the club's unused, untuned piano the night before, *Pat O'Brien's* owners hire 32-year-old, sheet music reader and former high-jump World Record holder, **Mercedes (Mur-si-DEEZ) LeCorgne** to play piano (solo) and entertain at the club. Her starting salary is \$25 per week for an 8-hour span of time (8pm-4am), 6 nights a week.

Taking the Stage – The First 48 Years of Dueling Pianos

1938 Sue Wheeler takes the stage with **Mercedes** at *Pat O'Brien's Place*, and together, they perform the first of its kind “twin pianos” show.

1942 *Pat O'Brien's* moves to its current location on St. Peter Street. Building on the success of their two-ladies piano show, the club buys three, copper-plated grand pianos, remodels what once was a vaudevillian theater, angles two, large mirrors behind the pianos, and opens its new Piano Bar. With **Mercedes** leading the show at the piano stage right, the club hires more female pianists, eventually running the “twin pianos” entertainment 18 hours a day, 7 days a week.

1942-1945 During WWII, the *Pat O'Brien's* Piano Bar becomes a favorite “last night” send-off for sailors and servicemen shipping off to war. “**This is number one and the fun has just begun...**” (from the “Roll Me Over” parody)

1950~1986 In Biloxi, Memphis and New Orleans, other two-piano clubs open... and close, while *Pat O'Brien's* continues to “**Pack ‘em in and roll ‘em over!**” (frequently said of Mercedes)

1968 After 32 years, *Pat O'Brien's* original piano entertainer, **Mercedes**, retires at age 63.

Commanding the Stage – The Modern Age of Dueling Pianos

1986 *Alley Cats* opens at a *Dallas Alley*, a multi-club complex in downtown Dallas, Texas. Former *Pat O'Brien's* performers, **Connie Kaye** and **Cindy Chen**, are brought to Dallas to provide show consultation.

1986-1990 *Alley Cats*’ original ‘Four Horsemen’: **Steve Greene & Ken Goodwin** (the comedy-show team) and **Rohn Bailey & Jon Glazer** (the rock-the-house team) and later, the ‘Fab Four’: **Dave Matthews & Kevin Clover** (the comedy-show team) and **Chris Roberts & Arch Hooks** (the rock-the-house team), present what esteemed *Alley Cats*

performer and innovator, **Sam Leatherwood**, calls “the ideal dichotomy.”

“You are a host, singer, player, and cheerleader all at once. No one said this was going to be easy.” (Alley Cats Entertainers Manual)

1986-1990 *Alley Cats*’ founding performers develop and codify the **architecture**, **nomenclature** and **pedagogies** of modern Dueling Pianos. “There is clever and there is vulgar. Strive for the former.” and “Requests cannot determine the pace of your show.” (Alley Cats Entertainers Manual)

1990 The *Cat*’s out of the bag – **Terry Cunningham** and **Jimmy Bernstein** open the first *Howl at the Moon Saloon* at Covington Landing in Cincinnati.

1990 First known use of the term “**Dueling Pianos**” is found in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (March 11, 1990), p. B-1, B-2, describing *Howl at the Moon* as a “New Orleans-style bistro with **dueling pianos**... featuring piano singalongs to the music of the ‘50s, ‘60s, and 70s...two baby grands manned by a pair of wild and crazy guys who spice old rock ‘n’ roll tunes with jokes dusted off from vaudeville and every audience-participation gimmick known to man.”

1990 *Alley Cats* did not use the term “dueling pianos,” but rather, referred to itself as “the first and finest high energy **sing-a-long bar**.” (Alley Cats Entertainers Manual). This comports with my recollections and those of others I’ve interviewed.

1988-1991 *Alley Cats* boasts of being the highest revenue producing bar per square foot in the nation. *Pat O’Brien’s* disputes that.

1991 **Van Walraven** joins the staff at *Alley Cats* and changes the course of music history for generations to come.

Alley Cats Entertainers (1986-1990):

The Four Horsemen:

Steve Greene & Ken Goodwin (the comedy-show team)

Rohn Bailey & Jon Glazer (the rock-the-house team)

The Fab Four:

Dave Matthews & Kevin Clover (the comedy-show team)

Chris Roberts & Arch Hooks (the rock-the-house team)

Other Alley Cats Hall of Famers:

Karl Berkebile, Jimmy Clark, John Purkey, Mike Matthews, Rod Summers, Sam Leatherwood, Rick Weidemann, Kyle Level, Will Townsley, Bill Ingram, Richard Tyson and Neal Kern.

Mandatory Alley Cats Players' Meeting and Rehearsal

Tuesday, November 4 1991

Bring in new material. We need more call-downs,
sing-a-longs, and parodies.

Remember the "Three Strikes Rule"

MAKING YOUR SONG or BIT SHOW-READY

Identifying and Delivering Payoffs

Thursday afternoon, mandatory Players Meeting/
Rehearsal at *Alley Cats* – c. 1991

Is this Rock-the-House a Bit, a Left-Turn or something else?

