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Mind, Body, Music

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MIND, BODY, MUSIC

KIM LEWIS

HONORS PROJECT

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Since the beginning of my life, I have had an intense passion for music. I was lucky enough to grow up with two parents who were music teachers who encouraged and nurtured the pursuit of music in both my brother and me. As a child, I wanted so badly to be involved with music in any way I possibly could. At age five, I begged my mom and dad to let me take dance lessons. At age seven, my big brother, who wanted to play the drums, began to take piano lessons, and little sister followed suit. Following a love for singing, I began taking voice lessons at age nine. When it was time for me to join the school band in fifth grade, I decided to play the flute, with no specific reason other than I just knew the flute was the instrument for me. Along with being a member of the band and choir in middle school, I joined the school orchestra, playing my grandmother's old violin. Throughout high school, I continued to be involved with dance, piano, voice and flute, as well as taking part in the school musicals. I loved music in every form, and knew early on that I would dedicate the rest of my life to music.

However, lingering beneath my love of music was a pessimistic villain that was consistently holding me back from performing at my full potential: performance anxiety. To me, there had never been a greater thrill than the moment before you walk on stage to perform, but the second I would arrive on stage, a wave of fear came over me that I couldn't control. Suddenly, my mind would begin to race frantically, in step with my quickly beating heart and speeding pulse. My hands would turn ice cold and begin to shake. When playing an instrument, my fingers would become stiff and grip the instrument tightly. My brain would fill with distraction and doubt, making the possibility of playing at my full potential nearly zero. I would often leave the stage in tears, remembering not a single good element of what I had just performed, replaying every mistake in my mind, and tearing my performance to shreds.

Not only did I suffer from performance anxiety, I suffered from practice anxiety as well. I vividly remember sitting at the piano as a young girl, becoming frustrated over an unmanageable passage, and eventually bursting into tears out of anger and frustration. My mother recalls me coming home from dance class when I was little, practicing my cartwheels over and over, then sitting down on the floor and crying because I couldn't do it. My anxieties followed me into my lessons, as well. I would boil over with frustration if I had difficulty mastering a new concept quickly, or failed to reproduce a piece as I had practiced it. Many lessons were spent trying to hold back the lump in my throat. When I was unable to control my emotions, lessons were difficult to continue productively.

When it came time for college, I decided to major in music education. I had to choose between the many genres (and instruments) within music that I loved and decide on a single focus. It was a tough decision, but I felt most comfortable playing the flute. Looking back, I realize that my anxieties had control over this decision, as well. The flute was what I felt most comfortable with because it gave me the least amount of frustrations. In simple terms, I cried the least over the flute. I would soon discover that the flute would prove to be just as frustrating as soon as it was my singular focus.

Once again, my anxieties followed me everywhere: through practice, lessons, and performance. Practice sessions were cut short because I was too frustrated to continue practicing. I would show up for my lesson, play at a level that was less than what I wanted (perfection), and break down. When I got on stage to perform, the same ritualistic bodily reactions began to take place: cold hands, racing thoughts, speeding pulse. Nothing came out the way I wanted it to, and I left the stage upset and disappointed in myself. I loved music enough to

make it my life's dedication, but continuously felt unfulfilled and heartbroken, never satisfied with the music I produced.

An incredible breakthrough occurred for me during my junior year of college, after I had decided to double major in music education and flute performance. I was preparing for the annual concerto competition at BGSU, hoping to be more successful than I had been the year before. I set a goal for myself of at least making the final round. While talking to one of my elder flute colleagues the week before the competition, I expressed some doubts that I had at the time about the competition. My colleague told me that whenever I had any doubts, I should immediately stop and tell myself that I can do it. The simple task of ceasing negative thoughts and replacing them with positive ones was easy and proved beneficial for me in the days leading up to the competition. I performed in the preliminary round with a sense of calmness that was unusual for me—a focus that I had never experienced in performance before. I felt as though I was just telling the story behind my music. I left the stage feeling decent about my performance, though I was still punishing myself for the few technical mistakes that I had made. I didn't get my hopes up for making the final round.

