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Application of Zen Techniques to Overcome Performance Anxiety

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF MUSIC

APPLICATION OF ZEN TECHNIQUES TO OVERCOME

PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

By

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ABSTRACT

Performance anxiety is a common problem among performing musicians. This treatise looks at physical, mental and behavioral approaches for treating music performance anxiety in music students and professional musicians. Its goal is to describe the causes and effects of anxiety as experienced by performing musicians and to describe strategies for dealing with this problem as described in the literature. I propose the use of techniques from the practice of Zen to address these issues. Zen philosophy and a Zen approach are compatible with many techniques already put forward for overcoming music performance anxiety. Zen serves to unite, extend and actualize various techniques into a useful and practical group of methods for improving musicians' relationship to their performance. As a pianist, I am experienced in using Zen techniques for overcoming my performance anxiety.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background and Significance of the Project

During my career as a pianist, almost every musician I have asked has said they experience physical and emotional tension on stage. Don Greene, in his book *Performance Success*, says performance anxiety is the most common problem that afflicts musicians.¹ Many performers feel anxiety and need ways of dealing with it.

Both professional performers and music majors face stress in such events as recitals, juries, auditions, and competitions. Stress is a normal human condition, a part of the functioning of our bodies and minds, according to Carole Bodger.² This treatise reviews various techniques people use to overcome performance anxiety. These techniques improve performance in front of an audience, and help bring back control and confidence on stage. The use of Zen methods will be put forward as a method of overcoming anxiety and developing self-confidence.

My research looks at physical, mental and behavioral approaches for treating music performance anxiety in music students and professional musicians. Key words in my search strategy for this review began with *music*, *musicians* and *performance anxiety*. Alternative key words such as *stage fright* were also included. A set of key words was used to search for specific treatment types including *cognitive therapy*, *cognitive restructuring*, *self-instruction*, *behavior therapy*, *muscle relaxation*, *breathing*, *meditation*, *Feldenkrais Method*, *Alexander Technique*, and *hypnotherapy*.

Purpose

The purpose of this treatise is to describe the causes and effects of anxiety as experienced by performing musicians; to describe strategies for dealing with this problem as described in the literature; and to propose the use of techniques from the practice of Zen to address these issues. My contention is that Zen philosophy and a Zen approach to studying and playing the piano can

¹ Don Greene, *Performance Success: Performing Your Best under Pressure* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 15-22.

² Carole Bodger, *Smart Guide to Relieving Stress* (New York: Wiley, 1999), 9.

improve pianists' relationships to their performances. According to Dorita Berger, “. . . with Zen, the pianist and the act of playing will become one.”³ The musician’s performance creates an “expression of consonance.”⁴ The fusion of the mental and physical experience makes uninterrupted concentration possible, which I believe is the key to avoiding anxiety.

Survey of Literature

Many books and articles address the mental and physiological symptoms of anxiety in performing artists. Paul Lehrer presents a number of self-reported manifestations of performance anxiety. Various kinds of anxiety can be treated by a specific kind of intervention. For example, special training in musical analysis tended to decrease the number of errors a performer made during a performance.⁵ David Barlow and Michelle Craske describe three systems affected by anxiety: the mental system (feelings), the physical system (symptoms) and the behavioral system (activities performed or avoided). They propose treatment with re-educative and cognitive therapies. According to Robert Woolfolk and Lehrer, physiological symptoms of stress appear to be effectively and specifically treated by techniques of muscle relaxation, biofeedback, and self-hypnosis.⁶ Charles Brantigan, Thomas Brantigan and Neil Joseph found that beta-blocker drugs may decrease tremors and other physiological accompaniments of stage fright. As a result, this kind of medicine is helpful for strong-anxiety players, though not for weaker-anxiety ones, because it can reduce the level of performer’s excitement in the performance.⁷ Lehrer says that certain cognitive factors can create anxiety in the performer’s life. If a performer demands an impossible level of perfection and cares too much about other people’s judgments, these problems raise the stakes too high and cause a low probability of performing successfully.⁸

³ Dorita Berger, *Toward the Zen of Performance: Music Improvisation Therapy for the Development of Self-Confidence in the Performer* (St. Louis, MO: MMB Music, 1999), 28.

⁴ Berger, *Toward the Zen of Performance*, 28.

⁵ Paul Lehrer, “A Review of the Approaches to the Management of Tension and Stage Fright in Music Performance,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 35, no. 3 (1987): 143-153.

⁶ Lehrer, “A Review of the Approaches to the Management of Tension,” 145.

⁷ Charles Brantigan, Thomas Brantigan and Neil Joseph, “The Effect of Beta Blockade on Stage Fright.” *Rocky Mountain Medical Journal* 7 (1979): 227-232.

⁸ Lehrer, “A Review of the Approaches to the Management of Tension,” 147-150.

Donald Hamann and Martha Sobaje found that the longer students have been studying an instrument, the less anxiety they feel in performance. Children who studied for six or more years tended to perform better in high-anxiety situations than in low-anxiety situations. They also explored the idea that consistent practicing is the most powerful method for dealing with performance anxiety.

Don Greene and Barry Green give suggestions for practical ways to improve performance under pressure, using a self-help approach to the issues. Don Greene presents seven skills in his book: determination, energy, perspective, courage, focus, poise, and resilience.⁹ These skills can help performers to reach their full potential despite anxiety during performances, and to regain a feeling of control over their performing situations. Barry Green presents a different approach; his ideas of power of awareness, will, and trust include exercises that can relate directly to making music.¹⁰

Sports and music are often seen as related fields; both are forms of self-expression which require hard work and discipline. Many books on sports coaching talk about the problem of anxiety. One of the earliest books to address this issue is Timothy Gallwey's *The Inner Game of Tennis* which aims to give insights into the mental aspects of playing tennis. He describes two selves: Self One, the 'I,' is giving instruction, and Self Two, 'myself,' is performing the action. One is the teller and the other is the doer. The process of getting the two selves to work together in tennis involves learning skills such as "letting go of judgments, the art of creating images and letting it happen."¹¹ Dan Millman, Joseph Parent, and Terry Orlick share their insights from decades of training world-class athletes, along with their research, observation, intuition, and teaching, and present their particular step-by-step plans for proceeding along a personal path to excellence. Millman and Parent both propose what they call "natural principles" for mental training. They suggest different approaches to reduce the performer's anxiety. Millman's approach includes mental and physical warming-up, meditation exercises, self-awareness, and imagination practice. His discussion of nonresistance and accommodation reminds us to trust everything in the natural process of growth, to turn problems into opportunities and stumbling

⁹ Don Greene, *Fight Your Fear and Win* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), 4-7.

¹⁰ Barry Green, *The Inner Game of Music* (New York: Anchor Press, 1986), 86-87.

¹¹ W. Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), 49.

blocks into stepping-stones.¹² Nonresistance transcends passive acceptance and actively rides the currents and cycle, making use of whatever circumstances arise. Accommodation means the development follows demands, and the progression is from one point to another.¹³ Parent suggests that performers need to rely on unconditional confidence in their abilities, let their instincts take over, and then the feeling of certainty will come.¹⁴ Orlick also discusses seven critical elements of excellence: commitment, focused connection, confidence, positive images, mental readiness, distraction control, and ongoing learning.¹⁵ These elements provide mental keys that can free a performer to achieve better results. According to Andrew Cooper, basketball coach Frank Lindley was the first person to use the phrase “in the zone.”¹⁶ This term is now widely used by athletes, researchers and practitioners, including the physician and mental coach Dr. Michael Lardon, who writes about reaching a state where thoughts and actions are occurring in complete synchronicity; the person is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement and success, in the process of the activity.¹⁷ He explains that he teaches athletes how to access “the zone” not only in sports but in all aspects of their lives by understanding how to “transform desire into will, channel emotions to victory, trust instincts and keep it simple, conquer fear through acceptance, and perform under pressure.”¹⁸

Performers must address use of the body, since many symptoms are physical. Two of the most popular physical disciplines used by performers are Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method. Both have been widely used and recommended for promoting flexible and efficient functioning. Alexander describes his technique as an educational discipline focused on releasing

¹² Dan Millman, *Body Mind Mastery: Creating Success in Sport and Life* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999), 6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6, 60.

¹⁴ Joseph Parent, *Zen Putting: Mastering the Mental Game on the Greens* (New York: Gotham, 2007), 10-11.

¹⁵ Terry Orlick, *In Pursuit of Excellence: How to Win in Sport and Life through Mental Training*, 4th ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2007), 11.

¹⁶ Andrew Cooper, *Playing in the Zone: Exploring the Spiritual Dimensions of Sports* (Boston: Shambhala, 1998), 21.

¹⁷ Michael Lardon, *Finding Your Zone: Ten Core Lessons for Achieving Peak Performance in Sports and Life* (New York: Perigee Trade, 2008), 30.

¹⁸ Lardon, *Finding Your Zone*, 60, 121, 145.

unnecessary muscular tension, and finding freedom of movement that allows choices for body use that are free from unnatural conditioning.¹⁹ Feldenkrais Method works through using exercises called “awareness through movement.” These aim at expanding self-image through movement sequences that bring attention to the parts of the self that are outside of focal awareness. Feldenkrais’s book *Awareness through Movement* claims that by using his method, musicians, actors and artists can extend their abilities and enhance creativity.²⁰ Alexander’s and Feldenkrais’ disciplines address primarily physical aspects of posture, movement, and coordination, and their relationship to thought and awareness. In Vivien Mackie’s book *Just Play Naturally*, she explains the Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method and how these two disciplines help physical functioning and can reduce anxiety.²¹

Principles and practices of Zen will be suggested in this treatise as an effective means of avoiding the negative results of performance anxiety. The author who first brought the teachings of Zen Buddhism to the attention of the Western world was Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. In his book *Studies in Zen*, he proposes three practices of Zen meditation: synchronicity of body and mind, being in the center, and being aware and balanced. He asserts that following Zen principles can lead to better concentration and help find the core mental state for optimum performance.²² *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, also by Suzuki,²³ provides a comprehensive description of Zen and suggests that Zen philosophy can lead to greater self-understanding. Taisen Deshimaru’s more practical *Questions to a Zen Master*²⁴ is not a scholarly work; he explains Zen as something relating to the most basic of everyday actions, even eating and sleeping, presenting this in a question and answer format between himself and his students. Shunryu Suzuki’s book *Zen Mind*,

¹⁹ F. Matthias Alexander, *The Alexander Technique: The Essential Writings of F. Matthias Alexander*, Selected and Introduced by Edward Maisel (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), 12.

²⁰ Moshe Feldenkrais, *Awareness through Movement: Health Exercises for Personal Growth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 25-29.

²¹ Mackie, Vivien. *Just Play Naturally* (Boston: Duende, 2002), 165.

²² Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Studies in Zen* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), 61-84.

²³ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1994).

²⁴ Taisen Deshimaru, *Questions to a Zen Master: Practical and Spiritual Answers from the Great Japanese Master* (New York: Penguin, 1997).

Beginner's Mind emphasizes the desirability of the kind of uncomplicated ways of thinking that are found in beginners in any field and in children.²⁵

Zen Buddhists have long taught that people can achieve enlightenment at any task through a mastery of concentration. Lawrence LeShan, John Novak, John Gibbs, and Guy Wuellner have all written about how to achieve focused concentration in order to help students become more successful. LeShan and Novak both describe Zen meditation; LeShan presents Zen from a more Asian perspective,²⁶ while Novak describes it from a more Western aspect.²⁷ Gibbs draws a parallel between dancing and studying. He says that perfect dancing is achieved when the dancer and the dance become one, and the same is true for students who can be one with studying.²⁸ Wuellner describes two situations encountered by performing musicians: “time-place consonance” and “time-place dissonance.”²⁹ The first kind of situation, which leads to more successful music performance, requires the musician to focus on being in the present time and present place. The second kind of situation is unsuccessful because the musician and the performance are out of synchronicity and only connect with each other occasionally. Berger integrates Zen philosophy and free improvisation therapy, describing a way for musicians to work through their fear to discover their inner and subconscious creative impulses, thereby reducing performance anxieties, making cognitive connections between themselves and the music, and creating a stronger performance.

James Austin, a medical researcher and Zen practitioner, attempts to bridge the gap between scientific studies and Zen meditation. His main discussion is about the connection between meditation and a state of greater consciousness.³⁰

²⁵ Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (New York: John Weatherhill, 1973).

²⁶ Lawrence LeShan, *How to Meditate: A Guide to Self-Discovery* (New York: Bantam, 1974).

²⁷ John Novak, *How to Meditate: A Step-by Step Guide to the Art and Science of Meditation* (CA: Crystal Clarity Publishers, 2003).

²⁸ John J. Gibbs, *Dancing with your Books: The Zen Way of Studying* (New York: Penguin Group, 1990).

²⁹ Guy Wuellner, “Dancing with Your Piano” *American Music Teacher* 42, no. 4 (1993): 30-33.

³⁰ James Austin, *Zen and the Brain: Toward an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 287.

Method

In this treatise I will first outline what is known about performance anxiety and examine the medical facts concerning the symptoms of anxiety, describing it from physical, mental, and behavioral perspectives. Next, I will present physical, medical and psychological treatments used by psychologists and sports coaches, describing existing approaches to dealing with anxiety. Finally, I will describe the practices and principles of Zen meditation, suggesting how Zen ways of thinking and acting can be used to address issues of performance anxiety.

CHAPTER 2

SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENTS OF ANXIETY

One of the most interesting stories of performance anxiety in music concerns the nineteenth-century German pianist Adolf Henselt, who was very shy and terrified of the public, and could not control his fingers when he knew people were listening.³¹ William Mason, who admired Henselt, told this story about his nerves:

Henselt was in the habit of spending a few weeks every summer with a relative who lived in Dresden. I passed through that city, and called on him one morning, and upon going up the staircase to his room, heard the loveliest tones of the piano-forte imaginable. I was so fascinated and sat down at the top of the landing and listened for a long time. After Henselt finished playing, I entered the room and we had a friendly greeting. I told him I really enjoyed his playing just as I came up the stairs, and begged him to play again, but alas! His performance was stiff, inaccurate, and even clumsy, and all of the exquisite poetry and unconsciousness of his style completely disappeared. It was quite impossible to describe the difference; and this was simply the result of diffidence and nervousness, which as it appeared, were entirely out of the player's power to control.³²

This chapter discusses the symptoms of and general treatments for performance anxiety. Music performance anxiety is widespread and problematic among professional musicians. The International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians surveyed forty-eight American orchestras with 2,212 respondents, and reported that 24% of musicians frequently suffered stage fright, 13% experienced acute anxiety and 17% experienced depression while performing on stage.³³ “Surveys of performing musicians indicate that almost half of them experience playing-related medical problems. . . . Stress, especially performance anxiety, may impede performance.”³⁴

³¹ Harold C. Schonberg, *The Great Pianists from Mozart to the Present* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966), 199.

³² *Ibid.*, 199-201.

³³ Alan. H. Lockwood, “Medical Problems of Musicians” *New England Journal of Medicine* 320 (1989): 221-227.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Symptoms of Performance Anxiety from Physical, Mental and Behavioral Approaches

Michelle Craske describes three dimensions of performance anxiety: the physical system (symptoms), the mental system (feelings) and the behavioral system (activities performed or avoided).³⁵ The following table lists the general symptoms of performance anxiety gleaned from her book, divided into physical, mental, and behavioral aspects:

TABLE 1 – Symptoms of Performance Anxiety: Physical, Mental, and Behavioral Aspects

Physical	Mental	Behavioral
Increased heart rate	Decreased concentration	Increased irritability
Shortness of breath	Increased distraction	Reduced talking
Tense muscles	Mind blanks, blocks, freezes	Fidgeting, pacing
Sweaty palms	Memory lapses	Frequent trips to toilet
Dry mouth	Negative thoughts	Jitters
Trembling or shaky hands, arms, knees or feet	Desire for perfectionism	Withdrawal from others
Stomachache	Unrealistic aspirations	Embarrassment
Lower body temperature		

Physical symptoms

Musicians with performance anxiety suffer from a variety of physical symptoms, most of which stem from the functioning of the nervous system. The human nervous system is composed of two basic parts and their subdivisions. The central nervous system is that part of the nervous system which includes the brain and spinal cord. It collects the information and controls the

³⁵ Michelle Craske, *Anxiety Disorders: Psychological Approaches to Theory and Treatment* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 30-58.

voluntary muscular activity throughout the body, and has a fundamental role in controlling behavior: it is the source of control for conscious function.³⁶ The autonomic nervous system controls non-voluntary functions such as heart rate, digestion, and respiration rate and functions below the level of consciousness.³⁷ However, in cases of emergency, the *central nervous system* interferes with the autonomic nervous system, sending impulses to it and asserting control over it. When musicians experience performance anxiety, the *central nervous system* tells the *autonomic nervous system* that an emergency has arisen. The response from the *autonomic nervous system* results in the body's sweat glands becoming more active, which causes sweaty palms; while the glandular activities of digestion are slowed down causing the salivary glands to stop functioning and the mouth to become dry.³⁸ Other physical changes also occur: a more rapid heart rate and shortness of breath. When people are anxious, adrenalin is released, causing the heart rate to increase and bringing about other physical changes such as shaking, digestive disorders, and shortness of breath.³⁹

Craske and Kenneth Craig say that people who have low anxiety in music performance primarily experience only the physical symptoms of anxiety, such as elevated heart rate and sweaty palms, but not mental or behavioral symptoms. Highly anxious individuals experience many physical, mental, and behavioral symptoms in their music performance.⁴⁰

Mental symptoms

Many musicians who suffer from performance anxiety tend to be critical and negatively self-evaluative of their performance.⁴¹

³⁶ Wikimedia Foundation, "Central Nervous System," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_nervous_system (accessed September 4, 2010).

³⁷ Wikimedia Foundation, "Autonomic Nervous System," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomic_nervous_system (accessed September 4, 2010).

³⁸ Mark Ely, "Stop Performance Anxiety" *Music Educators Journal* 78, no. 2 (1991): 35-39.

³⁹ Rabin Gonzaga, "Feeling Anxious and Panicky," Anxiety Panic Attack Resource Site, <http://www.anxietypanic.com/articles/1003.html> (accessed July 12, 2010).

⁴⁰ Michelle Craske, and Kenneth Craig, "Musical-Performance Anxiety: The Three-Systems Model and Self-Efficacy Theory" *Behavior Research and Therapy* 22, (1984): 267–280.

⁴¹ Arlin Cuncic, "Musical Performance Anxiety," Social Anxiety Disorder, <http://socialanxietydisorder.about.com/od/copingwithsad/a/musicianxiety.htm> (accessed July 12, 2010).

- They often worry about a negative reaction from the audience.
- They worry about what people will think of them if something goes wrong.
- During the performance, they often wonder if they will make it through.
- They often think that if they make any small mistakes, the performance won't be perfect, and then they will be a failure.
- They have very high aspirations, and often worry whether they can achieve their aim.

Ely states that negative thinking is the main source of musical performance anxiety. These thoughts overwhelm performers' expectations of success. Sometimes performers think about things which are unrelated to the actual musical performance. For example, they worry about whether friends and family will come, or why they hear a door open and close: "Did somebody leave?" All of these thoughts can increase tension and cause loss of concentration during a public performance.⁴²

The definition of perfectionism given by Randy Frost et al. is excessive concern over making mistakes, and includes high personal standards, high expectations and self-criticism.⁴³ A study by Shulamit Mor et al. shows that music performers with higher personal and social standards of perfection experienced more anxiety than those performers who did not demand as much in these areas. The researchers investigated this trait in forty-nine professional classical musicians, and they found that perfectionism can exert a negative effect on anxiety in performing musicians.⁴⁴

The experience of performance anxiety is also affected by the level of a performer's aspirations. Safi states that high aspirations may produce greater performance anxiety because the individual's self-esteem is threatened by sub-optimal performance. High anxiety is experienced in situations where social or environmental pressures are high.⁴⁵

⁴² Mark Ely, "Stop Performance Anxiety" *Music Educators Journal* 78, no. 2 (1991): 35-39.

⁴³ Randy Frost, Patricia Marten, Cathleen Lahart, and Robin Rosenblate, "The Dimensions of Perfectionism" *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 14, no. 5 (1990): 449-468.

⁴⁴ Shulamit Mor, Hy I. Day, Gordon L. Flett, and Paul L. Hewitt, "Perfectionism, Control, and Components of Performance Anxiety in Professional Artists" *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 19, no. 2 (1995): 207-225.

⁴⁵ Abdullah Taha Al Safi, "The Differences in Self-Learning Disposition, Test Anxiety, and Level of Ambition between High and Low Achiever Students in First Grade of High School." *Journal of Social Sciences* 30, no.1 (2002): 69-96.

