Creative Arts- Music performance
transcript
(Duration 17 minutes 02 seconds)

Hi, and welcome to tips and tricks for music performance. Hopefully, you've chosen your repertoire by now. In fact, you probably chose it a while ago, and if you haven't, it's time to choose it and to start doing a lot of practice. But, please bear in mind you still need to be flexible. In the year of COVID lots of changes are happening and we just need to stay flexible. You may need to reconsider your accompaniments. You may need to consider performing with a pre-recorded accompaniment or at least rehearsing the pre-recorded complement. You might need to trim some pieces or stretch some pieces because of changes. So please be prepared and practice really hard, but also stay flexible.

When it comes to about two weeks before your performance, you need to ramp up your practice and be doing even more and be really conscious of building up your stamina as well. The more you practice, the more your finger movement or your vocal cord movement, or your lip movement, your full-body movement, the more that will become automatic. And that's actually one of our goals of practice is to become not robotic, but for your muscle memory to do all the hard work for you. And then on the day of performance, you can concentrate on spontaneous expression and living in the moment and enjoying the ensemble and all of the tricky work should be well and truly under your fingers by then. When you practicing, it's a great idea to work on the tricky bits. So you might start at the beginning and stop when you make a mistake and then work on that bit until you can play it three times in a row without mistakes. And then keep going from there until you make another mistake, circle it on the music, practice that bit until you can play it three times in a row without mistakes, and keep going. So I call that the stop-start method or the red light, green light method. But it's also really important to practice from beginning to end sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes particularly as you're getting towards the performance date.

[Slide reads:

Ways to relax in between practice/study sessions: Tips for well being

* Yoga
* Go for a run
* Walk somewhere beautiful
* Gardening
* Read a book or magazine
* Swim
* Listen to music
* Knitting/craft]

Practicing calming exercises, it's very trendy to be mindful or to do yoga or to find relaxing pastimes at the moment, and it's trendy for good reason and it's great for musicians as well. There are a whole lot of free apps available. Just go to Google, see what you can find, but mindfulness is as easy as lighting a candle and staring at it for, I would start with about half a minute if you're not used to it, but building up and up until you can stare at a candle or next to a candle for several minutes at a time. And the idea is that you don't think of anything else. And as soon as you do think of something else, you just push that idea out of your head and try to have an empty brainwave only thinking about the candle. So, by relaxing your brain between practice sessions or between study sessions, when you're in the Higher School Certificate or Uni at any time of life, by giving a brand-new relaxed downtime, you're actually building strength for later. It's a bit like stretching after you've done some exercise.

Audience enjoyment is incredibly important in a performance. You need to remember that the audience is only there to enjoy the music that you have to offer. I promise no one sitting there counting your mistakes. They're simply there to enjoy the performance, to share the music with you, and to observe and share your passion for the music. So, while you're performing and while you're at home, practicing your performance, try to keep 100% of your concentration just on the music, beautiful music that you're making. And not be worried about what the audience might be thinking or worried about what's going on outside. Your audience has come to enjoy themselves. So, if you have ideas floating into your head like, "Oh, here comes my favourite bit," or "Is that a bird I hear outside?" "Oh, gee, what's that flashing light I can see off in the distance." "I'm hungry." "When is the last time I went to the toilet?" These ideas are not helpful when you're performing. So once again, practice pushing those ideas aside and just focus on how good a time the audience is having.

The expression in the music, the spontaneity you can put in, and try to have a good time. That way your audience will have a good time as well. Stamina as a musician is incredibly handy. Some athletes, if they're training for 100 metres sprint will actually train so they can sprint 110 metres. Then on the day when they only have to do 100 metres, it's certainly achievable. So as a musician, if you're preparing a 20-minute performance, it's a great idea to train yourself up, to be able to sustain your performance mode, your energy, your muscles, your stamina, not just for 20 minutes at home, but for 30 minutes at home. If it's an exam, a performance, a fundraiser, an assembly performance, performing for the grandparents, whatever it is. If you can train to be able to do it for longer than necessary, it's awesome for you.