Tempo and Key

Percussion

Song Form: | Set-Up | Intro | Verses and Choruses | Ending | Tag |

Partner Involvement

Sing-Along/s

Call and Response

Clap-Along

Room Split

Alternate Lyrics

Comedic Delivery

Geographical Reference (City, State or Country)

College Fight Song

Group Dance / Hand Motions

Showtime



Modern photograph of Werlein's for Music (est. 1854), shown at its original location on Canal Street.



c. 1900



^ Fats Waller, c. 1940



< Art Tatum, c. 1938



Sue Wheeler and Mercedes LaCorgne at Pat O'Brien's, c. 1938. They are the first known "Dueling Pianos" team.



Pat O'Brien's (Saint Peter St. entrance), unchanged, 1942 to present.



Mercedes, c. 1943 (age 38) – performed at Pat O’Brien’s 1937 to 1968.
She is the first known “Dueling Pianos” entertainer.
This framed photo has been on the wall at Pat O’Brien’s for 60~70 years
(Taken on October 30th, 2025 by Ben Michaels)

You're On Stage, Dammit!

Danny Korzelius

Dueling pianos is a crazy amalgamation of multiple, endless entertainment disciplines, and its performers all come from slightly different directions. I was a Musical theater Kid who played a few instruments, and I got A BFA in MT from SUNY @ Buffalo, and found myself quickly after graduation thrust into a full time Job at Rum Runners in Wilmington, NC. Several clubs and decades later, I'm still on stage, just not the one I was aiming for. But there's a few lessons I learned back in high school and college in my theater days that have served me well. I still think about these points often, so here's a quick rundown. Some may seem like no brainers, but I'm still surprised how even vets like me can tend to forget the simple things. Remember, no matter whether you're singing, conducting a crowd or just backing up your partner...YOU'RE ON STAGE DAMMIT.

- **Preparation matters** – There's so much to prepare for, so control what you can. Not knowing lines for a scene in class or on stage is just ridiculous. Get off-book, go over that part with your partner at the band house... Again, know what you don't know and go know it!
- **Every moment is the first time.** – It's the same lines all over again, but it's your job to say them again, for the first time. Give the audience as fresh of a performance as possible, from the downbeat.
- **Cheat out.** – Make sure the audience can see you and avoid getting stuck in full profile as much as possible, avoid just playing inward to yourself. Eyes up and available to the audience, it's always more interesting for the crowd to see your emotion. (this is where our devices have hit us the most, for all the good they do). Make sure the show is in the crowd, not in the piano.
- **“Throwing/Drawing focus”** – Where you look matters. The audience will look “with” you, if you want them to or not. If your partner is really trying to command the crowd, be looking at them and mirroring their instructions. Ignore the things that you don't want them looking at, like your guy under the drums fixing the wonky bass pedal for the 37th time....

- **Yes, and...** Don't deny what's happening. Accidents, unintended consequences, Everyone saw/heard it...just figure out a way to make it part of the magic and keep rolling. Also, allow your partner to lead you in a new direction, even after you have performed a song a different way for years. Be open to living in the moment and the audience will go with you.
- **Lighting makes a difference** – If you're lit well, people will look at you. Learn and utilize your lighting, and stay out of it if you don't want to be seen. Embrace the contrast of subtle and crazy and use it to enhance what you're trying to do.
- **Sing the intention of the text** – If you want to engage people in a performance, mean what you're saying. Even if it's ridiculous. Don't let the words become just pretty noises. Be honest.
- **Radiate** – Especially in bigger venues, everything has to be bigger and a little slowed down. Heightened realism. Play to the back of the room and let your energy get to the back of the house, not just the front row.
- **Learn to take notes/criticism** – Every run though had a session of notes, in front of the whole cast. Try to take notes to heart, but not personally. We can all improve, and even if you feel like the criticism is unwarranted, there's usually a nugget of truth anyways. BE OBJECTIVE ABOUT YOURSELF. We can all get better.
- **“The more skills you have, the more employable you are”** – Best piece of entertainment advice in my opinion. Never stop growing, and you'll never stop working.

And most importantly, IMHO....

Be honest with yourself – You're great at some things. You're not so great at others. Put yourself in positions to succeed by knowing what you do well. Try to be objective about your skills, accentuate the good and work on the bad. Give yourself equal parts grace and criticism, and a healthy ego will follow. ALWAYS BE LEARNING.

MUSICALITY DISCUSSION (Nate's Notes)

- Groove is king. The audience, whether they know it or not, will feel more of an urge to join in on your show if your groove is solid. If it's not, they won't lean in. I'll demonstrate some concepts and ideas for left hand groove for newer players.
- Fundamentals. Between Berklee and my time in NYC, I've been fortunate enough to play with players who are much better than I am. Without many exceptions, a lot of these players practice with a metronome, run their scales and arpeggios, and objectively examine and practice the hell out of trouble spots.
- Active listening. This is where ensemble work has helped me the most as a partner on the dueling gig. I'll talk a bit about the idea of filling in gaps in an arrangement and a bit about the utility of understanding counterpoint. If time allows, I will play a snippet of a song and show how counterpoint and filling and gaps is utilized in contemporary arranging, and then lay out a few concepts and ideas for how to practically apply that on the gig.

