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UTILIZING MENTAL PRACTICE TO COMBAT PERFORMANCE ANXIETY IN
PERFORMING MUSICIANS

By

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Undergraduate Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

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in Piano Performance

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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

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Piano Performance

Utilizing Mental Practice to Combat Performance Anxiety in Performing Musicians

Dr. James Randall

Performance anxiety is a crippling problem for many performing musicians. Success in dealing with such a problem can make or break a performance; therefore, it becomes necessary for musicians to learn ways to cope with debilitating nerves. As a performing pianist myself, I am interested in investigating ways current performance anxiety research can be best applied to ease musicians' stage fright. As there is a gap between current academic research on this subject and pedagogical practice, many teachers lack good advice to give students suffering stage fright. My thesis paper incorporates my personal experiences in mental practice with current academic literature in the fields of music as well as sports psychology and surgical medicine. Drawing from these resources, I will suggest a more structured pedagogy to help students and musicians develop a mental practice routine to combat performance anxiety. Practice techniques such as mental awareness and visualization can provide musicians with tools to alleviate performance anxiety and achieve a better performance

Utilizing Mental Practice to Combat Performance Anxiety in Performing Musicians

When beginning music lessons, students often find themselves overwhelmed by technical demands of playing an instrument. Whether it is a struggle with coordination or reading the music itself, it takes years of diligent practice to become a technically proficient musician. Unfortunately, after achieving a high level of proficiency, some musicians are still unable to reach an equally high level of performance. This is often a result of performance anxiety, and some musicians spend their entire careers fighting against their own stage fright.

Until quite recently, performance anxiety remained an elephant-in-the-room for most musicians. It was viewed more as a weakness than a normal psychological response to pressure. In the 1980's, literature on stress-induced anxiety from other areas such as standard test taking and sports performance began appearing in print (Nagel, Julie Julee). Attention to the issue in other fields caused attitudes in the area of music to become more open. Stage fright has since become acknowledged as an expected part of music performance. With this more open view, researchers in music have worked to investigate a variety of ways to deal with debilitating nerves. Much of this research focuses on the importance of "how musicians talk internally as they play" (Randall, Mac). This aspect of performance is quite different from the technical aspects of learning the mechanics of an instrument or the notes of a specific piece of music. Instead, it requires musicians to practice overcoming internal obstacles such as "lapses in concentration, nervousness, self-doubt and self-condemnation" (Gallwey xvii).

Performance anxiety, also known as stage fright, can cause a well practiced and prepared performance to deteriorate unnecessarily. It is classified by the American Psychological Association as a "social phobia" and affects individuals "somatically, behaviorally, and cognitively" (Garner, Allison Maerker). From this definition, musicians suffering from stage fright experience a myriad of symptoms from sweaty palms to physical illness and self-doubt. These negative symptoms prompt many performers to try and eradicate performance anxiety altogether with methods such as taking beta-blockers. Such methods, while perhaps effective, fail to acknowledge that performance anxiety is a natural part of any performance. Feeling nervous is an indication that the musician cares about the quality of his or her performance. Also, performance anxiety can provide a great source of energy to boost a live performance to higher levels of excellence. With these positive points in mind, one may choose

to consider ways to work with stage fright instead of against it. New research from performance specialists suggests musicians can find success in coping with performance anxiety through the development of “mental game” (Gallwey).

Strengthening one’s mental game is an effective way to treat the cause of performance anxiety as well as its resulting symptoms. Musicians with strong mental game are able to attain a much higher technical and musical level of performance. These performances are often described as being experiences where one is “in the zone” or fully functioning in “the groove” (Gallwey 15). Just as musicians technically prepare and learn the notes of a piece, so too can they mentally practice and prepare for dealing with performance anxiety. With mental coaching and preparation, one can combat the issue of stage fright. Presently, there is a gap between this research and current pedagogical practice. Many teachers lack information on mental game research. Nervous young piano students are often told that simply practicing and performing *more* will build the necessary confidence to solve the problem. Using a more researched and structured approach, students can utilize a mental practice routine to combat performance anxiety.

My research begins by defining the issue of performance anxiety based on a model called the Inner Game (Gallwey 8). The Inner Game model promotes the use of techniques that develop mental game to combat performance anxiety. Next, my research proceeds to describe a variety of mental practice strategies utilized in various fields to strengthen mental game. Finally, I propose a structured approach for musicians to combat performance anxiety through a mental practice routine. Using a college level pianist as an example, I will demonstrate how this mental practice routine can be incorporated into preparations for a recital over the course of a typical semester.