Later that week, I performed the same concerto for the weekly woodwind seminar. I was terrified, possibly more scared than I had ever been for any other performance I had ever given. I was performing for all of my colleagues in the woodwind area and the entire woodwind faculty. The pressure could not have been any higher. As usual, my hands turned to ice, my thoughts started racing, and my heart rate increased. One of my friends who was watching the performance later told me that she could actually see my heart beating in my chest while I was playing. My first note cracked and didn't speak, and from then on, the performance was a mess

(or at least, in my mind, it was). When the seminar was over, I left as quickly as I could and found the nearest solitary place where I could release my emotions without being seen by anyone else. I was completely devastated, mortified. I was not only angry with how I had performed, but had hit a point where I knew I could no longer continue performing without trying to gain control over my performance anxiety. “I blew it,” I said to myself, “everyone must think I’m awful.” I was so tired of sacrificing my music and performance opportunities to the pessimism that ruled my mind.

I pulled myself together after my emotional episode and went to marching band rehearsal. When the rehearsal was over, I looked at my cell phone to find several messages reading “Congratulations!” What had happened? I checked my email and saw that I had made the final round of the concerto competition.

My world came to a sudden halt. Here I was, cursing myself for the terrible musician I thought myself to be, and meanwhile, I was being put on a list of some of the best musicians in the school. It was in that moment that I realized that everything that had been causing my mental and emotional pain for years was all in my mind. I knew I needed to do everything I could to gain control of my performance anxiety. I had finally had enough.

At the beginning of the next semester, during a typical week of school, I appeared at my flute lesson. In my lesson, I played my weekly etude, and fumbled several passages as I played. When I was finished, I could feel the lump in my throat start to form. I was so frustrated with myself for the mistakes that I had made. My flute professor, Dr. Nelson, could see the frustration in my face. “Is everything ok?” he asked me. I began to break down, I could no longer hold it in. I explained to him the anxiety I struggled with on a daily basis while playing the flute. I

constantly felt that what I did wasn't good enough, and often became overwhelmed to the point of tears when I practiced. Once I began to get frustrated, I would get angry at myself for being frustrated, ultimately embarrassed by what I felt were childish fits. I was 20 years old, crying in a practice room over cracked notes and messy finger work.

I had never before expressed so explicitly to a teacher these personal hardships that I had dealt with my whole life and that I was never able to overcome. It felt good to finally release my worries to a person who I trusted and admired, and who I knew believed in my abilities more than anyone. Dr. Nelson suggested for me a few things to try to see if they would help reduce my anxiety level, including yoga and meditation. Along with his suggestions came kind and encouraging words that could only come from a teacher who cares deeply about his students. Little did I know, I had just taken the first steps on a journey to ending the mental anguish I had been experiencing my whole life.

I began to wonder how I had gotten so far in life, performing music in so many media, without formally addressing these issues. Every music teacher I had saw me suffer with these terrible anxieties, but it seemed that none ever offered a real, physical solution. Teachers would comfort me by saying "It's ok to make mistakes," "Nobody's perfect," and "These things don't happen over night." I knew these phrases to be true, but didn't seem to fully believe them. These idioms just wouldn't settle in my bones, and no matter how much I repeated them to myself, the anxieties continued to take over. I needed something more, a hands-on solution to my suffering.

Perhaps the lack of solution was partially my fault, as well. I was extremely embarrassed by these emotional fits. The older I got, the more childish it seemed for me to become so

distraught over such simple mishaps, so I hid it as best as I could from others. I don't recall even telling parents of these troubles, though they were the people in whom I confided the most when I was in need of help. The perfectionist in me had taken control of every aspect of my life. If I made a mistake, I would be angry with myself for the mistake. Subsequently, I would be angry with myself for being angry because I knew being angry wasn't helping me, in addition to being embarrassed. Then I would hide my frustration from others for fear of what they would think of me. I was always trapped in my own vicious cycle of perfectionism.

