

## Shmanners 368 Open Mic Nights: Cigars

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[theme music plays]

**Travis:** Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

**Teresa:** And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

**Travis:** And you're listening to Shmanners!

**Teresa:** It's extraordinary etiquette...

**Travis:** For ordinary occasions! Hello, my dove.

**Teresa:** Hello, dear.

**Travis:** How are you?

**Teresa:** [sighs]

**Travis:** You got a sneezy face? We'll see.

**Teresa:** I had, like, a sneeze attack, y'all!

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** I sneezed, what 15 times in a row?

**Travis:** You think you're cursed?

**Teresa:** Probably.

**Travis:** Yeah, that's what I'm thinking. Did you wrong anybody?

**Teresa:** Uh—

**Travis:** Did you wrong anybody today, or at any point?

**Teresa:** Not that I know of today, but it is possible at some point in my life.

**Travis:** It could've been at any point in your life.

**Teresa:** Oh, really.

**Travis:** This could be just a curse that's been sitting around for a decade or two waiting to take hold.

**Teresa:** Oh man.

**Travis:** That's the problem with curses! They're unpredictable! That's the thing!

**Teresa:** [laughs] I suppose so.

**Travis:** You curse someone on a Tuesday, it doesn't kick in until Friday! How you supposed to plan?

**Teresa:** You can't.

**Travis:** You can't plan! Thank you. That's always been my problem with curses, where sometimes you curse somebody and then it's just like, instead of one big curse on one day it's like, 7% of a curse on, like, 13 days. You know what I mean?

**Teresa:** Oh no!

**Travis:** And you're like, "What?"

**Teresa:** That is not good bang for your buck.

**Travis:** No! I wanted one big curse! I wanted one big curse! You know?

**Teresa:** Hey, anyway.

**Travis:** Yeah? We're talking about curses.

**Teresa:** No we're not. [laughs]

**Travis:** No? Okay.

**Teresa:** We're talking about open mic!

**Travis:** Open Michael. Love that guy.

**Teresa:** Open mic Shmanners.

**Travis:** Open Mic Eagle. Love that guy.

**Teresa:** So I think that first of all, first of all...

**Travis:** First of all.

**Teresa:** Mic stand for microphone.

**Travis:** What?!

**Teresa:** You know that. And you—

**Travis:** Michael-phone. [laughs quietly]

**Teresa:** [laughs] You keep changing it to something else.

**Travis:** 'Cause that's all I bring to the show. Uh, yeah.

**Teresa:** Oh, okay. Alright. And it is said to be one of the most accessible forms of entertainment, okay?

**Travis:** An open mic?

**Teresa:** An open mic. Because, I mean, the idea is if you want to do it, you can do it.

**Travis:** Now, here's what I will say.

**Teresa:** No experience necessary.

**Travis:** Here's what I will say. First of all, I would push back and say, what you mean, what they mean, most approachable, right? Accessible, accessibility, has a different meaning, right? So most approachable. I disagree.

**Teresa:** Alright.

**Travis:** Because that's only true if you are one of, I believe, three people on Earth born without the feeling of awkwardness.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** Like, if you're someone who's just like, "I don't feel anxiety. I don't feel uncomfortable on my behalf or other people's behalf."

Because I've attended—I've never performed at an open mic night 'cause it doesn't fit any of my skill sets really, but more than that, I have attended them, I've worked them. Ho boysie. Ho boysie, is it a minefield.

**Teresa:** I would argue that one does not need to possess the ability to not be fazed, right? Because an open mic night is a great place to practice and get through these anxieties.

**Travis:** Oh, no, no, no. Sorry. I'm not talking about when you're the one person on stage. I mean all the rest of the time when you have to watch everyone else be on stage and you're like, "Oh, god. Oh, ah, I can't. No, not like this!"

I watched this dude—let me preface.

**Teresa:** Alright.

**Travis:** There's a story, and I was working at the UCB on Sunset. No! The UCB Hollywood? Anyways, it was the new one that they built in LA.

**Teresa:** At the time. It's not new anymore. [laughs]

**Travis:** And so I got a job running lights and sound in the underground, the place that—the theater's right off the cafe. And one night, uh, this guy was hosting this open mic, and it was a really interesting concept that I am really in favor of, where it was like he had some booked comedians, and then open mic slots in between them for other comedians, right?

**Teresa:** Okay, okay.

**Travis:** But the only people in the room were comedians hoping to get in there and comedians performing.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** So the open mic comedians, each got three minutes, right? This guy gets picked, and he comes back to where me and the host are, and he's like, "Hey. When it's my time, play this song as my intro, and then I'll come in when it hits this part."

And me and the host scrubbed through it and we're like, "This is—it's, like, 45 seconds before that point comes in the song."

And he's like, "Yeah, I know."

And we're like, "And your three minutes starts when the music starts."

And he was like, "Yeah, I know, it'll be great."

And we're like, "Okay."

So it comes to his slot and the lights go down, and the music starts, and the lights go up onstage, and he's waiting at the back of the crowd..45 seconds. Almost a third of his whole set, right? And then 45 seconds. And the crowd's like, "Uh, huh? Okay?"

