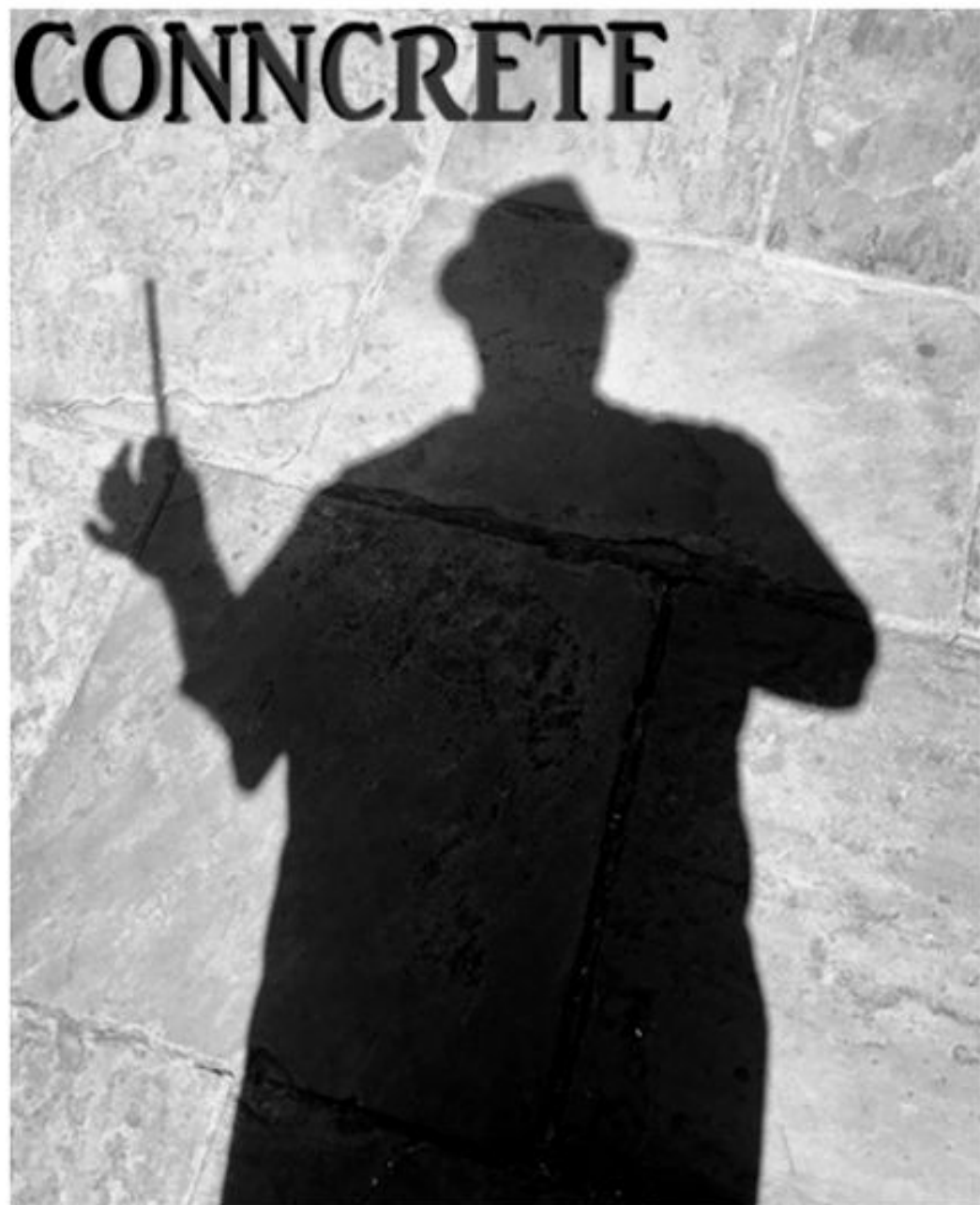


# CONNCRETE



**Busking Advice from a Conn Man**

# **CONNCRETE**

**Busking advice from a Conn-man**

---

**Copyright © Douglas Conn 2019**

# **CONNTENTS**

- Intro
- Bio
- The Allure
- Show Types
- Your Stage
- Gig Rig
- Bag of Tricks
- The Other Bag
- Attitude
- The Bally
- Audience Interaction
- Hecklers
- Crowd Control
- Comedy
- Applause
- Getting the Money
- Amplification
- Etiquette
- Travel & Weather
- The Law
- Tricks of the Trade
- Further Study

## Introduction

**Concrete** is my attempt to document some thoughts on street performing.

These pages could easily number in the hundreds (and perhaps one day they will.) For the time being, my goal is to focus on key topics, most important to a developing busker. The serious student will want to further their education with the study materials listed at the end of this guide.