The other thing that I think is a great idea, is to practice so hard at home that you can play 110% of the quality. And then when you perform, because mistakes will generally happen, then you'll perform at 100% and you'll be happy that. So once again, overtrain, and then be pleased with whatever you produce on the day. Dress rehearsal a week or so before the performance I highly, highly recommend, you do a full dress rehearsal. You want to use the same instrument, particularly if it's a piano, the same sheet music with all the same pencil markings on it, the same music stand, same lighting. If you're wearing makeup, try the same makeup, especially if you're a woodwind or a brass player. Makeup can really upset a performance, particularly if you're not used to it. The same lighting, the music in the same order, the same accompanist. Replicate every possible part of your performance on your dress rehearsal. Costume. You may find after your dress rehearsal, you need to change a few of those things and that's okay. You might find that you've put all your tricky pieces together and that you actually needed to space them out a bit. Having said that try really, really hard to have a dress rehearsal in exactly the same conditions, same time of day.

What we often find at school is that students will do, their warm-up before school and then do a two o'clock performance and they're well truly cold by then. So that's a lesson that on performance day, they need to do their warmup at home at eight o'clock. Do another warm up at lunchtime and a couple of minutes before they go in and get another warm up still before, say two o'clock exam. Things to try out iron out the wrinkles. Videoing yourself or recording yourself is not much fun the first couple of times, but I promise it gets easier. It is a sensational idea to start even now videoing your performance pieces and watch them back. You might even have the score in front of you, the sheet music in front of you or the lyrics in front of you, and just circle the bits that didn't go as planned. Maybe something was slightly out of tune or the balance was dodgy. The rhythm didn't feel secure. Also, take notes on the dynamics and particularly the balance as well because through a video we often lose dynamics. We lose the louds and the softs and the crescendos and the beautiful phrasing. Funnily enough, chances are, if they're lost in the video they're possibly lost on performance as well. So please overemphasize your dynamics because you want the expression to be noticed as part of creating beautiful music.

Since you've just videoed your performance, it'd be lovely if you sent that around to friends and family, for them to have a look at. I have a beautiful story at my school. Since we had to video our term one performances because of COVID. Some of the kids sent it around to grandparents in particular. And one of my piano students said a week later, "A box of new clothes arrived in the mail." Their grandparents were so delighted to see them. Firstly, see their faces and their music on video. But secondly, just to have that contact that during this COVID environment's a little bit harder to come by. So, you never know. It's performance day! All that hard work, all that time and energy, and effort, and now it's going to pay off beautifully for you.

Couple of bits of advice. Walk in with confidence. "If you happen to make a mistake, just make sure that your very next note is the most beautiful note and the next phrase is the most beautiful phrase in the world." That's advice from a very famous flute player from Ireland called James Galway. I dare say everybody makes mistakes and it doesn't spoil a performance. You just need to keep going. Hydration, it's so easy to forget to drink, but it's so, so, so important for musicians. Sometimes when you get nervous, you find you get a dry throat or your tongue feels a bit funny or maybe your throat feels a little bit tight and just a sip of water in between each piece of music makes the world of difference. So please stay hydrated, preferably with water. Speaking of which caffeine is actually quite bad for musicians and performance people in general. It can augment some of our nervous reactions. So if you can avoid high levels of caffeine, that includes energy drinks, coffee, coke, tea, and also avoid high levels of sugar. You can have whatever treats suit you after your performance, but please, please look after your bodies as best as you can with good food and drink beforehand.

Sleeping, eating, and rest is so important. I've always said the best preparation for an exam or a performance is a good night's sleep. No all-nighters before you perform. You need to have 100% of your focus and your energy and your stamina working for you on performance day. So get a good night's sleep beforehand. If it's a late afternoon exam if you can find time for a nanny nap in the middle of the day, go for it. A little bit harder when you've got a full day of school or there's other people around. Sleeping, eating well, a few people don't like to eat just before a performance, but the majority of us, we actually need to have a decent meal say at least have a decent breakfast. And then if you choose to eat only snacks up until your performance and then have a good meal afterwards. So sleeping, eating, and rest so, so important.