In Geoff Colvin's book

Talent Is Overrated, the phenomenon where people stop improving at a skill (like handwriting or driving) is referred to as reaching the **"OK plateau"**. This state is also described as the **"experience trap"** or reaching the stage of **"automaticity"** or **"arrested development"**.

The key points related to this concept are:

- **Initial Improvement**: When first learning a skill, people improve rapidly through conscious effort (the "cognitive phase").
- **The Plateau**: Once a person becomes "good enough" or "OK" at a skill to function comfortably in everyday life, they stop engaging in the focused activities necessary for further improvement. Their performance flattens out, and sometimes even deteriorates over time.
- **Automaticity**: The skill becomes automatic, or "second nature," meaning it can be performed without conscious thought. Colvin argues that great performers **avoid automaticity** through continual, conscious effort.
- **Deliberate Practice as the Solution**: World-class performers avoid the "OK plateau" by consistently engaging in deliberate practice, which involves continually identifying and working on their specific weaknesses, pushing beyond their comfort zone, and obtaining constant feedback

TIPNIQUE SURVEYS:

The power of suggestion. Don't make a big deal about small tips, but be very thankful and vocal about big tips. "We got \$20 for this song, thank you so much!" Now \$20 is in people's minds.

Make it fun - connect w the tippers (and everyone) - recognize who tips first and get to their songs.. as we're always looking for 'repeat offenders'...

Make people laugh and have a good time!

Be clever without being obnoxious. "The white piece of paper tells us what song you want to hear - and the green piece of paper tells us how dearly you love that song!" There are plenty of options.

You will make more money if you tip-whore mercilessly doing all of the "tried and true" bits we've all done. It's a fact. You'll make a lot of money. THAT night. Once. And ultimately kill the room. Or offend the client. Or make everyone leave with a bad taste in their mouth. But you WILL make more money. Take the vampire approach - don't suck them dry. Leave a little blood in their veins for next time.

Don't brow beat people, give them a great show, great music, great entertainment, a positive show, smile.... and the tips will take care of themselves.

Know your crowd, town, colleges, sports teams, local sports calendar, if you're thinking of doing any fight song battles. (Example: When I was in Baltimore, the stadium hosts NCAA Lacrosse Championships. We would learn those fight songs before the tourney started.

Making a *tasteful* statement (or two) at the start of the show is usually all that's necessary. I like to establish this:

(dollars=points & points=priority).

- If/when the room "turns-over," any patrons who missed your original statement of the rules will also eventually catch on.

Be gracious for generosity and inviting not shaming to those who haven't figured it out yet.

You must first demonstrate that you know what you're doing. Start the show off strong, sing well (intonation), play well (in time), know the tunes you're playing off book. Then you can start soliciting tips.

Put crowd experience and customer service first. If they like you, they'll give you money. If they love you, they'll give you a LOT of money.

Be clear but kind! Business is business but don't be robbing people

Be thankful and put on the best show that you can. We are so lucky we get to play music for a living- those that can tip will, and those that can't, will be thankful. I take pride in playing as many songs requests as I can, and making my team as much tips as I can- but I've found the most successful teams I've been on are thankful and love what they do regardless of what our tip night ends up being.

Be charming about it. If you're too country won't know how important it is to tip; if you're too pushy they'll feel gross. Be assertive and charming.

The tips have a purpose - they give the audience control over the show. It helps to let them know that! Also, positive reinforcement works better than negative reinforcement.

Adjust the approach to the audience. What works in a club is not appropriate for a fundraiser.

If you have a servant's heart and try and make people happy the tips will flow. If you try to ram your hand in their pocket or wallet more times than not, they will slam it shut on you.

Never ridicule someone that's giving you cash. (So they didn't use stairs, so they put request slip in the jar, so they gave different currency... ... find some other way to make your show edgy...)

The audience is your friend. Treat them like it, and they'll reward you.

I personally don't like to mention it much other than calling out when someone gives a big tip and making a big deal that their song is next.

I think most people in our audience WANT to be generous. I recommend never berating someone for their low or no tip; instead, I find favor with the audience at large by showing genuine appreciation for those who ARE generous.

Make it fun- something the audience wants to do. Don't hit them over the head with it.

There are three ways we earn tips:

(1) The most common is for playing songs or dedications.

(2) Another category includes all the various dueling pianos devices; e.g. song battles, college fight songs, country vs. rock, "put bread in my jar... put bread in my jar...".

(3) The most gratifying is the Compliment Tip. "You guys were amazing! We had the best time!" and they put down a very nice

I find I get better results emphasizing categories (1) and (3), and only doing a Number (2), when it develops naturally.