This advice is being provided by, and aimed at close-up / parlor magicians, but much of this info could apply to any busking act. You won't find any magic tricks described within, though I will post a page or two of references for learning good magic-busking material. The lion's share of this information will be the how, when and where to use the tricks you already perform.

Like most artistic endeavors, busking has no set rules. As such, any material you absorb from this guide should be molded to fit your own mindset and/or point of view.

Best wishes with your busking  
or as we say in the streets:

***FAT HATS!!!***



Doug Conn busking Jackson Square, New Orleans, Spring 2019

## **Bio**

I became enamored with street performing in the early 1980s. My initial inspiration was Harry Anderson and his tales of busking in New Orleans. A few years later, I would attend Cellini's *Busker / Close-up Convention* in Raleigh NC. This gathering was held in Cellini's *Buskers* bar and it was a life changing event. The magicians that headlined this conference were some of the best in the world (Slydini, Pop Hayden, Bob Sheets, Johnny Fox, etc) and the guest list was a *who's who* in the busking world. After 30 years of attending magic conventions, I can safely say, this event affected me the most.

Fast forward 3 years: I had just spent my first summer working as a professional magician (as an atmosphere performer at Carowinds amusement park in Charlotte NC) and I spent that fall / winter season working the counter of LaRocks Magic shop. My chops were warming up and I'd started to find my performing groove.

A few months later, after I returned to Cincinnati, Ohio, I was attending the "Taste Of Cincinnati" festival and I ran across my friend: Tom Frank. Tom was busking the festival and kindly invited me to share the pitch. I happily accepted this invite and returned the next day, with my bag of tricks in hand. Well, that afternoon, I made more money than I made in a week at my day job (I had been working as a movie projectionist.) Well, I never went back to that day job. I spent the next month living and learning with Tom in his epic downtown loft. Oh the stories I could tell!

That summer I decided to head to Chicago. I set off with \$50 in my pocket and a dream in my heart. Well, lemme tell ya, I found that dream in Chi-town. I quickly landed an ideal hotel: downtown in the heart of *Rush Street*. My busking pitch was across the street and I was having the time of my life. This initial three month run in Chicago provided the inspiration to follow the path of a street performer.



Doug Conn Busking *Taste of Chicago*, 1989

That path lead me to New Orleans, LA and I've been there for over 30 years. In that time, I've worked every close-up magic venue imaginable: hotels, convention centers, riverboats, casinos, bars, restaurants, etc. I have also worked in several magic shops (& even owned a shop for a couple years.) I have also worked magic clubs and conventions across the country. While I've enjoyed most all of these magical pursuits, the most enjoyable of all has been street performing. It can be tough and when it's tough there's nothing tougher, but when its good, there's nothing gooder. I hope this guide points some of you in the right direction towards finding that same joy I've discovered.

## **The Allure**

There are many reasons to consider street performance. Here's a short list for your consideration.

### **Experience**

The experience you'll gain as a street performer is invaluable. There are few venues that offer the opportunity to practice and perform as often as street. Limited only by your energy (and perhaps the weather) busking is a rare venue that provides the freedom to perform your act several times a day. On a good day, you might perform 10-12 shows. Multiply that time 4-5 days a week, and that \* times 52 weeks a year: Before you know it, you'll have logged thousands of shows. With the proper approach, you'll soon have a polished act!

### **Income**

Once you've put in the time and energy, you'll find street performing can provide a good income. Getting that money can be challenging for a novice busker. You can plan to spend six months to a year as a 'starving artist.' But with some intelligent work and constant effort at improving your show, you'll soon find your hats filling with money.

### **Exposure**

Working the streets will put you in front of many eyes and as such, will supply you with extra work opportunities. Keep your biz cards handy and have a sales pitch ready and you'll be provided with offers to perform for private events.

### **Freedom**

Perhaps the biggest allure to busking is the freedom to work when you want, where you want and doing what you want. Can you imagine that? Doing what you want, when you want! Your only boss is mother nature (and perhaps, occasionally, johnny law) but for the most part, you'll have freedoms that most people can only imagine.

### **Travel**

Busking provides a wonderful opportunity to see the world. If you intend to work as a full time busker, travel will be necessary. As such, I think the desire to travel is one of the most important traits a full time busker can possess.

### **Joy**

The experience of stopping a group of strangers to share your art (and then pay you) is one of the greatest joys I've had performing magic. When busking is good, there's nothing better. You'll experience many trials and tribulations to discover these happy times, but once you've experienced this high, it's one you'll likely want to experience over and over

## **Types of Show**

Here's a list of show types you might consider when approaching a street show

### **Sidewalk Show**

This is my preferred way to work, gathering a group of 5-50 people and presenting a show of 10-15 minutes. I find this technique to be the most flexible, allowing you to busk in a wide variety of places. A smaller show is less likely to cause a nuisance and can be performed without amplification which is a prime consideration for many spots.