Behavioral symptoms

Frequent symptomatic behaviors in performance anxiety include:

- Not saying anything when with other people, or talking all the time to avoid feeling nervous (Both behaviors are abnormal compared with one's usual behavior.)
- Going to the restroom to escape from interaction with people
- Walking around in the backstage area with no direction

Mark Ely states that most young children get very excited about performing for others. They simply love the attention. During adolescence, this excitement is replaced by self-consciousness, and anxiety associated with performing in front of one's peers becomes quite common. Even prior to adolescence, this excitement is often replaced by fear. One possible explanation for this is that people care too much about other people's opinions when they grow up. As a result, they feel embarrassed during the performance and experience various symptoms of anxiety.⁴⁶ According to Paul Lehrer, embarrassed behavior is the major effect of anxiety.⁴⁷

Commonly Used Treatments for Performance Anxiety from Physical, Mental and Behavioral Approaches

Overcoming performance anxiety is a task facing many performing musicians. Treatment strategies tend to take several different approaches.

Physical Approaches

Physical warm-up. According to Dan Millman, a former world champion athlete and sports coach, a physical warm-up of less than four minutes before the performance, using a simple and efficient series of movements, is helpful for reducing performance anxiety.⁴⁸ The warm-up series comprises ten flowing movements:

⁴⁶ Mark Ely, "Stop Performance Anxiety" *Music Educators Journal* 78, no. 2 (1991): 35-39.

⁴⁷ Paul Lehrer, "Performance Anxiety and How to Control It: A Psychologist's Perspective" *Tension in the Performance of Music* (New York: Alexander Broude, 1978), 134-52.

⁴⁸ Dan Millman, *Body Mind Mastery: Creating Success in Sport and Life* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999), 102-113.

1) Big Stretch:

Directions—Raise your arms up, and swing your arms forward and down while bending your knees. Let your head drop and relax forward. At the bottom, let your arms swing back, and complete the movement by swinging your arms forward and upward as you stand.

Benefits—Gently stretching the spine clears tension around chest and abdomen.

2) Side Reach:

Directions—Squat halfway down with your arms held halfway to your chest. Stretch up directly to one side, and return back to squat position. Then stretch on the opposite side.

Benefits—Opens ribcage and expands lungs; clears energy around the head and shoulder areas.

3) Neck Release:

Directions—Make three full circles with your head to the left side and three full circles to the right side. Keep your head relaxed as it circles, and keep your mouth closed.

Benefits—Relaxes tension of jaw, neck and shoulder.

4) Shoulder Roll:

Directions—Circle your shoulders forward-upward-backward-downward, and grasp one wrist with the other hand. Keep your arms relaxed and passive, and let your shoulders move.

Benefits—Releases tension around the chest, shoulders and upper back.

5) Spine Swing:

Directions—Lift your arms straight and out to the side at shoulder height, and turn your upper body to the left and right.

Benefits—Relaxes your pelvis and waist; clears energy field from knees to top of head.

6) Hip Circles:

Directions—Let your hands rest on hips while moving them in circular motion; circle three times to the left and three times to the right.

Benefits—Releases tension of lower back and hip connectors; opens energy field from knees to navel.

7) Leg-Swing Lunge:

Directions—Swing your leg forward three times. On the third time, lunge onto your forward leg, and bounce gently up and down. Rise up, and repeat all movements on opposite side.

Benefits—Stretches legs and enhances coordination and balance; coordinates right and left brain and body.

8) Arch Pike:

Directions—Using a chair, keep your arms straight while pushing the chair. Arch your back, and lift your head gently while your eyes look up. Push your hips back, and move your head between your shoulders. Look toward your belly while stretching your shoulders.

Benefits—Improves flexibility of spine, legs, shoulders, and wrists.

9) Kickboxing Leg Sweep:

Directions—Lift one leg up in front, and sweep the leg sideward and back. Repeat this sequence three times with each leg. For balance, keep your eyes focused forward and pelvis stable.

Benefits—Improves balance and coordination; supports lower back and frees tension.

10) Body-mind Balance:

Directions—Sitting on a chair with your spine straight, breathe in and out until your heart rate returns to normal. Close your eyes, and enjoy the relaxation.

Benefits—Provides rest and relaxation and enhances concentration.

The physical warm-up will help your body become warm, awake, free, energized, and relaxed. After the four minutes of physical warm-ups, deep breathing exercises will cool down your body.

Breathing. Our entire autonomic nervous system is driven by our breathing patterns. According to Joann Kirchner, simply changing your breathing pattern from shallow breathing to deep breathing will help to reduce your anxiety, tension and stress. One way to establish a good breathing pattern is to think of the number one as you exhale and then take a breath and think of the number two. Continue this process until you arrive at ten or fifteen and feel your mind and muscles begin to relax. Deep breathing is one of the best ways to lower stress in the body.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Joann Kirchner, “Managing Musical Performance Anxiety” *The American Music Teacher* 54, no. 3 (2004-05), 31-33.

Alexander Technique. The Alexander Technique is an educational procedure developed in 1904 by Australian actor Frederick Matthias Alexander. The technique aims to teach consciousness and control of posture and movements, to help performers relieve their bodies of harmful tension and stress, and to cultivate a natural relaxation. The Alexander Technique eliminates unwanted muscular patterns of movement or habits that interfere with smooth performance. Posture, balance and coordination will be automatically improved.⁵⁰

In a study by Elizabeth Valentine et al., one group of music students was given fifteen lessons in the Alexander Technique, while another group of students had no lessons in the technique. The treatment group improved in musical and technical quality, increased positive attitude and decreased performance anxiety. These investigations concluded that the Alexander technique may improve the quality of performance and help reduce rapid heart rate under stress.⁵¹

Feldenkrais Method. The Feldenkrais Method was developed by Moshe Feldenkrais, a scientist who synthesized insights from physics, psychology, motor development, bio-mechanics, and martial arts. It aims at expanding the self-image through movement sequences that bring attention to the parts of the self that are outside of focal awareness. The Feldenkrais Method consists of two modalities: Awareness through Movement, and Functional Integration. Based on theoretical grounds, both modalities stimulate the nervous system's ability to self-organize towards more effective and intelligent action. Feldenkrais teaches in his method that the human brain has three systems:

- Rhinic system—supplies the individual internal requirements of every living organism
- Limbic system—a group of structures in the brain that deals with everything that concerns the outward expression of vital internal needs

⁵⁰ Wilfred Barlow, *The Alexander Technique* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 3-14.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Valentine, David Fitzgerald, Tessa Gorton, Jennifer Hudson, and Elizabeth Symonds, "The Effect of Lessons in the Alexander Technique on Music Performance in High and Low Stress Situations" *Psychology of Music* 23, (1995): 129-41.

- Supralymbic system—a third group of structures of the brain concerned with activities that distinguish man from animals⁵²

The Supralymbic system turns the human hand into an instrument capable of playing music, drawing, writing or doing many other activities. “There is a delay between what is engendered in the Supralymbic system and its execution by the body. This delay between a thought process and its translation into action is long enough to make it possible to inhibit it.”⁵³ The delay between thought and action is the basis for awareness. People can control their awareness by using the principle “Think first, act later.” Feldenkrais method has enjoyed popular acceptance and is still taught today to music students.

Biofeedback and hypnotherapy. According to Lehrer and Woolfolk, physiological symptoms of stress appear to be effectively and specifically treated by techniques of muscle relaxation, biofeedback, and hypnotherapy.⁵⁴ *Biofeedback* uses precise instruments to measure a patient’s brainwaves, heart function, breathing, or skin temperature, to get biological signals that are then fed back or returned to the patient in order for him to learn to control his own heart rate, skin temperature or other physiological functions.⁵⁵ But according to both McKinney⁵⁶ and Richard,⁵⁷ there is no firm evidence indicating that biofeedback can reduce performance anxiety.

Hypnotherapy is a technique that uses the hypnotic state, which enables changes in perception and memory, results in a major increase in response to suggestion, and provides the potential for controlling many physiologic functions that are usually involuntary. Hypnotherapy

⁵² Moshe Feldenkrais, *Awareness through Movement: Health Exercises for Personal Growth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 41-42.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁴ Paul Lehrer and Robert Woolfolk, *Principles and Practice of Stress Management*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 1993), 3-14.

⁵⁵ David Danskin and Mark Crow, *Biofeedback: An Introduction and Guide* (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield, 1981), 2-4.

⁵⁶ Harold Van McKinney, “The Effects of Thermal Biofeedback Training on Musical Performance and Performance Anxiety” (PhD diss., University of Northern Colorado, 1984).

⁵⁷ Joseph John Richard, Jr., “The Effects of Ericksonian Resource Retrieval on Musical Performance Anxiety” (PhD diss., West Virginia University, 1992). *Dissertation Abstracts International* 55, no. 2-B, 604.

involves the patient entering the state of deep relaxation, during which the mind becomes very open to positive suggestion. Hypnotherapy can be used to develop self-confidence and to improve performance in a variety of spheres of activity ranging from sports, music and drama to presentations and exams.⁵⁸ Harry Stanton assessed the therapeutic effect of two 50-minute sessions of hypnotherapy for musicians who have performance anxiety. He found significant reduction in performance anxiety for the treatment group musicians. The results suggest that hypnotherapy may be effective in the treatment of music performance anxiety.⁵⁹

Prepare and practice more. Philip Tartalone collected physiological data from thirty-nine college music students who were preparing for brass jury recitals. The data were taken from students four weeks before the jury, through the dress rehearsal phase and during the actual performance. Blood pressure, heart rate, and respiration rate all showed a distinct rise at the time of the dress rehearsals and again at the jury performances. The results showed a significant anxiety increase during the dress rehearsals and jury recitals. The researcher also reported that the participants with less jury-playing experience generally showed higher heart rates and respiration rates than the more experienced students.⁶⁰

Donald Hamann and Martha Sobaje worked with sixty college music students who had studied musical instruments for varying lengths of time. They found that the longer a student had been studying an instrument, the less anxiety he/she felt in performance. They also concluded that consistent practicing is the most powerful method for preventing performance anxiety.⁶¹

Piano performance requires a high level of skill in different areas including virtuosic technique, interpretative skill, aesthetics, and good memory. To achieve these skills, performers require years of training, constant practice, and intense self-evaluation. Lehrer suggests that

⁵⁸ Grahame Randall, "Hypnotherapy and Hypnosis Explained," <http://www.hypnotherapy-doctor.co.uk/hypnotherapy-and-hypnosis-explained.html> (accessed July 12, 2010).

⁵⁹ Harry E. Stanton, "Sports Imagery and Hypnosis: A Potent Mix?" *Australian Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 22, no. 2 (1994), 119-124.

⁶⁰ Philip Michael Tartalone, "Patterns of Performance Anxiety among University Musicians Preparing for Brass Area Jury Recitals: Physiological Arousal and Perceived State Anxiety" *Dissertation Abstracts International* 54 no. 1, (1992):24-A.

