

Performance Tips

Practicing performing skills is as important as practicing the music. You can't just practice your song a million times and expect to play it well in an unfamiliar situation. When your body is pumped full of adrenalin, what do you do??? No matter how well you know your song, you have to **practice how to channel this body energy in a positive way**. It becomes very hard to play when you can't breathe, you're going to throw up or your fingers are shaking! Practice performance skills - as much as you would your music.

Performance skills require that you take a positive attitude! The gloomier your expectations, the more prone to nervousness you're liable to be. Over anxious performing can show you an all or nothing way of thinking. "If I'm not perfect, I've blown it." Rewrite the script! Say "I'm OK..... I'm ready to risk" say it oh about a million times....**Don't be perfect! Just be yourself!**

How do we do this?? Here's how:

- **SING THE SONG IN YOUR HEAD AS YOU PLAY IT!** This is one of the best ways I have found to keep the chatter in my mind occupied. The chatter in the mind will try to keep disrupting concentration. Eventually talking back to the chatter, will make it disappear and not return! Singing the song inside your head will help you stay with the song and keep your mind out of trouble. Remember, your fingers know the piece!! Your job is to mentally focus on what your doing and singing does just that!
- **PRACTICE SELF ACCEPTANCE;** Every time you pass a mirror, say "I am acceptable to me!" And mean it!! Your stage presence is very important in communicating the "whole" of your message, body movements, clothes, how well kept you are and how comfortable you are in your own skin. "I am just me - and I am ok!"
- **DO BRAIN GYM!** Outlined on page 13. This works to center us, calm the body down and help us focus.

SELF TALK EXERCISES

The mind is one of the hardest things to control while performing. The incessant chatter inside our head can throw us off center. When we make a mistake a voice pops up and says something very unnerving - which slowly leads us to

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us
Ralph Waldo Emerson

have more of those unnerving problems - whoops there it goes again! The following are phrases to use to **TALK BACK TO THE CHATTER!!** This works! Practice these statements often. Make up your own self talk - and start talking back to that which wants to disrupt you as you perform!

- *This sounds so awful.....*That's OK, this is a work in progress
- *I'll never get it.....* Just take it real slow - Concentrate!
I can do this.....use the force!!
- *I never do anything right.....* I can list all the things I've done right.
I can fill pages - I can fill books!!
- *My playing is so boring.....*Well, I will find out how to spice it up.
- *I'm not cut out to play music.....*Now wait a minute! I am a friend to myself, and I support me!
- *They think my playing is terrible.....*Well I don't hear anyone booing so far.....no tomatoes either.....
- *I goofed again.....* I'm doing the best I can for right now.
Look how well I recovered!
- *I can't play this piece.....* But its like walking, one foot, then the next. pretty soon I'll get it.

READ THIS LIST OFTEN BEFORE A PERFORMANCE!!!!

- Before you rush into your song, place your harp in front of you, slowly draw the harp to you. And then just sit. **Take a deep breath**, maybe close your eyes if you want, and focus on your heart center. Then play!
- If your heart is pounding, one trick to offset the beats and not make you rush, is to **deliberately talk very slowly when you introduce your piece**. Be conscious of each word you tell the audience, as if it were a great meal you are eating and want to savor each bite before you swallow!!
- **Practice** saying out loud how you want to introduce the song
- **Build breathing marks into each song** so you form a habit of breathing when each phrase comes up to play. - breathe, breathe, breathe!

*And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more
painful than the risk it took to blossom
Anais Nin*

- Give yourself permission to fail! **If you make a mistake, KEEP GOING!** If a bomb drops keep going! Run through some improvisation notes to get you back to where you got lost.. **Mistakes are a way of developing and getting better at what you do. You have to make mistakes to learn!!** But in a performance, just *KEEP playing.*
- Feel the music, feel the meaning of the song, *remember why you chose this song to play, and how much you love this song.*
- **Have fun** at this performing! The worst judge is inside of your head, not in the audience.
- Imagine all the people in **the audience are sending you love** and good wishes for a great performance. They are on "your side".
- Prepare, prepare, prepare. When your brain goes out the window - you will be surprised how much your fingers have remembered when you calm down. **The music is in your body!**
- For an instrumental song - visualize a story happening. This makes it easier to remember.
- Do **Brain Gym** exercises to help keep the brain connected electrically! Exercises listed on page 13.

FOODS TO AVOID - FOODS THAT HELP!

You may experience a lot of body discomfort before a performance!