45 seconds. He runs up on stage. Then he performs terrible, t—bad jokes. They weren't good. Most of the time he would giggle at his own joke halfway through, lose his place, and then just finish the joke.

So then it comes time, I give him the light, and the light lets you know, like, "Hey, your time's almost done."

He doesn't acknowledge that at all, and goes another minute past the three minutes. I look at the host and I go, "What am I doing?" And he goes, "You gotta bring down the lights."

So I brought the lights down.

The gentleman continued performing in the dark! And I brought the lights back up, and back down again. And he kept [wheezes] doing his set! And I looked at the host and I was like—and he was like, "I don't know!"

**Teresa:** Were you able to cut the mic?

**Travis:** So I brought the lights up again, the host goes back on stage.

At this point, this guy has been on stage for six minutes, double his time. And the host goes on stage and is like, "Hey, man, you're done! We brought the lights and you gotta stop."

And the guy goes, "Okay. One more joke?"

And the host was like, "What?! No!"

And the guy's like, "Okay. Well, it would've ended like this."

And just tells the punch line, and says, "Good night, everybody!" [laughs] And walks off stage! It was wild. It was wildly uncomfortable.

**Teresa:** Little do you know that this was his performance art.

**Travis:** No.

**Teresa:** This is what he likes to do.

**Travis:** Now, thank you for voicing that, 'cause you know there are people listening. I know the dif—I, Travis McElroy, know bombing on purpose to be funny. I know what that looks like. I do it on My Brother, My Brother, and Me all the time. I know what it looks like to play a bit and have everybody, like, groaning at the bit. This guy was not doing that. This guy, at 45 seconds, as he ran on, had, like, bubble guns that he was firing in the air. Just firing bubbles everywhere. It was—but then didn't acknowledge it in any way! Just—it was a part—it was wild. Anywho.

**Teresa:** Anywho.

**Travis:** I love open mics.

**Teresa:** [laughs] So, they're great venues for working out new material, or promoting upcoming shows, and they take place all over the place. So, the most popular venues are coffee shops, nightclubs, comedy clubs, pubs, theaters. But they also often host them at libraries, or occasionally strip clubs. Pretty much any place that you can plug in a PA system, you can have an open mic.

**Travis:** So she we specify what makes an open mic an open mic, right?

**Teresa:** Yes, here it is.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** So it is a performance, right? Where performers sign up in advance for a slot with a host or an MC, right? Of the open mic night. Which is usually an experienced performer or a venue manager, right?

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** They carry the show, and they bring each performer on one by one. Each performer is usually given a certain amount of time, three, five, ten minutes, whatever have you, to show their stuff before the next performer goes on.

**Travis:** One of the big differentiators, to make it clear, the thing that differentiates open mic night the most is most of the time for most shows, people are getting booked, right? Either they have auditioned for it or they have a management thing that's booking them onto the show or booking them at the place. They are being hired to do it. And open mic night is like, there's 20 spots, 20 people can sign up, and those 20 people can go, or whatever. Right?

**Teresa:** As such, you often don't get paid for this performance.

**Travis:** Correct.

**Teresa:** Um, usually there's no or low entrance fee. Sometimes it's just the same—like if it's in a coffee shop, you buy a drink, right? And then you get to sit and watch the open mic. There's no, like, tickets or anything, although they do often encourage tips or a performer might have their Venmo on their shirt or whatever, right?

**Travis:** I mean, you could potentially also, like, if you have records to sell or demos or something that you could hand out or sell or something.

**Teresa:** Sometimes, yep. Some people do that too.

**Travis:** There's also, um—I mean, there's so many different versions of it, 'cause there's the signup one. But I was talking about the one where it's like, you come, we pick your name out of a hat, and it's like, if you get picked you get to go up and perform.

I've also heard of ones where it's like, uh, if you sell five tickets or you have five people there who say they're there to watch you, you get to perform. It's based on, like, did you bring five people? Okay, great, then you can get up and do it.

**Teresa:** It is usually a solo performance, although it could be stand-up comedy, or sketch, or music, poetry, spoken word, that kind of stuff. Because it's usually quite small, right? There may not even be a stage. Could just be a corner, right?



**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** And so it's not usually a group kind of thing, although I have seen occasionally someone do, like, poetry or spoken word with, like, a person on a guitar sitting behind them.

**Travis:** Yeah, you might get away with, like, two people, if it's like they play a guitar while I sing, you might get away with that. But it's also most of the ones I've seen, if you're doing music, if you're playing music, it's acoustic. Right? Like, you're not setting up an amp, you're not setting up a full drum set or whatever. Like, this is a much chiller vibe than that. 'cause you also don't have setup time. That's the other thing of like, this dude who had a 45 second intro. It's like, we're churning—'cause think about it, right? If it's an hour long show, say there are, like, 20 people with three minutes, they're not building in, like, set changes or whatever.

**Teresa:** Of course not. Of course not. Now, the history of open mic nights, as you might surmise, is pretty sparse, scholarly speaking, because it is so low-key, right? You could, if you made the argument, maybe you could trace it all the way back to Irish music sessions, or early blues and jazz jams, right? Or, you know, things like that. Maybe—we can't deny that open mics have been influenced by the hootenanny, right? That was in Greenwich Village, or the poetry gatherings of the beatnik movement.

