

Stage Fright

How to conquer it!



Performance Anxiety . . .

Jitters, Anxiety, Dry Mouth, Shaking, Sweating, Blushing, Digestive Disturbance, Adrenaline, Fight or Flight Syndrome

Sounds fun doesn't it? Even though our Spring Recital on May 5th is a long time away, I want to take the time to open this discussion with you while the topic is fresh on my mind. I couldn't help but notice that quite a few of my students were profoundly affected by stage fright during our Fall Recital. It is my goal to help each of you develop a strategy for coping with performance anxiety so that you will be more comfortable on stage and can present yourself as the shining star you truly are.

After reading through the laundry list of disquieting anxious symptoms, the first question you may ask is, "Why put myself or my child through this?" The answer is simple. Unburdening yourself from unnecessary fear is a prerequisite for reaching your fullest potential. This is a valuable *life lesson*, interpreted through piano. For this reason, I believe that every student should have the

opportunity to perform in recitals, regardless of their natural musical ability or current skill level. That is the reason I encourage my youngest students to participate in performances, even if all they can manage is walking up to the piano, attempting to play, and bowing politely. These are all starting places, springboards if you will.

The mistake I most often see when training students for performance is the underestimation of the level of mastery required to be truly prepared. Being able to get through your piece fairly well in your lesson is altogether different from putting it to the test in front of an audience. In your lesson you are relaxed. On stage, you will most likely not be. There will be countless audience distractions, not to mention the biggest distraction of all, the performer's roving mind. When faced with a new or infrequent experience, it's only natural for the brain to become overactive in an attempt to navigate it.

The fact is, mistakes in performance are likely. Of course, we all desire to play flawlessly, and sometimes we even manage it. However, it is unrealistic and dangerous to *expect* perfection. A gifted performer does



NOT necessarily always play perfectly, rather, they know how to recover and maintain composure in the face of mistakes! We are *imperfect human beings*, elevating ourselves through our art. When I discuss the possibility of performance mistakes with a training student, I'm not foreshadowing failure, I'm equipping them to do their very best under any circumstance. I liken this to knowing where the oxygen masks and emergency exits are on a plane. When you have a back-up plan in place, then the answer to the question, "What happens if I mess up?," is less of a distraction for the roving mind. This insurance frees you to focus on the task at hand.

If underestimating the amount of practice required to prepare for performance is a

My philosophy

- Every student shall be included in performances.
- Every student will be encouraged to reach their fullest potential, beginning at their own unique starting place, wherever that may be.
- Every student has the right to be educated in an uplifting way that develops their self-esteem rather than destroying it.
- Every student is a work in progress as is our studio as a whole.

Stage Fright continued . . .

significant part of the problem then it *must* be addressed. In piano studios, you will find a wide variety of approaches to this universal dilemma. "Old school intimidation" is a common and prevalent tactic. Teachers may badger students, saddle them with guilt, degrade them for making mistakes, whatever it takes to threaten the student into working harder for them. I'm here to assure you that you will never *ever* get this counterintuitive approach from me. While I am definitely endowed with a hefty will and obsessive work ethic, I do not possess an inner bully.

The question then becomes, what to do with the lackluster student who isn't quite putting in enough effort. Parents, I need your help here. I am only one part of the three-part equation that will create a successful learning environment. Teacher + Student + Parent = Success! I only see students for a small amount of time each week. If there is an imbalance in preparation at home, there is only so much I can accomplish in the lesson, despite my own ferocious commitment level. Studio parents need to make regular piano practice part of your child's homework. Practicing five times a week is a great all-around goal; more is better.

When a performance is near, I need for you to check your child's progress on their piece regularly, help them find ways to test it out in front of a practice audience, and purposefully try to distract them while playing to see if they can remain focussed. I also need for you to inform me if your child is struggling with performance anxiety.

This can be tricky business. Very young children are often completely uninhibited. If a youngster is not yet concerned about how others perceive them, performance may come naturally. Some even seem to love the limelight. These little firecrackers are rarely concerned with quality control, however. They learn early that they can garner positive attention based singularly on their cuteness. In this instance, we have to be very careful not to implant fear in their minds. Most adults seem to find



public performance/speaking challenging themselves. Therefore, it's imperative that we don't accidentally transfer our own fears to our children. They're clever little things. They can read us by the tone of our voice. Scary, isn't it?

As children mature, peer approval becomes a critical goal. Obviously, some children are more susceptible to this need than others. The onset of stage fright can be sudden and unpredictable. My own daughter caught me completely off guard by having a first meltdown moments before a recital a couple of years ago. Previously, she showed no signs of apprehension. Engrossed in my own preparations, I missed a valuable clue. She had started to practice obsessively the night before. Since she was already well prepared, this should have set off a few alarm bells. However, instead of recognizing her mounting fear, I was proud of her for taking her responsibility seriously. Lesson learned! When you start to see little signs of approaching fear, it's time to inform me so that we can strategize and talk to your child about how they are feeling.

