

Performance Anxiety (Stage Fright)

Performance

per·for·mance

\pə(r)-'fɔr-mən(t)s\

1 a : the execution of an action

b : something accomplished : deed, feat

2 : the fulfillment of a claim, promise, or request : implementation

3 a : the action of representing a character in a play

b : a public presentation or exhibition <a benefit performance >

4 a : the ability to perform : efficiency

b : the manner in which a mechanism performs <engine performance >

5 : the manner of reacting to stimuli : behavior

6 : the linguistic behavior of an individual : parole; also : the ability to speak a certain language — compare competence 3

Anxiety

anx·i·ety

\æŋ-'zi-ə-tē\

1 a : painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind usually over an impending or anticipated ill

b : fearful concern or interest

c : a cause of anxiety

2 : an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physiological signs (as sweating, tension, and increased pulse), by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it

Performance Anxiety and stage fright are the same things and no they are not.

Performance Anxiety is the group and Stage Fright is the sub of that group. Basically it is the fear of doing something in front of a group. We all got it pretty much when asked to stand before the class and read page 4 of Fun With Dick and Jane.

As a group musicians, singers, and theatrical performers we have PA to a certain point.

There is always a bit of anticipation when we take the stage. We start doing that mental check list:

Am I in tune?

Is my fly zipped?

Did I iron my slacks and did I leave the iron on?

Is he or she here?

Do I have picks?
Where is my capo?

Seamus Kennedy is a longtime member of the Irish Folk music community. He performs around the world at festivals, fund raisers and saloons. He has a great show and is very open to conversation but be prepared to duck. He pokes fun as well as he picks a guitar.

Seamus, I am doing a workshop on performance anxiety. Have you ever dealt with stage fright? Have you any advice I can offer to the workshop? I'd appreciate it.

Don, I can honestly say I've never had stage fright or been nervous before a show. I just go out and do my job. Sorry I can't be of more help.

Actually that is a help. Thanks Seamus.

Some people just don't get it ever. In this case Seamus performs so much that the shows may blend into one long show and he just keeps going.

Andy Cohen, Blues and folk performer is of a similar mind

I have never really experienced it beyond mild butterflies. The coping mechanism I use is to be prepared to wing it no matter what happens. If you have confidence in your ability on the instrument, your ability as an entertainer, and you know within some variation what you're going to say between numbers, how to deal with a broken string in front of the crowd, how to make a joke out of your inevitable clams, you shouldn't have any trouble. Going onstage before you're ready will sure give you the willies, though!

Andy mentioned with out saying so outright is be prepared. Know your song before you start singing.

Woodshedding is something you can't do too much of if you plan to be a performer.

Felicia Dale, the Dale half of Pint and Dale is a singer, fiddler, and hurdygurdy player on the West Coast. She performs a lot of maritime folk music at Festivals, Libraries, and Coffee Houses.

Felicia, I am doing a work shop presentation on coping with performance anxiety. Have you had trouble with stage fright ever? Any advice?

11/15/2015 9:51pm

Hi- yes, I've had problems over the years with stage fright and fear of singing or playing particular instruments or particular songs/tunes. I've dealt with this mostly with what are called "energy" techniques. Specifically Emotional Freeing Technique, Tapas Acupressure Technique, Eye Motion Desensitization and Reprocessing and Reiki. All of these have helped me tremendously. I would not be playing fiddle at all, for example, without them. I used to need beta blockers for some higher pressure gigs but haven't needed them for years because of using these techniques. I use Reiki and EFT nearly every day for one reason or another or just to keep myself tuned up. I recommend all these techniques to everyone no matter what problems a person is facing.

Thanks Felicia, I appreciate your time very much.

Felicia brings up without saying that health is a big concern when dealing with PA. How am I feeling? Did I take my meds? Will I have an Insulin Shock between sets? Is my blood pressure going to spike on me? Should I be singing with this cold? How sick is too sick to play?