**Travis:** But I—also, man, if you told me, "Yeah, back in, like, Ancient Greece it was like, do you want to get up and speak on a topic?" Right?

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Then get up and do it.

**Teresa:** Which is why tracing the history is so kind of amorphous, right?

**Travis:** That is the thing, 'cause sometimes we run into this with topics where it's like, it's not the idea of the thing, it's giving it a codified game. And like—'cause I'm sure, like, you know, that Plato wasn't like, "Alright! Uh,

it's two drink minimum, open mic. Who wants to get up and talk about democracy?!"

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** But, like, that idea, right? Of like, if you want to speak and no one's speaking hop up there and go, has probably been around longer than there were bars.

**Teresa:** Right. So there was a time early in the 20th century when this new idea of the open mic broadcast, so for radio, right? Uh, Marcus Aldredge has a book called Singer-Songwriters and Musical Open Mics, where he traces the format to these musical broadcasts where popular musicians would perform live on air in a specific venue, right?

**Travis:** Oh, sure.

**Teresa:** And then after that there'd usually be some kind of, like, talk radio guests to discuss news and other topics, right? Um, also I mentioned the beatnik movement. That was in the late 50's, early 60's, which created an intense demand for poetry, right? And one of the ways that you could get that was the open mic styles. These performances were in places like San Francisco and New York City. I mean, when I think about the beatniks I think about Jack Kerouac, right?

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** Um—

**Travis:** Yeah. Can I tell you? I don't know anything about Jack Kerouac. I know that his name rhymes.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** And I think that's the only thing... honest to God, that's the only thing I know about him.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** Until you said that I wouldn't have associated him with poetry. I don't know anything about him whatsoever except that his name sounds like some kind of Marvel secret identity for somebody, like—

**Teresa:** Oh man. Okay. Well, maybe-

**Travis:** Sorry! Hey, listen! I'm not the educated one here, you know what I mean?

**Teresa:** [laughs] Let's make a note of that, and maybe we'll come back to it.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** I don't have time right now. So, um—

**Travis:** I also like that Kurt Vonnegut has gut in his name. I think that's great.

**Teresa:** So, these community based events were often underscored by jazz musicians. That's just kind of, like, the beatnik kind of vibe, right?

**Travis:** We've talked about poetry jams and stuff before, right?

**Teresa:** A little bit, a little bit.

**Travis:** I mean, they're an absolute boon to, like, if you're, like, a coffee shop or a bar, right? This idea, same with trivia, which you talked about, right? Of here is an event. You're gonna sit the whole time and stay. And especially if you're someone who, like, either brings a bunch of friends with you or builds a following, right? You're having people who stay the whole time. Right?

Like at a trivia event, people aren't just drifting in and out to play trivia. You come, you sit, you play. And I think that is the same when you talk about these poetry events, except even more so, all of the content is generated by your customers.

**Teresa:** Right, which makes it a great time filler, right? [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah, right?

**Teresa:** So the open mics of the early 60's kind of folk music-wise were, like, first advertised in pubs all over Greenwich Village, right? They weren't meant to be huge moneymakers for the venues, but they were great at keeping people in seats and filling time for the bigger sort of things.

**Travis:** Especially on your off nights, right? You get people in there, your Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, maybe even Thursday, right? Now you've got a full place, especially if you have any kind of food, right? Like, that's solid revenue. That's why people do, like, trivia nights on Tuesdays, right? That's why they do, like, drink specials Wednesdays. 'cause people aren't going out those nights.

**Teresa:** Right. This was sometimes called a hootenanny. Also, it's very similar to the, quote, "cutting contests" that blues and jazz musicians would host during the Harlem Renaissance. It was kind of like an improvised kind of, like, competition, almost, right? Um, so both in the 20's in Harlem and the 60's in Greenwich, these things served a couple purposes, right?

It could be a teaching exercise, right? Where pros show off their talent and stage presence. But also it's a chance for younger performers to get on stage and prove themselves, right? Kind of ingratiate themselves into whatever community they're trying to be part of.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** And so this is when around that time that the words "open mic" started being published in, like, various print publications, in association with these things.

**Travis:** It's also one of those where it's like, I like the succinct—succinici—the su—

**Teresa:** Oh no.

**Travis:** The succinct-ness? I like how short it is.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** And how clear it is. Um, that open mic. I got it. But it's not a super creative name, right? "The microphone? It's open."

**Teresa:** Well, no. But, but, in his autobiography, Bob Dylan wrote in—Chronicles is the name of the autobiography—he talked about how he got his start at these open mic nights in Greenwich Village, and he described it as feeling like he was part of an invisible nation of people who shared a culture of the songs and stories that brought people together in the community.