Dry mouth, lump in throat, blinking, hives, tense stomach, the "runs", throwing up, the shakes.....and the worst thing is, sometimes you don't know until a day or an hour before you perform how you will react! You do not want your stomach too full of food before a performance which could cause you to be nauseated or uncomfortable. Light snacks with protein + carbohydrates will help to avoid hunger and ensure a smooth performance.

Potentially distressing foods to avoid before a performance:

beans, cabbage, sugary products, coffee, onions, soda pop, garlic, any heavy fried foods

I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is to try to please everyone
Bill Cosby

New Therapies to Help the Mind/Body Connection For Performance Anxiety

A whole host of new modalities are emerging due to the exploration of mind and body connections. Discoveries of tapping on meridian points on the body are shown to center our mind, relax the body and remove negative thoughts stored in our mind and body. Our bodies have electromagnetic currents that flow from one point to another, like direct current rather than alternating current. How can this help us with performance anxiety? These simple tapping methods can realign these currents, front to back, side to side and top to bottom. These methods work with children and adults!

Try these exercises when ever you are stressed! They help reconnect your neural network in your brain when under stress.

- 1. Brain Buttons:** One hand is placed over the navel, the other hand rubs on each side on the top of the sternum (with the thumb + #2, #3 fingers).
- 2. Over-Energy Correction;** Cross the left ankle over the right + place the left hand on the right knee, then the right hand on the left knee.
- 3. Centering:** Tap several times with the #2 + #3 fingers under the nose and above the lips.
- 4. Collarbone Breathing Exercise:** Place the right hand under the collarbone where it meets the sternum. With the #2, #3 fingers of the left hand, tap five times on the back of the right hand between the #4 finger and pinky close to the knuckles. Breathe deeply in +out. Then switch hands.

For more information on how these therapies can help in performance click on these web sites:

www.emofree.com

www.energypsych.org

www.remap.net

www.braingym.org

Active Imagination

This type of exercise is incredibly profound in its ability to stimulate the nerves and muscles just by using our imagination. Recently on a 60 minutes TV show, a doctor was training a veteran, who lost his arm in the Iraq war, how to use a mechanical prosthetic device. The end of his stump still has nerve endings. He was instructed to imagine moving his fingers. With practice, he can move his

*Mistakes are almost always of a sacred nature. Never try to correct them.
Salvador Dali*

fingers using his mind/imagination technique. The implications of this are staggering! Another example is when Olympic skiers, who found themselves injured before the big competition, were wired up with electrodes to their leg muscles while they imagined skiing down the slopes. What the doctors found is that even though they were sitting comfortably in an office, *their muscles were firing "as if they were skiing."* The imagination is much more powerful than we imagined! My student, Ann, was doing an active imagination practice for playing a wedding. This was her first time and after going through the whole performance, (starting with getting ready at home, packing the harp, dressing etc.) she realized she could not wear the dress she picked out because it was too short! Active imagination gets us in touch with the ability to visualize and walk through a scenario on an energetic level first!

The next performance you have, sit in a chair and actively imagine the whole thing - from start to finish; what you will wear, what car you'll take to get there (with a full tank of gas!), bringing all your equipment, cell phone. Imagine the things you will notice about the stage area, who is there to help set up, and who is doing sound check. Include where you will keep your purse, case. Imagine who will come to the performance, who will sit in the front row. Imagine how good it will be to see your supporters come out to hear you play. Imagine seeing your fingers on the harp strings as you hear the song in your head. Imagine a wonderful performance - knowing as you do this exercise that your muscles will comply. You are training your mind and body on a deep energetic level and you are very successful!

Yogic Breathing Technique

This is a technique that is 100% effective to calm + focus the body!!! I swear by it!!! This technique is called *Alternative Nostril Breathing*, yet it has many names. Use this when your heart/mind is racing! This is how it works:

1. Close left nostril with the left #2 finger. Breathe in
2. Before you breathe out, close right nostril with the right #2 finger + breathe out of left nostril
3. Breathe in left nostril while right nostril is still closed, *before you breathe out*, take off right #2 finger, and place left #2 finger on left nostril and breathe out through the *right nostril*.

Repeat this sequence for 3 to 5 minutes....you will be incredibly calm!!!

All these techniques can be used for performance anxiety. These methods are elastic and useful in every day life. Any time you need to settle down, focus, be calm, be in charge and confident, these skills come in handy. Go forth, Perform!

I passionately hate the idea of being with it. I think an artist has always to be out of step with his time - Orson Welles