### **Trickle Pitch**

This is similar to the Sidewalk Show, but with less emphasis on a full show. You'll stop groups of 2-20 and do 2-3 tricks, maybe 5-10 minutes of magic at the most. You'll hat the audience, and then rinse -repeat. This approach is best for busy sidewalk pitches when it's not appropriate to gather a larger crowd. This style is also ideal for developing material that hasn't made it into a full show.

### **Walkaround**

Another option well suited to a close-up magician is walkaround. Much like the title says: you just walk around and look for people to approach and perform. This style allows you to work just about anytime / anywhere. An added bonus is you'll only need 1 or 2 good tricks.

### **Circle Show**

If your goal is to make the most money, you'll probably want to focus on a circle show. The goal with a *circle show* is to gather the most people you can, while you present a larger, longer experience. These shows make the most money. They also come with the most constraints. For example, the prime time spots are often occupied by several bigger acts, leaving you waiting 2-3 hours between shows. But heck, if your show is good enough, maybe you only need to do one!

Regarding show structure: It's in your best interest to be flexible. If you're busking full time, you'll find troublesome venues where you cannot perform your standard act (perhaps your standard pitch is out of commission or maybe the sidewalks are too crowded, etc.) Contrastly, there will be times where a different approach could make you more money. An accomplished busker should be able to work different styles.

## **Your Stage**

With the street as your stage, you need to create an atmosphere that will entice a crowd to gather for a show. Here's a few methods for creating this environment. You'll find more details about my set-up in the follow up section: *Gig Rig*.

### **Table**

A table sets a wonderful stage for a magic busker and this is my preferred approach: I like to draw people in close and then back them up as the crowd size increases.



Dana Fleming and his busking table.

### **Rope**

Many buskers use a rope to create an edge for the stage. Using a rope, you can control the exact size of your audience as you beckon them to stand next to the rope.



Here's a pic of Rod Cannon who performs an act out of his pockets. The rope sets the stage & the only props are a sign and his amp. I love this tight set up.

### **Chalk/Water/Tape**

Chalk is another option to mark your edge and I've also seen people use water; squirted on the ground, to draw a line to define your stage. A common gag is to fill a lighter fluid bottle up with water and use this to squirt the water / edge. Of the two, water gets my vote as it doesn't deface the space. I've also seen people use tape, but I think this is a horrible approach.

### **Riser**

If you want a bigger crowd, higher is better. The biggest (most profitable) busking shows usually involve higher staging. For example, a juggler might use a large unicycle or an elevated rola bola. I've seen many magicians use their prop case, and/or a small stool, to elevate their show.



### **Your Stage: Riser, cont**

Below is a pic is Niko Leo, one of my all time favorite street magicians.

Niko is in the process of building a crowd in center pitch, Jackson Square, New Orleans... Within minutes, there will be upwards of 100 people watching him!



You'll see several things that set the stage here: Niko uses a large rope to guide his audience, while a small stool and/or his gig case provide elevation.

Look close and you'll notice other things that build atmosphere: Niko's sign hangs from his dolly and other assorted props are arranged to create interest. You see the whip? That provides an important sound element. As we will discuss in the *bally* section: Setting this stage plays a big part in building a crowd.

## **Gig Rig**

In this section, we'll look at the current rig I use for busking. This set up serves me well in most venues (beyond busking) I can easily recommend this rig to any working magician.

**The table:** For the majority of my busking work, I've used either a keyboard stand or a waiter's tray (as a base) along with a cloth covered board that served a table top. I used this set-up when I presenting the cups and balls as the finale. This past season, I've opted to perform a tighter show, with a smaller footprint. In an effort to streamline my act, recently downsized the table.

I'm currently using a *DJ Laptop Stand*. I've been very happy with the the Pyle / Large model PLPTS3. I've set / reset / used this thing 100's of times and it remains in top notch working condition. Open thanks to Tommy Pickles for suggesting this model.

I also use a Patrick Przysiecki pad crafted to fit the DJ Laptop stand. Patrick does wonderful custom work. Not everyone will need/want a pad, but if you do, *Patricks Magical Surfaces* are the best in the biz. They are a bit more expensive (heh, probably the most expensive piece of my rig) but, for me, the longevity of the prop is well worth the expense. I've used other pads and they don't hold up well to the elements.



**My act:** bag of tricks, misc bag and amp are all carried in a *catalog case*. You can find catalog cases at an office supply stores (ebay is another option.) As seen in the pic, I use foam board and sticker lettering to craft a '*magic show*' sign. This is velcroed to the outside of the catalog case. The back of this sign has my paypal/venmo info (more on this in 'Getting the Money'.)