In order to more clearly comprehend the issue of performance anxiety, it is necessary to understand a model called the Inner Game (Gallwey 8). In his book, *The Inner Game of Tennis*, professional tennis player W. Timothy Gallwey presents this model as a way to both understand performance anxiety and also learn to cope with it. Through his research he became a prominent force in establishing contemporary ideas about mental game. In the book, he proposes the equation: Performance = Potential – Interference. According to this equation, if one can decrease interference, one will subtract less from his or her potential and therefore reach a higher level of performance. Performance anxiety is a severe source of interference for many, so

finding ways to mitigate it will result in better performance. Gallwey goes on to describe an interesting way of understanding the outlets of interference. To explain these outlets, he suggests that our conscience is divided into two distinct parts: Self 1 and Self 2.

Self 1 is the “thinking and telling” conscience that gives our body verbal instructions (Gallwey 14). These instructions are usually critical of performance and egotistical in nature. They are the type of comments that put performers on edge and usually cause lapses in concentration. Gallwey describes a typical remark from Self 1 by giving an example of a tennis player attempting to improve a particular stroke. When the intended improvements are not happening, Self 1 might snidely remark, “Bend your knees...you clumsy ox, your grandmother could play better” (Gallwey 9). Is this something one would say to a respected friend? Of course not! A friend deserves more trust, and it seems that Self 1 does not have much faith in one’s natural abilities.

An example of a sabotaging Self 1 comment toward a musician can occur when performing a piece from memory in a recital. During such a performance, any lapse in concentration can lead Self 1 to question whether or not the musician does in fact know what notes come next in the piece. Following Self 1’s train of thought, this performance is likely to suffer a nervous memory slip due to negative interference. It is easy to judge Self 1 as an agitating part of oneself with no good purpose after experiencing a performance compromised by its interference. Before allowing such judgements to take over, it is important to realize that Self 1 usually has the individual’s best interests at heart; however, its means of obtaining these best interests are most often misguided, which is why one needs to focus on quieting its interfering criticisms.

Self 2 is the “physical and doing” part of the conscious body that embodies one’s natural potential (Gallwey 35). When considering Self 2, it is important to realize that “everyone who inhabits a human body possesses a remarkable instrument” (Gallwey 35). The body is very capable of performing numerous functions without interference or instruction. Take eyesight as an example. It is not necessary to consciously think about and give the brain step-by-step instructions on how to picture and interpret the surrounding world. Instead, the body naturally takes over the process on its own and one gets to enjoy the final product: vision. With this kind of natural ability, Self 2 certainly deserves more respect from Self 1. The lack of trust from Self 1 towards Self 2 as demonstrated by its negative criticisms and instructions results in

performance anxiety. Finding a way to silence the inner chatter of Self 1 allows Self 2 freedom to utilize its natural potential and reach a higher level of performance.

Many fields outside of music, such as sports psychology and surgical medicine, have developed mental practice strategies to quiet Self 1. These strategies are based on concepts from the Inner Game model asserting that a vital way to combat performance anxiety is by cultivating mental awareness. Mental awareness is an important component of mental game that uses focus to require the individual be “present in the present” moment and not be consumed by concerns from the past or future (Gallwey 93). Daily mental practice of strategies such as centering and visualization help one put his or her mind in this present state of focus.

Centering is an exercise that works to calm scattered energies into focused, directional energy. The technique of centering is applicable to a wide audience and was originally developed by a renowned sports psychologist named Robert M. Nideffer. In the mid-1970's, Nideffer quantified the human stress response as the “fight or flight” response (Greene 46). No matter what the degree of stressor, be it a car that will not start or a robbing at gunpoint, human bodies react the same. This physical response to stress is an evolutionary adaptation of hormones that prepare one's body to fight or flee any particular stressor. Unfortunately, this level of energy does little good in promoting concentrated thinking in a high stakes performance setting. Nideffer developed the process of centering to help individuals focus these scattered energies into focus. Don Greene, a student of Nideffer and leading sports psychologist, put this technique on clinical trial in 1982 with members of the San Diego SWAT team. Greene wanted to see if the members could “perform any better if they employed Nideffer's centering technique to focus themselves before firing [weapons]” (Greene 51). What he found was that the officers who had received training in centering shot with an accuracy that was significantly better than their colleagues who received no training (Greene 52).