⁶¹ Donald L. Hamann and Martha Sobaje, "Anxiety and the College Musician: A Study of Performance Conditions and Subject Variables" *Psychology of Music* 11 (1983): 37-50.

understanding the musical structure of different pieces is important for music performance. He presents a number of self-reported manifestations of performance anxiety. Various kinds of anxiety can be treated by a specific kind of intervention. For example, special training in musical analysis tended to decrease the number of errors a performer made during a performance.⁶²

Mental Approaches

Sports and music are often seen as related skills; both are forms of self-expression which require hard work and discipline. Several sports coaches have established the value of mental practice in reducing performance anxiety and improving performance. Millman did research on three groups of beginning basketball players. The first group practiced shooting baskets from the free-throw line for two weeks. The second group practiced mentally by imagining themselves shooting baskets for two weeks. The third group performed unrelated activities during the same time period. After two weeks, the result was that those who practiced mentally improved almost as much as those who trained physically. The third group didn't improve at all. The study suggests that mental practice may be as effective as physical practice.⁶³

Gallwey's *The Inner Game of Tennis* aims to give insights into the mental aspects of playing tennis, and was the first of Gallwey's books (including *Inner Game of Golf*⁶⁴ and *Inner Game of Work*⁶⁵) to address similar issues in different fields. He describes two selves: Self One, the 'I' means to give instruction, and Self Two 'myself' means to perform the action. One is the teller and the other is the doer. The process of getting the two selves to work together in tennis involves these learning skills:

- Learning how to get the clearest picture of your desired outcomes
- Learning how to trust Self Two to perform at its best and learn from both successes and failures

⁶² Lehrer, Paul M. Review of *The Approaches to The Management of Tension and Stage Fright in Music Performance*, *Journal of Research in Music Education* 35, no. 3 (1987): 143-153.

⁶³ Millman, *Body Mind Mastery*, 122.

⁶⁴ W. Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Golf* (New York: Random House, 2009).

⁶⁵ W. Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Work* (New York: Random House, 2001).

- Learning to see non-judgmentally, which means to see what is happening rather than just noticing how well or how badly it is happening ⁶⁶

According to Cooper, basketball coach Frank Lindley was the first person to use the phrase “in the zone.”⁶⁷ It is a term used by athletes, researchers and practitioners. When athletes are in the zone during their performance, they perform optimally when their mind and body motion become synchronous by subconscious means. Physician and mental coach Dr. Michael Lardon has for many years studied the state of being in the zone. These are the moments in life when we achieve complete synchronicity between thoughts and actions and perform at our highest level. Lardon presents the top golf player Tiger Woods as the best example of “instant amnesia,” an important requirement for sporting success at the highest level. Lardon said, “To be in the now, you have to accept what has just happened. If you can’t do that, you will be separate from the experience and that is when trouble lurks. Instant amnesia is a quality that Woods personifies and it is essential because you are not always going to hit a perfect shot and when you get up to make the next shot, you must not be thinking about the previous one.”⁶⁸

Terry Orlick says high levels of achievement and the pursuit of excellence in any field do not come easily. Many obstacles must be overcome. He helps performers go through the anxiety problem and gain the confidence from his self-growth and self-directed strategies which are based on the following points:

- After a mistake, accept the coach’s criticism, come back with a strong shift of ideas, make the right moves
- Never give up
- Take tips, ask questions, listen, admit errors and correct them
- Learn to play well after a mistake
- Learn to control temper

⁶⁶ W. Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), 13.

⁶⁷ Andrew Cooper, *Playing in the Zone: Exploring the Spiritual Dimensions of Sports* (Boston: Shambhala, 1998).

⁶⁸ Michael Lardon, *Finding Your Zone: Ten Core Lessons for Achieving Peak Performance in Sports and Life* (New York: Perigee Trade, 2008), 79.

- Learn to adapt to the stress of success⁶⁹

Orlick said, “Your images lead your reality. Mental imagery gives you a chance to deal effectively with a problem or event in your head before you confront it in real life.” In sport, the developing athletes who make the fastest progress and those who ultimately become successful make extensive use of mental imagery. The following is an example of success given by Orlick:

For many years an Olympic figure skater had experienced difficulties with a compulsory loop. I asked her to try to visualize herself doing the loop while she was sitting in a chair in my office. She was unable to imagine herself completing the loop. Either she would see herself making an error and stop at that point, or the image would break up. I asked her to mentally practice doing the loop for approximately 10 minutes every night for a week. It took several days of mental practice for her to get by the breaking point in imagery. Once she got past the point, she began working on consistently getting through the complete figure in imagery without breaking. Finally, she focused on feeling herself do the loop as perfectly as possible several times in a row. As soon as she began to feel herself skating the loop correctly in imagery, she also started to do it correctly in real performance. Within two weeks of mental imagery practice, she improved tremendously.⁷⁰

Orlick concludes that if in your mind you keep thinking negative things, you definitely cannot do well on stage. To visualize yourself performing well in competition will program yourself for success.

Mental practice and imagery can lead musicians to peak performance in a way that resembles the methods of successful athletes according to Malva Freymuth. She describes the process of creating mental images of the sights, sounds, and sensations of playing a musical instrument. Mental practice can enhance the musician’s ability to receive sensory feedback while playing and also allows physical rest, during which vital mental work can take place.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Terry Orlick, *In Pursuit of Excellence: How to Win in Sport and Life through Mental Training* (Champaign, Illinois, Leisure Press, 1990), 44-48.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

⁷¹ Malva Freymuth, *Mental Practice and Imagery for Musicians* (Missouri: MMB music, 1999), 36-49.

Behavioral Approaches

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT). This is a major approach involved in the treatment of performance anxiety. It refers to therapy based on a combination of basic cognitive and behavioral research. CBT involves a collaborative effort through psychological and physical understanding: to understand negative thought patterns that are related to emotional and behavioral disturbance, to identify and reduce unhelpful patterns of functioning, and to be able to improve our awareness and learn to challenge these unhelpful behaviors. Relaxation and mindfulness techniques are also commonly used in CBT.⁷²

Margaret Kendrick et al. used CBT, emphasizing self-instruction and attention-focusing techniques with behavioral rehearsal, with fifty-three pianists who experienced musical performance anxiety. The result was that the cognitive-behavioral therapy and behavioral rehearsal procedures that involved relaxation and refocusing were effective in reducing musical performance anxiety, and can help musicians perform to their potential.⁷³ Albert LeBlanc suggested that performers who suffer from the negative effects of performance anxiety should attempt to adapt to different performing environments and practice under similar conditions. Behavioral rehearsal or imagery has been found to be effective in reducing performance anxiety.⁷⁴

James Papsdorf studied a treatment approach for musical performance anxiety that combined progressive muscle relaxation and cognitive therapy. The results suggest that it is possible to lower the level of stage fright in performance-anxious musicians through this CBT approach.⁷⁵ Papsdorf listed items describing progressively more stressful musical performance situations:

⁷² Keith S. Dobson and David J. Dozois, *Handbook of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapies*, Chapter 1 (New York: The Guilford Press, 2009), 3-38.

⁷³ Margaret J. Kendrick, Kenneth D. Craig, David M. Lawson, and Park O. Davidson, "Cognitive and Behavioral Therapy for Musical Performance Anxiety" *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 50 (1982): 353-362.

⁷⁴ Albert LeBlanc, "A Theory of Music Performance Anxiety" *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning* 5 (1994): 60-69.

⁷⁵ Julie Nagel, David Himle, and James Papsdorf, "Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Musical Performance Anxiety" *Psychology of Music* 17 (1989): 12-21.

1. Imagine you have just booked the recital hall for your graduation program which will be held in six weeks.
2. Three weeks before your recital, imagine yourself trying out your program for several friends. They offer suggestions different from those upon which you and your professor have agreed.
3. It is one week before the recital; imagine that your programs are sent to the school for posting, and you see them up on the bulletin boards.
4. It is three days before your recital; imagine some people telling you they are looking forward to hearing you.
5. Imagine that you are working on some difficult technique two days before the recital and it does not go well.
6. You are in bed the night before the concert, and your mind flashes to the performance. You wonder if you are properly prepared.
7. Imagine that you are warming up in the recital hall before people begin to arrive.
8. Imagine that you are waiting backstage—the five-minute bell sounds.
9. Imagine yourself walking on stage; you receive a warm ovation from the audience.
10. Your arms feel weak and shaky and your hands are wet.
11. Imagine yourself half-way through your first piece; you mess up a passage you had worked hard on.
12. Your mind flashes to a tricky spot coming up soon. You wonder if you will get through it okay.
13. Imagine yourself toward the end of your last piece; suddenly you have a memory slip.

Papsdorf said these images are related to the negative thinking of performance anxiety.

Performers need to avoid of these stressful musical performance situations, evaluate their own anxiety responses and develop positive thoughts, using CBT to prevent performance anxiety.

Barry Green gives practical ideas for developing improved music performance under pressure, using a self-help approach. In his book, *The Inner Game of Music*, a radically different approach for improving music performance is presented, namely his ideas of the power of Awareness, Will, and Trust. Green addresses the *Inner* and *Outer Distractions* which frequently bother performers, saying we should choose to focus our awareness in the present moment, and not wander off into the past or future. He suggests performers can be Aware of the present by

paying attention to sight, sound, and feeling. For the power of Will, Green thinks the intensity of desire to succeed determines the quality of our concentration. For the power of Trust, Green suggests that performers should try to imagine some positive responses, and practice concentrating on these images. Once their attention is focused on the positive thoughts, the negative ones will disappear. If you trust you will succeed, your positive attitude will lead you to success. Examples of positive thoughts are:

- I know I will play well because I worked hard for preparing this performance
- I am looking forward to performing and enjoying the concert
- My mind is quiet, I feel peaceful and relaxed⁷⁶

Combined Method of Treatment for Performance Anxiety

Kirchner says it is important for performers to seek methods to deal with the feelings that accompany performance anxiety. She suggests several basic techniques to alleviate mild performance anxiety:

- **Memory Stations:** Analysis of the phrase structure of the music, often by every eight to sixteen measures, can be marked on the score. Such notation is a helpful way to memorize music for visual learners.
- **Video/Audio Tape:** If the performer develops the habit of recording himself, that will enable him to review his playing, and to critique his performance as an outsider observing a friend's performance
- **Realistic Expectations:** The time frame also needs to be considered. After learning a piece, ample time should be allowed to live with it before the actual performance. Arrange two or three mock performances in front of people, to feel stage anxiety in advance.
- **Frequent Performance:** Performing frequently may increase the musician's confidence level, and the performer is able to gain self-knowledge within the performance venue.
- **Visualization:** Visualize playing an entire program. This may reduce anxiety.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Barry Green, *The Inner Game of Music* (New York: Anchor Press, 1986), 86-87.

⁷⁷ Kirchner, "Managing Musical Performance Anxiety" 33-39.