Looking back, I realized that the first step was admitting my own affliction. I had to look in the mirror and admit to myself that I was a perfectionist. I suppose that being a perfectionist was something that I had known about myself for a long time, but never really understood the harm that it was causing me. In true perfectionist form, I would tell myself that I didn't need help from anyone else, that I could do better on my own. However, there is no way that one can fix a problem without admitting that a problem exists in the first place. Admitting the problem is often the moment that the perfectionist feels weakest. She's torn down her walls and exposed her greatest fears. But it is in this moment of assumed weakness that the greatest amount of strength and the ability to move forward are gained.

I began to search for summer workshops and festivals, in pursuit of more knowledge on how I could begin to tame my anxieties. In June of 2013, I attended the Anatomy of Sound Workshop at the University of Michigan. The workshop is led annually by Amy Porter, flute professor at University of Michigan; Jerald Schwiebert, Assistant Professor of Theater at University of Michigan; and Laura Dwyer, a certified yoga instructor and the principal flutist of the Sarasota Opera Orchestra. In 2013, the workshop's featured guest artist was Carol Wincenc,

professor of flute at The Juilliard School and Stony Brook University. This four-day intensive workshop featured master classes and sessions with each of the professionals, and included in-depth discussions about the study of breathing and body awareness in both flute practice and performance. Though the workshop is exclusively for flutists, I gained an abundance of knowledge applicable for any musician.

One of the main focuses of the workshop was body awareness, and finding freedom in the body so that your body may be used to its full potential while performing. Key words and phrases used in reference to body awareness were “availability,” “allow,” “include” and “open focus.” All of these words and phrases have meanings that intertwine and compliment each other.

The process begins with the idea that there is no such thing as a “good” or “correct” posture or body position when sitting, standing, or playing an instrument. When one tries to achieve a “good” or “correct” posture, he is most likely holding muscles tense or pushing your body in a way that is unnatural. The key is to *allow* motion, so he not holding your body in a specific position and creating tension. Schwiebert’s book *Physical Expression and the Performing Artist* gives detailed photos and drawings of the difference between a person who has achieved freedom of movement, and someone who is straining in an attempt to achieve a certain posture or stance.

In tandem with the denial of any idea of a “correct” posture, one also must realize that there is no such thing as perfect stillness. Even if we try to sit as still as possible and not move a muscle, we are always breathing, and the breath creates movement. Breathing is the fundamental source of life. Breathing connects us to our bodies. Breathing is a process that

involves the whole body, from the top of your head to the soles of your feet (Schwiebert 19).

One phrase that Schwiebert repeated throughout the workshop was “with every breath and every move, your spine is expanding and contracting” (18). The realization that no living being can ever achieve perfect stillness can be an awakening for those who attempt to hold themselves in a “correct” position while trying to make music.

The next key idea is the unity of movement throughout our entire body. Many people have misconceptions about how the body moves, and are uneducated on the topic of the human anatomy. As musicians, our bodies are the vehicle for expression, and we must understand how our bodies work so that they may be used to their full potential during practice and performance. All of our body parts are connected via muscles and bones. When asked to look to the right, most people will only turn their head to the right. By only turning your head, you must hold other muscles tight so that the head alone may be moved. If this position was held, you may begin to feel sore in the neck. To turn the head to the right without straining other muscles, one must also *include* the shoulders, torso, and possibly the hips. Full body *inclusion* allows for less muscle strain and more freedom of movement throughout the body. When one understands how he moves and when he includes all muscles and joints as he moves, his entire body is available for expression (Schwiebert 15).

This idea relates to a musician’s tendency to examine one specific area when attempting to solve a problem they may be having in their bodies while performing. For example, if a flutist has pain in her left shoulder while playing the flute, she tends to focus on only the shoulder as the primary source of the pain. In reality, the muscles in the arm and shoulder are connected to muscles that run all the way down the back. Pain in the shoulder may be caused by the fact that

the flutist is holding her back muscles tight. If we *open our focus* to *include* the whole body and *allow* movement, we find that it is easier to relieve pain than if we were focusing only on the area from where the pain is originating.