Remember to "show" as well as tell. Especially on solo shows, I keep my piano somewhat clear, minus requests with money on them. If someone comes to give me a "suggestion", they clearly see what they are missing. This system does some of the work without you having to say it. Furthermore, if it's too cluttered, the message isn't as clear.

Never make it a direct ask. Simply find creative jokes to indirectly point it out.

Overly praise people who tip you, never insult people who don't.

Making it a fun way for them to have money to burn.

mention it maybe once at the top of the show, and don't be a douchebag about it. People aren't dumb, and if you play songs well, the money will come in and continue to come in.

As an owner, I don't care about tips. I only focus on bar sales. Sales is what pays the company bills, not tips to entertainers/service staff.

There is a way garner tips without verbally assaulting the audience. I think most audiences can "sense" it even if they're not aware of it, and it makes for an uncomfortable performance for both the players and the audience. Yes, we are here for the money. And the audience should be encouraged to tip. But this isn't the stock market. There's a way to blend making the money and actually engaging with the audience. (Which is a win win win.)

I LOVE IT WHEN MY PARTNER...

Listens and supports

Pays attention to what I'm playing and saying! And pays attention to the audience.

Pays attention and doesn't step on my jokes.

Is open to taking necessary risks, complements me (or the other player) via playing, vocally, after solos, after songs, and has their next song ready that maintains the flow of the evening.

Plays along with me. We're meant to be a team, joke with me, do background vocals, be engaged. That's really the bare minimum I ask for!

Supports me and not constantly on their devices. I also want my partner to try and comp me and pay attention to the audience.

Takes risks and "yes-and's" with me.

Sings harmonies...generally adds to the energy/positive vibe

Engages with the audience & brings me into their show, too.

Is in the passenger seat and just lets me drive the song, and vice versa.

Is part of my show and does something fun without steamrolling over a bit!
There's a balance lol

Supports the decisions and call that I make and tries to help or support in anyway while I'm leading the song.

Tells me they know a song, and then plays it off book.

Is "present", laying solid grooves without stepping all over when I'm leading a song, great at bantering back and forth, smiling, and ENTERTAINING POSITIVELY !

Is engaged -- listening musically, accepting cues, being in the moment and willing to go off script -- when I'm leading a song.

Plays upper structure stuff when I'm leading a song, and stays engaged through my tunes

Plays little things from the recording that take it to another level. Horn lines, little hooks that make the song sound accurate.

Has a great sense of humor. The more fun we have, the more fun the audience can have with us.

Provides thoughtful, strategic and well-timed interruption, to advance banter and comedy.

Cracks a good joke. Gets a standing ovation. Does anything to put the crowd at ease and get them going

Understands we aren't a cover band and adapts a versatile entertaining style to the crowd we have, not necessarily the crowd we want.

Smiles! Particularly when they're not leading.. They're still on stage. Remember your face!

Treats me like a person/tries to connect with me both onstage and off.

doesn't make the audience do things I didn't ask them to. e.g. only helps them clap *when* I ask them to help them clap, not just randomly

Recognizes that I am struggling with a song that I had to play for a large tip so they follow it with a very strong, popular song (instead of also performing a song they are not comfortable with for a big tip). In other words, they are seeing the big picture.

Looks good

I HATE IT WHEN MY PARTNER...

Never looks up, doesn't interact or even look at the audience, spends too much time on the pedal, doesn't leave the bass-line alone when s/he's not leading, doesn't smile... steals punchlines... treats it as a job, vs an experience

Does anything over top of me when I'm leading and does it the way they do it, not supporting me. So then it just sounds like a jumbled mess. Don't do your singalong cues for BEG while I'm leading. Get out of my groove register. If your partner isn't playing the "right" chords and they aren't floundering and fumbling, don't smash the right chords or inversions over top of them. Exchange notes (if y'all are into that) AFTER the show. Not during shit.

- '-is lost in an iPad or phone for most of their songs
- yelling at the crowd to get tips or participation.
- doesn't know many songs

- '- Talks after their song is over (unless it's for good reason.. i.e. They need to address something they forgot to say before playing their song - happy birthday/dedication, etc).

- Plays their own bass line when I'm leading the song

Has their nose in their devices

Takes things too seriously or isn't willing to take too many risks.

Adds their clever little lyric modifications to EVERY dang song, all night long. We get it - Brown Eyed Squirrel is hella funny...the first 100 times. Especially if I'm trying to "perform" a song and do it well, and they're trying to turn it into a bit

Tells me they know a song, and then plays it only semi-accurately with a chord chart from Ultimate Guitar tabs.

Over Plays along with the same song a different way.

Is checked out

Gets overwhelmed and doesn't let me help

Plays bass notes over my bass notes.

Is on their phone; doubles my bassline

Plays on my bass line is a given for most people, but there's too many to list

1) Sits there and does nothing when I'm playing 2) expects me to learn all the high paid requests we don't know, and 3) plays songs they don't know when I know them well.

Tells the audience to expect from me a great piano solo ... immediately before ... I play a piano solo...

Plays over me while I lead a song, especially on the bass line or sometimes the complete song. I've literally thrown my hands in the air and stopped playing, and they didn't even notice.