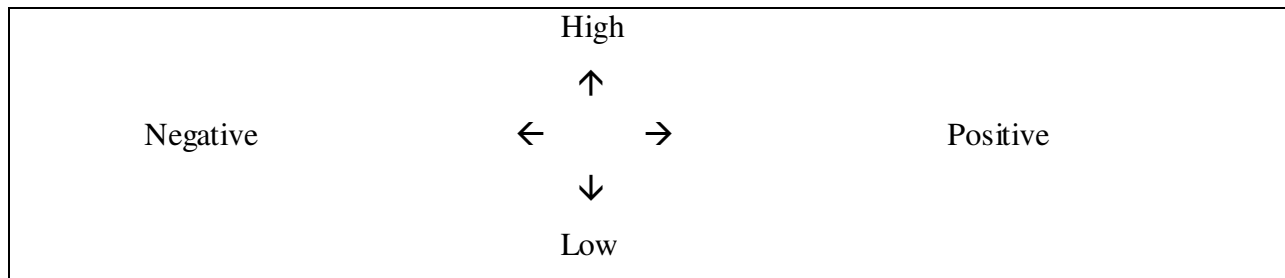
Kirchner mentions that each technique can be used independently or in combination with one or more of the others.

Performance mastery trainer Don Greene said, “Fear is not a lack of talent; it does the most to undermine us.” He presents seven skills for performance anxiety: “determination, energy, perspective, courage, focus, poise, and resilience.”⁷⁸

1) Determination consists of Intrinsic Motivation, Commitment, and Will to succeed. The performer needs to have the passion and fire to achieve a goal and desire. When confronted with many options, the performer needs to decide which is the best one, and not be stuck at the crossroads. Our will to succeed is affected by what we perceive to be others’ definition of success.

2) A model of “Four Energy Zones”⁷⁹

TABLE 2 – “Four Energy Zones”



Different people feel different kinds of energy on stage. High positive energy performers are optimal, but sometimes they lack the ability to relax. Low positive energy performers are mellow. High negative energy performers panic, and low negative energy performers are resigned. Greene suggests managing our energy in the center in order to control our focus under pressure.

3) Perspective has three components: self-confidence, self-talk, and expectancy. Greene states that all these components should be positive; otherwise, attitude adjustments should be made because one’s outlook affects the outcome of one’s actions.

⁷⁸ Don Greene, *Fight Your Fear and Win* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), 3-5.

⁷⁹ Greene, *Fight Your Fear and Win*, 44.

4) Courage is doing things you fear, having the ability to risk. Greene said fear is different from self-doubt. Doubts are thoughts which need self-confidence, and fears are emotions which need courage.

5) Greene gives four aspects of focus: presence, intensity, duration, and mental quiet. Presence requires performers to stay in the moment, and not leap ahead or drift into the past. Intensity refers to giving 100 percent of your attention to accomplishing the performance. The more intense your focus, and the longer you engage it, the more energy reserves will be channeled into your performance. Duration demands performers to sustain their focus on task for as long as it is required. Mental quiet allows performers to remain undistracted by internal noise or imagery.

6) Greene describes poise as performing with ease under fire. To have poise is to have all the qualities given above, plus the ability to make them work in concert with each other.

7) Greene describes resilience as three skills: ability to recover, ability to fight and mental toughness. Choosing to move on is necessary when performers make a mistake on stage. Greene states that mistakes are acceptable because they indicate you are committed to giving your all, to holding nothing back. Great performers do not play it safe, because no great performance ever came from holding back. Performers need to have the ability to fight for what you most want or what you believe in. Learn to get past perfectionism, because if you strive to do everything perfectly, success is impossible.

According to Greene, these seven skills can help performers to reach full potential even when they have performance anxiety, and to regain a feeling of control while performing.

Using Beta-Blockers for Treatment of Performance Anxiety

Many studies have reported the use of beta-blockers for the control of performance anxiety symptoms. In a study of professional orchestral musicians in Canada, Lee Bartel and Edward Thompson found that beta-blockers seemed to be the most effective type of drug for dealing with performance anxiety.⁸⁰ Beta-blockers prevent the flow of adrenalin to the autonomic nervous system. They are known to reduce physiological manifestations of

⁸⁰ Lee Bartel and Edward Thompson, "Coping with Performance Stress: A Study of Professional Orchestral Musicians in Canada" *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning* 5, no. 4 (1994):70-78.

performance anxiety such as increased heart rate, sweaty palms and shaking. Beta-blockers usually are administered in a small dose of ten to twenty milligrams two hours prior to a performance.⁸¹ Charles Brantigan, Thomas Brantigan and Neil Joseph found that beta-blocker drugs may decrease tremors and other physiological accompaniments of stage fright. As a result, this kind of medicine is helpful for strong-anxiety performers, but not for weaker-anxiety ones, because it can reduce the level of the performer's excitement in the performance. Beta-blockers appear to be more effective for those musicians who have mainly physical symptoms of performance anxiety, and less effective for those experiencing more mental symptoms.⁸²

However, some researchers present a variety of reasons for discouraging the use of such drugs. First, even though the drugs help mask the symptoms of performance anxiety, they cannot cure the problem. Some studies indicate that beta-blockers are sometimes ineffective for some people.⁸³ Although the use of beta-blockers may not lead to a physiological dependence, they can easily lead to psychological one; performers may begin to think that they must have them to perform even though they are not physiologically beneficial.⁸⁴ Negative symptoms of taking beta-blockers have been reported in at least 10% of users include bradycardia (heart slowness), hypotension, coldness in the subject's extremities, dizziness, and constipation.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Alice Brandfonbrener, "Beta Blockers in the Treatment of Performance Anxiety" *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 5-1, (1990): 23-26.

⁸² Charles Brantigan, Thomas Brantigan, and Neil Joseph, "Effect of Beta Blockade and Beta Stimulation on Stage Fright" *American Journal of Medicine* 72 (1982): 88-94.

⁸³ James Hollandsworth, *The Physiology of Psychological Disorders* (New York: Plenum Press, 1990), 146-49.

⁸⁴ Mark Ely, "Stop Performance Anxiety" *Music Educators Journal* 78, no. 2 (1991) 35-39.

⁸⁵ K. Neftel, L. Käppeli, M. Rossi, M. Dolder, H. Käser, H. Brugesser, and H. Vorkauf, "Stage Fright in Musicians: A Model Illustrating the Effect of Beta Blockers" *Psychosomatic Medicine* 44, (1982): 461-469.

CHAPTER 3

ZEN

Description of Zen

“Zen” is a Japanese word, derived from the Chinese *Ch’an* which originated as the Indian Sanskrit *Dhyana*. It is usually translated as *meditation* or *contemplation*, perhaps most aptly as *inward communion*. *Dhyana* is a high state of consciousness in which man finds union with the ultimate reality of the universe.⁸⁶ Historically, Zen may be regarded as the fulfillment of long traditions of Indian and Chinese culture, though it is actually much more Chinese than Indian. By the sixth century AD, the Chinese were already taking the first steps in this meditative practice. By the twelfth century, Zen was known in Japan where it rooted itself deeply and most creatively in the Japanese culture.⁸⁷ Today, Zen philosophy has spread around the world. The phrase “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form” is the central idea of Zen philosophy. Zen mind is an empty and ready mind; because when your mind is empty, you are ready for anything; it is open for everything.⁸⁸

In Zen, essence of mind is intrinsically pure, which means that the practitioners of Zen do not allow themselves to be carried away by the circumstances they are in, but remain able to keep their minds unperturbed, irrespective of these circumstances.⁸⁹ The mind’s union with the absolute and union with nature are one. “Zen purposes to discipline the mind itself, in order to make it its own master, through an insight into its proper nature. The discipline of Zen consists of opening the mental eye in order to look into the very reason of existence.”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Alan W. Watts, *The Spirit of Zen: A Way of Life, Work and Art in the Far East* (London: Butler & Tanner, 1936), 17.

⁸⁷ Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), 3.

⁸⁸ David Fontana, *Discover Zen: A Practical Guide to Personal Serenity* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001), 102.

⁸⁹ Hui Neng, *On the High Seat of "The Treasure of the Law" The Sutra of the 6th Patriarch*, trans. A. F. Price and Wong Mou-Lam, Chapter 5, http://www.katinkahesselink.net/tibet/hui_neng5.html (accessed September 4, 2010).

⁹⁰ Watts, *The Spirit of Zen*, 25.

History of Zen Practices in the East

Zen histories claim that in the fifth century, the lineage began when the Sakyamuni Buddha passed on the essence of his awakened mind to his disciple Kasyapa, who in turn transmitted it to his successor. The process continued down to Bodhidharma, who transmitted it to China in the sixth century. The first Zen master in China was Hui-ke who was the disciple of Bodhidharma.⁹¹

During the early part of the Tang dynasty (seventh century), Zen really began to take hold of the Chinese mind. In China, Zen is proffered as a teaching which is “. . . a special transmission outside the scriptures, not depending upon the letter, but pointing directly to the mind, and leading us to see into the nature itself.”⁹² According to Chinese Zen master Lu Kuan Yu, the object of Zen training in China is to wipe out the impurities which soil the mind so that the fundamental face of self-nature, or inner self, can really be perceived.⁹³

Japanese Zen master Dogen wrote *Shobogenzo*, the essential Japanese Buddhist text, in the thirteenth century. Dogen said that Zen begins at the point where there is nothing further to seek, nothing to be gained. This is his teaching in *Shobogenzo*:

When a fish swims, he swims on and on, and there is no end to the water. When a bird flies, he flies on and on, and there is no end to the sky. . . . Yet if there were a bird who first wanted to examine the size of the sky, or a fish who first wanted to examine the extent of the water, and then try to fly or to swim, they will never find their own ways in the sky or water.⁹⁴

Dogen also said Zen means waking up to the present moment, without looking forward to tomorrow. We must concentrate on Zen practice, thinking only of this day and this moment. After that it becomes truly easy. We must forget about the good and bad of our nature, the strength or weakness of our power.⁹⁵

⁹¹ John Powers, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (Oxford: One World, 2000), 254.

⁹² Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Studies in Zen* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), 48.

⁹³ Lu Kuan Yu, *Ch'an and Zen Teaching* (Berkeley, CA: Shambala Publications, 1970), 19.

⁹⁴ Watts, *The Way of Zen*, 124.

⁹⁵ Gudo Nishijima, *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo, Shoji Chapter* (Bristol, UK: Windbell Publications, 1994), 44.