The other main focus of the workshop was intention. Intention was incorporated as both a mental and physical aspect of performance. Intention is the purpose with which one creates music and the expression that you put forth as a result. Schwiebert describes intention in his book as “the determination to act a certain way.” “When you intend to do something, you have it in mind as a purpose or a goal” (32).

Intention is set in an effort to deter the perfectionist’s fear of failure and desperation to do a “good job.” We discussed during the workshop how doing a “good job” is an unrealistic and unattainable goal. When we set forth to do a “good job,” we lose the sense that our task has a purpose, and only see it as a means to an end or a reward. A musician may play a piece of music for an audience, only hoping that the audience will think that he is a great musician. Along the way, he neglects to make any meaning of the music itself. However, if he focuses on his intention with the music, his music will likely be more meaningful, and the audience will enjoy his performance more. The musician has captured and pleased the audience by simply focusing on his pure intention.

To create an intention, one must have a specific purpose with which he is performing his music. We discussed specificity of intention, creating specific details with which one is performing. One person’s intention is like no one else’s. For instance, let’s say a piece of music makes you imagine a countryside scene. Seeing the countryside is a form of intention. However, one can make the intention more specific by imagining himself *in* the countryside,

looking at a yellow flower that has a small spotted bug sitting on one of its four leaves. “If one does something as if he is really doing it, the process of doing it makes it real: you experience it” (33). Suddenly, one is able to perform “in the moment” as she fully experiences her full intention.

Setting a specific intention not only allows one to communicate more clearly with her audience, but also takes her mind away from performance anxiety, distracting thoughts, and self-judgement while performing. When we judge ourselves while we are performing, we are stuck in the past, and no longer in the moment. When we have anxiety about an upcoming difficult passage, our minds are worried about the future, and no longer in the moment. With a specific intention, we are focused on the purpose of our music: we are in the moment, and our performance is given meaning.

Finally, the two focuses of the workshop, body awareness and intention, were brought together. “Thoughts trigger a physiological response in the body. When you visualize yourself doing an activity, the body’s neurons fire just as they would if you were actually doing the activity” (33). When the body is free to move as it is meant to, the body becomes *available* for your pure intention to be expressed. In addition, movement creates expression by becoming a part of the music. When we perform, movements should be an extension of our expression, not learned choreography that we create in an attempt to look like we are doing a good job. The whole body moves simultaneously, the breath moves freely, and the breath carries our intention through our instrument and out to the audience.

The ideas that I learned from Anatomy of Sounds were life changing for me. As I performed, my body had always felt tense, and I was never mentally “in the moment.” I began

to understand that my negative thoughts were having a negative impact on my body while practicing and performing, and vice versa. Anatomy of Sound helped me to begin to understand what I needed to do to begin letting go of my performance anxiety and tension.

Later that summer, I attended the Sewanee Summer Music Festival in Sewanee, Tennessee. David Brockett was the horn teacher at the festival. Brockett regularly teaches horn at the Cleveland State University and Baldwin Wallace Conservatory in Cleveland, Ohio. Currently, Brockett is pursuing a masters degree in psychology from Cleveland State University. In the first week of the festival, Brockett gave a session on performance anxiety. As soon as I saw the session on the daily schedule, I knew I had to go.

At the session, Brockett spoke about the power of meditation in practice and performance. Meditation is a simple yet extremely beneficial addition to your daily routine. Brockett led us through a small meditation exercise. To begin meditating, Brockett instructed, start by finding a quiet, solitary place. Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor, with your back against the back of the chair. Rest your hands on your knees or thighs. Half-lid your eyes so they are almost closed but not completely, and bring your focus at about a forty-five degree angle downward. From here, begin to focus on your breathing. Allow the breath to flow in and out naturally, and listen and feel the breath as it moves throughout your body. If you find that your mind wanders, just bring it back to focus on the breath. There is no judgement or criticism for lost focus, just a redirecting of focus back to the breath. Focusing on the breath takes the mind away from distracting thoughts and connects us to our bodies. Begin practicing this meditation exercise for five minutes a day, then slowly increase the meditation time as you feel

that it becomes easier for you to maintain focus. Meditation is a skill, just the same as playing an instrument, and it must be practiced over time to experience its true benefits.