**Travis:** [Bob Dylan impression] [[An invisible nation of time?]].

**Teresa:** Oh boy. That's...

**Travis:** That's my impression of him.

**Teresa:** ... not a very good impression.

**Travis:** Was it good? Aw, man. Okay. I was feeling pretty good about it.

**Teresa:** Okay. [laughs] Sorry.

**Travis:** That's okay. Hey, you keep me grounded, baby, and I love it.

**Teresa:** [laughs] When we get into the 80's and 90's, this is the new, like, punk music scene, right?

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** And so it was almost, like, anti-folk music. Um, and so a lot of the newer kind of brasher, less acoustic, right? Movements, um, didn't really flourish at the open mic the same way that the other stuff did. But because open mic had kind of spread across the country, it became less about music and more about, like we said, like, standup, like you experienced.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm. And then you also get, like, rap battles, rap, you get, you know, rap open mics, you get poetry mics. Slam poetry open mics, which was big in the 90's. Um... you also mentioned, like, dancing? Like there's, you know, at dance clubs and exotic dance clubs, as they were. Um, they have open stages, and they'll have, like, amateur nights and everything there as well.

**Teresa:** Yeah, absolutely. Um, so let's go over some of the rules.

**Travis:** I wonder if they ever do, like, open mics at fancy kitchen restaurants where it's like, "Hmm, the kitchen's yours. Come cook."

**Teresa:** [wheezes] I don't—there's a lot of expensive equipment.

**Travis:** Yes, chef.

**Teresa:** Probably... not.

**Travis:** No? Okay. Bring your own hot plate. Show us how you can do it, chef. Behind, corner.

**Teresa:** We'll go over some of the rules. But first, a word from...

**Travis:** Some other Max Fun shows.

**Teresa:** Some other Max Fun shows.

[theme music plays]

[music plays]

**Laura:** Hi, everyone! I'm Laura House.

**Annabelle:** And I'm Annabelle Gurwitch, and sometimes it feels like the whole world is a dumpster fire.

**Laura:** Right? There's too much to worry about.

**Annabelle:** That's why we make Tiny Victories! It's a 15 minute podcast where we celebrate our minor accomplishments and fleeting joys.

**Laura:** And listeners call in, like Valerie, who found the perfect gift for her daughter's boyfriend, and Adam, who finally turned his couch cushion the right way!

**Annabelle:** And little happinesses, like how birdsong helps your brain.

**Laura:** That's science!

[bird chirps]

**Laura:** So join us in not freaking out for 15 minutes a week.

**Annabelle:** That's Tiny Victories with Annabelle and Laura, Mondays on Maximum Fun.

**Laura:** Whew! It's a tiny victory just to make a network promo.

**Annabelle:** Honestly.

[music and ad end]

[dog barks]

[music plays]

**Alexis:** Are you tired of being picked on for only wanting to talk about your cat at parties?

**Ella:** Do you feel as though your friends don't understand the depth of love you have for your guinea pig?

**Alexis:** When you look around a room of people, do you wonder if they know sloths only have to eat one leaf a month?

**Ella:** Have you ever dumped someone for saying they're just not an animal person?

**Alexis:** Us too.

**Ella:** She's Alexis B. Preston.

**Alexis:** She's Ella McLeod.

**Ella:** And we host Comfort Creatures: the show where you can't talk about your pets too much, animal trivia is our love language, are dragons are just as real as dinosaurs.

**Alexis:** Tune in to Comfort Creatures every Thursday on Maximum Fun.

[music and ad end]

**Travis:** So, in this lawless wasteland that is open mics, what's the rules?

**Teresa:** Okay. Well.

**Travis:** You know there's also, like, improv open mics, improv jams, comedy jams? Like, where it's basically just like, you can just get up and do it and just improv. And the thing is, it's not—once again, it's not about me. It's about—you see that person over there who's bouncing, ready to get up there, thinking they're just gonna get up there and just blow everyone away? That's the only kind of embarrassment I feel, is secondhand embarrassment.

When I see someone else doing something I'm like, "No! Oh please, don't—please don't do this!"

I don't get embarrassed! I just get embarrassed on behalf of other folks.

**Teresa:** Yeah. I have both kinds of embarrassment.

**Travis:** You have all the kinds of embarrassment, baby.



**Teresa:** [laughs] Okay. So, first of all, if you're performing at an open mic, simpler is better. We all heard about this unfortunate person.

**Travis:** Me having to listen to it.

**Teresa:** [laughs] It was quite—

**Travis:** Don't you let off one of history's greatest monsters, the man that—ugh! Twice I pulled the lights down and up!

**Teresa:** So it seems that this person had quite a complicated show to put on, so that was not appreciated. So it's a low-key time, low-key piece. Okay? Next, make sure that you go to the open mic you want to participate in before you properly sign up. Scope it out, you know? Try and figure out—you know, you're trying to get the feel of the event, what the stage is, what the equipment they have is, what kind of performances they usually host.

**Travis:** [simultaneously] What the vibe is, yeah.

**Teresa:** Right? So it might keep you from showing up to a metal night, like a punk rock metal night and, you know, trying to do your tight five.

**Travis:** I want nothing more.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Than to watch—forget what I said earlier about secondhand embarrassment. I would love to see just, like, a stand-up comic in the back, like, with their notes, and then the music start, and it's just like, heavy metal. And they're, like, the fifth person out of ten and they're like, "Alright!" And they just get up and do it. I wanna watch that so bad.

