



ESL Podcast 603 – Praising a Performance

GLOSSARY

bravo – a word shouted by audience members to congratulate performers for a very good performance immediately after they have finished; a word used to show one's approval of what another person has done.

* Wow, you got 100% on the test! Bravo!

standing ovation – when members of an audience stand up and clap and/or shout loudly to show their approval and appreciation for a performance or speech

* The best part about being an actor is receiving a standing ovation at the end of a show.

to gush – to be excessive in expressing one's praise, appreciation, or enjoyment; to talk too much about how much one likes something

* I know you like the car, but try to not to gush about it in front of the salesperson, or we won't be able to negotiate a good price.

passable – acceptable; meeting the minimum standards or requirements

* All these applicants have passable qualifications, but we haven't yet found anyone who seems like a perfect fit for the job.

nothing to write home about – not special; not good enough to spend much time thinking or talking about it; not very interesting or unusual

* The meal was okay, but it was nothing to write home about.

jaded – bored and uninterested because one has experienced too much of something to be excited about it anymore

* Marleah used to love traveling internationally, but now that she has been doing it in her job for a few years, she has become jaded and would rather just stay at home.

genius – very intelligent, clever, and talented; very good; exceptional

* The suggestion you made at today's meeting was pure genius! How did you come up with such a great idea?

to take (one's) breath away – to be very beautiful, wonderful, exciting, and surprising

* The view from the top of the mountain is so beautiful, it will take your breath away.



ESL Podcast 603 – Praising a Performance

number – one part of a longer performance, such as one song, one dance, or one act

* For her first number, Tracy is going to sing an aria from La Boheme.

to embarrass (oneself) – to make a fool of oneself; to do something that one is ashamed of later; to do something that one would rather not have other people see one do

* Be careful when you post private information and photographs online. You don't want to embarrass yourself.

faint – slight; not very strong

* My grandmother's house always has the faint scent of homemade chocolate chip cookies.

praise – words that express one's appreciation or enjoyment of something

* Do you think it's possible for parents to give too much praise to their children?

over the top – excessive; too much of something

* I can understand teenagers who want to wear unusual clothes and hairstyles to be different, but Kimberly goes over the top, wanting to wear a bathrobe, slippers, and bright purple hair to school!

effusive – expressing one's emotions or thoughts with a lot of excitement and enthusiasm

* Lynn is often effusive, spending several minutes thanking people for even the most ordinary things.

lead – the main role in a show or performance, usually given to the best artist or musician

* Ariana auditioned for the lead role of Guinevere in the musical Camelot, but she didn't get it.



ESL Podcast 603 – Praising a Performance

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Claudia mean when she says that the performance “took her breath away”?
 - a) It was too fast and difficult to understand.
 - b) It was very exciting and suspenseful.
 - c) It was wonderful and beautiful.

 2. What was their granddaughter’s role in the school play?
 - a) She was the most important tomato on stage.
 - b) She was the tomato that danced in front of everyone else.
 - c) She was the tomato that pulled the other tomatoes along.
-

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

number

The word “number,” in this podcast, means one part of a longer performance, such as one song, one dance, or one act: “Should we start the performance with our best number, or save it for the end?” A “number cruncher” is an accountant or someone else who works with numbers and makes many calculations: “If you don’t like math, why did you decide to become a number cruncher?” The phrase “to be good (bad) with numbers” means to (not) understand math and (not) be able to make calculations: “He’s bad with numbers, so he prefers to study history and literature.” As an adjective, “numb” means without feeling: “The dentist gave her a shot that made the right side of her mouth numb so she wouldn’t feel anything as he worked on her teeth.”

lead

In this podcast, the word “lead” means the main role in a show or performance, usually given to the best artist or musician: “Marcello is a very talented actor who always gets the lead roles in school plays.” The “lead musician” is the main or most important musician in a group: “Who is the lead guitar player for Led Zepplin?” The phrase “to be in the lead” means to be winning in a race or competition: “Which horse is in the lead right now?” Finally, the phrase “to take the lead” means to become very active and involved in a project or activity, showing or telling other people what to do: “When Mathieu took the lead and made the project a success, he earned a promotion at work.”



ESL Podcast 603 – Praising a Performance

CULTURE NOTE

When an audience enjoys a performance, it has many ways to “express” (show) its appreciation. Depending on the type of performance, it can be “rude” (not polite) or inappropriate to show appreciation during the performance, but it is usually “acceptable” (okay; allowed) to express appreciation between songs or “acts” (parts of a play) and it is always acceptable at the end of a performance.

