

Stress-Free Playing:

*Become a more fearless,
confident, resilient performer*

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Valerie Harris, instructor



Pre-performance Routine

Centering:

- Identify a focal point
- Form a clear intention
- Breathe mindfully
- Release all tension
- Center
- Process cue

Mental Quiet

- Practice mindfulness: be in the moment!
- Create a “still pond” in your mind
- Eliminate monkey mind
- Breathe deeply
- Practice with relaxation:
Relax, breathe deeply, run it mentally, run it physically, be aware and mindful of sensations, let it go!

Activation Strategies

Achieve YOUR Individual Zone of
Optimal Functioning

Confidence & Trust

Growth Mindset: focus on success, learn from mistakes. YOU can achieve!

Deliberate Practice: practice with Intention

- Define a goal
- Envision result
- Mentally perform
- Physically perform
- Evaluate result
- Note successes
- Identify any problems
- Identify cause
- Determine a strategy
- Test
- Repeat process until satisfied

Develop a more balanced perspective.

Power of Positivity: Reframe your thinking

After every practice:

- Write down 1 thing that went well
- Write down 1 thing that improved
- Write down 1 instance of great effort.
- **Silence the inner critic**
 - Note things without judgment
 - Create a mental brag book
 - Would you say that to a friend?
 - Say this, not that
 - Facts vs. opinion – let go of the inner heckler
- **Trust Yourself and your preparation**
- **Prepare well in advance and for all situations**



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Focus and Flow

- Fixed attentional capacity; use it wisely
- Attentional direction: internal / external
- Attentional width: broad / narrow
- If we focus intently on the most important aspects, we will not have enough processing power to worry

Singing Brain

- Lead with your inner voice
- Hear the sound as you play
- Listen to yourself without analysis

Eliminate Monkey Mind

- Play as long as you can stay focused
- When mind wanders, gently bring it back

Adversity Training

- Practice with distractions
- Practice with adverse conditions
- Practice in an unfamiliar place
- Audio/visual recordings
- Gradually increase stakes: start with low stress simulation, then build up

Attention Scripting Strategy

- Envision the whole performance including arrival, waiting, setup, etc.
- Practice performing exactly how you want the whole performance to go (envision, then physically perform) including arrival, waiting, setup, what you'll think while waiting, putting your music up, sitting at the organ, playing

Attentional Control Training

- Play as long as you can
- When mind wanders, stop and note
- Try again
- See if you can go longer each time

Mental Resilience

Problem with mistakes

- Diverts attention
- Physical response
- Snowball effect

Practice a new response:

Rapid Recovery Reflex

- Let it go! Don't judge!
- Relax
- Recovery cue
- Focus on NOW
- Don't overcompensate
- Singing Brain

Mental protection

- attentional force field
- circle of success

Express your inner music!

- Speak through your instrument
- Tell a story
- Get into the moment
- Shape the phrases, let the music breathe
- Create beauty – express emotion
- Engage your congregation in a richer, more meaningful worship experience!

Resources:

Performance anxiety blog, free email newsletters and “Beyond Practicing course”: <https://www.bulletproofmusician.com>

Mindfulness: <https://www.blog.oup.com/2019/06/five-attitudes-mindfulness-performing-musician>

Mindset: Dweck, Carol S. *Mindset : the New Psychology of Success* 1st ed. New York: Random House, n.d.

Self-acceptance: <http://consciouslifestylemag.com/self-acceptance-self-judgment>

Silencing the Inner Critic: Green, Barry., and W. Timothy. Gallwey. *The Inner Game of Music* 1st ed. Garden City, N.Y: Anchor Press/Doubleday, n.d.

Trust: Westney, William. *The Perfect Wrong Note : Learning to Trust Your Musical Self*. Pompton Plains, N.J: Amadeus Press, n.d.

https://www.ted.com/talks/sian_leah_beilock_why_we_choke_under_pressure_and_how_to_avoid_it

<https://positivepsychology.com/mihaly-csikszentmihalyi-father-of-flow/>