

Practice strategies for performance anxiety management

Vanessa Cornett vanessa.cornett@stthomas.edu

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Performance anxiety is “The experience of persisting, distressful apprehension about and/or actual impairment of performance skills in a public context to a degree unwarranted given the individual’s musical aptitude, training, and level of preparation.” (Salmon 1998)

Anxiety management assumes the performer is:

- Well-prepared; has practiced sufficiently
- Performing repertoire appropriate to his/her musical ability
- Physically and psychologically able to master the repertoire and perform with confidence

Music teachers are responsible for cultivating a new cultural paradigm.

Old:

- ◆ Ignore or dismiss student concerns
- ◆ Invalidate or minimize student experiences
- ◆ Suggest that mental toughness is a characteristic of real professionals
- ◆ Offer superficial or uninformed advice

New:

- ◆ Create a safe space
- ◆ Listen to student concerns
- ◆ Empathize and validate without trying to be a therapist
- ◆ Be a resource for students

Special considerations for teaching Millennials and Generation Z:

- Students are over-committed, over-schooled, over-tested.
- They have been conditioned to value breadth over depth, product over process.
- They have been rewarded for effort more often than for quality of work.

Teaching strategies:

1. Use goal setting to develop autonomy and decrease anxiety.
2. Remember that students rarely know their repertoire as well as they think they do.
3. Address memorization strategies early on in music lessons.
4. Provide a wide variety of performance experiences, from lower to higher stress.
5. Teach adversity recovery techniques to develop a performance mindset.
6. Practice stress reduction and mindfulness techniques in the lesson.
7. Remember that a teacher’s choice of language has a powerful impact.

Practice strategies:

1. Work for automatic execution to lighten cognitive load.
2. Remember that over preparing does not mean over practicing.
3. Use analysis and mental practice to build security and confidence.
4. Practice engaging multiple sensory modalities.
5. Develop a performance mindset as well as a practice mindset.
6. Use objective self-assessment to focus on the big picture.
7. Practice anxiety management techniques as often as you practice music.
 - ◆ mindfulness, breathwork, stress reduction, visualization, centering, cognitive restructuring, yoga, hypnotherapy, professional counseling, etc.

A few recommended resources:

Carson, Rick. (2003) *Taming Your Gremlin*.

Cornett, Vanessa. (2019) *The Mindful Musician: Mental Skills for Peak Performance*.

Green, Barry, with W. Timothy Gallwey. (1986) *The Inner Game of Music*.

Klickstein, Gerald. (2009) *The Musician's Way*.

Lehmann., Andreas, et al. (2007) *Psychology for Musicians*.

Maisel, Eric. (2005) *Performance Anxiety Workbook*.

McAllister, Lesley. (2013) *The Balanced Musician*.

The Piano Magazine: Clavier Companion “healthy playing, healthy teaching” column.

Werner, Kenny. (1996) *Effortless Mastery: Liberating the Master Musician Within*.

Westney, William. (2003) *The Perfect Wrong Note: Learning to Trust Your Musical Self*.

Online:

The Bulletproof Musician

The Musician's Way

Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy teacher education webinar series:

- *The Words We Speak: The Power of Language in Nurturing Confident Musicians* (2018), Vanessa Cornett
- *Motivation, Mindset, and Grit: Fostering a Culture of Excellence* (2018), Christopher Fisher

MTNA webinars:

- *Overcoming the Brain's Negativity Bias: Empowering Students Through Positive, Engaging Language* (2017), Barbara Fast and Andrea McAlister
- *The Road Less Traveled: A Mindful Approach to Toxic Busyness* (2017), Vanessa Cornett

College Music Society musicians' health webinar series (free to non-members):

- *Finding Center: Strategies to Awaken Energy, Clarity, and Focus for Peak Performance* (2019), Lesley McAllister
- *Mindfulness Practice for Students and Faculty* (2016), Vanessa Cornett
- *The Role of the Teacher in Keeping our Students Healthy* (2018), Gail Berenson
- *Athletes and the Arts: What Musicians Can Learn from Athletes* (2015), Randall Dick and John Snyder