The process of centering is divided into seven steps. First, one must form clear intentions by determining a goal to accomplish after centering. When first practicing centering, Greene recommends making a goal of simply feeling focused. Intentions in this step need to use assertive and positive language. This gives the mind a clear and encouraging goal to obtain. Second, one must find a visual focal point. Greene suggests fixing one's gaze on something a moderate distance away that is comfortably below eye level. Next, with closed eyes, begin “breathing mindfully” (Greene 54). This involves breathing in through the nose, filling as much

of the lungs as possible with air before exhaling through the mouth. It is necessary for the mind to remain present through this exercise and focus all attention on the simple act of breathing. It takes a surprising amount of practice to remain focused on this, as an overactive and critical mind is constantly fighting to break concentration and cause focus to wander elsewhere.

While continuing focused breathing, the fourth step of centering is to release bodily tension. Greene advises mentally scanning the body for spots of tightness, often found in areas of the upper body such as the shoulders. Check these spots with each inhale, and then release the tension while exhaling. Once sufficiently relaxed, the fifth step is to mentally locate one's center of gravity. Greene describes this location as being "about two inches lower than your navel and two inches below the surface" (Greene 55). Finding this center is important for helping one feel grounded and in control of internal energy. Through this, remember to keep the mind focused on breathing.

The sixth step in centering is to "trigger action" with a "process cue" (Greene 56). A process cue can be anything that places the brain in a mindset for good performance. For musicians, a very helpful process cue is a piece of music that one is performing. Mentally playing through snippets from a piece of music is just what the brain needs to obtain effective concentration for a stellar performance. After utilizing this process cue, the last step in centering is to open one's eyes and look back at the focal point determined earlier in step two. One is to find any remaining internal energy and imagine hurling it from one's center of gravity towards the focal point. This leaves the mind and body in a state of relaxed concentration—where one has finally let go of Self 1 and put trust in Self 2's natural ability, instinct, and experience. When learning the technique of centering, one will not always be lead to long periods of mental silence; however, with consistent practice, short periods of quiet can turn into much longer intervals. The ebb and flow of distraction and concentration is natural, and centering gives one tools to gently nudge the mind back into focus.

Mental practice strategies involving visualization also cultivate mental awareness. Visualization can be thought of as a "feeling sense" through which an individual is able to encourage specific modes of mental processing (Ristad 118). Using visual mental processing with images as a means to communicate with the body will enhance an individual's performance capabilities. According to Gallwey's research with the "Inner Game," mental visualization is a vital form of communication with Self 2. Self 2 thrives on visual stimuli and mentally processes

the world using images to structure the body's performance. Essentially, "a picture is worth a thousand words" to Self 2 (Gallwey 40). Self 1, on the other hand, is a verbal processor and uses words to command and communicate with the body. Therefore, one way to effectively eliminate Self 1 from creating mental interference with performance is to shift from processing thoughts with words to processing them with pictures.

A key idea to understand when practicing visualization techniques is that "trying fails; awareness cures" (Green and Gallwey 30). To demonstrate this idea, Gallwey describes in his book two very different approaches to teaching a tennis lesson. In the first approach he describes, Gallwey gives his student detailed verbal instructions regarding the proper technique to serve a tennis ball. The student proceeded to struggle to serve the ball proficiently after these instructions and instead experienced "an awkward tightening when performing the desired action" (Gallwey 5). Essentially, the student was trying too hard and Self 1 interfered with criticisms based on Gallwey's instructions. In the second lesson approach, Gallwey opts to give no verbal instructions and instead asks the student to observe him serve ten balls. Gallwey's goal was to have the student "watch carefully, *not* thinking about what I [Gallwey] was doing, but simply try to grasp a *visual image*" of the serve (Gallwey 6). This method cultivated mental awareness through visualization and cut out interference from Self 1. Ultimately it allowed the student to succeed more quickly and naturally in achieving a proficient tennis serve.

