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Huntsman Post

Jon Schmidt of The Piano Guys Details His Road to 217 Million YouTube Views

By Klydi Heywood



Jon Schmidt talks to USU students.

Photo by Klydi Heywood

The Piano Guys' videos have attracted more than 217 million views and 1.2 million YouTube subscribers. Jon Schmidt, the pianist for the group, said it all started by daring to do something that had never been done before.

Mr. Schmidt shared his story as part of the Huntsman Entrepreneur Leadership Series that started in January and is sponsored by the Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence. Students filled the auditorium in the Eccles Conference Center 30 minutes before the show started, and by 6 p.m., people were sitting in the aisles and crowding the doorways, hoping to see Schmidt talk and perform.

Mr. Schmidt started his career by playing at benefit events and selling his music on cassette tapes whenever he could. Although he said he was amazed that people actually wanted to buy his tapes, he continued to test out new venues for his music. He rented out the Highland High School auditorium, put up a few posters, and played the piano for about 1,000 people.

"That's the kind of formula I used," Mr. Schmidt said. "If there are any aspiring musicians out there, that's a great formula."

He then took it one step further.

"I thought, you know what, if I package myself like a big name, I wonder if people will believe it?" he said.

He rented out Kingsbury Hall, a major performance venue in Salt Lake City, and filled the house.

"What you project really does become what people perceive and believe, even if you're just pretending and faking," Mr. Schmidt said. "In other words, fake it 'til you make it," he said, laughing.

Another piece of entrepreneurial advice from Mr. Schmidt was to do something that has never been done before. When Mr. Schmidt met cellist Steven Sharp Nelson, he wanted to create something different. With their first YouTube sensation, "Love Story Meets Viva la Vida," they realized they had done exactly that.

Mr. Schmidt illustrated his story by sharing a number of tunes, including "[Love Story Meets Viva la Vida](#)." The audience responded to his music as he bobbed his head to the beat, swayed his shoulders to the melody and even spun around to play upside down.

When asked what got him through the tough times of being an entrepreneurial musician, Mr. Schmidt gave credit to God and his gut. He stated that in order to feel good about what he does each day, he has to follow his passion.

[View a recording of Jon Schmidt's Entrepreneur Leadership Series presentation on "Building a Music Company with Social Media."](#)