



Kiki Melendez on stage at The Comedy Store in Los Angeles.

Surviving... stage fright

For years, my parents had just one goal: that I get an education. They sent me to college in Florida, where—technically—I majored in psychology. In reality I was mastering disco-dancing at several nearby clubs. So when Rudy, a very dedicated, blind fellow student, told me he'd help me study for finals in exchange for a date, I accepted. For our night out, Rudy wanted to hit a comedy club—a request that changed my life. Fast-forward two years. Already living in New York City and inspired by what I saw that night with Rudy, I signed up for comedy school and created a stand-up act. It wasn't long before I started landing

gigs left and right, performing at some of the country's most famous clubs. Feeling good about it all, I decided to put together a sketch-comedy show.

It took several stressful months of planning and preparing, but finally the night arrived. But when I was about to take the stage, what happens? I go numb. I walk on stage, stare into the 1,000 or so faces in the audience and start, uh, hyperventilating. I muddled through my act, and when I wrapped it up five minutes later you could hear a pin drop. I had bombed.

That night, I quit comedy. A few weeks later, I packed my bags, moved to Los Angeles and switched to the radio business. I worked as an on-air personality for a morning show, then jumped to TV and did a show called *Kiki Desde Hollywood* for Galavisión. Both of these, believe it or not, were easier than being onstage because when

I performed, I did so in a studio without a live audience. No pins dropping.

Next came my big break: a deal with a network to do my very own talk show. But as it so often happens in Hollywood, the show fell through.

It forced me to realize that all through these projects, I had actually been avoiding the stage. I told myself that if I was going to be serious about entertainment, I was just going to have to get over it.

So I went out and convinced an L.A. comedy club to let me put together a review called *Hot Tamales Live!* All female comedians—myself included. On the show's first night, the audience was packed. And then...my palms started sweating. Again. *Ay Dios...*

Then, a thought came to me. I

remembered Rudy. I remembered my disco-dancing college days. And it occurred to me to incorporate all of that—the dancing, the music—into my act. Why? Because that was me being—well—Kiki!

I went onstage dancing, then said to the audience, "I know what you're thinking! 'God, she's just like Jennifer Lopez!'" 'Cause I have a big ass and I can't sing!" The audience roared with laughter.

I had finally figured out that the secret to conquering my stage fright—to be myself. Big ass and all! —Kiki Melendez

Hate public speaking?

1. **Don't be complicated:** Keep it clear and simple so you don't lose your audience.
2. **Write it down:** Jotting down notes on a card will help you flow and not be redundant.
3. **Be humble:** Speak from your soul and people will listen. Joking around can definitely backfire if you're not as funny as our girl Kiki!