

Developing Confident Performers

The Pre-College Teacher and Performance Anxiety

Performance anxiety is “distressful apprehension about performing and/or impairment of performance skills.”¹ Performance anxiety manifests itself in a variety of physical, behavioral, and cognitive symptoms.

Contributing Factors

Perfectionism

Trait anxiety

Poor preparation

Introversion

Gender

Comparison or competition

Why does this matter?

- In a study conducted by Fehm and Schmidt, 86% of adolescent musicians called for more assistance in managing performance anxiety.²
- Performance anxiety can begin as early as the preschool years, as demonstrated by a research study conducted by Boucher and Ryan.³
- Ignoring performance anxiety in young students can be harmful for their future.
- We **must** address performance anxiety in the studio and not treat it as something shameful.

Low Self-Esteem

There is a strong correlation between low self-esteem and performance anxiety. This leads to negative thoughts, perceptions, and comments about one’s abilities.

- Learn to replace negative thoughts with more positive ones.
- Challenge students’ irrational beliefs and self-doubt, and help them recognize negative thought patterns.
- Empower students to recognize their strengths, while realistically assessing their weaknesses.
- Assign short, easily mastered pieces to help build students’ confidence and self-esteem.

¹ Lydia Fehm and Katia Schmidt, “Performance Anxiety in Gifted Adolescent Musicians,” *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 20, no. 1 (January 2006): 99.

² Ibid, 106.

³ Hélène Boucher and Charlene Ryan, “Performance Stress and the Very Young Musician,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 58, no. 4 (January 2011): 330.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is one of the most common contributors to anxiety. Perfectionists are overly concerned with minor mistakes, and fail to recognize successes.

- Talk to students about the dichotomy of striving for perfection, but not holding themselves to that standard.
- Guide students to focus on making music, expressing themselves, and sharing a message with the audience.
- Teach students to accept that mistakes are an important and normal part of life from which we can grow and learn.
- Always be liberal and honest with affirmation.

Teacher Qualities

All teachers are unique and individual, but some general qualities have been recognized to produce confident students. How a teacher interacts with a student can impact his or her progress and success. Important teacher qualities include the ability to:

- Foster a sense of collaborative partnership with the student, rather than dictating what will happen in music study.
- Be capable and ready to correct unhealthy patterns of thought in addition to teaching students to be musically successful.
- Possess the ability to discern and identify the causes and contributors of performance anxiety in each student, and provide them with potential coping strategies.
- Commit to setting aside time to invest in the student and his or her struggles with anxiety.
- Initiate conversations about performance anxiety, and share personal struggles and victories with anxiety.
- Encourage open conversations about positive and realistic performance attitudes and goals.⁴

Teacher-Student Relationship

Teachers have a unique opportunity to influence the lives of students in both musical and non-musical ways.

⁴ Hee Sun Chung, "Anxiety in Musical Performance: Literature Review and Implications for Piano Pedagogy" (DMA diss., Indiana University, 1992): 82-83.

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- Get to know each student, maintain open communication, listen carefully, and connect clues to understand each student's struggles with anxiety.
- Foster important traits such as discipline, self-motivation, healthy self-esteem, and many other qualities that will follow the student throughout life.
- Serve as a musical guide for students and discuss every piece of music, including its composition, character, storyline, structure, etc.