Barbara Shaw and her husband are a part a Blue Grass Band from Connecticut. They tour a good bit along the East Coast.

Barbara:

I used to get it but not any more. What I generally do is put very easy songs at the beginning of the set and plan what I'm going to say about the first one or two, to work off the stage fright with easier pieces. Then when things calm down and the audience (hopefully) starts to respond, I become more spontaneous. Another trick is to circulate among the audience if possible before the set, so you make a few friends and feel more comfortable with a few faces out there. Hope that gives you something. Good luck! Sounds like it will be a good workshop. ~Barbara P.S. I resisted the temptation to comment about "stage fright in December" which is the worst kind...

Barbara employs a technique or two that I like to use. Do the same song or something so easy that you can do it in your sleep. The stress free song allows you to calm down. It helps to have a friend in the audience. If you are new to the venue make an acquaintance and perform to them until you are able to move your eyes about the room. Smile back at the smiling face

Captain Kendall Morse is a story teller, Folk Singer, and National Treasure. Kendall performed in and around New England for years. The bulk of his work was singing songs and telling stories about the unique characters in his part of Coastal Maine.

I had it big time when I first started performing in public. I was so nervous, my shoes wouldn't stay tied. My heart would pound hard enough so my shirt would pulse visibly. I really thought I could have a stroke, so, why was I doing this?

Suddenly, an awakening. A voice from the blue, if you will, It said, "Relax. what you are doing was given to you not to claim as your property, but to pass on top others for their enjoyment. You are not responsible for this, so, relax and enjoy making others happy they came to see you.

I am not a bit religious, but this struck a note of truth, and, it was like a great weight was lifted from my back, and I haven't had stage fright since. That was 40 years ago. It also helps to think that there are no enemies in that audience. If they don't like what I'm doing, they will leave. The ones who stay are my friends. I wish I could be there to see how it goes for you.

A few years ago Kendall was diagnosed with throat cancer. He lost the use of his vocal chords. With speech therapy and force of will he has learned after a fashion to speak again. So now with his wife to do the singing while tells the stories he is back doing as many jobs as he feels he can.

There are many performers out there who have dealt with debilitating PA and continue to perform. Read Carly Simon's autobiography for a glimpse at her challenges. John Gorka has made a stage persona out of Performance Anxiety and you have to ask yourself does he have PA or is he putting us all on. Perhaps not totally about PA but an interesting performance problem was had by Jackson C. Frank. Frank was a guitarist and songwriter that was discovered by Paul Simon and they became good friends for a time. Simon and Garfunkel, John Mayer, and Wizz Jones covered at least one of Frank's songs, Blues Runs The Game. Simon produced Franks album recordings and it was during the recording session that Frank needed to play behind screens because he could stand to have Paul Simon, Al Stewart, and the engineers looking at him while he played. Frank was later on to be diagnosed with Schizophrenia.

I have a fair amount of Performance Anxiety when I play. I utilize much of what Barb Shaw suggests.

I add to her comments by saying I try to always be rested before I leave the door. I rarely eat before I play and I do a small loosening up ritual.

When I am on my own the first song I play is almost always an accapela song called The Blue Collar Holler. Then I will go to a simple Cowboy song and by then I am good to go

for the rest of the performance. I break up my performance with Poems, Stories, and songs to give my hands a rest but more importantly to learn the crowd. Finding who likes what has me facing a willing ear for the stories, a poetry fan for the poems, and music lover for the singing and playing.

Do a check list before you leave the door. I once meet a pipe master leaving the Scottish games to run home to Phoenix because he left his pipe bag in the kitchen. Mike Katz, the piper with The Battlefield Band left his pipes NYC and paid for a cab ride to get them to The Night Eagle in Oxford NY for a performance.

My list is:

Guitar,

Banjo,

Straps,

Spare strings for each,

Capos for each.

Harmonicas

Gig Bag.

PA System if I need it.