

Performance Anxiety Tips

by

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[NOTE: This information is based on the lecture presentation, "Perspectives on Performance Anxiety," given by the author at the UMEA conference in February 1998]

Successfully dealing with the concerns of playing or singing in stressful situations, such as recitals, contests, auditions, etc. is an important part of being a good musician. I have found the following tips useful with my students and in my own performing.

1. *Nervous is Normal.* This is very important. The goal is not to eradicate nervousness. It is to perform well without letting nerves get in the way.

2. *There is a Tomorrow.* Very few times in our lives do our careers hinge on a single performance. Also, not too many people die while performing!

3. *Be Confident/Be Positive.* The key is to act or "be" confident whether you *feel* confident or not.

4. *Have a Routine.* Most success is planned, so having a performing ritual will help.

5. *Prepare Music Well with Good Fundamentals.* Music must be thoroughly practiced with sound basics of relaxation/body position, tone, rhythm, and technique. So, turn off that TV and get to the practice room!

6. *Make Music.* Understand that the point of performing is to make music. Careful reflection on this and related topics are an essential part of dealing with performance anxiety and good music-making in general.

7. *Avoid Alcohol, Drugs, etc.* Be wary of chemicals that alter you. My band director would always tell us that, "Performing and alcohol do not mix."

8. *Breathe.* Spend the first few minutes on stage thinking about your air use. Further, make sure the breath marks are well-conceived and clearly marked on your music.

9. *Eat Bananas.* Chop up a few of them on your cereal on the morning of a big performance. They have natural ingredients that help deal with stress.

10. *Eat Right/Exercise/Sleep 8 Hours A Night.* Eating burritos at 1 a.m. the night before an 8 a.m. audition is usually not a good idea. Also, “Every hour of sleep before midnight counts as two” is a good old rule to follow.

11. *Relax in your Body/Concentrate in your Mind.* Usually we do the opposite.

12. *Get in the Hall Before the Performance.* The day before would be best, but playing a little on the stage even an hour or two before “showtime” helps.

13. *Check your Clothes **Before** You Walk on Stage.* Make sure your performing clothes are not too tight and/or restrictive. (I think we all know why clothes we have not worn recently might be too tight, don’t we?)

14. *DO IT!!* There is no magic formula for dealing with performance anxiety. Learning to perform well takes time. It is more like exercising than turning on a light switch. Try to make small improvements every time you perform. Always be looking for opportunities to perform.

This article originally appeared in and is
© *InterFACE* (Journal of the Utah Music Educators Association)
fall 1998 (Volume 44, No. 1)