In D. T. Suzuki's book *Study in Zen*, he said: To study Zen means to have Zen-experience, to experience is to be self-conscious. The Zen way of deliverance is not that of religion, to be free from doubts and worries. In contrast, Zen appeals to a certain inner experience and not to a blind acceptance of dogmas. Zen expects us to experience within ourselves.⁹⁶

The Introduction of Zen to the West

Before 1900, Zen was almost entirely unknown in the Western hemisphere. At first, much of the difficulty and mystification which Zen presented to the Western student was the result of his unfamiliarity with Chinese ways of thinking.⁹⁷ Just before World War I, there was only one work on Zen available in any European language: Kaiten Nukariya's *The Religion of the Samurai*.⁹⁸ The book presents the characteristic of Zen that requires strict control over body and mind. Ancient warrior monks had serene countenances, even in the face of certain death, which made them much admired even by their foes.⁹⁹

Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, a Japanese translator, teacher, and Zen master, was the first person to bring the message of Zen to the West, and his reputation as a scholar was internationally recognized. Suzuki's widely read and quoted books include *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*,¹⁰⁰ *Essays in Zen Buddhism*,¹⁰¹ and *Studies in Zen*.¹⁰² In 1936, Suzuki gave his famous talk at the opening meeting of the World Congress of Faiths at the University of London; and in the same year, Alan Watts produced his *Spirit of Zen*, the first major attempt by a Westerner to write on the subject. Watts later published another book, *The Way of Zen*, which

⁹⁶ D. T. Suzuki, *Studies in Zen*, 62, 72.

⁹⁷ Watts, *The Way of Zen*, 3.

⁹⁸ Kaiten Nukariya, *The Religion of the Samurai* (London: Luzao, 1913), <http://books.google.com> (accessed September 1, 2010).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ D. T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (Grove Press, 1994).

¹⁰¹ D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (Grove Press, 1949).

¹⁰² D. T. Suzuki, *Studies in Zen*.

takes the reader back to the philosophical foundations of Zen. The first English edition of Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery* appeared in 1953. It is the first description of Zen being practiced, as it were, by a European.¹⁰³

Just as in Europe, interest in Zen philosophy grew quickly in the United States. In 1958, Zen master Shunryu Suzuki came to America. He decided to stay because he found that Americans have what Zen teachers refer to as a beginner's mind reception to Zen: they have few preconceptions about Zen, are quite open to it, and confidently believe that it can help their lives. Since then a large Zen group has grown up with six locations reported in California by 1973.¹⁰⁴ Zen has continued to grow throughout the United States. The International Research Institute for Zen Buddhism listed approximately 750 Zen centers in the United States in 2000.¹⁰⁵ According to a 2007 Pew Research Center survey, 0.7% of the people in the United States study Zen.¹⁰⁶

Zen Meditation Practices

The highest level of Zen spiritual practice is meditation, a mental discipline that puts the conscious mind into a deeper state of relaxation or awareness. The goal of meditation is to focus and eventually quiet your mind. The basic discipline for meditation is Breath Counting in which the practitioner counts during the length of each inhalation and exhalation; his intention is to join his consciousness to his breath and have no other thoughts. When we practice meditation our mind follows our breathing. The more we practice awareness of the breath, the more we become aware of all our experience.¹⁰⁷ Zen meditation practices consist of two broad categories: Mindfulness and Concentration. Breath Counting is important in both practices. *Shamatha-vipashyana* is a mindfulness practice as is Zazen, the sitting practice used in Zen meditation.

¹⁰³ Christmas Humphreys, *Zen Comes West* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1960), 15.

¹⁰⁴ Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, 17.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Kirchner, "International Research Institute for Zen Buddhism," 2000, http://iriz.hanazono.ac.jp/zen_centers/country_list_e.html#America (accessed September 1, 2010).

¹⁰⁶ "Religious Composition of the United States" United States Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2007, <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/affiliations-all-traditions.pdf> (accessed September 4, 2010).

¹⁰⁷ Lawrence LeShan, *How to Meditate* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1974), 104-107.

Shamatha literally means development of peace, and *Vipashyana* means insight, or clear seeing. The purpose of mindfulness practice is to calm our thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations so as to become free from distractions. Concentration practice is based on concentrating on a particular point in order to control the mind and focus attention. In effect, concentration practice produces a state of relaxation by shutting out all the distractions of anxiety, arousing perceptions and thoughts.¹⁰⁸ A Zen master gave this meditation instruction to a famous sitar player:

The musician asked: “Should I control my mind or should I completely let go?” The master answered: “Since you are a great musician, tell me how you would tune the strings of your instrument.” The musician said: “I would make them not too tight and not too loose.” “Likewise,” said the master, “in your meditation practice you should not impose anything too forcefully on your mind, nor should you let it wander.”¹⁰⁹

Meditation is the core of Zen practice. “The effort will be refined more and more while you are practicing. At first the effort you make is quite rough and impure, but by the power of practice the effort will become purer and purer. When your effort becomes pure, your body and mind become pure. This is the way to practice Zen: concentrate on breathing with the right posture and with great, pure effort.”¹¹⁰

The Use of Zen in Everyday Life

In everyday life, most people do not really experience existence, because they are too busy focusing on their own subjective version of existence. If you can limit your activity to what you can do just now, in this moment, then you can express fully your true nature.¹¹¹ The following story is about concentrating on what you are doing in this moment:

¹⁰⁸ Paul Olson, Frank Piano, Ashe Mukherjee, Scott Mitchel Kamilar, Lynne Hagen, and Elaine Hartsman, *Religious Theories of Personality and Psychotherapy: East Meets West*. (New York: Haworth Press, 2002), 106, 111.

¹⁰⁹ Olson, *Religious Theories*, 110-11.

¹¹⁰ Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (New York: John Weatherhill, 1973), 37.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

A pupil asks a Zen master the secret of the method which had led him to “Satori” (a Japanese Buddhist term which means spiritual awakening -- Oxford English Dictionary).¹¹² The master answered: “When I am hungry I eat, when I am tired I rest.” The pupil, surprised and disappointed with such a paradoxical answer replied in his turn: “But everyone eats when he is hungry, and rests when he is tired.” Master said: “No, when you eat you are not attending to what you eat, and when you lie down you are not attending to your rest; your mind is elsewhere, and your imaginative activities are given free rein.”¹¹³

Cooking is in our everyday life. Edward Brown, a chef and author of *The Tassajara Bread Book*, told us: “When I cook, another body comes alive. Not the body of walking or typing, not the body of sitting or talking, but the body of cooking. To cook is not just to prepare food for someone or for yourself; it is to express your sincerity. So when you cook you should express yourself in your activity in the kitchen without thinking anything else.”¹¹⁴ This requires practice.

Life delineates itself on the canvas called time, and time never repeats; once gone, forever gone.¹¹⁵ An important passage from D. T. Suzuki is one which confirms this:

We can never retract what we have committed to deeds; Zen therefore ought to be caught while the thing is going, neither before nor after. It is an act of one instant. To get hold of this fleeting life as it flees and not after it has flown.¹¹⁶

In Zen, there are no actions which we should consider as “ordinary” in contrast to others which we regard as “exceptional.” Each incident of daily life, each perception of the concrete world can be an occasion for “Satori,” which means sudden enlightenment.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Oxford English Dictionary, <http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.lib.fsu.edu> (accessed September 4, 2010).

¹¹³ Robert Linssen, *Living Zen* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 178-79.

¹¹⁴ Edward Brown, *The Tassajara Bread Book* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995), 6.

¹¹⁵ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, vol. I (London: Luzac, 1927), 300.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 298.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 4

ZEN FOR THE PERFORMING MUSICIAN

This chapter provides information on how to apply the principles of Zen meditation to the musician's practice and performance, so that they may enjoy their playing without experiencing moments of frustration or struggle, and allowing them to regulate musical performance anxiety.

How to Practice Wisely for Performance

In the previous chapter, Zen meditation practices were introduced with two broad categories: Mindfulness and Concentration.

Mindfulness Practice (Zazen). The Zen sitting meditation Zazen is also known as Mindfulness practice which is characterized by an expansion of the field of attention. Music performance demands and develops all your capacities; physical skill is only one part of these capacities. After we develop our physical skills, we need to exercise body, breath, and attention through dynamic meditation and sitting practice. Although Zazen meditation is traditionally practiced sitting cross-legged on a cushion, it can also be done while sitting in a chair with both feet on the floor.¹¹⁸ First relax and take a comfortable posture, upright but not rigid. The head, shoulders, and spine are vertically aligned, but without tension. This posture expresses wakefulness. Next, rest your hands comfortably on your thighs, palms down. Pay attention to your breathing for a few exhalations. Feel the physical breath going out and dissolving into space.¹¹⁹ When you are doing Zazen, you are within the complete calmness of your mind; you do not feel anything. Try to practice Zazen for fifteen minutes a day, and the calmness of your sitting will encourage you in your everyday life.¹²⁰ "Sitting quietly, doing nothing, spring comes

¹¹⁸ Taigen Daniel Leighton and Shohaku Okumura, *Dōgen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community: A Translation of the Eihei Shingi* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 64.

¹¹⁹ Olson, *Religious Theories*, 112.

¹²⁰ Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, 121.

and the grass grows by itself.” This “by itself” is the mind’s and the world’s natural way of action.¹²¹

For the musician, it is helpful when practicing Zazen to sit in the chair in which you play, whether the musician is playing piano, woodwind, brass, or strings. Sit with music stand empty and practice complete calm. At first, you will be calmly striving to empty the mind of distractions. Within weeks, this will come naturally.

Concentration Practice. Concentration meditation involves focusing attention on one thing, and when the attention wanders, bringing it back to that one thing. This is done while working or during any other activity such as reading, eating, running or performing. Leo Babauta said that he uses running as his form of meditation, of trying to be in the present. “During the time of concentration practice, he tries to focus on his breathing, on his feet as they strike the ground, on how his body feels, on the sights and sounds and smells of nature around him, and on his thoughts as they occur. He tries not to think about the past and the future, but tries to remain in the moment.”¹²² The concentration practice is difficult, and requires awareness and energy to continually return one’s attention to a central focus. Likewise, the musician focuses on his breathing and becomes involved with the music. Douglas Bernstein and Thomas Borkovec indicate that the concentration practice of Zen meditation is directly applicable to dealing with anxiety. They write: “Focusing on the present moment precludes anxiety. Anxious thoughts can be let go of by gently refocusing each time they intrude on the task itself. This procedure not only reduces the occurrence of anxiety-provoking processes but also maximizes the quality of performance.”¹²³ Orlick said effective refocusing grows most readily from developing a simple refocusing plan, which you can use to regain control.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Watts, *The Way of Zen*, 134.

¹²² Leo Babauta, “The Zen of Running,” <http://zenhabits.net/the-zen-of-running-and-10-ways-to-make-it-work-for-you> (accessed September 1, 2010).

¹²³ Douglas Bernstein and Thomas Borkovec, *New Directions in Progressive Relaxation Training: A Guidebook for Helping Professionals* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 126.

