

Music Performance Anxiety Therapies: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) is a widespread epidemic in the world of instrumental and vocal performance. While traditional music education provides a solid training in terms of technical and interpretive execution, attention is rarely given to managing the very symptoms that may challenge one's ability to perform at optimum level. As both collegiate study in music performance and the process of acquiring employment as a performer often require the presentation of skill in an evaluative setting, it is imperative that more light be shed on the management of music performance anxiety. Equipping the next generation of musicians with the skills to handle fear, adrenaline, tension, and other threats to their concentration in demanding situations may not only improve the quality of the performing arts henceforward, but also the success and satisfaction of those onstage.

This poster highlights findings from an extensive assessment of the current literature and research on the methods by which Music Performance Anxiety has been and is currently being treated among amateur musicians, conservatory students, and professional instrumentalists. Cognitive-Behavioral therapies including Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy, Meditation, Electromyographic Biofeedback, Progressive Muscle Relaxation, and Alexander Technique, Expressive Art Therapies such as Guide Imagery and Music Therapy, as well as Exposure Therapies, and pharmacological treatments will be discussed, as well as implications for future research and current music educators.

The Role of Evaluative Performances in Defining and Developing Musical Talent

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Abstract

Evaluative performances, such as festivals, competitions, and conservatory examinations, are a frequent fixture of formal music education. Many teachers, parents, and students believe that the rigorous curriculum expectations and expert adjudication provide an authoritative assessment of musical ability; however, the definition of musical talented that is perpetuated through evaluative performances is narrow and includes many factors which are not directly related to musical skill. This poster examines the role of evaluative performances in influencing which students are considered musically talented and how musical talent is developed. The findings are based on a study involving current and former piano students who were interviewed about their experiences participating in evaluative performances. The quality of student experiences with evaluative performances is affected by several factors, including the student's musical preferences, work habits, motivational orientation, ability to cope with performance anxiety, and relationships with parents and teachers. When students' characteristics align with the demands of the evaluation, they are likely to be successful and to have a strong sense of self-efficacy that propels them toward future learning and participation in evaluative performances. If any one of these factors is absent for a particular student, he or she is likely to have negative views about participation in evaluative performances. Because students' festival and examination achievement is so often taken as an indication of musical talent, students who are unsuccessful or who do not want to participate in these evaluations are in danger of being viewed as lacking in musical ability and of having their musical development neglected as a result. It is important to examine the construct of musical talent

that is fostered through evaluative performances so that students whose abilities lie outside of the required curriculum can be offered opportunities to pursue their full musical potential.

“Creating Safe Spaces for Music Learning”

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Abstract

A vast amount of educational research has addressed issues of motivation, providing teachers with numerous strategies for encouraging students to engage and persist in learning activities. Before music educators consider using such strategies, however, it may be necessary to ensure that students feel safe enough to take musical risks and freely express themselves. For example, some evidence suggests that student expressiveness may be hindered in highly critical, socially comparative musical environments, especially in cases where students enter the environment with a relatively low sense of self-efficacy.

Drawing upon research literature in motivation, creativity, and counseling psychology, this poster provides a theoretical model for fostering emotionally safe learning environments that instill music students with a positive sense of self-belief, freedom, and purpose. Our inquiry is framed by four questions:

1. What kind of learning environments foster intrinsic motivation and musical engagement?
2. In what ways are music students influenced by critical, demeaning, or fear-based attempts at motivation?
3. How do competitive structures affect student creativity and self-expression?
4. What impact do elitist notions of talent have on perceptions of music as an accessible, learnable skill?

This literature review organizes past research findings according to the above four themes, in order to offer implications for music educators in creating effective learning environments. Recommendations include (a) specific teacher attitudes and behaviors that nurture a sense of trust and respect, thereby encouraging experimentation, risk-taking, and self-expression; and (b) music teaching strategies that foster purpose-driven student commitment and musical mastery toward self-actualization.