Says they know a song or can pull it off but it is very inaccurate, especially when it's the chorus. To quote a mentor, "Well I could have done that!"

Is listening on his/her phone, while I'm leading a song, then butchers "Brandy (You're a Fine Girl)," which happens to be one of my better songs.

Is doing exactly what they would do if I wasn't there.

Isn't ready to go when my song ends. During my song, plan what you're going to do first before joining in with me. Dead air kills rooms.

Tip whores so hard that the show becomes all about the tips instead of giving a good show

Criticizes me on stage and doesn't follow the cues I set up.

Does not pay attention to where a song might go or an opportunity for improv exists because they are in their phone/not listening/etc.

Doesn't pay attention to what I'm saying or playing! I've seen "support your partner" listed on the FB page as the most important thing in this gig. Listening to what your partner says to the audience, not talking over them while they're doing a bit (even if you feel you can do it better), and responding to the audience are ALL examples of being an actively supportive partner.

Thinks they should get the audience to clap, but is not really committed to it, so they clap their hands at the audience during my song in an attempt to get a clapalong going, but then quickly give up and start looking through their requests. I don't know why this happens, partners should never do anything without committing to it.

Looks bad

MENTAL HEALTH

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is the national mental health hotline. You can call or text 988 anytime, 24/7, for free, confidential support with suicidal or mental health crises. For life-threatening emergencies, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room immediately.

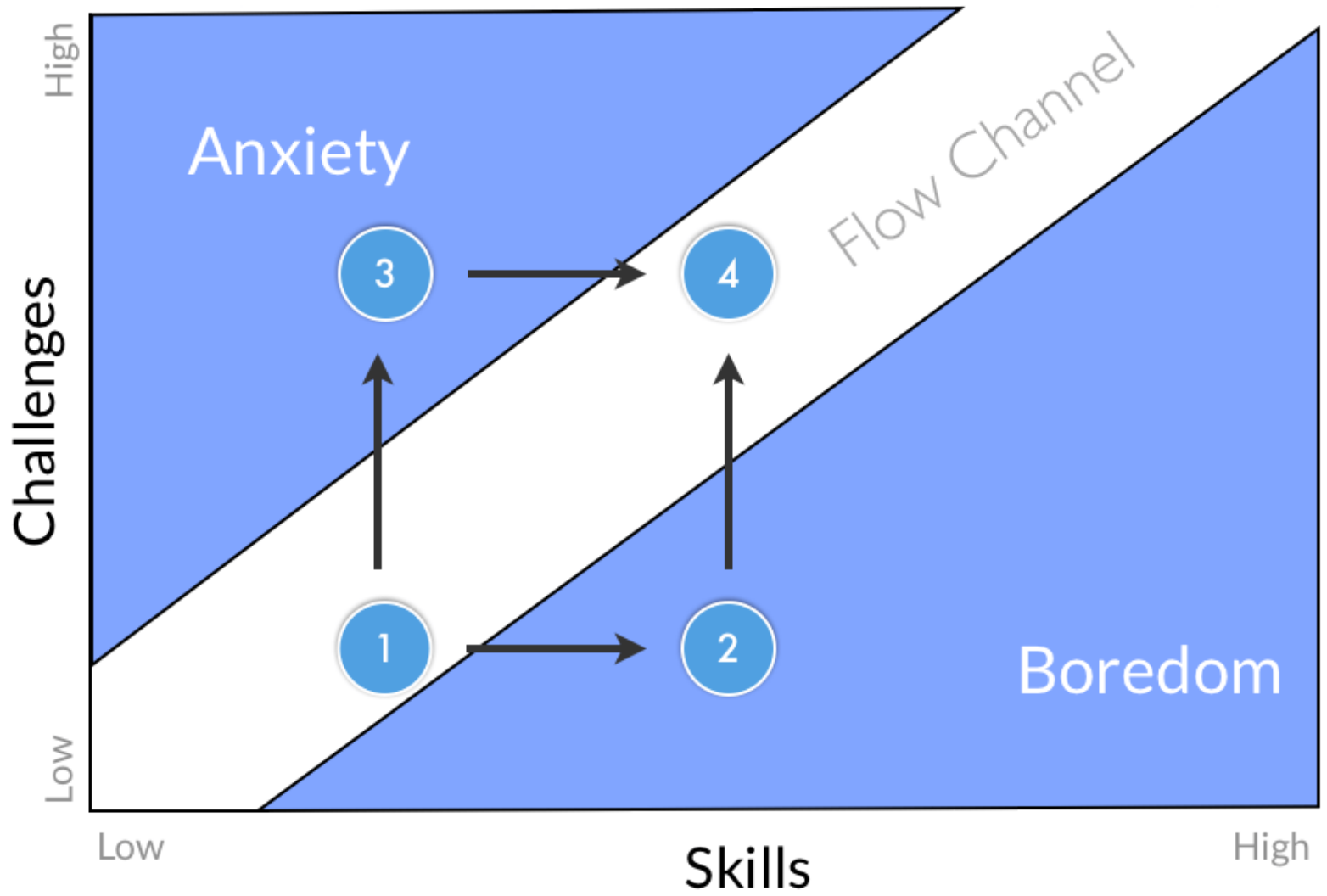
- **Call or text 988:** This connects you to the [988 Lifeline](https://988lifeline.org), providing 24/7 confidential support.
- **Chat online:** You can also chat online at 988lifeline.org/chat.
- **TTY users:** Use your preferred relay service or dial 711 then 988.