In a performance situation, engaging in this small meditation exercise can be extremely beneficial. Brockett explained that when we become nervous or anxious about performing, our body goes into “fight or flight” mode. The sympathetic nervous system is activated and begins to cause physiological changes. Blood leaves our extremities and rushes to the center of our bodies. Adrenaline rushes, our hearts beat quickly, and we may even begin to shake. Practicing meditation can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps to put our bodies back into “rest and digest” mode. Rest and digest is the state of our bodies when we digest food, and our internal organs are regulated. The explanations of these anatomic processes helped me to begin to understand what was happening in my body before and during a performance, and how I could work to begin controlling it.

Another benefit of meditation is that it begins to make one aware of the thoughts that go through her mind. As I began to work to slow my anxieties, I realized that I had to catch myself thinking negative thoughts, and put an end to them. One must become an observer to her own thoughts, instead of getting lost in them. This is a process called metacognition: thinking about thinking. When I would begin to get frustrated, I would stop myself and ask “What is going through my head right now?” I would begin to analyze any negative thoughts that I was thinking and why I was thinking them, and was then able to disable and dismiss them. One must not let her mind run away with negative thoughts. Of course, this process is not able to begin without the initial step of the admittance of perfectionist tendencies. If the perfectionist is not able to

admit that her current thought process is faulty, then she will have no reason to enact this process.

My experiences in the summer of 2013 proved extremely effective for me, propelled me to research more into the topic of performance anxiety. I wanted to know more about how to overcome performance anxiety, and how I could reach out and help others who may be experiencing similar struggles. In addition, I looked for resources that would help me to reduce the anxieties that I experienced while I was practicing.

I began reading a book called *The Art of Practicing* by Madeline Bruser. Bruser is a pianist who lives in New York City, where she maintains a private studio and performs regularly as a soloist. One of the main focuses of Bruser's book is creating a practice routine that can help make the transition from practice to performance much easier. In order to make performing easier, we must practice in the same way we want to perform. Practicing can often become frustrating when we do not get the results that we desire, and frustration causes tension. "Frequently, however, tension and inefficient technique stem from mental and emotional attitudes toward ourselves and our practicing" (Bruser 10). *The Art of Practicing* is a step-by-step approach that integrates movement principles with meditative discipline (Bruser 3).

In her book, Bruser explains how she struggled with unproductive and ineffective practicing while she was a music student, and ultimately felt completely unmotivated to practice. She was guided by one of her teachers to begin practicing mindfulness meditation, similar to the process that Brockett described in his session at Sewanee. "I sat still and focused on my breathing in order to develop an awareness of ordinary events in the present moment. This discipline slowed down my chattering, goal-oriented mind," Bruser describes (2). Mindfulness

meditation can help you focus more on the music in the moment while practicing, producing more effective practice sessions. One can begin to become more aware and receptive of the sounds and sensations she experiences while practicing when she has cultivated the ability of self-awareness through mindfulness meditation.

Bruser also discusses how meditation can not only make you more aware of your own sounds that you makes while practicing, but the sounds that take place in the environment around you. Musicians most often practice alone, therefore are not used to perceiving any outside stimulus that may be disruptive. However, as soon as the musician gets on stage in front of an audience, sensory awareness is heightened and he suddenly becomes impacted by everything that happens around him. Practicing an awareness of the environment while you practice can help to ease the sense of heightened awareness in a performance situation. “If you practice allowing the environment into your mind, it becomes a part of your every day experience. You get used to having a vivid awareness of the environment, and it ceases to be threatening” (Bruser 51).