¹²⁴ Terry Orlick, *In Pursuit of Excellence: How to Win in Sport and Life through Mental Training*, 4th ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2007), 21.

In Zazen and concentration practice, there are several things to be remembered: Breathing, Bouts, and Length of Time Every Day. In Zen meditation, the intention is to join and become one with one's breath. There is no emphasis on breathing in a particular way, such as breathing deeply or breathing slowly.¹²⁵ Zen meditation practice is difficult in the beginning. It can be hard to concentrate for very long. One must practice concentration in small bouts at first, of just ten seconds at a time, letting oneself rest in between, and then concentrating again for another ten seconds, and repeating. Later, one can stretch this to twenty or thirty seconds, or even a minute or two with practice. One should find some time every day to practice meditation and keep a journal to record concentration times and also to write down how one feels about each day's practice. Zazen lets the mind calm down, so one can then focus on practicing concentration meditation for achieving the best possible performance. In combining both Zazen and Concentration meditation, the Zen disciple will overcome anxiety.¹²⁶

Practice Daily with a Beginner's Mind. Every day, every moment is a learning experience. Whether you are practicing meditation, playing the piano, or learning gymnastics, practice can involve either drudgery or play; they all emphasize daily training and require time and effort.¹²⁷ A Chinese Zen master has a famous saying, "A day without work is a day without food."¹²⁸

When you practice, it is important to have a beginner's mind because it is the way of the Zen mind. The mind of the beginner is empty, ready to accept, to doubt, and open to all possibilities. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, in the expert's mind there are few. Our original mind includes everything within itself. If you discriminate too much, you limit yourself. If you are too demanding or too greedy, your mind is not rich and self-sufficient. If we

¹²⁵ Josho Pat Phelan, "Practicing with Our Breathing," <http://www.intrex.net/chzg/Pat1.htm> (accessed September 1, 2010).

¹²⁶ Leo Babauta, "The Zen of Running," (accessed September 1, 2010).

¹²⁷ Robert Rosenbaum, *Zen and the Heart of Psychotherapy* (Philadelphia, PA: Routledge, 1998), 308.

¹²⁸ Huai-Hai, *Sayings and Doings of Pai-Chang*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Los Angeles: Center Publications, 1978), 99.

lose our original, self-sufficient mind, we will lose touch with the precepts of Zen.¹²⁹ Musicians should allow the beginner's mind to open itself, so the music will flow out naturally.

Synchronicity of Body and Mind

Zen places great emphasis on the mind-body interaction. The more focused and disciplined the mind, the better it controls the body and resists its distractions; the better trained the body, the more it serves the mind.¹³⁰ *Satori* is a word from the Japanese Zen tradition that points to a "sudden awakening" or insight into our fundamental nature. This insight is not the result of abstract mental concepts or ideas but rather a momentary, experiential fusing of body and mind. You experience *satori* when your mind is free of internal distractions, with attention focused on the present moment; your body feels vital, relaxed, energized, and sensitive. The athlete, artist, and musician all experience this state in the moment of truth. This state of mind-body integration is the essence of dynamic meditation and the instinctive reason you enjoy what you are doing; it is the inner target of the Zen archers. *Satori* is the heart of the moving experience, a taste of inner peace and inner power. It happens usually to a practiced mind in a practiced body.¹³¹

D. T. Suzuki said: "A mind unconscious of itself is a mind that is not at all disturbed by effects of any kind . . . It fills the whole body, pervading every part of the body . . . flowing like a stream filling each corner. If it should find a resting place anywhere, it is a state of 'no thinking,' 'emptiness,' or 'the mind of no mind.'"¹³² In D. T. Suzuki's excellent book *Zen and Japanese Culture*, and his introduction to the book *Zen in the Art of Archery* (by Eugen Herrigel), he discusses the connection between Zen and the ancient art of swordsmanship:

If one really wishes to be master of an art, technical knowledge is not enough. One has to transcend technique so that the art grows out of the unconscious. . . . You must let the

¹²⁹ Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. 22.

¹³⁰ David Fontana, *Discover Zen: A Practical Guide to Personal Serenity* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2001), 95.

¹³¹ D. T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), 111.

¹³² *Ibid.*

unconscious come forward. In such cases, you cease to be your own conscious master but become an instrument in the hands of the unknown. The unknown has no ego-consciousness and consequently no thought of winning the contest. . . . It is for this reason that the sword moves where it ought to move and makes the contest end victoriously.¹³³

Trusting your body, and allowing the performance program that has been ingrained in your mind and body to unfold, results in winning: it takes care of itself. Canadian Olympian Kim Alleston spoke of her experience of freeing body and mind in competition:

I have experienced flow on several occasions, and to me it was a feeling of separating my body from my conscious mind and letting my body do what came naturally. When this happened things always went surprisingly well, almost as if my mind would look at what my body was doing and say, Hey, you are good, but at the same time not making any judgments on what I was doing because it was not “me” that was doing it; it was my body. This way, by not making any judgments, it was easy to stay in the present.¹³⁴

This freeing of mind and body applies to all activities we may perform, such as dancing or playing instruments. In all things, it is important to synchronize your mind and body and become one with the work at hand.

Being in the Center

In Zen practice, the concept of *Oneness* means becoming inseparable from the essence of what you are doing during the moment that you are doing it. Being in the Zen zone means being all here; being totally present; absorbing yourself in, and connecting yourself to, and becoming one with your body, your mind, your performance, and your experience.¹³⁵

All people have the capacity to excel, or become the best they can be, at something. To reach your capacity, you have to make the decision to focus fully on excelling. You have to choose to pour your heart and soul into it. It is totally within your control. When you make the decision to do something with commitment and quality, all the rest is focus. How far your

¹³³ Ibid., 94-96.

¹³⁴ Terry Orlick, *In Pursuit of Excellence: How to Win in Sport and Life through Mental Training*, 2nd ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2000), 107.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 105.

journey takes you depends on the depth and direction of your focus.¹³⁶ Distracting thoughts or emotion could result in a performer's anxiety, and cause obstruction between mind and movement. As one Japanese Zen master pointed out, you can read the environment much more clearly when you are "calm internally," just as you can see the reflection more clearly on a calm lake than on a disturbed one. Anxiety is like wind that disturbs the image on a calm lake.¹³⁷

Orlick introduces some focus reminders that can help you to be in the center and free you to connect fully with your performance:

- Focus by feeling, not forcing
- Let your intuition lead you
- Stop judging along the way; focus on the doing
- Trust what is already living deep within your body and soul
- Become one with your performance
- Win by removing all thoughts of winning

With pure focus nothing gets between you and your performance. When you are totally engaged in the process of doing, you become what you are doing. You, your focus, and your performance are one.¹³⁸ Orlick has taken these ideas from Zen, and they also apply for musical performance.

Balance and Awareness

Awareness shows us what feels and works best for us. According to Green, you need to pay attention to your own experience; then you will find out that your best teacher had been right there inside you all the time.¹³⁹ Remaining fully aware in your mind and in your body of every attempt you make during practice is important. Whether you practice sports or instruments, if you practice five hours every day but really pay attention for only two hours, then you are

¹³⁶ Orlick, *In Pursuit of Excellence*, 4th ed. 32.

¹³⁷ Orlick, *In Pursuit of Excellence*, 2nd ed. 107.

¹³⁸ Orlick, *In Pursuit of Excellence*, 4th ed. 144-45.

¹³⁹ Barry Green, *The Inner Game of Music* (New York: Anchor Press, 1986), 37-44.

wasting three hours a day. In fact, those three hours may do you more harm than good, because you can form incorrect pathways without noticing it. Only perfect practice makes perfect.¹⁴⁰

Many thoughts and feelings both positive and negative may pass through your mind before the performance, and they turn up the pressures on you. It is necessary to find the proper balance for reducing pressure. Millman said: When you practice, you apply the same mental focus and determination as you would in competition; when you compete, you are as relaxed and easygoing as in practice. To work both sides of the movement in order to find the center is the law of balance.¹⁴¹

Competition and Performance

“The Way of the sage is to act but not to compete.”—Lao Tzu¹⁴²

In competitions, we have to learn to deal with disappointment, with losing something. It is like the game of musical chairs. Finally, only one person is seated on the chair while everyone else is standing on the sidelines. When we let go of scores, victories or failures, we discovered the joy in the process of training, learning, and striving toward the heights of our potential. The Olympic Creed written in 1894 states:

“The most important thing is not to win, but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph, but the attempt. The essential thing is not to have conquered, but to have fought well.”¹⁴³

Self-confidence plays an important part in every performance and competition. Zen masters gain confidence through self-reliance. They feel the need to rely only on their own efforts. Albert Bandura developed the field of “self-efficacy” and his principles sit at the core of building confidence. His research shows that there are four essential components of confidence:

1. Experiences of Mastery—where you have had past experience of doing well

¹⁴⁰ Dan Millman, *Body Mind Mastery: Creating Success in Sport and Life* (CA: New World Library, 1999), 117-18.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁴² Lao Tzu: ‘Tao-Te Ching,’ *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, ed. Elizabeth Knowles, 5th ed. (Oxford University Press, 1999), 452.

¹⁴³ Millman, *Body Mind Mastery*, 139.

2. Vicarious Learning—which comes from seeing someone do something that you can see yourself doing as well
3. Modeling Another’s Behavior—that inspires you to achieve your goal
4. Social Persuasion—which means receiving positive verbal reinforcement from someone you trust

You also have to know how to mobilize these concepts and integrate them into your experience in order to nurture your confidence.¹⁴⁴

Suzuki says no matter how desirable and worthy a competition or performance is, it will become a disease if the performer’s mind is obsessed with it. The performer has to overcome these obsessions:

1. The desire for victory
2. The desire to resort to technical cunning
3. The desire to display all that he has learned
4. The desire to overawe the enemy
5. The desire to play a passive role
6. The obsession to get rid of whatever obsession with which he is likely to be infected

When any one of these obsesses the performer, he becomes its slave, because it makes him lose his freedom. Whenever the mind is obsessed with anything, make haste to detach yourself from it.¹⁴⁵

You cannot control what other people do, only what you do. The ultimate competitive strategy is to remain centered in your own unshakable spirit and calmness. The performance is the focus. If the performer focuses on the performance, the correct feeling comes automatically. So you just let your interest get absorbed in the performance. Relax and enjoy it. Lots of successes are unintentional. Things cannot be forced. Free yourself to let them happen. You do not have to try to be happy. Simply live and experience the simple joys of life, and happiness comes as a by-product. In life, you do not have to consciously try to win in order to win. Similarly, during a contest you should simply get absorbed in the experience.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Michael Lardon, *Finding Your Zone* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008), 136-37.

¹⁴⁵ D. T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 153-54.