There are a variety of mental practice techniques that use visualization to promote mental awareness. One such technique involves visualizing Self 1 taking on human form in one's conscience rather than remaining an intangible idea of interference. Performance specialist Eloise Ristad, who developed this visualization technique, calls this form an individual's "judges" (Ristad 13). In order to begin understanding Self 1, it is important to have a conversation with one's judges. Ristad encourages one to start this conversation by mentally imagining his or her own "private collection of judges" sitting around a table (14). Next, allow them to express any criticisms as well as expectations that they hold. Periodically practicing this conversation helps one maintain a clear understanding of the judges and therefore Self 1's motivating factors and tactics. These conversations often show that the judges most often do want one to perform his or her personal best; however, the negative tactics they employ inhibit peak performance. After understanding the judge's viewpoints, one can continue the conversation by requesting a negotiation with them. Ristad suggests explaining to the judges

that their self-sabotaging performance criticisms do not help obtain a common goal of achieving a great performance. Make the request that these criticisms stop, and ask the judges for more support and acceptance. Consistent practice of this particular visualization technique provides a clearer sense of understanding about Self 1 and the sources of its interference.

Another visualization technique to enhance mental awareness involves visualizing the performer's own unique set of symptoms induced by performance anxiety. Part of being a performer is becoming aware of these individual symptoms and their corresponding effects. When these symptoms present themselves, many performers try to suppress them in an attempt to control their own performance anxiety; however, suppressing these feelings of discomfort does not benefit the performer. It often has the opposite result of control and forces a build-up of nerves that can create an outpour of anxiety at any moment. Avoiding this outpour through visualization techniques requires an individual to visualize "pushing [symptoms of performance anxiety] to the point where they can go no further" (Ristad 162). Take, for example, an individual who experiences quivering hands due to performance anxiety. Rather than attempting to suppress the symptom and make it go away, this individual can visualize the quivering getting worse. The goal is to see how far symptoms can be pushed. Interestingly enough, most performers find that visualizing their symptoms getting worse ultimately has the opposite effect. Many find that "almost as soon as one *tries* to intensify a symptom, it begins to disappear" (Ristad 163). As a performer, this is an extremely empowering technique.

Yet another way to utilize visualization is through a technique called mental role-playing. In performance, and "when on stage, you are an actor" (Miller, Marilyn). A pianist, for example, can use visualization as an exercise to imagine that he or she is a world-class concert pianist. One can start small by focusing on little details such as imagining the confident stride with which a professional performer would cross the stage for an opening bow. Imagine the self-assured smile this performer might flash toward the audience before turning toward the piano. Images such as these help communicate to Self 2 how to actualize and embody the desired character, which is the goal of such role-playing exercises. Next, one can continue by mentally imagining the way a concert pianist would play the first few measures of a particular piece. Envision specifically this performer's physical motions and how they communicate the character of the music. How do these motions correspond with the sounds produced in the acoustic atmosphere of this particular concert space? The imagery of such details can continue endlessly.

In a matter of minutes, it is easy to become immersed in the scene one has created. While immersed in the scene, one may notice that Self 1 is silent. Role-playing shifts the mind from verbal processing to visual processing. Without verbal communication, Self 1 has lost its voice and is unable to interfere with Self 2.

The success of role-playing exercises became widely acknowledged at a Music Educators National Conference in San Antonio, Texas. W. Timothy Gallwey was a guest lecturer at this particular conference. A violinist during his session gave a performance of a Bach Sarabande. The performer, whose name was Mary, demonstrated a love for the piece that was noticeably inhibited by her self-consciousness of performing for so many distinguished musicians. Her performance anxiety manifested itself in her bow, which shook while she played and produced a weak and quivering tone. After the performance, Gallwey asked Mary who her favorite violinist was. Given another opportunity to perform the Sarabande, Mary was to pretend that she was her favorite violinist. She was also told to imagine that there was a video camera above stage recording her performance. It didn't matter what the performance sounded like because the sound on the recording would be replaced by a real recording of the professional artist. What mattered was that Mary look like her favorite professional. This freed Mary from worrying about how she played and allowed her to "throw herself into the role" of a professional violinist (Green and Gallwey 91). This performance was a stunning and drastic change from Mary's first attempt. Visualizing herself in the role of a professional performer increased her mental awareness by inhibiting interference from Self 1.

The importance of mental awareness and its role in focus is a topic of interest among many disciplines. The discipline of medicine, specifically surgical education, recently began focusing on the importance of training students in mental awareness along with standard technical training. This focus began at the University of Virginia Health Sciences Center with research by faculty member Dr. Doug Newburg. Dr. Newburg's goal was to improve surgical education through "incorporating mental training into surgical training" (Newburg and Tribble). The idea was to use a more holistic approach in teaching both mind and body to surgical students. Students who underwent this education model reported feeling more confident and better prepared to perform surgery.