I also bring a folding stool (\$10 at Walmart.) The stool acts as a side table for the catalog case and in between shows, it provides a place to rest the tuchus. As seen in the pic, the stool also provides a resting space (below the seat) for my PA/Amp to keep it off the ground and protected. A bungee cord keeps the folded table and stool secure for easy transportation. One hand holds that, while the other carries the catalog case; This approach allows me to carry my act into a pitch, this as opposed to pushing in a hand dolly with bigger props.

## **Your Bag of Tricks**

Many novice buskers make the mistake of bringing WAY too much material to the pitch. You should only bring the material ya know you'll be using. If nothing else, consider the weight. Part of your job as a busker is transporting your act to and from the pitch and the less weight, the better.

When choosing magic for the street, you'll want to pick angle proof material that easily resets. This is a good general magi-rule to follow, but is double important when busking. On the best days, you'll want to rapidly repeat your show. If the act requires a long reset, you're costing yourself money.

Use material that can withstand the environment. Sun, wind and water/sweat will all take a toll on your props. Because busking props must be replaced often, filling your bag of tricks with things bought at Walmart (or an office supply store) will make your busking life much easier.

If you choose to use gaffs, choose those that can endure the elements. In my opinion, it's best to keep gaffed material to a minimum. Brick and mortar magic shops are few and far between and ordering items to be shipped is time consuming and troublesome (doubly so if you're travelling.)

## **The Other bag**

In addition to a bag of tricks, I carry a second bag with daily essentials. Here are a few things I have in that bag:

Wet Wipes - to keep clean in the elements  
Breath Mints - for minty fresh breath  
Sun Screen - for those sunny days  
Protein Bar - for a quick snack  
Hand Lotion - invaluable on cold days  
Nail Clippers - to keep the hands in shape  
Multi tool - to make quick repairs on props and costume  
Extra Batteries - for amp headset

I also pack a fresh washcloth (you will sweat, you will need this)  
Plus a couple of bottles of water to keep hydrated.

## **Attitude**

The right attitude will make or break your busking experience. If you're on the pitch and in a good mindset (ready, willing and able to engage your passersby) they will sense this and respond accordingly. Likewise, if you're in a bad mood and struggling to find the energy to start another show, they'll feel that too.

Bring a positive, energetic mindset to the pitch each day and you'll find an audience will reciprocate that energy through your shows.

## **Confidence**

Perhaps the most important mindset a street performer can possess is confidence. People can sense when watching someone with confidence and they will respond better when approached by a performer with this pizzazz. Heck, I've seen some abysmal acts succeed on the streets, just because the performer possessed the confidence to persuade a crowd to 'stop, watch and pay'. I've discovered ignorance also works ... but we're not going to discuss that.

**You'll gain the necessary confidence through experience with a well rehearsed show.**

Read that last sentence again, it's the key to busking-growth.

## **Bad Days**

You'll have many wonderful busking-days, that leave you smiling from ear to ear. But most often, you'll question your sanity... wondering why anyone would put themselves in a position to endure the challenges found in street performing. In fact, you'll likely have more bad days than good (this is especially true for the developing busker.) So yeah, handling adversity is a key skill for street performers.

If you're having a bad show or a bad day, just try to get through to the next one. It's amazing the difference one show can make. The tough times never last. Try to keep everything in a positive perspective and know that: in the long run, everything is gonna be fine.

I've found meditation techniques work well (breathe!) If you're new to meditation, do a lil research and open your mind, to controlling your mind (I've discovered some great phone/apps for this!) Methinks the time you spend building some meditation techniques will be well worth it.

One page of this manual is hardly enough to cover the importance of mental toughness (and each individual will require unique training.) Part of your homework will be to do some research and work on the subjects where your mindset needs the most improvement.

## The Bally

### **Ballyhoo**

- 1 : a noisy attention-getting demonstration or talk
- 2 : flamboyant, exaggerated, or sensational promotion or publicity
- 3 : excited commotion

To start a show, you'll need a crowd and it's your job to build that crowd. This is what's known as *The Bally* or *Ballyhoo*. The Bally is one of the most important pieces of a buskers repertoire. The proper approach can make or break your street performing experience. You'll want to spend time and energy crafting a bally that will interest and attract the casual passerby.

Cellini often lectured on the importance of *Sound, Movement and Color*. Of these three, when building a pitch, the most important is **sound**.

Your first and most important sound maker is your voice. You'll want some well crafted words that will draw a crowd. An amplifier is helpful (more notes on amplification later.) While setting your stage, this is a great time to bally a crowd. Chat with folks while setting out your table, props and/or rope.