Now, here's the thing. Overall, right? One of the things that you really have to—and I'm sure it'll come up again as we talk about the etiquette of this, right? But you talked about it with, like, Bob Dylan and stuff. Of, like, these open mic nights, you end up being part of a scene in whatever city you live in, right?

So if it's, like, Cincinnati, right? And I want to get a start in standup comedy, right? Or I want to get a start in the music scene or whatever, you're gonna see a lot of the same people at a lot of these nights over and over again, right? You're probably gonna go to the same open mic night at the same venue week after week or month after month, right? So making sure that you show yourself to be, one, somebody that people want to be there, right? That you're observing the rules, that you're showing up, you're getting to know the people beforehand, you're making a good impression, you're supporting the other people performing.

All of that forms a really good kind of vibe about you. Because once again, if you think—like, the chance that someone will elevate, out of a city, out of a crowd, out of whatever group is doing it, right? And you want them to think, "You know who I had a lot of fun playing with? That person. I'm gonna see if they're free to, like, do backup for me, or open for me when I do this paid gig in town, right?"

**Teresa:** Yeah, totally.

**Travis:** And vice versa, right? If you get a paid gig that they're like, "That's amazing. We want to be there to support you and tell everybody about it," right? All of that. It is not a one person show to elevate your career to a place where you actually want it to be. You have to be supported by other people and you have to support other people.

**Teresa:** Absolutely. And in addition to the vibe kind of rules, there might actually be rules for the venue. Like, are you allowed to swear? Are you allowed to play covers, or do they just want original music?

**Travis:** Also a good question.

**Teresa:** What is the time limit?

**Travis:** We talked about that with poetry, right?

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** That, like, don't show up to, like, an originals night and read somebody else's unless it's somebody there who's like, "I'm not comfortable reading it. I would like you to perform this for me."

See, I pay attention. What's up?

**Teresa:** You do pay attention. Great work.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Um, are there songs that are banned from the venue? Which actually comes up a lot.

**Travis:** Yeah. That's true with karaoke, too. I know it's not exactly the same, karaoke and open mic night, but one, there are songs that they don't play, and two, there are songs that the host always sings. And it's like, you don't sing the host, that's the host's song. Don't put that song in.

**Teresa:** Yeah. To know those rules is a great idea, but we also talked a lot about, like, feeling the vibe, right? Um, you know. So, like, a lot of venues come with their own vibe, right? You wouldn't do the same set in a comedy club that you would at a library, right?

**Travis:** That's true.

**Teresa:** So, you know, read that room. And don't be pushy, especially if you're a first timer.

**Travis:** There you go.

**Teresa:** So when you sign up, that's what you sign up for, right? If it's like, first come, first served, right? Don't try and, like, do your set and then leave five minutes in, or demand that you become the closer, or—

**Travis:** Or ask if they can move you up because, like, you have to go somewhere or whatever. It's just like, no, that's not—what? No!

**Teresa:** The rule is if it's an open signup, you sign up for when you sign up.

**Travis:** And I would say, along those same lines, if you get there and it's like, okay, you go on second to last or whatever, stay in the room. Listen, watch the other people. One, it's a polite thing to do. Two, a good way to perfect your craft is to watch other people use theirs, right? See what you can learn.

I'm not talking about, like, copying jokes or copying songs or whatever. But say, like, "Oh! That's—oh, I like the way that they, like, kind of turned and delivered that to one person. And oh, that was a good inflection on that. That kind of makes sense for a thing I've been trying to figure out in my set." Right?

**Teresa:** Absolutely.

**Travis:** And just, like, it's funny, right? And if you stay and support them, they'll stay and support you. Same if you bring friends for your set. This is very important, right? Especially if it's one of those shows where it's like, bring people with you to go on. Make sure that your friends are also supporting the other people there. Make sure that—because it's a reflection of you, you brought them, all that stuff. Make sure that you are supporting the other performers.

**Teresa:** Absolutely. Don't go over your time limit.

**Travis:** Please.

**Teresa:** You were very upset at this person.

**Travis:** So, most of the time you either—there will either be a visible, like, countdown clock, or just a clock in general, but most of the time if you have a set time, um, they will have a clock, or they will hold up signs to let you know, or they'll flash a light, right? And the light is usually like, "Hey. You have, like, 30 seconds left or something. Wrap it up." Right?

And now most of the time I will also say this. If you're, like—if it hits your time, they'll let you finish a joke. Unless—if you have been, you know, not been pushing it, right?

**Teresa:** [laughs] Right, yeah.

**Travis:** And so that's the thing, is like, if it seemed like they were building to the punch line, I would give 'em, you know, 10 extra seconds, 15 extra seconds. Um, just don't abuse that. Don't take advantage of that. And, you know, be gracious about it. If you go over your time, it's another thing you're there to learn is your time management, your delivery, how to have a set that fits within that amount of time. It's where the joke "a tight five" comes from, right? Like, "Can you do a tight five?"