FLOW

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1934-2021) was a professor at Claremont Graduate University and former chair of the Department of Psychology at the University of Chicago. His books include Creativity, The Evolving Self and the national bestseller Flow.

Flowchart for the state of "flow"

- **Start:** Beginning of a task.
- **Step 1: Assess skills and challenges.**
 - **Decision:** Is the challenge greater than the skill?
 - **Yes:** Go to **Anxiety**.
 - **No:** Go to **Step 2**.
- **Step 2: Assess skills and challenges.**
 - **Decision:** Is the skill greater than the challenge?
 - **Yes:** Go to **Boredom**.
 - **No:** Go to **Flow State**.
- **Step 3: Anxiety.**
 - **Process:** The task is too difficult.
- **Step 4: Boredom.**
 - **Process:** The task is too easy.
- **Step 5: Flow State.**
 - **Process:** A state of deep focus and enjoyment, where the challenge and skill are balanced.
 - **Characteristics:** Clear goals, immediate feedback, a sense of control.
- **Flow:** Arrows connect each step to show the progression and decision points.
- **End:** The process can lead to either the flow state or a negative state like anxiety or boredom.



DREW's CHEAT SHEET

THE SHOW STARTS WHEN THE AUDIENCE ARRIVES. Everything that happens once people enter the door is part of their experience. If you argue with your partner within sight or sound of patrons, if you are dealing with sound/light issues on stage in a concerning way... this sets a really bad tone for the show. Same goes for Staff.

APPEARANCE MATTERS. You can't separate the senses. Dress your best, whatever that means *for you*. This doesn't mean dress "formal" (unless your club has a dress code). It means put time and thought into your appearance and style.

START STRONG. Anchoring (explain). People tend to set their anchor point at their first impression of something. Start the show the way you want it to be for the rest of the night. If you warm up and ignore the audience, you have informed them that this is the show where the crowd ignores the performer and talks amongst themselves. When you try to change that approach later on, the audience will not easily follow along as they have already anchored.

DON'T PERFORM BEYOND YOUR ABILITY. A perfect swan dive gets you a 3/3. A botched reverse 4.5 somersault with 4.5 twists in the pike position... is a 0/10. You don't get points for degree of difficulty, only your execution. Of course it is true that you will get a 7/10 for hacking through some difficult songs with a decent degree of competence.

MUSICALITY MATTERS - "Bad singing is not entertaining."

BE AUTHENTIC. Be you. Authenticity is the cure for competition. Maybe you can't sing or play like so and so, but you can sing and play like *YOU*.

I let this influence my repertoire... there are 50 songs that come up every night. Learn all of them. There are 500 songs that come up every week. Learn all of them.

There are 5,000 songs that come up once a month... learn the ones you love. Then, on that one occasion when a rare Bruce Hornsby request comes up for \$100, you can knock it out of the park... or you can just play it at the end of the night much to the delight of your fellow Duelers. (Thank you Rachel Solomon!)

FIGURE OUT THE HIGHEST MORALITY.

- Dunking songs to make the most people happy and make the most money... or playing the full version of a song to make that one person very happy?
- Do you play the songs just like the record? Or do you color the chords for your own enjoyment?
- On that note, do you chastise a partner for not staying true to the record (which is the blueprint we all use to construct these songs in real time), or do you let them do their thing?
- At the tip count, do you bring up something that bothered you? Or trust that your team is all doing the best they can and maybe they don't have the same priorities as you?

CHALLENGE: figure out what you can compromise that is foolishly idealistic. Maybe it's something that serves a morality you believe in, but is not important to others.

EVERY SONG NEEDS A PAYOFF. Singalong. Clapalong. Piano Solo. Parody lyric. Joke. Toast. Call Down. Bit. 4-Way. Showtime. Game. Couples Slow Dance. Entire Crowd Dance. Conga Line. Call and Response. TV Theme Songs. Total Silence. Impressive Performance. Emotional Performance.

As soon as they have you figured out, you've lost them.

CHALLENGE: The problem of the performance piece. Too many Duelers go back to back to back to back with just performance pieces (where you play the song to the best of your musical ability without involving the audience). I've seen this time and again be a huge detriment to shows. I recommend 1 performance piece per player per set, but obviously not strictly.

CHEAT SHEET SURVEY RESPONSES

Start strong. Start confident. Do not play something you have to read. Do not play a song that is not setting the tone for the entire night ahead. Do not warm up yourself, warm up the crowd. Your first song can make or break the entire night.