The middle portion of the book gives Bruser’s ten-step approach to practicing. The first few steps are simple changes that can be made to your daily practice routine without adding a lot of extra time. Step one is stretching. Bruser points out that musicians often stretch and breathe deeply in the moments before a performance, but often neglect to do so in their daily practicing. Stretching pumps fresh blood and oxygen through the body tissues and muscles, and “releases tense muscles, preparing them for work” (Bruser 30). Bruser puts the most emphasis on stretching the back, loosening the spine, which supports us and contains our sensory and motor nerves.

Bruser titles step two “settling in.” This is where mindfulness meditation becomes a part of the practice routine. Practicing mindfulness meditation before beginning to practice can help the musician to focus in on their practicing and become present in the moment. “Presence is the state of being fully present, of body, mind, heart, and sense perceptions being completely engaged with the activity of the present moment” (Bruser 45). Bruser then describes a very similar meditation process to the process described by Brockett at Sewanee. The practice of mindfulness meditation before beginning to practice gives us the chance to clear our minds from the rush of our daily activities, and focus in on the music.

Step three is entitled “tuning into your heart.” This step involves the summoning of the emotions that we wish to express through our music. One of the first chapters in the book is titled “Meeting Yourself.” In this chapter, Bruser describes the vulnerability that is often engrained in the personality of a musician, and how to embrace vulnerability as a beneficial quality that aids musicianship. “Vulnerable literally means ‘able to be wounded,’ which includes letting yourself be pierced emotionally by things” (Bruser 9). By tuning into this vulnerability while we practice in connection with the awareness that we have cultivated through the practice of mindfulness meditation, we can become fully available to the music, and practice sessions will be extremely productive.

I realized that this sort of vulnerability could be what I was experiencing in practicing, lessons, and performance. With an emotionally fragile personality, I was deeply affected by frustrating circumstances. However, vulnerability can be used to the musician’s advantage when handled carefully. Vulnerability allows us to experience emotions that put *intention* behind our music, the major concept that was discussed at the Anatomy of Sound Workshop. We have the

ability to feel the meaning of the music deep within us, and we must allow it to be let free in both practice and performance. When a performance is unsuccessful, we feel wounded. When our music is criticized, we take it as a personal offense because our music comes from a personal place. However, if we can reign in this vulnerability, we can allow it to influence our music in a positive way.

I began to think about the harm and benefits of perfectionism in a similar way to how Bruser discussed vulnerability. Perfectionism seemed to be both a blessing and a curse. At times, perfectionism caused me a lot of trouble and anxiety, coupled with self-criticism and the constant feeling that nothing that I did was ever good enough. However, I felt that I owed much of my success throughout my life to the influence of my perfectionism. Perfectionism pushed me to do my best, achieve more, and go beyond what was expected. The scale is tipped when the curse of perfectionism outweighs the blessing. When one pushes herself so hard to the point that she is overcome with anxiety, the “perfect” result is often no longer worth the pain it took to get there. How do we gain control of perfectionism? We must harness the power of perfectionism, using it as a push that catapults us forward, instead of throwing us to the ground. The difference can be illustrated by transforming the phrase “What I do isn’t good enough” to “I can do better.” The change is slight, but can make a big difference. I would catch myself thinking negatively while practicing, and try to turn the negative thoughts into positive, inspiring thoughts. Instead of criticizing myself while I was practicing and thinking: “This isn’t good enough,” I would think “How can I change my practicing to fix this problem?” The overall result is more beneficial practicing due to a more positive outlook, and there is a discovery of a self-confidence and self-trust as you analyze your own work in a healthy way.

After my summer experiences and reading *The Art of Practicing*, I had discovered a lot about my own performance and practice anxieties and how I could begin to control them. This information was life changing for me, and I couldn't wait to put all that I had learned into practice. However, I began to wonder how others experienced and dealt with performance anxiety. I felt the need to share the information I learned with others who may be dealing with similar issues, and wondered if anyone had any other techniques to offer. I also couldn't rid myself of the nagging feeling that perhaps something could have been done much earlier in my life to prevent me from having so much performance and practice anxiety that took so long to address and overcome. What if one of my teachers had reached out and given me some of these techniques to reduce my anxieties earlier in my life? What if I had come forward to a teacher with the severity of my issues sooner? I decided to send a survey to both music teachers and students to get an idea of how the issue of performance anxiety was dealt with among others.