That means it's five on the dot, right? It is a tight five. It's not like, "Yeah, I can do a tight five," and then you do, like, six and a half. That's not a tight five.

And so that's another good reason for doing open mic. You start to, like, hone your time management and getting the pacing right, and all that stuff.

**Teresa:** Um, so here's another one. You may, dear listeners, have heard at the beginning that the bomb is inevitable. You are not gonna always do a great job.

**Travis:** True.

**Teresa:** In fact, this is the place to go and not do a great job, because that's the mistakes that help you learn, right? I don't know if that person at the beginning learned really anything, but we want to make sure that you are not afraid to really pull a stinker. [laughs quietly] Um—

**Travis:** Aww, babe. That's cute. Pull a stinker.

**Teresa:** [laughs] And don't feel like you have to apologize if that happens, okay? So the stakes are really low at open mic, and it's good to have fun, but if it doesn't work, now you know that it doesn't work, and it's part of the process. Don't, like, get upset about it, or spend the rest of the night saying everything you did was so awful, because it feels like you're fishing for compliments and trying to get people to say "Oh no, it wasn't that bad." But maybe it really was that bad.

**Travis:** Maybe—and I know it seems trite, right? To say, like, you learn through failing and stuff. But especially in something like this, it's absolutely true. Right? 'Cause, like, if you've ever gone to see whoever your favorite actor is in your favorite play, right? They had months of rehearsal before that where it wasn't right, where they couldn't remember their lines, where they couldn't remember their blocking, where they forgot to bring on a prop.

Even your favorite standup comic, right? You watch their hour-long special. That hour-long special is many different performances cut together to be like, "And this was the night that this joke worked best, and this was the night this joke worked best."

**Teresa:** And plus, those are usually filmed at the end of a tour.

**Travis:** After they've had all the practice, yeah.

**Teresa:** After they've had all the practice, right?

**Travis:** And so that idea of like, you really—you can stand in front of a mirror and perform these jokes for practice. But until you get in front of an audience, you don't know if it works or not, right? This is something Justin and Griffin and I talk about all the time, 'cause we don't script My Brother, My Brother, and Me live shows. So every night when we go out there it's like, "Maybe tonight, nothing will be funny."

**Teresa:** 'Cause they can't all be bangers.

**Travis:** They can't all be bangers. But luckily we do an hour-long thing, and there's three of us, so at some point one of us will say something that's funny. So that kind of helps balance it out a lot.

I think the other thing too, is... all joking aside about open mic nights, I would be surprised if there's anybody there who's like, "I'm here to watch people fail!"

There might be. There might be some turds in the audience. But most of those people, they're as afraid of performing as you are, right?

**Teresa:** Or they're there to support someone who they know needs the help.

**Travis:** Yeah. You're gonna do great.

**Teresa:** It's gonna be great. If you are doing a musical open mic, here is a good way to know not to do the songs you picked. These are a few very popular covers that seasoned open mic performers say don't do.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Don't do Wonderwall.

**Travis:** No, yeah. Yeah, could've told you that.

**Teresa:** Don't do Country Roads by John Denver.

**Travis:** Oh! Now, hold on.

**Teresa:** Here's the thing. Because everyone is gonna want to sing, right? And that's not the vibe for the open mic, and it is not gonna help you learn to do your music better. It is just gonna be a great time for the audience. And if they sing with your song, then they might want to sing with other people's songs, right? It sets a bad precedent.

Um, don't do House of the Rising Sun. It is very long. It's too long. Same thing with Free Bird. It's too long.

**Travis:** [simultaneously] Don't do Hey Jude, I would say, for the same reason. Very long.

**Teresa:** Um, don't do Hallelujah.

**Travis:** Sad.

**Teresa:** Very sad. And...

**Travis:** Very slow.

**Teresa:** Very slow. Really kills the vibe. Um, don't do Bohemian Rhapsody. Nobody can do that as good as Queen can do that.

**Travis:** Now, I will—I will push back.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** On one thing. If you have a really fun, like, dramatic country cover of Bohemian Rhapsody—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —or like a really great, like, banjo bluegrass cover of it, I am a sucker for that. I talk about it all the time. Tyler Childers, song performed at Huntington, West Virginia, the V Club, back, back, back, back, back. I was 23. So this was, what, 15 years ago, 16 years ago? And, like, he was just getting started.

Now he's amazing, by the way. Check out his latest music video. Oh, absolutely lovely.

Um, but he did a, like, gothic country cover of Rolling in the Deep by Adele—

**Teresa:** Which is not on this list.

**Travis:** —and it is still, to this day, my favorite version of Rolling in the Deep. 15 years later I think about it all the time. Okay.

**Teresa:** And this is a lesser known song, but don't do The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.

**Travis:** That is not a lesser known song! That song rules! "[singing] The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald!"

**Teresa:** Well, the one I mentioned before that was Bohemian Rhapsody.



**Travis:** That's true, yeah.

**Teresa:** Also, again, too long. It's way too long.

**Travis:** I just looked it up. You gotta watch it. Tyler Childers, In Your Love. I don't care if you like country music or not. Watch the music video. Have some tissues handy. It's beautiful. You're gonna cry your little face off. Go ahead.