Have different gears ready (fast, slow, silly, call downs, etc) so you can appropriately co-drive the show, vs playing 'chase' the leader...

Practice every day, even if its just Hanon exercises
-talk about being present - you can practice ON THE GIG - especially if arthritic-

Be yourself...I sometimes describe it as letting out a little of my inner wise-ass, without punching down. You want to hug the crowd in. If you are genuinely having fun, the people will pick up on it.

the most important people in the room are the ones that booked the event or made the request.

'-be thankful you get to perform and can make a great living doing what we do EVERYTIME you step on stage. It will change your entire demeanor, presentation and eventually your bottom line because companies and clients will want to hire you !!!

Stay on top of the new music and "trends" ie viral Tik-Toks

Less talk, more rock! 🤘👍 But if you have to say something, it should be intentional or provide value: (Funny, cheeky, and/or clever).

Lift your eyebrows. Easy fix for "resting dick/bitch face." ABL - Always Be Learning. Kill the Ego. Every room is different.

Focus on developing the tools of your craft (vocal tone and intonation, piano skills, and arranging), and the good gigs will find you. Less time on marketing yourself on social media until you have your shit together.

Be fearless.

Have several backup moments ready to go; a crowd can change so fast and depending on your partner's song the mood can change fast so be ready for anything. But also feel free to take command of that ship and steer it if you're confident about it!

Talk to a/the veterans in this gig: the ones that have been doing dueling pianos for A LONG TIME. Not just get the dos and don'ts, but to hear the stories and know the history of this incredible amazing and awkward living we all have. Every time I hear a story I gain appreciation for how this gig came to be, what it has come to, where it might lead.

Be humble and take criticism. No one's perfect- but some are better than others/ and if we allow them to share lessons and guide us, as individuals and an industry, we will be better for it.

Smile and be off-book

Understand the philosophy of the show and then make it your own. Everyone has a different way of approaching an "interactive musical comedy show" and our shows shouldn't all be the same jokes and bits.

Read the room

Listen and watch what is going on and understand you are there for the audience and not the other way around. You are there to facilitate their good time.

Never apologize to the crowd for playing two slow songs in a row. If we do two slow songs in a row, I'm sure we have a good reason. No need to perform from a place of guilt or shame.

When you're having fun, the audience will have fun. Don't forget how privileged you are to have this as a career! One that brings joy and reprieve for people. I always feel so lucky to be a dueler and piano entertainer.

Don't try to be like anyone else. Find the version of you that works on stage.
AUTHENTICITY IS THE CURE FOR COMPETITION

Adopt an attitude of gratitude about the gig. We are indeed among the privileged few!

Never disrespect anyone's request. It may have deep significance to the person who requested it.

Two pianos is one too many... unless you play half as many notes.

If you're thinking about your partner and they are thinking about you, then you're likely going to be successful. Classic teamwork stuff. Also have fun.

From an owner: Be kind to my staff. The number one reason I don't invite a player back is when my staff tells me they were rude.

Have a back up song ready to go for that moment that your mind goes blank. It should be something the audience will know, but not something that gets requested a lot- don't take money out of the jar! Eg "Breakfast At Tiffany's" by Deep Blue Something.

Know at least 200-300 top songs off book

Learn 5 songs that you so so well they are shoe stoppers

Have a literal cheat sheet until you don't need one. Helps you avoid dead air, keeps people engaged, toasts, go-to songs, etc. Another important thing is write your own bits, become the act that you would pay to go see.

Watch your partner.

Compliment in public, criticize in private. And most importantly

Smile! 😊

get off your goddamned ipad and look at the audience

Find a way to fill in the holes, both on stage with your partner and with the audience.

4 WAY COMPETITION

“4-Way” is a term from the early days of Dueling Pianos when all 4 members of the night’s team would play together on stage with both pianos as well as auxiliary instruments (like percussion, drums, bass, guitar, horns, fiddle, etc.)

This competition is to encourage teamwork and have a little competitive fun.

Teams will be chosen at random, Noon on Wednesday.

If you wish to enter, put your name on a request slip and into the tip jar provided. We will draw teams of 4 and ask those Duelers to gather in that moment to exchange information (maybe start a text thread) to communicate.

The first name drawn will be “Team Captain” and submit their name/number to stage manager Kin Curran (who can alert them when their team is ON DECK).

Teams will have 9 hours to figure out:

- Your Team Name
- Your Song
- Who is singing or playing what instruments

You will have:

- 2 Electric Pianos (and all the various patches on them)
- 1 Key Bass
- 1 Electric Drum Kit

NO AUXILIARY INSTRUMENTS (sorry to the sax, fiddle, and guitar players)

When your team is to perform next, Kin will text you “YOU ARE ON DECK”
At this time, your team will sit at the “DUELERS ON DECK” table.

You will submit your TEAM NAME/SONG to the MC (Matt Tobin) as you take the stage. He will likely make light hearted puns.