Dr. Newburg acknowledged the effectiveness of visualization techniques in his research on teaching surgery. Such visualization techniques are described in a study done by

Judy McDonald and Terry Orlick on the “Psychological Considerations Effecting Excellence in Surgery.” This study used interviews and polls from top surgeons about qualities leading to successful performances. One common characteristic brought up in many of the interviews was that elite surgeons have a “vision of what they want to accomplish.” Part of Dr. Newburg’s holistic approach to teaching surgery involved helping students work to develop their own vision. This vision is something that continually grows as the students develop into competent surgeons. Most importantly, it provides a focused goal to encourage mental awareness in high-stress performance situations.

In the beginning of their mental training, surgical residents at the University of Virginia were encouraged to work towards maintaining a “general awareness of what is going on around them” (Newburg and Tribble). This general awareness trained the residents to maintain multiple layers of conscious thought and processing about a particular situation. Dr. Newburg describes this technique using a visual analogy of people swimming in the ocean: while one person swims at the surface, another may be scuba diving deeper down. From a surgical perspective, the top layer is conscious of the medical procedure at hand, while a lower layer of conscience acts to double check the procedure being performed. Visualizing these layers of consciousness is important for remaining aware in order to pay attention to have a successful performance.

Another important aspect of mental awareness Dr. Newburg imparts on his students is distraction control. In an article explaining his holistic teaching methods, Dr. Newburg describes a scenario that occurred when he first joined the faculty at the University of Virginia. A patient was wheeled into the operating room with a failing heart, and someone casually mentioned to Dr. Newburg that this patient was the former mayor of Charlottesville, Virginia. This information made Dr. Newburg extremely nervous and brought on self-conscious thoughts about the negative publicity that would ensue if the operation did not go well. In this particular situation, it was vital to shut out all of these distracting thoughts in order to perform a successful surgery (Newburg and Tribble). Training students in mental awareness prepares them for controlling such distractions.

Providing musicians with holistic technical and mental preparation is key in combatting performance anxiety. Many musicians, when grappling with performance anxiety, decide that the best way to approach the problem is with a larger quantity of technical practice.

This means hours upon hours spent isolated in a practice space undergoing an arduous technical grind. Unfortunately, such determined efforts often do not always help the performer gain control of his or her stage fright. Adding a structured mental practice routine to daily technical practice will help musicians develop stronger mental game to deal with performance anxiety. Methods of incorporating a mental practice routine can be demonstrated through an example college level pianist who is preparing for a recital over the course of a typical semester.

The first step in establishing a mental practice routine when preparation for this example pianist's recital begins early on in the semester is developing a sense of visual processing. This step is a challenging hurdle, as piano lessons require verbal conversations between teacher and student. This verbal barrier created between teacher, student, and instrument does not encourage visual processing. It is important to realize the limitations of the verbal barrier, because "language is not an action, it can only hint at the complexity of the action" (Gallwey 53). Playing piano is a skill that the pianist's body performs. It is not a process that can be adequately described using verbal language. Therefore, it makes sense that Self 1, as a verbal processor, is not fully capable of instructing one's body how to play the piano. Self 2 is much better equipped for such a job and can best translate these actions with the highest efficiency.

Early on in the college pianist's preparation for his or her recital, the verbal barrier mentioned previously must be crossed. Synthesizing information through visualization provides an essential learning bridge between explanatory language and the indescribable nature of many musically desired actions. In order to assemble this type of bridge, the piano student must take any given verbal instructions and use them as a guide to one's own experiential discovery. For example, perhaps the college piano student is struggling to obtain a desired color of sound in the opening chords one of his or her pieces. The teacher, rather than using words in an attempt to describe the preferred color, should play the chords to demonstrate the color of sound. Such a demonstration provides the student with visual and audio feedback that Self 2 can internalize and reproduce.

To begin any mental practice session, the example piano student must establish mental awareness. Every practice session should begin with centering as part of a technical warm-up routine. This puts the pianist in a productive mindset and helps develop mental awareness. Also, it is important to take periodic breaks from strenuous practice in order to avoid burnout and

injury. Centering provides a way to come back from these breaks and refocus attention to the practice at hand. The pianist preparing for his or her recital will have plenty of practice in utilizing this mental practice technique. By the time the recital arrives, he or she will be confidently able to center backstage and have a to have a focused start to the performance. This focus is constantly tested throughout the course of the recital. During any given performance, there seems to always be an audience member with a chronic cough or desire to flip noisily through program notes. Consistent practice of centering prepares the example pianist to deal with distraction management. When his or her mind begins wandering toward the coughing audience member during the recital, he or she has mentally practiced bringing the mind back to a place of awareness and focus.

