

Anxiety in Musical Performance

Presence on Stage 2023

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1. Stress Facts

- Covid
- Family issues
- Social media
- Work
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder: restless, fatigued easily, difficulty concentrating, irritable, muscle tension, sleep disturbance
- Stress has a cumulative effect.

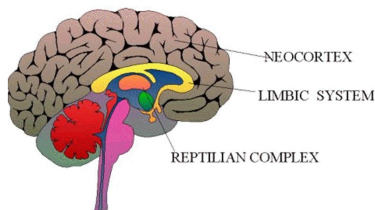
2. List Things That Are Currently Causing You Stress

- Biological
- Psychological
- Soul perspective
- People

3. Depression and Anxiety

- Go hand in hand
- What are you feeling in your daily life?
- Not everything is urgent!
- When we pay attention in a rigid, effortful, and stressful way, it is a drag on the entire mind-body system.

4. MacLean's Triune Brain



Paul MacLean's Triune Brain

- In the 1960's Neuroscientist Paul MacLean formulated the *Triune Brain model*, based on the human brain divided into three distinct regions. The hierarchical organization represents the acquisition of brain structure through evolution.

- Humans act in a predictable way to acute and chronic stress – a primal reaction to escape a dangerous situation.
- When the *flight or fight* response is evoked, part of the *involuntary nervous system, the sympathetic nervous system*, is evoked. The *Hypothalamus* secretes adrenalin and other related hormones bringing about physiologic changes. These changes include increased blood pressure, heart rate, breathing, blood flow to muscles, and metabolism, preparing us for conflict.
- We need to counter this with the relaxation response to quieten the activity of the sympathetic nervous system.

Amygdala (Brain Stem) – The Reptilian Brain

- Fight or flight response
- Aggressive Drive
- Anxiety regulation
- Controls automatic function -temperature, blood flow and hunger
- Regulates the body – homeostasis
- Generates survival reactions
- **The amygdala is on the switch: fight-flight reaction for protection.**
- This is directly associated with conditioned fear and gives a fast appraisal of potential danger. Anxiety kicks in when the brain senses fear. If you perceive a threat, it is all systems that go as the body responds.
- Once the system is activated, we experience excess energy and stress. Learning happens from what our experience says.
- We create a narrow focus when our well-being is threatened – a reflexive response to fearful situations. This is an emergency mode of paying attention. The physical response is felt with heart and respiratory rate increase which affects our perception, emotion, and behavior. We cannot be addicted to this!

Paleocortex (Limbic System) – The Mammalian Brain

- Generates emotions -anger, guilt, sadness, joy, love
- Center for habits and memory
- Eating and reproduction
- Attachment center
- **Paleocortex is the off switch: the decision-making center of the brain.**
- This decision-making center of the brain processes emotion and talks to the automatic nervous system. We approach the problem, experience the fear and learn how to resolve it in the moment.
- It looks at the importance and emotion of fear and gives you a choice of how to respond. It is a learned process, and you can choose the off switch.

- Here we can *evoke the relaxation response* – see the anxiety, don't deny it and switch it off by *evoking a calm emotion*.

Neocortex (Primate) – The New Brain

- Rational and logical thinking
- Abstract thought, imagination, and language
- Information processing and learning
- Spiritual values
- **The Neocortex, the logical part of the brain, does not communicate with the Amygdala.**
- Uses our memory and pulls back our known associations. So, we need the memory of allowing the fear to flow away, and this will also help if we create a soothing emotion and breathe to calm ourselves down.
- Change your way of seeing the world from a narrow focus to an open-focus response. Narrow focus occurs when our well-being is threatened – a reflexive response to fearful situations. The realization of space around you resets the neural network and calms down the sympathetic autonomic activity, increasing parasympathetic activity. The overuse of narrow attention got us into our current epidemic of stress-related problems, and relearning how to rebalance attention processes can get us out.
- Our perceptions become our reality and truth. Expressions need to *evoke calming effect or relaxation response*.

5. Problematic Response: Denial

- This causes tension in the body, allowing the fight/flight dilemma to continue.
- Words paired with a calming emotion help the relaxation response to kick in.

6. Helpful Response: Accept, Appreciate, Adapt

- Observing the body is the primary anxiety-regulating technique. When observing, you are not resisting or judging what the body is doing; you are simply noticing and accepting what's happening in the moment. In this way, you are using sensations, not thoughts. This calms the body because there is no resistance to the physical activation; therefore, the body can relax and find its equilibrium. The body will calm down by itself when you let go of resisting the experience you are having.
- Notice what the sensation is like-be very specific. Where in your body is the anxiety happening? Is your heart beating very fast? What does it feel like? Is it warm, cold, achy, throbbing, still, or moving? Notice the anxiety without resistance or judgment. The key is to focus on your body while the anxiety is there. Even though you are experiencing anxiety, you can direct your attention positively.

- Thoughts may try to lure you into worrying, rumination, or self-attacking. Maybe you are tempted to withdraw or distract yourself.
- Avoid the temptation to be overwhelmed by your defense mechanism. Stay with the anxiety, you will be fine!
- The observation of the anxiety might be uncomfortable, and it may feel foreign. Don't be dismayed - you are building emotional muscles and reprogramming your UAM.
- Expand your awareness of visual space – let your peripheral field of vision widen. The realization of space calms the parasympathetic nervous system.
- Practice neuroplasticity and vagal toning exercises to reset the neural networks.

7. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

- Psychotherapy in which negative patterns of thought about the self and the world are challenged in order to alter unwanted behavior patterns or treat mood disorders such as depression and anxiety.

8. Tips for Dealing with Anxiety in General

- Identify your feelings and regulate them
- Fill your emotional cup using techniques of neuroplasticity and vagal toning exercises.
- Stay with positive experiences
- Internalization of the experience is essential – stay with a positive experience for a breath or longer. This will help neurons to keep firing so they wire together.
- Feel it in your body. The more embodied our experiences are, the greater the neural trait that is left behind.
- Focus on what feels good about this experience – this will increase dopamine and norepinephrine.
- Each day you can grow the qualities inside you that help you become more resilient.
- Savor pleasurable experiences.

9. Tips for Musical Performance

- **Some things to help before you go on stage:**
- Creating a routine
- Essential oils
- Minute of mindfulness/stillness meditation
- Evoke the relaxation response and open up your attention from a narrow focus –see and feel the space around you.
- Visualizing a successful and enjoyable performance.
- Breathe and educate your brain to deal with anxiety.
- Hearing the beginning of the piece in your inner ear to stop the negative self-talk.

- Gather yourself on stage and decide to be ‘in the moment.’

10. Mindfulness

- Create an environment for success
- Set boundaries
- Practice mindfulness
- It is essential to know what is in your emotional cup.