After each team performs, the judges will make their notes while Matt entertains, then the judges will give some feedback while the next act gets ready.

After all teams have performed, the judges will deliberate while the convention comes to a close.

Prizes are:

- 1st \$200 per Dueler on team
- 2nd \$50 per Dueler on team
- 3rd \$25 per Dueler on team

DP CONVENTION - DC WALKING TOUR

Water Taxi Tickets:

<https://www.cityexperiences.com/washington-dc/city-cruises/water-taxi/washington-dc-water-taxi/?date=11/04/2025&endDate=11/04/2025>

CHOOSE: Date: Nov 4 (Tuesday)
 Departure: National Harbor
 Destination: Wharf
 Time: National Harbor 12:55 PM Departure

Select: Round Trip

Return Trip: Wharf 5:45 PM Departure

Water Taxi Round Trip, Adult (add number of tickets)

Add to Cart and Purchase

12:30 PM Meet at Water Taxi (\$35.20 Round Trip)

12:55 PM Water Taxi Departs for The Wharf (Stops in Alexandria)

2:05 PM Arrive at The Wharf in D.C.

Walking Tour of the Washington, WW2, Vietnam, Lincoln, Korean War, MLK (with view of Jefferson) Monuments. 3.8 Miles. 1 Hour 23 minutes at a relaxed pace. Plenty of time to visit each spot.

Walking Route:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/AjjV2guXhq8CWULc6>

5:45 PM Water Taxi Departs Wharf

6:50 PM Water Taxi Arrives at the National Harbor.

Alexandria, VA, was once a part of Washington, D.C., and was founded in 1749 as a thriving trading post. The city served as a vital supply center during the Civil War, and George Washington, in his youth, helped plan the city's street system before being publicly addressed as President of the United States in Alexandria's [Wise's Tavern](#). Today, its Old Town is one of the earliest nationally designated historic districts and is home to the [Torpedo Factory Art Center](#).

The Wharf in D.C. is a modern waterfront neighborhood featuring the oldest continuously operating open-air fish market in the United States, the Municipal Fish Market, which opened in 1805. It is also home to the 6,000-seat concert venue [The Anthem](#), four piers with different activities, and is a major hub for water taxi service and live music.

The National Mall is nicknamed "America's Front Yard" and is the most visited national park in the United States, drawing over 24 million visitors annually. It is home to more than 100 memorials and monuments, a large collection of museums, and over 9,000 trees, including American elms and the famous cherry blossoms. The term "mall" originates from the British lawn game "pall-mall," which was played in a similar area in London.

The Washington Monument has a marble stripe from a paused construction period, was built with three types of stone, and has a cornerstone containing a time capsule with documents, maps, and money. It took 36 years to build, has 897 steps to the top, and was dedicated on February 21, 1885, before opening to the public in 1888.

The World War II Memorial features 56 columns for the 48 states, the District of Columbia, and seven territories, and the Freedom Wall has 4,048 gold stars, with each star representing 100 Americans who died in the war. It was designed by [Friedrich St. Florian](#), built with over 17,000 granite stones, and includes two hidden "Kilroy was here" inscriptions.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial was designed by a 21-year-old Maya Lin, who was still an undergraduate when her design was chosen from over 1,400 anonymous entries. The two V-shaped black granite walls are each 246.75 feet long and are organized chronologically by date of death or disappearance with the names of over 58,000 men and women who were killed or listed as missing in action. The memorial has a unique symbolic system: a diamond next to a name means the person was confirmed dead, while a plus sign indicates they were missing in action, and the symbols can be changed as new information becomes available.

The Lincoln Memorial has 36 columns, representing the states in the Union at the time of Lincoln's death, and its design is modeled after a Greek Doric temple. The 19-foot-tall statue of Lincoln weighs nearly 175 tons and was initially planned to be smaller. There was also a typo in the inscriptions that has since been corrected, and a secret basement exists beneath the monument.

The Korean War Memorial features 19 stainless steel statues representing a patrol squad, with the number 19 symbolizing the 38th parallel and the 38 months of war. A sandblasted mural wall reflects the statues, creating the illusion of 38 figures. The memorial also includes the [United Nations Wall](#) listing allied countries and the Pool of Remembrance which lists casualties and has the inscription, "Freedom Is Not Free".

The MLK Monument is the first on the National Mall dedicated to a Black person and a civilian. Its address, 1964 Independence Ave. SW, is a nod to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the design features a 30-foot "Stone of Hope" emerging from two boulders representing the "Mountains of Despair". Visitors pass through the "Mountains of Despair" to reach the "Stone of Hope," and the memorial also includes a crescent-shaped wall with 14 quotes from King.

The Jefferson Memorial was dedicated in 1943 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and sits on reclaimed land around the Tidal Basin. It features a 19-foot bronze statue of Jefferson, an open-air design inspired by the Roman Pantheon, and numerous quotations from his writings on its walls. An interesting side note is a 1930s protest known as the "Cherry Tree Rebellion," where local women protested the removal of cherry trees for the memorial's construction.