¹⁴⁶ Orlick, *In Pursuit of Excellence*, 4th ed. 144.

How to Achieve Enlightenment

The spirit of Zen encompasses *Prajna* and *Karuna*. These two words are Sanskrit terms. *Prajna* may be translated “transcendental wisdom”, and *Karuna* “love” or “compassion”. *Prajna* makes us look into the reality of things. When *Prajna* is attained we have an insight into the fundamental significance of life and the world. *Karuna* is free to work in its own way which means that love is able to spread itself over all things.¹⁴⁷ At the highest levels of spiritual practice, you cannot have one without the other. They are a means to realizing enlightenment. Zen meditation goes beyond the act of being aware, and enters the realm of becoming awareness itself. As far as spirituality is concerned, it all depends on how one gives up one’s own “Ignorance and Affects” and attains no-mind-ness.¹⁴⁸ Zen meditation means letting your natural faculties act in a consciousness free from thoughts, reflections, or affections of any kind.¹⁴⁹ In the book *Zen in the Art of Archery*, Eugen Herrigel said he spent many years trying to find the right way of releasing the bowstring, for it had to be done “unintentionally,” in the same way as a ripe fruit bursts its skin itself. The right art is purposeless, aimless. The more obstinately you try to learn how to shoot the arrow for the sake of hitting the target, the less you will succeed in the one and the further the other will recede.¹⁵⁰

The following story further exemplifies the above principle:

A boy travelled across Japan to the school of a famous master of the martial arts. When he arrived at the Dojo he was permitted an audience with the Sensei. The master asked, "What do you want from me?" "I'd like to be your pupil and become the best Karateka in the country," the boy answered. "How long must I study?" "At least ten years," said the master. "Ten years is a long time," said the boy. "What if I were to study twice as hard as all your other pupils?" "Twenty years," replied the master. "Twenty years! And if I were to give my all, day and night?" "Thirty years," came the master's reply. "How can it be that each time I say I'll try especially hard you tell me it'll take longer?" asked the boy.

¹⁴⁷ Watts, *The Way of Zen*, 71, 154.

¹⁴⁸ D. T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 101.

¹⁴⁹ D. T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture* (Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society, 1938), 97.

¹⁵⁰ Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Vintage, 1999), 31.

"The answer's obvious. When one eye is looking towards the target, there's only one eye left to find the way."¹⁵¹

This parable teaches that by learning and practicing Zen, the performer should keep two eyes focused on the process and he will be able to reach his goal naturally.

Perceived Benefits of Zen Meditation for Performance Anxiety

Zen meditation yields numerous physical, mental and behavioral benefits. Mary Elizabeth Taylor's treatise shows Zen meditation reduces general anxiety by reducing heart rate and other physical symptoms. It helps the body to rest and regenerate by decreasing the metabolic rate and lowering the heart rate.¹⁵² Deane Shapiro provides a study which includes the information about meditators' relative experience levels, changes noted during meditation, and an evaluation of the quality controls procedures he used. He found that meditation practice can decrease heart rate.¹⁵³ A study by James Anderson indicates that meditation can decrease blood pressure. By using meditation as a primary intervention for hypertensive patients, he found that meditation produces a statistically significant reduction in high blood pressure that was not found with other forms of relaxation.¹⁵⁴ D. R. Morse et al. found that people who practice meditation show less muscle activity than self-hypnosis, suggesting that meditation is an effective means of muscle relaxation.¹⁵⁵

Benefits of mental approaches associated with Zen meditation practice include improved focus and concentration, greater awareness, and improved perception.¹⁵⁶ Meditation in both mindfulness practice and concentration practice was discussed in the previous chapter.

¹⁵¹ Heiner Klug, "The Zen Master of Piano Playing," <http://www.peter-feuchtwanger.de/english-version/texts/heiner-klug-the-zen-master-of-piano-playing-pian/index.html> (accessed July 12, 2010).

¹⁵² Mary Elizabeth Taylor, "Meditation as Treatment for Performance Anxiety in Singers." (DMA, University of Alabama 2001), 52.

¹⁵³ Deane Shapiro, *Meditation: Self-Regulation Strategy and Altered State of Consciousness* (New York: Aldine, 1980).

¹⁵⁴ University of Kentucky (2008, March 15), "Meditation Can Lower Blood Pressure, Study Shows," Science Daily, <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/03/080314130430.htm> (accessed September 2, 2010).

¹⁵⁵ D. R. Morse, M. Furst, and L. Dublin, "A Physiological and Subjective Evaluation of Meditation Hypnosis and Relaxation" *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 39 (1977): 304-324.

¹⁵⁶ Taylor, "Meditation as Treatment for Performance Anxiety in Singers," 55.

Mindfulness practice can help performers empty their minds, foster a condition of “no thought” and reduce their mental tension. Concentration practice requires performers to focus on the present moment without thinking any negative thoughts, and to be non-judgmental because distracting thoughts or motions could increase the performer’s anxiety.

The behavioral effects shown as a result of the practice of Zen meditation include a form of desensitization as well as the phenomenon of “unstressing.” Unstressing is a process of liberating the nervous system from past stress.¹⁵⁷

Based on the above discussion, Zen meditation can be used to help in reducing anxiety and stress for musicians. It diminishes negative thoughts and allows the performer to be more calm and composed. When the body is relaxed and the mind is calm we are less physically tense, because muscles and minds relax at the same time. The meditation process is done quietly and on one’s own; this gives one a chance to be more conscious of oneself, and helps to escape from the distractions of external surroundings.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 58, 59.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

After the discussion in the previous chapters, we certainly have some ideas about how to use the principles of Zen meditation for treating performance anxiety. In chapter two, different techniques were discussed which have been developed for reducing music performance anxiety. Physical approaches were presented for warming up practices, breathing exercises, Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais Method, biofeedback and hypnotherapy. Several helpful mental approaches were discussed: imagining the real performance, learning to see non-judgmentally, and learning to keep thinking positive thoughts. Studies indicate that Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy can help performers to understand the negative thought patterns that are related to emotional and behavioral disturbances. Finally, combined methods of treatment for performance anxiety are discussed such as using video/audio tape to record oneself playing, visualization exercises, and Don Greene's seven skills for performance anxiety: determination, energy, perspective, courage, focus, poise, and resilience. Obviously, all these treatments are helpful for music performance anxiety, but each of the individual techniques targets a specific anxiety symptom. Zen meditation has the advantage of including all physical, mental and behavioral approaches at the same time. The practice of Zen induces physical changes through breathing exercises and the changes that follow from it. Zen cleanses the mind of distractions. The behavior of anxiety, such as jitters and embarrassment, disappear with the practice of Zen.

Zen meditation is a powerful technique, especially for musicians. It trains the mind to be attentive, and also teaches the body to be relaxed so that it can produce challenging technical passages and maintain muscle flexibility. When the mind is more aware and alert, the likelihood of memory slips and blanks is lowered.

Here, I want to share my own experience using Zen meditation to help overcome performance anxiety. I feel the air going into my lungs more deeply, my body feels more relaxed and my mind becomes tranquil. This is an accurate description of the process. The mind slows down partly because I am not doing anything; I am taking a break from activity. Once in a while, my mind still fills with distracting thoughts. In this case, by consciously directing our attention to

the details of breathing, I remove my attention from random thoughts, and the mind is left only with the simple process of breathing. The focus moves away from the performance to the music.

It often happens that performers, after experiencing unsuccessful performances due to their inability to deal with the anxiety involved in the performance process, usually choose another career, or decide to teach and never go back on stage. This happens because performers are not emotionally prepared to review these frustrating moments in order to do something about them. Musical performers are rarely taught how to “tune” their minds through meditation. If performers do not tune their instruments, when they play, the dissonances will dominate. Likewise, untuned minds will manifest themselves in the way individuals see problems. Therefore performers need to stay in the moment of performance in its full length and meaning, focusing on the present.

Performance anxiety does not necessarily start at the moment one sets foot on stage. It may start at the first thought of putting the performance together or at the first contact with the pieces to be performed. Meditation is one of the ways that can lead to a more successful outcome. It can improve performers’ minds and control their preparation and performance. Being mindful in each second of the performance, experiencing and fully enjoying the richness of the sound and enjoying the sensation of the balance and strength of the body as it makes music, brings the mind to the center of focus and thus prevents music performance anxiety.

The practice of Zen meditation can be effective in coping with performance anxiety both on and off stage. Zen meditation can be practiced in everyday activities such as walking, cooking, or washing the dishes. The practice of Zen meditation is being aware of what one is doing while one is doing it. By being more aware in all aspects of our lives, we can better deal with both the physical and mental distractions that occur onstage.

Zen meditation can bring a clear perspective to the art of performance, leading the performer to the focus and confidence of being in the center. Finally, you can make every performance just what you want it to be. There is nothing telling you how to find the Zone, because it is not something you can find. It is not something that is missing. It is not something separate from you. You cannot find it because you never lost it. The experience of the Zone does not have to be manufactured; the feeling of confidence is our natural state. The qualities of Zen are exactly what we need to achieve peak performance as a pianist: one-pointed concentration and full view of perspective, intensity and ease, poise and balance. Understanding Zen is

something we must find for ourselves: we have to try it and practice it. Only then will we see our own true nature, that is, the nature of the universe.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Hui Xu was born in ShenYang, a principal city in northeast China, and began playing the piano at the age of five. When she was twelve years old, she was accepted in ShenYang Music Conservatory's pre-college division. She continued her study at Odessa Conservatory in the Ukraine under the famous Ukrainian piano professor Igor Ivanovich Suhomlinov, a disciple of the legendary pianist and piano pedagogue Heinrich Neuhaus. Hui Xu received an 'excellent,' the highest honor, from Odessa Conservatory and completed her Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees there. During her time in Europe, Hui Xu received honors in several international competitions.

After earning a Master of Music degree in Piano Performance at Ball State University in Indiana, Hui Xu entered the College of Music at Florida State University to pursue the Doctor of Music degree. At Florida State University Hui Xu won the Doctoral Concerto Competition as well as the following the Chapman Competition sponsored by the Rotary Club. She was awarded Graduate Assistantships in Teaching and Accompanying, and was the recipient of a Tallahassee Music Guild Scholarship and China Linkage Scholarship.

Hui Xu has had extensive performance experience as a soloist and collaborative artist. She has concertized in numerous countries, including the United States, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Lithuania, and China. In 2010, Hui Xu's performance in New York's Carnegie Hall was a milestone in her performance career. She has performed as soloist with the Odessa Music Academy Orchestra in Ukraine, the Indiana Ball State Symphony Orchestra, and the Florida State University Symphony Orchestra.

Hui Xu received the Doctor of Music in Piano Performance in 2010 from the Florida State University.