Many circle shows will often use amplified music during the ballyhoo. This triple attack of music with voice commands and the visuals of setting up a variety act can draw people like moths to a flame.

Another option for making sound is an instrument. There are many that work well in busking environments. I've used: Cowbells (*moooooooooove* on in!) whistles, bells and horns. Many magi-buskers will use their wand as an impromptu drumstick, rapping on the ground or on their table to draw interest. Squeakers are another useful tool (\*pet shops have the best ones!)

Quick / visuals can also be used to entice. Consider using a few quick effects to keep your initial audience interested as you build a bigger crowd (flipstick, silk vanish, coin tricks, etc.)

Sidenote: one of the biggest, beginner mistakes is to ask people if they would like to watch a show. "*Would you like to see some magic?*" will almost always receive a negative response (or simply ignored.) It's much better to instruct the spectators what you want them to do... for example: "*Hey Folks, WATCH this trick!*"

Your audience can also help with the ballyhoo. Urging a group to clap and cheer is a time honored way to build a bigger crowd. Once you've stopped your first few people, you've accomplished the hardest task and will be on your way to building a crowd.

## **Audience Interaction**

The fourth wall of a standard stage is practically non-existent on the streets. As such, audience interaction is a key element of most busking shows: Ask Names (and use them!) Ask Questions (where ya from?) Have people hold props (pick a card!)

Early in your show, the commotion an audience makes can help build a bigger crowd. Instruct your crowd to make some noise; *oooooh / ahhhhh / applause*, etc.

Also, remember this: People love to watch people. As such, one of the strongest things you can do to strengthen your crowd is to get a spectator on stage alongside you.

In my current show, I employ several *hands on* moments with different audience members. And, my current closing routine also involves several members of the audience along with an audience member standing beside me.

Like most *rules*, this one is meant to be broken: It is possible to ignore my advice and perform an act without little / no audience interaction. But, In my experience, your crowd and hat size will increase tremendously with it

## **Hecklers**

I've had many magicians ask me how to handle hecklers. I have trouble answering that, because I rarely get heckled. I believe this has something to do with the way I present myself: my performing persona is kind, humble and non-confrontational.

That said, regardless of your presentation, heckling on the streets is inevitable. You'll eventually be called to battle one of these knuckleheads. It's good to have a few lines / comebacks ready for these instances: *"Ah, I remember my first beer."* *"Hey Buddy, I don't come to your job and jostle the slurpee machine!:"* *"A voice from the rear! And that aint easy!"*

A google search for heckler lines will provide much more ammo.

If a heckler won't take the hint after a few verbal jabs, I'll try simply ignoring them. And if the problem persists: I'll break character and directly ask them to behave (or leave.) If all else fails, just stop performing. You can restart when they leave or just take an extended break and start another show without such hassles.

## **Comedy**

Comedy is an important part of most street shows. While it's possible to perform a serious show, most buskers find the greatest success working a comedic style. This doesn't mean you must be a full-on comedian, but a few well timed laughs throughout the act can keep energies high and faces smiling.

Rant: I've seen many buskers use insult comedy to good effect. Unfortunately, many of these buskers are simply imitating others (Gazzo) It's true that insult comedy works great on the street, but if your only reason for using this type of humor is because you've seen others use it, you might want to question your reasoning. Be nice, it makes us all look better (end rant.)

I also think it's important to generate laughs when you're asking for money. And, continuing a witty repartee through the collecting process can increase the size of your hats:

*"Don't forget, your donations are tax free"*

*"Money stinks, but I don't mind the smell"*

*"If you didn't like the show, tip anyway! Why should we both be disappointed?"*

## **Applause**

As mentioned in the 'Bally' section, enthusiastic applause draws a great crowd. So, early in the show, urge your audience to clap, cheer and make some noise!

But, you'll find a round of applause is not always desired. As you get deeper into your show, ill-timed ovation can signal an end to an event and will often send a large portion of your crowd off in search of the next thing to experience.

I suggest using applause early in the show and then keep it to a minimum until the finale. Comedy and laughter is a great way to provide similar energy in the interim. Ex. *"Please hold your applause as I have a weak finish!"*

The only way to discover if/when these applause points are affecting your crowd, is to experience it in real time and apply some intelligent analysis towards your act.

These are just a few parts of the busking performance-puzzle....  
Best wishes in putting together the pieces.