When a show or performance is over, the audience “applauds” (claps; hits hands together rhythmically to make a noise). The performers, especially actors, come up for a “curtain call,” when they all stand on the stage in front of the audience. If it is an informal performance, audience members may shout “woo-hoo” or similar noises to “indicate” (show) that they liked what they have seen or heard. At more formal performances, audience members are more likely to shout “bravo.”

If audiences really like a musical performance, they might shout “encore,” meaning that they would like to hear more. Most bands or orchestras have an extra song or two that they have prepared for this purpose, so if the “conductor” (the person who leads an orchestra) hears enough audience members shouting “encore,” he or she will have the orchestra play another song or two.

Often people will bring flowers for a “soloist” (a person who performs alone for a period of time as part of a larger show or performance). The flowers are often brought to the soloist by the “director” or “producer” (the people who create the show).

Family members and close friends sometimes “go backstage” (go behind the stage, where performers change clothes) after a performance to “congratulate” (tell someone that he or she has done well) the performers, and these people often bring flowers, too.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – a



ESL Podcast 603 – Praising a Performance

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 603: Praising a Performance.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 603. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Support this podcast, help keep the audio files free for everyone by becoming a member of ESL Podcast. You can get more information on our website.

This episode is called "Praising a Performance." It's a dialogue between Claudia and Javier. They'll be talking about a performance, I believe it's like a play in a theater, and using vocabulary that you would use to describe performances such as plays or movies. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Claudia: Oh, that was so good. I've never seen anything better. Bravo! Bravo!

Javier: There's no need for a standing ovation and stop gushing. The performers did a passable job. It was nothing to write home about.

Claudia: You are so jaded. That performance was genius. It took my breath away.

Javier: I thought the first number was okay, and none of the dancers embarrassed themselves, but that's all I can say about it.

Claudia: I'm sure they'd thank you for that faint praise. Me? I've never seen anything better.

Javier: Now how can you say that? That's just over the top.

Claudia: If I can't be effusive, who can? How many times will we see our granddaughter in a school play?

Javier: She's seven years old and she played a tomato!

Claudia: Yes, but don't forget: she played the lead tomato!



ESL Podcast 603 – Praising a Performance

[end of dialogue]

Claudia begins by saying, “Oh, that was so good. I’ve never seen anything better (anything better than that). Bravo!”, she says, “Bravo!” “Bravo” is a word that is shouted by audience members to congratulate a performer for doing a very good job right after they finish. So someone may sing a song particularly well, and everyone at the end stands up and “claps” their hands, put their hands together and says, “Bravo!” especially if it is, for example, a opera or classical music concert or a play. It’s less common, for example, at a rock concert. In fact, I don’t think anyone says “bravo” at a rock concert; it’s much too formal of a word. You could also use it in other circumstances. Someone performs well on a test, for example, you might say, “Bravo! Good job!”

Javier says, “There’s no need for a standing ovation and stop gushing.” A “standing ovation” (ovation) is when the people watching the performance or listening to it, the audience members, all stand up and they clap and shout loudly to show how much they liked the performance. So, it’s when everyone stands and claps. That’s a standing ovation. Sometimes informally it’s called a “standing ‘O’,” “o” for “ovation.” He says to Claudia, “stop gushing.” “To gush” (gush) is to express your praise or appreciation or enjoyment of something, but too much, to talk about something that you like too much. “She was gushing over her new boyfriend, and I couldn’t stand listening to her anymore. So I went outside and put my head under water so I could not hear her anymore.” True story!

Javier says, “The performers did a passable job.” To say something is “passable” means it was okay, it met the minimum requirements; it was acceptable, but it wasn’t great. He says, “It was nothing to write home about.” This is a popular expression. When someone says, “it is nothing to write home about” they mean it wasn’t very good. You shouldn’t spend time thinking about it; it wasn’t very interesting, it wasn’t very special or unusual. “How was the restaurant?” “Well, it was nothing to write home about.” It wasn’t very good; it was okay.

Claudia says to Javier, “You’re so jaded (jaded).” “Jaded” is someone who is bored or perhaps uninterested in something because they have had too much experience to become excited by it. They’ve seen, perhaps, too many performances like that. Someone who is jaded is someone who, perhaps, has been doing something for a long time and no longer can react appropriately, no longer can become excited or sad even about something. Claudia says, “That



ESL Podcast 603 – Praising a Performance

performance was genius.” “Genius” usually means very intelligent. Dr. Lucy Tse is a genius. But here, it means it was excellent, it was very good. If it’s used to describe a performance, that’s its meaning. Claudia says, “It took my breath away.” To take (one’s) breath away” is an expression that means that you saw something or heard something very beautiful, very wonderful, something that surprised you because it was so good. It is as though you had stopped breathing because you were so interested in the performance. There was also a song – written, I don’t know when. Back in the 80s? [Jeff sings] *Take my breath away. Doo doo doo, doo doo doo, doo doo doo*. Remember that? I think it was in a movie. Maybe a Tom Cruise movie, Top Gun perhaps? But anyway, that movie, uh, did not take my breath away!

