

How to overcome audition anxiety

Peter Gane tips on how to get rid of anxiety and be ready for auditions



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In some performance situations you can feel very stressed, for instance, an audition, a recital, an assessment, playing to your peers, playing a big orchestral solo.

1. Keep within your comfort zones



Well, in order to minimise excess anxiety when auditioning, say for the EUYO, try to avoid that “one-off focus on the event feel” as this could increase pressure. The important thing to remember is to try and keep within your comfort zones i.e. think of it as just another ‘sharing’ of what you normally do. Aim to develop practical routines, habits that are used always, not just in preparation for the “big” event. So, the way you practise, communicate, perform and play, needs to have been securely established and embedded as the default. At all times when you play and prepare develop good habits and procedures that incorporate excellent breathing, good posture with a balanced and relaxed body language.

Remember, as the Alexander technique says: “becoming more mindful of the way you go about your daily activities, how you move, sit and stand affects how well you function”.

2. Warm up



So, with this in mind, think about starting every practice session with a short limber up and develop some mindfulness exercises. Warming up body and mind for practice enhances the development of good breathing and good posture. Then, without your instrument, stand with your feet a little apart with soft legs and knees, gently loosen up all parts of your body from head to toe. Shake feet, legs and arms; flex fingers, roll shoulders, work face muscles and breathe. Like an athlete, work on flexibility first then proceed to stretches. Now, with your instrument do some easy ‘warm ups’ not confusing warming up with real practice. Warming up is just what it says, a preparation to play.

3. Practise



Now practise your studies, excerpts, technical exercises, pieces whatever, remembering to work at your own pace. Develop a strong work ethic by starting and stopping exactly on time. Keep fresh by including frequent short breaks. Now 'play' through what you have been practicing. Have a break then 'perform' what you have just played. Remember, it's important to practise performance and have a clear 'view' of the music – tell a story – use imagination to project the character and musical gestures as you feel them letting this guide your preparation.

4. Correct



To replicate "live performance situations" run through without stopping, in different venues if possible and note weak spots; get used to risk limitation and build up your stamina. Record yourself, memorise as a routine, if relevant, organise plenty of time with an accompanist and preferably, before your rehearsals, really get to know the accompaniment. A good recipe is to practise your part from the piano score. Get your eyes out of the music, perform to the panel and develop good body language remembering to move with the music. Avoid at all costs being stiff, ridged, tense and locked in with poor breathing and communication.

5. Prepare



Make sure to allow enough time before your audition; get to venue early; build in warm-up time and don't rush. Give yourself both the mental and physical space required. Build up your confidence by developing in depth knowledge of the set repertoire. Knowing that you can play your part and how it fits in really does reduce anxiety. Take the time to get to know your part thoroughly, both in and out of context. Listen to different recordings and interpretations, conquer the technical challenges thrown up and be intimate with how your part fits into the whole picture. Communicate your personal thumbprint, exaggerate the gestures of the music, try to project your view of it. The panel wants to hear the real you and wants to see you enjoying making music.

6. Counter stress



Stress occurs when you perceive that the demands made on you exceed your ability to cope. So, whatever preparation you do – do more, but make sure all practice is useful – have a purpose for each session. Do not mindlessly overwork. If you always breathe well, keep focused, relaxed, balanced and have really prepared both your solo piece and excerpts, then be confident that your audition will go well, why shouldn't it? After all, you are well prepared, and this is the way you always play! Remember it is just another 'sharing' of what you normally do.

It's worth noting that sports scientists can find no physical differences between athletes of Olympic standard and moderate athletes. The only difference that can be identified in any way, shape or form, is that the great athletes think about their event all the time, mentally rehearsing every element time and time again.

Smile, enjoy, share.

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