One visualization technique to incorporate into a mental practice routine is creating a vision of what one hopes to accomplish. A combination of watching others perform, advice from mentors, and personal experience aid in the growth of one's vision. It is a continual process that requires practice and "constant reflection and analysis" (Talbot-Honeck and Tribble). As the example pianist prepares for his or her recital, visual goals are important in focusing Self 2. Visual goals can be anything from imagining a storyline to go with the music to picturing smooth technical motions through a particularly virtuosic passage. Such visual goals give Self 2 something to work towards while simultaneously feeding no words of potential criticism to Self 1. Having a vision and sense of what one hopes to accomplish can go a long way in helping to silence Self 1 and combatting performance anxiety.

Musicians often feel that performance anxiety cripples their ability to find creativity in the moment. After months of living with a piece of music, a concert performance is a "personal expression of the feelings and emotions that music aroused" in the individual (Talbot-Honeck and Tribble). Repetitive technical practice is not conducive to this type of creative expression. Such technical repetition works like a machine to nail down the music so that the fingers automatically know where to go. This certainly provides the performer with a solid sense of kinesthetic security; however, this does not necessarily guarantee a stellar performance. Since the fingers kinesthetically know what they are doing, the unoccupied mind can grow bored and drift. Self 1 creeps back into the picture and stage fright takes hold. To prevent this situation, the example pianist should use mental practice as a means to intentionally remain present in the creative process. For example, perhaps a section of one of the pianist's pieces consists of rapidly

descending scalar passages. Rather than letting kinesthetic memory take over, the pianist can remain mentally aware by visualizing imagery to go with this passage. The possibilities for imagery are endless. He or she could, for example, imagine these passages representing water falling off a cliff. Through this type of creative process, pianists can “try to put new ideas in what they do, not just move their fingers” (Talbot-Honeck and Tribble).

Visualization helps bring creativity and new ideas into one’s practice. Every piece of music has a story behind it. Some programmatic works tell a straightforward tale of something indicated in the title while other works are more of a story about what the composer was experiencing and hoping to communicate during the time of composition. The learning process for making this story come alive begins early on with research and discovery of the music’s intent. A structured mental practice routine makes use of this research to practice visualization techniques such as role-playing. In order to practice this technique, the example piano student must also do research on the character he or she is playing. Character research requires listening to as many recordings and live performance videos of the pianist’s pieces as possible. Self 2 gleans a lot of information from this research and is able to create the desired musical character in the student’s performances. After the pianist has established a sense of intent and musical character, he or she is able to mentally visualize playing its role. The exercise works as described earlier in this paper. The pianist should take time to imagine the details of walking out onto stage and taking on the character of the piece he or she is playing. He or she should visualize the manifestations of this character in the physicality of playing and the sound produced. The more detailed the visualization, the more the pianist is practicing visual processing skills that ultimately cultivate mental awareness to combat performance anxiety.

Utilizing these mental practice strategies in a structured routine will hopefully leave the example pianist feeling prepared to give a stellar performance. Incorporating mental practice into a technical routine provides a more holistic approach to performance preparation and develops confidence in the musician’s ability to cope with performance anxiety. This holistic approach would require some further research on musicians. It would be necessary to test the method on a diverse group of musicians in order to get their feedback and determine its effectiveness.

Performance anxiety is a debilitating issue that can make or break any musician’s performance. For much of history, performers have tried to ignore the issue and pretend it was

only a symptom of weakness. New attention toward performance anxiety allows musician now to accept nervousness as a normal response to high-pressure situations and begin finding methods to combat it. Current pedagogical practices have not quite caught up to using these new methods to help students deal with stage fright. Incorporating techniques into practice that encourage mental awareness and visualization can mitigate musician's performance anxiety. Teaching musicians to develop their mental game provides a highly effective method of dealing with the issue of stage fright. A strong mental game allows a performer reach a solid state of mental awareness to turn off the inner criticisms and chatter from Self 1 that so often interferes the natural abilities of Self 2. With a quiet mind, Self 2 is able to tap into its natural potential and reach a high level of performance. Just as learning how to play a musical instrument requires a certain amount of skilled technical practice, learning how to strengthen one's mental game requires dedication to mental practice. Through mental practice techniques that develop mental awareness, one can effectively combat the effects performance anxiety on performance.

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