**Teresa:** Okay. If you are attending an open mic, it is not appropriate to heckle.

**Travis:** No! [gasps] It's never appropriate to heckle!

**Teresa:** It's never appropriate to heckle.

**Travis:** If you don't like it, just leave!

**Teresa:** But people are here to try and, like—try stuff off... try stuff out is what I mean.

**Travis:** Try stuff up.

**Teresa:** [through laughter] Try stuff around.

**Travis:** There you go.

**Teresa:** Um, and so, like, don't do that. That's not it.

**Travis:** I would also so, in the same, don't offer critique or insight unless they ask, right? Especially if they're a stranger. Don't walk up to someone and say, like, "Can I tell you how that could've been better?" No. No, you can't. Thank you very much. Now, if you're someone I know, and I say, "What did you think? How can I improve? What worked what didn't?" By all means, give me.

**Teresa:** The first time Travis asks you that you say, "It was great."

**Travis:** That's not true, no!

**Teresa:** And then the second time—

**Travis:** I don't wanna hear that!

**Teresa:** And then the second time he asks you, then you give it—you give the goods.

**Travis:** I know I'm great. I wouldn't ask if I was worried about bad feedback. But I can only improve the things that were bad.

**Teresa:** Yes, I know.

**Travis:** Don't just tell me it was great.

**Teresa:** I know. But if you ask—

**Travis:** You're right, but I can't admit it.

**Teresa:** [laughs] If Travis asks, right after it happened, you say "That was great."

**Travis:** "It was great!" but you gotta say it like that. "It was great!"  
[crosstalk]

**Teresa:** And then—

**Travis:** And I'm like, "Okay, yeah, but like—"

**Teresa:** The second time he asks, several hours to days later, then you can tell him.

**Travis:** Alright. I'm—I feel...

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** ... called out. I feel on the spot. I...

**Teresa:** So, here's another one. Um, remember it is a performance. Even if it's in a bar or a coffee shop. No one expects anything to be completely, hear-a-pin-drop silent. That's fine, right? But keep your voice down. Remember it is a performance.

So it's not like you—we talked about this in trivia a little bit, right? Um, where the questions are often asked over a mic, and so you don't want to be loud while the questions are being asked. Same then with open mic night.

**Travis:** You know they have a set now—I've seen this a couple times now, whereas you're playing trivia it's like you go to a website, and the questions also pop up on your phone and you answer through your phone. So you're not, like, going up to the desk, and you don't have to, like, ask people to repeat it over and over again. It's very interesting.

**Teresa:** [simultaneously] That's great.

**Travis:** Um, I would say along those same lines though—and this should be obvious, but just in case it's not, um, whatever kind of open mic night it is, but especially if it's a musical one, don't sit in the back of the room, like, practicing, even if it's quietly, on your instrument, while someone else is performing. If you feel the need to do that, like, go out to the parking lot or something. But, like, don't—just, like, don't sit in the back and practice your jokes while someone else is telling jokes! Don't. Just, come on.

**Teresa:** Also, applaud for everyone.

**Travis:** Yep.

**Teresa:** Even if it's bad. Just do it. Applause—it not only is, you know, the polite thing to do, it also is a really great signal that, "That's over now. Great. Thank you." [wheezes]

**Travis:** Even if you can't applaud the execution, applaud the effort. Applaud that they got up and did it, right? Because you never know. It might be someone's first try at doing it ever. It might be a huge step for them just to get up and do it. And that deserves applause no matter what.

**Teresa:** Also don't talk about things before you leave the venue, right? Save it for the car ride home.

**Travis:** Save it for the car ride home!

**Teresa:** And tell—

**Travis:** Save it for the bus, as we used to say at speech and debate competitions. Save it for the bus? Save it for the bus.

**Teresa:** You know, once that door closes, then you can talk about it. Don't talk about any of the stuff while you're still there. Even the—I mean, I suppose if it was all good, you could say, "That was great, the best thing I've ever done. Best open mic I've ever been to."

**Travis:** Oh, I thought you were just talking about, like, critiquing other people's stuff.

**Teresa:** Oh, same.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Same.

**Travis:** Especially that.

**Teresa:** All that stuff.

**Travis:** You know, the—we—you know, we go see a lot of shows and stuff, and when I was a kid would go see shows. And the thing my parents would always say to me is like, you never know whose mom is sitting behind you. Was the thing that would like—we'd go see a show and I'd want to talk about it and they'd be like, "Whoa! Eh! You never know whose mom is sitting behind you. We'll talk about it in the car."

**Teresa:** Yes. Um, do buy something from the venue. I mean, obviously if it's a library you don't have to buy anything, but you might support the

artists by buying merch if it's there. But also, you know, these places can easily just turn on a TV these days, right? They don't have to have open mics. You can be a sports bar three days a week and do just fine. So, like, buy something from the venue, support the open mic night.

If it's a cocktail, or a coffee, or an appetizer, whatever it is, right? And that will help keep these places, you know, open. And keep it so that everybody else can enjoy open mic nights too.