The student survey consisted of 7 questions, and was distributed via Facebook and gleaned thirty-one respondents. Students from Bowling Green State University, the University of Missouri, the University of Tennessee, Georgia State University, and Texas Tech University participated. The teacher survey consisted of 5 questions, and was distributed via email to faculty of Bowling Green State University who teach private applied lessons. Out of thirty eight teachers who were contacted, 7 replied with answers, and included teachers of piano, saxophone, cello, voice, oboe, and clarinet.

One question on the student survey simply asked the students if they had ever suffered from pain related to playing their instrument. Every respondent except one described some sort of pain that they had a result of playing their instrument. Pains included back, neck, shoulders,

arms, hand and wrist, fingers, facial (embouchure), and loss of voice (vocalists). Pain in the back and hands or wrists were the most frequent pain, while neck and shoulders were the second most frequent pain. Another question asked students to describe symptoms of performance anxiety. Symptoms given by responders included sweating, upset stomach, shaking, difficulty breathing, dry mouth or throat, dizziness, increased heart rate, muscle tension, and difficulty concentrating. One student described that the performance becomes an out of body experience. Another student responded that they have experienced having full blown panic attacks that could include crying, shaking, vomiting, and shortness of breath, and commented that it would most likely take 2 or more hours for them to gain control of these symptoms. My survey was proving that students could have a variety of levels of performance anxiety and practice and performance related tension, from almost none to a moderate or severe level.

Other questions on the student survey dealt with the interactions between students and their teachers on the topic of performance anxiety and performance and practice related tension. I asked the students if their teachers discussed the issue of performance anxiety with them, and if so, what advice the teachers gave them. Thirteen of the respondents said that they did not discuss the issue of performance anxiety with their teachers. Other respondents included techniques that their teachers gave them, which included being well prepared, deep-breathing exercises, performing often in front of others, visualization, yoga, meditation, and positive self-talk.

Some respondents explained that their teachers told them phrases such as “relax and have fun,” “be in the music,” and “buck up and do it.” As a growing musician, I had also been given similar phrases in an attempt to calm my nerves before a performance. The trouble that I

discovered was that repeating these phrases to myself were not powerful enough to overcome the physical symptoms of my performance anxiety. Musicians who suffer from a high level of performance anxiety need physical solutions that can regulate the physical symptoms of performance anxiety before and during a performance. The easiest way for students to get these solutions is via guidance from their teachers, who should be educated enough on the topic to deal with the variable levels of performance anxiety among the students that they teach.

Students were then asked if they felt that their teachers approached the topic of performance anxiety openly and on a regular basis, or only when the student inquired about the topic. Twenty-one respondents said that they only discuss performance anxiety when they inquire the information from their teachers. Three respondents said that the topic was brought up equally by teacher and student, and 2 respondents said that performance anxiety was only discussed near the time of a performance. Based on these responses by students, I was confirmed in my presumption that many teachers do not address the issue of performance anxiety as a preventative measure.

In the teacher survey, I asked similar questions. I asked the teachers what advice they gave students in regard to performance anxiety. Answers included focusing on the details of the music (dynamics, breath support, character), mental practice, performing as often as possible, yoga, Alexander Technique, good preparation, focusing on controllable aspects of performance, and focusing on the intent of sharing beautiful music with the audience, rather than worrying about what people will think of you. One teacher explained that she tries not to talk about performance anxiety too much, as she believes talking about it can sometimes make it worse. She instead focuses on helping students prepare in a way that allows them to perform without

anxiety, such as repeated success in the practice room, studio class, and multiple other performances to help them build confidence. However, she sometimes teaches techniques such as yoga and Alexander Technique, and remains open to the discussion of performance anxiety with her students.

