

Stress and Anxiety

Professional performers do experience performance anxiety, and do not have nerves of steel. Professionals play well IN SPITE of their nervousness, not because they have eliminated it.

Stress and Anxiety are completely normal and expected. It is part of the human condition.

Many times stress and anxiety are caused by the negative signals we are murmuring in our heads.

Truths

There is no single factor that more greatly affects our ability to learn and perform than the image we have of ourselves.

Try this: Do not say anything to yourself that you would not say to a friend!
Try it.

Critical performance evaluation must not be allowed to damage self-image. It matters not whether criticism comes from outside sources or from within the player himself. The conditions conducive to good learning and significant improvement always emanate from positive, objective encouragement, whether from the teacher or from oneself.

Many young players become discouraged when a piece they practice diligently does not go well the first time it is played in public. When listening to experienced performers, young players should remember that the professional musician plays the same pieces repeatedly.

Be kind to yourself!

The attitude with which work is approached determines the quality of the final result.

Try to find a short meditation before practicing. When the conscious mind is quiet, the subconscious can do its best work.

Extremes in self-evaluation should be avoided

Listening to great artists, especially live, in concert, is the single-most important step to becoming a great musician.

Have a regular schedule and stick to it. Bed time, practice time, fun time. Skipping your scheduled routine will add stress to your life, especially when you procrastinate.

Techniques to help:

Positive mental imagery: See yourself performing beautifully, rehearse every note going exactly as you would like. Do this a bit every day, it cannot be crammed. Control what you picture and picture only what you want to see happen. Some people hope to do well, others expect to do well.

Meditation: Easily accessible for 5-30 minutes. Try to maintain the sense of calm you achieve in meditation as you begin to practice/play music. Give up all needs to “sound good.” Refer to Kenny Werner’s book, “Effortless Mastery.”

PowerPoses: Stand tall, confident, and proud. “Fake it ‘til you make it!”

Deep breathing (yoga): Metronome on 60, inhale for six counts through the nose, hold for six counts ,inhale through mouth for 1 count, exhale through mouth for 6 counts. Repeat 6 times.

Laugh: When feeling stress and anxiety, go watch a funny video or laugh with a friend. Anxiety cannot live while laughing. Remember to keep in perspective what you are doing. It is probably not life threatening, laugh some more!

Other great books include “With Winning in Mind,” and “The Music Lesson.”