## Getting The Money

If your goal is to make money, you'll need to convince people to pay you. To do this, you'll use what's known as a **hat pitch**: as scripted request that entices the audience to tip. There are many ways to approach this. I prefer a short and sweet pitch. Other buskers discuss money at length (this is more appropriate for a longer / circle show.) You'll have to decide what works for you. Here's my current hat pitch:

*Before you leave, I have to let ya know, I'm not being paid to be here today... not by the city, the state or any other criminal organizations! This act is solely supported by your kind donations... Hey, no one's laughing now! Jokes aside, if you've seen something you've liked and got a nice sensation, step up to the hat and make a nice donation!"*

It's best to use one or two money lines (during your show) prior to your official hat pitch. This gives your audience a chance to understand what's happening before you hit them for money at the finale. Some light humor that mentions tips is a standard approach. It's also helpful to use humor while collecting. (I discuss this in the 'comedy' section.) When asking for money, its best to mention the exact amounts you expect. If you ask for a dollar (or don't mention any particular denomination) that's probably what you'll get: one dollar. My current show runs about 12 minutes and I suggest a five dollar tip (\*I do this during my card to wallet routine) and I get those fives (& sometimes I get \$10's, \$20s and occasionally \$100's!) Without suggesting an amount, you're leaving an ignorant audience to decide your fate.

### Cash Apps

As we enter this modern era of a cashless society, the modern busker has some excellent alternatives to collect cash. There are several popular phone/apps that allow an audience to tip you. And it's my experience that electronic tip\$ are much higher on average.

**Venmo & PayPal** are the two I've opted to use. As pictured to the right: I use some signage that easily points people in that direction.



Lastly, when working a *Trickle Pitch* (busking for small groups in short bursts) in lieu of the standard hat pitch, you may wish to use a bucket, a box or an extra hat, available for people to tip as they see fit. This approach is ideal for the sidewalk / trickle shows, allowing people to drop donations anytime during the show as opposed to waiting for a finale hat pitch.



## **Amplification**

Most good busking spots come with ambient noise. An amplifier will insure you're able to be heard. So, I'm advocating working with a PA, but I want to mention that it's very important to be able to perform your act without one.

Of all the laws regarding busking, the use of amplification is one that can/will cause problems for many buskers. If you rely on an amp to perform your show, be aware there will be places/pitches you'll discover where this is not an option.

I only perform my act with amplification if the pitch warrants it. If you're blessed with a quiet pitch that doesn't require extra amplification, well then, don't use it. This keeps your voice in shape for times when you need a strong set of vocal cords to work a spot where amplification is preferred but not allowed. Like most muscles, your vocal cords must be trained. Even using an amp, you'll find your voice will be strained performing 3-4 hours, 4-5 days a week. But, with time and practice, this muscle will become stronger and before you know it, you'll be belting out shows without missing a beat.

Which amp to use? For my current show, I use a **HiSonic 40 watt amp (model HS-120B.)** This compact amp is ideal for a smaller crowd and it fits perfectly in my catalog case. The price is also reasonable: you can find one on Amazon.com for around \$100. My current amp has been in use for over six months and still provides 2-3 hours of showtime (this after 100's of daily uses / charge cycles.) I've also used a 'belt amp' to good success. This is a reasonably priced option for a smaller show or a trickle pitch.

If you plan on doing bigger / circle shows, it's worth the money to buy the best amplifier you can. You'll probably want to spend \$500-\$600 for the right equipment. An external power source may also be needed.

Before leaving this section, I have to appeal to the masses: Please, please PLEASE: if you chose to use an amp, keep it reasonable. Only make the sound as loud as you need. I've seen too many performers abuse the power of amplification. In cities with the best pitches, you'll often find several performers / musicians that work amplified. And when one performer turns up the volume, this requires everyone in the area to do the same. Before you know it... an "amp war" ensues... and that is bad for EVERYONE (\*including your potential audience members who now must deal with sensory overload.) If nothing else know this: being too loud is one of the top ways a show / pitch gets shut down.

## **Respect the pitch!**

## **Etiquette**

You'll need to mind your manners on the street: both with the locals and your fellow buskers.

### **The Locale**

First and foremost: be courteous of merchants. Nothing will get you shut down quicker than upsetting a local business.

In my experience, the most problematic issues are sound/noise and crowd size. Keep your crowds tight. Don't block the sidewalks! Not only is this bad etiquette, it's considered illegal in most major cities.

As mentioned in the amp section of this manual (and worth repeating) if you use an amp, keep it at a reasonable sound level. Not only is it bad etiquette to over amplify, it's often illegal. Most city ordinances have decibel laws for public performance.

Keep it clean: If you use effects that leave refuse on the pitch (bits of rope, fruit, broken balloons or any other trash) then be sure to clean up after yourself. Leaving a mess only makes you (and other buskers) look bad. Be tidy.

