Performance Anxiety or Performance Passion?

Nerves, clammy hands, rapid heart, shallow breathing, disappointment or Exercise, technique, deep breathing, visualisation, 3XPs, achievement

Most musicians, whether professional or amateur, will admit that performing creates an adrenaline rush. How the effects of this feeling are managed is crucial to a successful performance. The performance may also be in the context of an exam, audition or even possibly, the weekly lesson! As there is a plethora of information and remedies available, the performer should develop his or her individual control measures or plan. The following ideas are presented as a framework on which to build the plan.

Before the 'big' date, allay nerves and clammy hands by exercising, especially the legs in walking regularly. Daily technical exercise provides endurance and dexterity.

Eating a balanced diet with protein, carbs and veggies, plus adequate sleep can deliver energy and enhance the physical well-being.

Rapid heart and shallow breathing may be controlled with deep breathing exercises. Practising yoga and meditation can instil an aura of calm and logical thinking.

Playing the programme as often as possible for an audience comprising family, friends or peers allows the plan to be utilised before the actual performance. Visualisation of the event, at the actual venue, is as helpful as a practice session. Consciously envisaging the beginning, middle and the end will engage control and avoid disappointment. Mature age students may require single focus, rather than multi-focus lens to read music.

Eating well at least six hours beforehand, or if time does not permit this, a small meal, on the day eliminates gastric disturbances. Avoiding stimulants like tea and coffee, alcohol or drugs shows good judgement. Walking, deep breathing and drinking warm water allay unwanted feelings. Passive exercises that engage the left and right brain by crossing opposite hands to legs give another focus. Health food shops have a product available called Rescue Remedy which comes highly recommended.

At the performance, engaging the warm-up ritual of maintaining hydration and getting into that prepared 'visual zone' gives shape to the plan. Finally, remembering the three Ps should produce an achievement:

- PITCH = tone; PACE = tempo; PAUSE = effect
  (wait in between pieces/sections whilst preparing for the next)

Accept that all performances create a heightened feeling. Work on preparing a plan that suits the individual.

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Ensemble and Band Opportunity

In addition to the traditional AMEB syllabi, Ensemble Performance syllabi are available for Woodwind, Strings, Percussion, Brass and Mixed Ensembles.

Syllabus content is not published in the AMEB Manual of Syllabuses, but instead is downloadable from the Federal AMEB website at: http://www.ameb.edu.au/site/index.cfm?display=121863

Like all AMEB syllabi, the Performance syllabi are presented in 3 levels:
- Level 1 – Beginning (First to Fourth Grades)
- Level 2 – Developing (Fifth to Eighth Grades)
- Level 3 – Advanced Development (A Mus A & L Mus A)

The works identified for each Grade in the Ensemble syllabi are a guide only – any works of a suitable standard may be presented for examination, and this includes candidates’ own compositions. The time limit for each Grade determines the number of works presented.

Level 1 (grades 1–4) Syllabi could be of particular interest to school ensembles ranging in size from duos to larger ensembles of mixed instruments.

At Level 1:
- there must be a minimum of 2 players in each ensemble
- there must be at least 1 person per part
- there must be a minimum of 2 written parts
- there is no upper limit on the number of players in an ensemble
- At Level 1 a conductor may be used. No conductor may be used at Level 2 and 3 performances. The Conductor is an extra non-assessed person.

Works from widely used tutor books 'Best in Class', 'Standard of Excellence' and 'Essential Elements' are amongst those listed in the syllabi for Level 1 (Grades 1–4) in Percussion, Mixed Ensemble, Brass & Woodwind.

Each subject focuses on works for instruments in the specified family but works presented under each subject may include other instruments such as Piano, Guitar, Harp or Percussion.

Ensemble syllabi offer a good support for those working with larger numbers of students. They are a valuable opportunity to stimulate an ensemble or band with formal, professional feedback.

Call the AMEB office on 8303 8088 to discuss your ensemble or band assessment needs.

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