**Travis:** And if you are in Cincinnati and you have, like, a bar that you own and you want to do an open mic night, let me know. I think I'm gonna start doing standup comedy. It's never too late to start. Almost 40. Maybe I'll start doing slam poetry, huh?

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Teresa's nodding her head very vigorously.

**Teresa:** [simultaneously] No she's not. No.

**Travis:** She's so excited about this idea.

**Teresa:** No. You know what kind of hours comics keep?

**Travis:** Yeah!

**Teresa:** No!

**Travis:** Do you know how hard it is to, like, be around kids all the time?  
[laughs]

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** No, just kidding! I love my kids very much! That was a joke! That was a joke! I love my kids.

**Teresa:** And also if you—

**Travis:** [laughs loudly] You snapped out of that laugh so quick!

**Teresa:** [laughs] Also, if you yell "Free Bird," I'm telling your mom.

**Travis:** Come on.

**Teresa:** You're not allowed to do that.

**Travis:** Come on. That joke's done. That joke was done ten years ago.

**Teresa:** That joke was done the second it came out of somebody's mouth.

**Travis:** That joke is done. Now, you yell for Ke\$ha's TiK ToK, which is a way better song than Free Bird.

**Teresa:** No, also—

**Travis:** I'm just saying it's a better song than Free Bird. I think we can all agree, Ke\$ha's TiK ToK is a better song than Free Bird. Everyone agrees.

**Teresa:** We are not yelling out demands from the audience from the audience, 'cause if you do, I'm telling your mom. That's bad.

**Travis:** That's fair. The only time to do that is if someone asks you to do it. That the only time.

**Teresa:** "I need suggestions."

**Travis:** Yeah. And maybe not even then.

**Teresa:** "An occupation?"

**Travis:** Maybe not even then.

**Teresa:** "A farm animal?" [laughs quietly]

**Travis:** No. And then you just always say weasel. And they're like, "What?" And you say, "Sorry. What—I mis—I misunderstood."

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** No matter what they ask for. "Give me a profession."

"Weasel."

"What?"

"Sorry. Sorry, I thought you were gonna say animal."

"Okay, give me an animal."

"Plumber. Agh!"

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** I almost cursed, but I didn't.

**Teresa:** You didn't.

**Travis:** I didn't. Alright. Hey, everybody. Thank you so much. Thank you for listening. If you're listening to this on the day it comes out, which I think is the fourth? I'm going to be at Gen Con. I'm at Gen Con right now, come find me! Help! [laughs]

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Um, I'm doing a bunch of stuff. I'm doing two different shows on Friday. Uh, go to Instagram. You can find my schedule there. Let's see. What else? We've got new merch out now. There's a Clint the Planeswalking Janitor sticker designed by Zachary Sterling. It is so good and so funny. It's a reference for Adventure Zone where every time Dad forgets to talk and do a character voice, we refer to it as Clint, the Planeswalking Janitor. We also have a mystery sale going up over there on the merch store. We got limited quantities available, so act fast. And 10% of all merch proceeds this month go to Earth Justice, which uses the law to preserve a rich, sustainable, and diverse natural heritage for current and future generations.

We also have live shows coming up from the Twenty Sun and Sea: Surf the Vibe tour. We're gonna be in Seattle, Washington August 31st and September 1st. I should be clear, there. It's gonna be My Brother, My Brother,

and Me. Um, and New York Comic Con, we're gonna be there October 12th and 13th.

**Teresa:** Again, My Brother, My Brother, and Me.

**Travis:** And Adventure Zone. We're doing that one.

**Teresa:** Oh, okay. But I won't be there.

**Travis:** You won't be there. I think we might be doing Adventure Zone in Seattle, too? We gotta figure that out.

We're also gonna be doing, uh... whatever, another live show in Philadelphia. Show and date are coming up, but that will be tied into the New York Comic Con tour. New York Comic Con will require a badge to attend the show in person, but there will be badge-free tickets available to watch a video on demand of the show online. Badges for New York Comic Con are on sale now, and the tickets for New York Comic Con shows for our shows will go on sale Friday, August 4th at 11 AM, so there's a chance they're on sale now when you're listening to it.

There's more info, tickets, and links at [bit.ly/mcelroytours](http://bit.ly/mcelroytours). You can also find my Gen Con schedule there. Go check it out.

We want to say thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we would not be able to make this show. We want to say thank you to our research, Alexx, without whom we could not make this show. We want to say thank you for listening. Your support is very important to us, and we appreciate it, and you're great, and thank you.

What else? What did I forget? I always forget! Huh, I can't remember!

**Teresa:** [laughs] We also always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners. If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.



Also, we are always taking topic submissions. I mean, we're taking idiom submissions, or even just saying hi. Make sure—

**Travis:** We're taking submission submissions. If you have an idea for things we should take submissions for, let us know.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Uh, and you can send those to us at [shmannerscast@gmail.com](mailto:shmannerscast@gmail.com), and say hi to Alexx, because she reads every single one.

**Travis:** And that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week!

**Teresa:** No RSVP required.

**Travis:** You've been listening to Shmanners...

**Teresa:** Manners, Shmanners. Get it?

[theme music plays]

[chord]

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