### **Fellow Buskers**

Claiming a good pitch can be troublesome. In most cities the standing rule is *first come first serve*. In New Orleans, it's not uncommon to see buskers out at the break of dawn to grab a good spot. Meanwhile, some of the major pitches (Key West, Boston, Etc.) have special lotteries to distribute spots to street performers.

It's important to respect your fellow buskers. Don't impede the workflow. When a performer is up on a pitch, let em do their thing. We're there to perform and make money: this is not the time to start a conversation. In pitches like New Orleans, where there can be as many as 4-5 magicians on a given pitch, it's important to keep your show tight and keep the flow, flowing. Don't overextend and don't dilly dally.

Each city / venue will have a unique set of guidelines. If you're new to a pitch, try and do some homework before your arrival. The internet is your friend here: Performing forums, Facebook and other resources should provide the info you need.

When it comes to busking etiquette: I think the golden rule is best followed here:

*"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"*

## **Weather & Travel**

*“Originally, the dream was about traveling and developing a job that would permit me to travel.  
I decided to go into street performing because it was a traveling job:  
it would let me go around the world.”*

-Guy Laliberte (Creator of *Cirque Du Soleil*)

If you choose to be a full time busker, travel is inevitable. Mother nature will be your boss and she is a finicky one. Summers are too hot in the south and winters are too cold in the north. As such, the desire to travel may be one of the most important character traits a busker can have. If you don't like to travel, you probably won't be happy working the streets long term. And, of course, on the flip side, if you like to travel... well, congratulations on finding your potential dream job.

Having to uproot and travel requires a minimal lifestyle. Best case scenario = you can put your personal belongings into a suitcase and a backpack. You'll also be travelling with your show / props you don't want to be hauling much more than that. The less the better.

Many of the buskers I know opt for a travelling home. Either a van or a mobile home of some sort.. At the very least, a good sized vehicle can provide a place to lay your head in between pitches and/or finding a home base.

### **Rainy Days**

If the weather is spotty showers, you should consider working. Rainy days will keep many other acts inside and make your piece of the pie that much bigger. I've had some of my best days, dodging showers in between shows. Weather forecasting has grown leaps and bounds over the past few decades. There are some great 'radar' apps that will give you exact info on what to expect. Check your phone's app store and find the one that works for you.

Alternatives for busking when the weather puts you out of commission:

### **Bar Busking**

Not all busking is done outside on the streets and bar busking is an option to have for times when it's too cold, rainy and/or windy. You can work bars going table to table or you can talk to the bartender or manager about presenting a more formal show for the bar. Or sometimes you can do both: warming up the crowd with close-up, then presenting your bigger show en masse.

### **Malls**

Inside malls are another option for the resourceful busker. An inside pitch can provide shelter from the elements that can/will keep a busker from busking. There are some malls that welcome buskers and others will need to be sold on the idea. For some buskers, gaining access to a mall pitch can make or break a season.

## The Law

Most large cities have an ordinance regarding busking and you'll find it varies widely from place to place. Some cities embrace buskers and allow you to perform freely. Other busking spots will have a permitting system, while some will try to outlaw you completely. These rules are usually governed by the city, but some are regulated by private business. Alternatively, the pitches are governed by the buskers themselves: for example, setting up a lottery system to see who will perform when and/or where.

If you're unsure about the law in any particular spot, I think "*it's better to ask for forgiveness than permission*" (a rule of thumb I was taught early in my busking career.) If you live in the United States, your first amendment rights allow you to perform in public. There have been MANY cases where a city has tried to shut down a busker and when taken to court, the busker usually wins the right to express their art (based on the First Amendment.) Unfortunately, these legal battles can be lengthy and costly.

The internet is your friend here. Most major cities have posted public info regarding street performing laws (and lemme tell ya, this is a BIG plus from the 'hearsay' I grew up with 30 years ago.) A quick google search should provide the info you need. There are also online busking forums where you can find out the most current information.

Each locale will have unique rules and regulations. For example, in New Orleans, you're not allowed to busk Bourbon Street after 8pm. I was reminded of this by a veteran officer who approached me one night inquiring the time: "*Hey son, do you know what time it is???*" I said I was unsure and he said "*It's time to get a watch, it's 8:02, come with me!*" And I spent that night locked up, in a downtown New Orleans Jail... ah memories.

Sometimes just a random police officer will shut you down for various reasons (blocking fire lanes is one I've often heard.). One night in Chicago, I was stopped from doing my close-up magic act when a policeman insinuated I was playing the three card monte scam. He didn't want to listen to my arguments... he just wanted me gone. Policemen are rarely wrong... And even when they're wrong... it really doesn't matter. Arguing with the powers that be will rarely (never) provide the results you're looking for.