Javier says, “I thought the first number was okay.” In a performance, a “number” is one part of a larger program – a larger performance, such as one song or one dance. “Number” tends to be associated with song and dance mostly. Javier says, “none of the dancers embarrassed themselves, but that’s all I can say about it.” “To embarrass yourself” means to do something that you are not happy with later on, to make a fool of yourself, to do something that you would prefer no one else saw because it wasn’t very good. Javier says the dancers did not embarrass themselves, but he can’t say they did a good job either.

Claudia says, “I’m sure they’d thank you for that faint praise.” “Faint” (faint) means not very strong. “Praise” is when you tell someone how much you like something or enjoy something. “Faint praise” is when you compliment someone, you say something nice to them, but really it’s sort of a criticism. For example, you say to your son or daughter who got a B-plus on their test (the highest score would be an A), you say, “Oh, that B-plus, that’s almost as good as an A. Congratulations.” You see you’re complimenting them, you’re praising them, but really you’re criticizing them. That’s what faint praise is, and that is what Javier is doing in describing the dancers.

Claudia says, “Me? I’ve never seen anything better.” Javier says, “how can you say that? That’s just over the top.” Something that is “over the top” is something that is excessive, when you have too much of something. Let’s say, for example, your girlfriend does something wrong and she wants to apologize for it. It wasn’t anything serious, but she wants to say that she’s sorry. That will never happen, usually! But let’s say that it does, and she comes in and she starts crying, and she falls down on the floor acting as though her life was basically over. That would be over the top, that would be doing too much to say you’re sorry.



ESL Podcast 603 – Praising a Performance

Claudia says that if I can't be effusive, who can? "Effusive" (effusive) means to express your feelings, your thoughts, your emotions with a lot of excitement, a lot of enthusiasm. Claudia says, "How many times will we see our granddaughter in a school play?" Now we know what is going on here. Claudia and Javier have a granddaughter – their son or daughter has a child – and they are watching the child perform at a play at the child's school. Many American schools often put on plays once or twice a year, performances or plays for the parents and grandparents.

Javier says, "She's seven years old and she played a tomato!" We use the verb "played" in a play at the theater to describe the character that the person was supposed to be. For example, Tobey Maguire the actor played Spiderman in the movie Spiderman. Or, I played Chewbacca in the movie Star Wars – true story!

Javier says that their granddaughter played a tomato. Sometimes, you know, with children's plays, they're often a little silly and the children dress up like vegetables, apparently. I don't know! Claudia then says, "Yes, but don't forget: she played the lead tomato!" When you say someone in a play or movie "played the lead" you mean that was the main role in the show or performance. Usually it's the best actor or the best artist that plays the lead in a performance. So, Claudia and Javier's granddaughter played the lead tomato, the most important one. Of course, that's a little silly – a little crazy. "Lead" has several other meanings in English, as does the word "number" that we mentioned earlier. Those can be found in the Learning Guide, of course.

Now let's listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

Claudia: Oh, that was so good. I've never seen anything better. Bravo! Bravo!

Javier: There's no need for a standing ovation and stop gushing. The performers did a passable job. It was nothing to write home about.

Claudia: You are so jaded. That performance was genius. It took my breath away.

Javier: I thought the first number was okay, and none of the dancers embarrassed themselves, but that's all I can say about it.



ESL Podcast 603 – Praising a Performance

Claudia: I'm sure they'd thank you for that faint praise. Me? I've never seen anything better.

Javier: Now how can you say that? That's just over the top.

Claudia: If I can't be effusive, who can? How many times will we see our granddaughter in a school play?

Javier: She's seven years old and she played a tomato!

Claudia: Yes, but don't forget: she played the lead tomato!

[end of dialogue]

I think it's time that we gave our scriptwriter, Dr. Lucy Tse, a standing ovation. So everyone now please stand up, clap your hands. Thanks, Lucy!

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

English as a Second Language Podcast is written and produced by Dr. Lucy Tse, hosted by Dr. Jeff McQuillan, copyright 2010 by the Center for Educational Development.