Next, the teachers were asked if they address the issue of performance anxiety on a regular basis with their students, and whether they bring up the topic themselves or wait for a student to present an issue. I got an array of answers for these questions. One teacher said they address the issue when a student has an approaching performance. Another teacher said she does not try to talk about it, and will bring it up if she feels that it is an issue. Another teacher said he routinely asks students how they are feeling about upcoming performances, and then addresses any issues that the student may arise. Another teacher said that he brings up the topic because he finds that students rarely do.

Finally, I asked the teachers to describe the characteristics that they look for in a student that would indicate that the student suffers from performance anxiety. Responses included tight or raised shoulders, lack of facial or musical expression, tension in holding the instrument, hesitations, rushing tempi, perfectionism, unrealistic goals, negative self-talk, a protective stance, furrowed brow, shallow breathing, lack of concentration, small amounts of talking, appearing to be on the verge of tears, uneven vibrato. I was particularly struck by one teacher's response, as she said she is often struck by how anxiety can hit a student and catch her and sometimes the student completely off guard, and disable them in performance.

I believe that teachers need to bring up the issue of performance anxiety with their students and offer techniques for performance anxiety reduction as a preventative measure, rather

than as an attempt to control performance anxiety issues after they have already begun to negatively impact the student. Whether the student is regularly experiencing performance anxiety or not, and whether the student experiences performance anxiety at a mild or severe level, performance anxiety is most likely an issue for every musician at some point in their career. By approaching performance anxiety regularly in lessons and giving students techniques to apply in both practice and performance, performance anxiety can be ended before it becomes an issue that is engrained in the student's mind and body, and is difficult to reverse and gain control over. In addition, performance anxiety can be a difficult topic for students to bring up with their teachers. Performance anxiety is a very personal topic, and can be embarrassing for a student to express to her teacher. Teachers can avoid missing cues from students that may indicate performance anxiety issues by inquiring about the topic with students on a frequent, preventative basis.

Bruser describes in her book that she often allows her students to take a few minutes at the beginning of their lesson to do some of the meditative exercises that she teaches. "Many of my students begin every lesson with a few minutes of stretching," Bruser explains (30). "Sometimes one of my students arrives at a lesson in a particularly distracted state...after doing a breathing exercise for a couple of minutes, she feels refreshed, and her playing becomes freer and smoother" (Bruser 48). Taking the time to allow the students to mentally and physically prepare can make a big difference, especially if the student has their lesson in the middle of a hectic schedule. In addition, this gives the teacher the opportunity to work on these techniques with a student, and the teacher may aid the student in beginning to add techniques such as meditation to their daily practice and performance routines.

When a teacher acquires new students, a way that they could find out about their students' performance anxiety level is to have the students fill out a simple questionnaire. The teacher may ask students to list their symptoms of performance anxiety, rate their performance anxiety on a scale from 1 to 10, describe any exercises that they regularly engage in before a performance to reduce performance anxiety. The teacher may also leave room for the students to openly write about any performance anxiety issues that they may have, or ask the teacher any unanswered questions that they may have on the topic. This questionnaire will give teachers a good idea of which students need the most help with performance anxiety reduction techniques. On a regular basis, perhaps every semester or every year, teachers can have their students fill out the same questionnaire. This will allow teachers to continually gauge the progress of their students' performance anxiety, and can also allow students to reevaluate their performance anxiety and see the progress that they have made.

My journey to gaining control of my performance anxiety was not easy, did not happen overnight, and is something that I will continue to work to keep control of throughout my career. Overcoming some of my greatest fears and ending a problem that I had struggled with for my entire life has been one of the hardest things that I have ever had to do. My goal is that with my experiences and research, I can reach out and help others who may be dealing with similar performance anxiety struggles. As a future teacher, I hope to apply the discussed techniques with my students to help prevent performance anxiety and tension among growing musicians. In addition, I hope to share this information with other teachers, in the hopes that they will approach it with an open mind, and share it with their students as well. Nobody is alone with performance

anxiety. By connecting with other musicians and sharing information, we may better the ability to fulfill our life's calling: sharing music freely with others.

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