About 10 minutes before your performance time, please make sure you've tuned really, really well. If you're a reed player, you'll need a few spare reeds lined up. Have a cup of water they're ready obviously. Tune-up before the performance tune-up really well. Whether you use an app on your phone or whether you use your ear and a piano, you'll have to tune up to the actual piano. And that's a bit of a trick on Higher School Certificate performance day when the piano is being used. So practice tuning to an app I suggest. And then when you walk into the exam tune to the actual piano. I would recommend tuning between each piece as well. But warming up at the start of the day. And then we'll meet up again at lunchtime. If it's an afternoon performance, couple of warmups, great idea. Once you've tuned and warmed up, you'll need to find a way to keep your instrument warm. For the half an hour or so before you'll be doing your tuning. You'll be doing your warmup. You'll be finding ways to rest and relax. Flute players can hold the head of the flute, the joint to help keep it warm. Singers can wear scarves, bass players hold your mouth mouthpiece all these ways to keep the instrument as warm as possible.

Smile as you leave the performance. There's a lot to celebrate. It's been nine to 12 months of really consistent hard work for you guys. And you deserve to enjoy the performance. Even if you didn't particularly enjoy the experience at the time it's a good idea to pretend that you did. So please smile at the examiners. Have strong body language as you walk out the door and at least pretend to be happy and you might even convince yourself. In fact, I have a good friend who at Uni was about the average performer, worked really, really hard, was a perfectionist, loved performing, got average marks. And one day she decided from here on, at the end of my performances, I'm going to pretend to be happy. I'm going to smile. I'm going to have strong body language as I walk out. And when people say, how did you go? I'm going to say, "Yeah, I did a fabulous job. "I'm really, really pleased." And from that day onwards, her marks improved massively from an average student to a high distinction student. It's worth trying.

Just a few more tips. Practicing in front of the mirror is pretty awkward when you start doing it. But just as in music and how you use your body language, even how you move your head and make small adjustments, it's really important to the nonverbal communication or non-musical communication. That's part of the performance. Particularly if you're a singer, you need to consider what words you emphasize with your hands, how you change colour as you perform to help follow the story and the music, and to change the mood. And these things are highlighted when you're standing in front of a mirror. You'll be surprised at what kind of gestures you can get away with. It actually enhances your performance. You might also be surprised that you've earnt yourself some bad habits that maybe you rock from side to side for the whole performance, not so cool. So please try practicing in front of a mirror if you can.

A tip I picked up from a flute teacher in Brisbane is that often when we get nervous, we have a flight or fight response. And some of the body reactions we have to that we can sweat or our heart rate elevates or we are short of breath. So his suggestion is replicate those symptoms by sprinting for a hundred metres or running full flights of stairs. So your body goes into that short fight or flight mode, then grab your instrument or your voice and sing through your repertoire. So that way, no matter what conditions you find yourself in, you've practiced performing under those conditions and you'll be far more comfortable performing at your best. And we certainly had some changes from NESA as far as how many people can be in the room. How many accompanists, whether we could use pre-recorded tracks or not. There are some changes in 2020. And there still may yet be some changes.

So I come back to my very first point, which was, yes, please prepare, but also stay flexible. One thing you can do is ask either your accompanist or any other piano player that you know, you can even look something up on Google. There's plenty of underemployed musicians at the moment during COVID that don't have gigs and they've got lots of time on their hands. So people are very, very happy for not a lot of money to record your piano accompaniments for you. Practice with those. And that way you at least know the compliment really, really, really well. But also if at the end of the day, something awful happens and your accompanist can't come, you've actually practiced recording with pre-recorded accompaniment. So live is always best in my opinion, live music, nothing beats it. But for an Higher School Certificate performance life goes on. You need to find a way to make it work and having a pre-recorded accompaniment just might help you out.

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