

## How to Overcome Performance Nerves (8 Tips!)

When preparing for a big performance, mental preparation is often considered just as important and necessary as physical practice, (I find this very true in my own experience) if we want to play our very best.

These tips work best if you've done the work in the practice room and show up to a performance knowing your stuff!

### **TIP #1: Process Your Nerves (helpful to do in the weeks leading up to a performance)**

I believe pretending we're not nervous as if we're just awesome all the time can come back to us at inopportune times (like during the performance!). I'd much rather process and handle my worries regarding a particular performance ahead of time than keep them bottled up.

Two ways I like to process my nerves before a big performance include:

#### **1. Welcoming Uncomfortable Feelings exercise:**

Sit quietly. Close your eyes if you'd like. Identify how you feel about the upcoming performance, allow any uncomfortable feelings about the event to surface at this time. Perhaps write them down (examples: anxious, tense etc.)

Welcome your feelings, allow them to be there without trying to change them. Also be open to the idea that these feelings might have something valuable to teach you. (example, perhaps they'll allow you to identify an untrue story you might be telling yourself about what's expected or okay etc.)

Could you imagine, just imagine letting these feelings go? Any answer is okay

Would you be willing to let these feelings go? Any answer is okay

From here, create a new story that isn't charged by the anxiety you just let go of. Instead of "I don't do well under pressure" change it to "I've been putting a lot of pressure on

myself lately and I realize now that I have a lot of control over how I perceive the situation to make me feel more at ease and even excited about my performance!" .

Repeat this process as often as you'd like

## **2. Stop the cycle of worry exercise:**

- On a piece of paper, write down some things that make you really nervous about your upcoming performance (i.e. you're nervous to play for someone that's going to be in the audience or you might be afraid of playing one particular section of a piece etc.).
- Breathe through your nose and out through your mouth
- Close your eyes
- Take your first example on your list, whatever it might be and imagine what might be the worst case scenario
- Keep imagining what might be even worse, take it to an absurd degree
- UNTIL, no matter how hard you try, the only emotion you can feel regarding the situation is NEUTRAL and the emotional charge previously surrounding the scenario is no longer present
- Open your eyes and repeat same exercise for your next worry on the list until you finish the list

Repeat this process as often as you'd like

## **TIP #2: Visualization**

Start by taking 10 slow and deep breaths to relax, then:

Either silently or while listening to a recording of the music you'll be performing, imagine in great detail how you look, feel and sound when your performing extremely well.

Perhaps you feel, relaxed, confident, alert, playful, excited and joyful

Imagine how you stand when you feel confident and comfortable

Imagine how it feels to play with your best sound, articulation and with relaxed efficient fingers

Imagine how you handle any mistakes that might happen. See if you can imagine not even letting them phase you at all, not apologizing at all but continuing to enjoy the performance as much as possible. Remember, everybody has made a mistake in a performance, it's totally okay to have them, as long as you're doing the best you can, that's all you can do.

Imagine how you sound when you are having a great performance, Imagine how you look, imagine the stage and the audience listening etc.

The more feeling you put into this the better. Our feelings are like a muscle, the more we practice eliciting feelings of joy and relaxed confidence, the more easily we will be able to access them when we need them the most (i.e. while performing :)).

### **TIP #3: Focus on sharing music with people, not on playing “perfectly”.**

Focus on sharing something you're excited about when you play or sharing the different characters in the music to the people listening. Sometimes it's fun to approach your music as if you're reading a very exciting story to your listeners in a very engaging and expressive voice :)

### **TIP #4: You know this:**

If during your performance you have a slip up or you forget something for some reason, simply remind yourself that **you know this**. Trust yourself, you know your music so let your good preparation do it's job. Many times we can get in our own way during a performance, trying to think too hard about the next note which can cause problems and unhelpful doubt. Get out of your own way and trust your work!

### **TIP #5: Simulate Unfavorable Situations Beforehand:**

For example, if you know you experience shortness of breath when you get nervous, practice doing jumping jacks for 1 minute and then try playing your music or a particularly long phrase. This way, if you experience a little shortness of breath during

performance, it won't catch you off guard because you've practiced under those conditions before.

#### **TIP #6. Practice Mindfulness:**

It's extremely important to be focused and alert in performance in order to do our best. If we turn off our ears and try to hide from the situation, that might not turn out so well. So practice mindfulness, take a seat for a few minutes before you practice, take a few slow deep breaths and pay attention to how you feel notice your breathing, shoulders, muscles relaxing in the face, any thoughts that come in just observe. Carry this alertness with you into your practice and performance. For example, listen to the piano, notice how your breathing feels, observe how your fingers feel and how your posture feels while playing etc. Worrying begins when we dwell on the past or focus too much on what's coming up, when we're having fun and enjoying the process, we're usually pretty present!

#### **TIP #7: Practice performing**

Do a few "mock" performances for friends and family or strangers! These mock performances can give us helpful information to better prepare for our official performance.

#### **TIP #8: Read!**

There are so many excellent books on how to overcome performance jitters and play our best. My three favorite have to be:

Mental Toughness Training for Sports by James Loehr  
The New Toughness Training for Sports by James Loehr  
6 Weeks to Finals by Sharon Sparrow

*Others include:*

A Soprano on Her Head E. Ristad  
Inner Game of Music by Barry Green  
Inner Game of Tennis by Timothy Gallwey  
The Mental Game: James Loehr