If you know you're in the right and an officer of the law is trying to prevent you from expressing yourself, it's often best to request a ticket / summons and then fight the incident in court. In the case of that Chicago policeman who insisted I was gambling and scamming, I filed a complaint on the officer and I wasn't bothered by him again.

## Tricks of My Trade

Over the past 30 years, I've performed many routines on the street. My goals as a younger busker were to perform the biggest show possible. I used fire eating to draw a crowd, and this was intertwined with a cigarette/magic sequence (alas, both fire and cigarettes are frowned upon in public spaces these days and as such, should be avoided by the modern busker.) My main show consisted of: linking rings, cut and restored rope and the cups and balls. This was performed as a *circle show* and served me well for many years.

Age, wisdom and artistic choice have led me to my current act, and at the time of this writing (spring 2019) I'm performing a smaller show. Here's the set list:

*Chinese Linking Rings:* This is a strong visual opener that contains the important elements of sound, movement and color. In my opinion, the rings are an ideal opener.

*Coin Routine:* I use coin magic to draw my audience closer. My coin sequence contains 2-3 minutes of non-stop magic that allows any passerby to easily be hooked in a moment.

*Sponge Bunnies:* I use this time honored classic to get a couple audience members on stage (this as a quick interlude to the ensuing card routine.)

*Card Routine:* I finish with a multiple selection routine. The goal being to directly engage several more people in the audience. My current finale is a signed card from wallet.

Sidenote: I often use the *thumb-tip/silk vanish* to engage my initial group. This quick visual provides the right stuff to stop a crowd. The thumb-tip is a versatile prop that allows many other strong / organic effects... perhaps you can vanish a spectators burning cigarette... or maybe vanish/reproduce some liquid into a dollar bill. I've seen several street magicians that make a living using ONLY the thumb tip (I'm not advocating this, but it is possible!)

I also keep a few 'b' routines in my trick-bag. I'll often use a rope routine (a variant of George Sands "*Sandsational Rope*") and I also keep an *Invisible deck* handy. Either of these can be used to extend the show and/or performed as a 'one of' when you need some extra material for select audiences. Or heck, these last few items: *Thumb-Tip, Rope and Invisible Deck* are enough to perform a full show on the street (If you're not sure where to start, start there: open with a strong thumb tip / visual, use the ropes as a middle piece and close with the invisible deck.) It's important to choose the material you're comfortable with. When busking, the last thing you need is to be focused on mechanics, patter or prop management. These things should all be 2nd nature.

## **Further Study**

I've only scratched the surface in this manual.

Here's some study materials to further your busking pursuits.

### **The Royal Touch** - Cellini

This is one of my all time favorite magic books. It's a work of art. The information contained in these pages is enough to provide any busking magi a lifetime of material. The hardcover is well worth the search / expense (or you can buy [The Royal Touch](#) .pdf at lybrary.com.)

### **To Lure With Spectacle** - Jimmy Talksalot

Jimmy's blog contains some of the best advice on busking you'll find online. In fact, if you do nothing more than discover Jimmy's resource, your money and time spent on these notes has just been rewarded. While there, do yourself a favor and buy a hardcopy of "To Lure With Spectacle" <http://jimmytalksalot.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html>

### **Secret Art of Magic** - Eric Evans

Here's your post graduate course, from one of my all time favorite magicians: Eric Evans. In the "Secret Art" Eric applies teachings from Sun Tzu's "The Art of War" onto the busking battlefield.

For a further *must read list*, visit [busk.com](http://busk.com)

<https://busk.co/blog/busking-tips-tricks/best-equipment-for-busking/13-books-every-street-performer-read/>

There are many online resources that can help you with your busking pursuits. For example: *The Magic Cafe* has a "Sidewalk Shuffle" forum which focuses on street performing. Facebook also has several busking groups. These forums are a great way to keep up with current info.

## **Recommended Viewing**

I understand many magi prefer learning from videos/dvds/downloads, so here's a couple suggestions for the visual student

### **Art of Street Performing: 3 Volumes**

This instructional documentary featuring Cellini (the king, the maestro!) 40 years of magic/busking experience are brought to life throughout this three DVD set. Cellini was the best. If you're a serious busking/magic student, this should be high on your list of priorities.

<http://www.kozmomagic.com/artist/cellini/>

### **Tales From the Street** - Kozmo

This wonderful DVD set featuring (the super-successful KOZMO) is full of invaluable advice. I particularly enjoyed the Q&A section with Koz & Danny Hustle. Check it out:

<http://www.kozmomagic.com/artist/kozmo/>

**Best wishes on your busking pursuits!**

**Questions, Comments?**

You can find me at [www.dougconn.com](http://www.dougconn.com)

Or feel free to drop me an email:  
[connjure@gmail.com](mailto:connjure@gmail.com)