Sometimes, nagging performance anxiety can skyrocket into a really big problem. Here's where the monumental symptoms start to set in--trembling, dry mouth, sweating, the works. At this point, a student is at risk of fight or flight syndrome. They will make a decision to face their fears or flee. My goal is to prepare them to face it, by whatever means possible, so that they can eliminate/reduce the paralyzing fear.

You may wonder where my insight comes from. Here's a bombshell for you. I often have terrible stage fright and perform regularly in spite of it. I was forced to come to grips with it in order to get myself through grueling degrees in Piano Performance. Through trial and error, I developed a counterattack that allows me to focus exclusively on my music during performance.

This is what works for me:

1. Prepare as much as I possibly can, and

then prepare a little bit more.

2. Have a back-up plan for recovering from mistakes.
3. Practice performing for a casual audience.
4. Perform as frequently as possible.
5. Use positive self-talk in the moment of performance. *I remind myself that I have done everything in my power to prepare and that now is the time to enjoy the fruits of my labor. Mistakes do not equate disaster or failure. Even though my heart is beating wildly, I can still play as well as ever, and I will be so proud of myself afterwards for rising to the occasion. Ready! Set! Go!*

"It takes a village to raise a child!" I love that phrase and all it implies. Teachers have this intrinsic value system at their core. We know that the success of a child's education is heavily impacted by the collective resources of the community in which they are being reared, not only by what happens at home in isolation. Teachers step up in service to our community by nurturing all of our children.

In the spirit of collective success, I want to leave you with some food for thought. Parents, right in the palm of your hands you hold some awesome transformative power. At the end of a performance, children *expect* their parents to rave about them and celebrate their success. They know they have your unconditional love. For that reason, maturing children often place a higher value on the affirmation of acquaintances and strangers. Rather than simply packing up your child and leaving as quickly as possible, consider taking the time after a recital to select a child who does not belong to you and encourage them with positive supporting words. You may very well be giving their self-esteem a miraculous boost. I challenge you to select more than one child. Certainly, congratulate the performer who impressed you, but also seek out the child who struggled. To this child you can say:

"I'm so impressed that you went up to the stage and played. Performing will get easier each time you try it. I hear some real improvement in your playing. Keep up the great work. I enjoyed hearing you. I look forward to hearing you next time. That was such a cute piece."

The possibilities for encouragement are endless. From personal experience, there is nothing more disheartening than toiling over performance preparation and then walking away feeling as if your efforts were unnoticed and unappreciated. This is doubly true for a child who is attempting to face some real fears. You can make a huge difference. It does take a village!

Representing
the gold
standard in
piano education,
not the status quo.

Fall Practice Averages

The results are in. Our Spring Practice Trophies will be the collective average of the Fall, Winter, and Spring Quarters. Students who maintain an average of five practices a week will earn a third place trophy. An average of six will result in a second place trophy and seven will garner the

coveted first place trophy. Remember that you must record your practice sessions in your assignment book in order to receive credit for them. Please check the list below to see how your practice average is adding up. If your name is not on the list, then it's time to step up the practicing and be more diligent about keeping track.

FIRST PLACE: Anabel Byars, Katy Chen, Hollie Hardin, Hannah Hardin, Avery Kononchek, Izabella Kulczycka, Eli Mrug, and Olivia Odom

SECOND PLACE: Sarah Buchanan, Ben Goble, Sarah Mather, Kennedy McClure, and Will Womack

THIRD PLACE: Emily Browning, Walker Phillips, Lillie Stephens, and Madison Walker

HOLIDAY HITS GROUP CLASS: DECEMBER 15, 10:00 TO 11:00 A.M. PLEASE RSVP

We will be sharing our Christmas carols, singing, and enjoying some party food. Mercifully, Tina Simonton has helped me out by setting up a sign-up sheet on Sign Up Genius, for party contributions. Please RSVP to me that you are coming so I know how many to prepare for. If you can contribute something to the party, please sign up at the Sign Up Genius Web Site. I'll include the link with this newsletter. Please do keep it simple. We don't have to have everything on the list. Anything you can contribute will be such a big help. We usually have ten or fifteen students in attendance. I'll be able to narrow down the number after I receive the RSVPs. This is the perfect time to practice performing in a fun, low-pressure situation. Hint! Hint!



Winter Quarter Schedule:

November 26 - 30: Winter Quarter Lessons Begin.

December 1 - 7: Tuition Installment #1 Due.

December 15: Holiday Group Class. 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. Please RSVP.

December 24 - January 4: **Winter Break. No Lessons.**

January 26: Group Class. 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. Please RSVP.

January 7 - 11: Tuition Installment #2 Due.

February 1 - 7: Tuition Installment #3 Due.

February 11 - 15: Last Week of Winter Quarter Lessons.

February 18 - 22: **Winter Flex Week. No Lessons.**

February 25 - March 1: Winter Quarter Make-Up Week.