

**VIDEO LESSON  
ON YOUR DISC**



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## DRUM CLINIC Ergonomics & Technique Performance Anxiety

This month we give you some handy tips to help overcome stage-fright

**P**erformance anxiety can affect all of us to some extent. The thought of getting up to play in front of an audience could be so terrifying that it becomes a massive obstacle.

Our susceptibility to anxiety is closely related to personality. Both introversion and extroversion are personality traits required by a musician. An introspective temperament allows us the self-sufficiency to endure hours of solitude while practising, but the need to engage and entertain an

audience require facets of an extrovert personality. With a need to work in such contrasting environments, it's no wonder we may on occasion find ourselves on the outside of a comfort zone.

Earlier in the series we discussed how excessive muscle tension could be caused by fatigue, stress and/or panic whilst playing. This is actually part of a complex bodily defense system known as the 'fight or flight' reaction - the body takes steps to defend itself by mobilizing its resources.

The heart beats more quickly and breathing becomes deeper, allowing circulation to increase and priming muscles for action. Blood vessels in the extremities of the body contract to concentrate circulation to the vital organs, leaving hands, feet and ears feeling cold. Some may experience nausea, the result of changes in the blood supply affecting the digestive system. For people who suffer from anxiety, the arrival of any of these physical symptoms can only make the mind feel worse about the situation.

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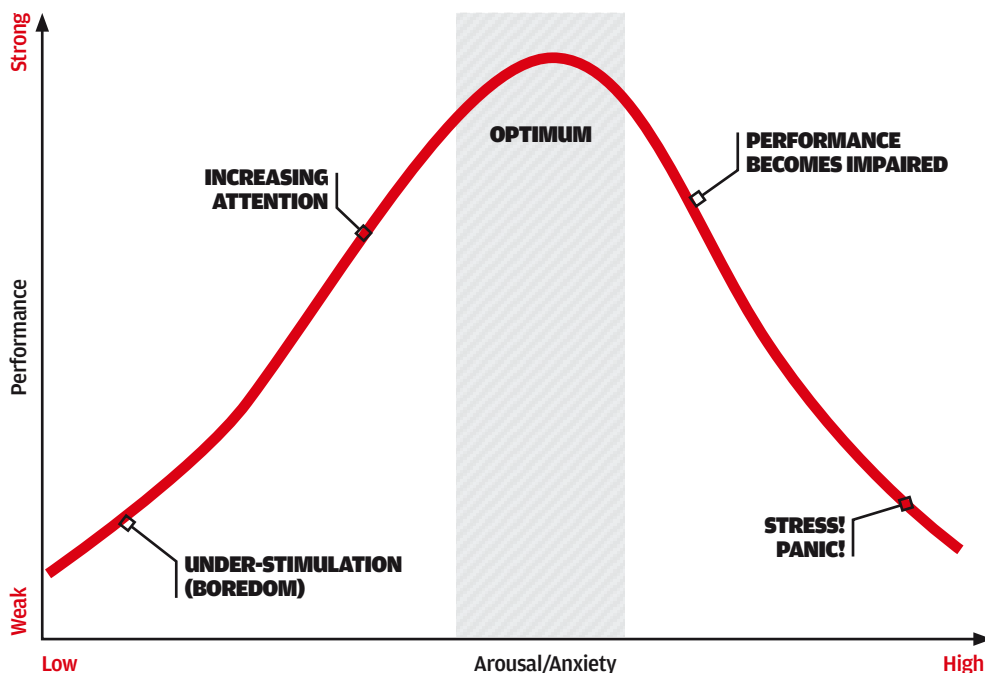


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### The Benefits of Anxiety?

*Many musicians find that the right amount of anxiety can be beneficial to their performance. The more "switched on" our central nervous system is, the better we perform. This is known as the arousal level and it is relative to the level of anxiety we are experiencing.*

*The excitement and challenge of a performance can help us to engage and focus, low levels of arousal allow for a stress-free performance but this means we could be under-stimulated by the experience, bored and are likely to be delivering a half-hearted, emotionless performance.*



The graph to the left shows the level of performance initially improves as anxiety increases, but there will become a point when we begin to experience stress and panic. High levels of anxiety during a performance can lead to "perceptual narrowing". This is the shrinking of our attentional focus to only a few stimuli. Awareness of the bigger picture is lost as you begin to fixate on only what is right in front of you. Any stimuli in the periphery, such as auditory or visual cues from other band members, risk being missed.

Awareness of dynamics, expression, creativity and technical facility will also diminish, as we begin to overthink our actions, engaging in a distracting, self-critical internal dialogue, signifying a regression to the cognitive processes usually associated with early stages of learning a new movement.

Individual personalities will perceive the varying levels of anxiety differently and some may feel that their optimum

performance occurs only in very low arousal levels, while some players require a higher level of excitement to become motivated and engaged. High levels of arousal can be beneficial to tasks requiring gross motor control and stamina, while low levels allow the brain to process lots of information, so it could be said that the level of anxiety/arousal that makes for optimum performance will vary depending on the instrument and genre.

## Help!

Doctors tend to prescribe drugs only in cases of long-term suffering, where acute anxiety has become damaging to overall health. Still, any form of tranquilizer or anti-depressant can only give short-term relief from the symptoms of anxiety. Alcohol is often the obvious choice for nervous performers attempting to relax and is easily available when your regular place of work is a pub or club. However, like other recreational drugs, it will compromise sensory perception and motor skills, which will greatly impair performance. Moreover, you risk the consequences of becoming dependant on the use of alcohol and drugs.

Psychotherapy approaches often favour confronting the root cause of the problem. An approach known as Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) uses techniques designed to make positive changes and access greater achievement in all areas of a performer's life. Simone Niles is a vocal coach and qualified NLP practitioner at The Institute. She focuses on the personal and developmental aspects of performance artists, in order to facilitate an exceptional level of performance. In her upcoming book, Simone provides a practical guide to performance excellence.

## NLP & Performance Anxiety

"NLP practitioners work with the understanding that we are born with only two natural fears," says Simone, "the fear of falling and the fear of loud noises. Therefore all other fears have been learned or conditioned and subsequently can be 'unlearned'. Fear in performance ultimately comes down to one thing, fear of 'exposed failure'. This can be seen as not wanting to

starts beating fast, I feel a knot in my stomach and then I know I'm pumped and ready to go.' Do these symptoms sound familiar? Of course they do, except in this case they were a positive push in the right direction instead of an obstacle in performance. So how you perceive these physical reactions is very likely to contribute

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mess up in front of anyone, fear of being misunderstood, fear of rejection and pretty much being scared to 'bare your soul' in front of an audience. Now, regardless of your skill level, technique or practice, stage fright occurs for many performers and it is not directly related to the aforementioned.

"I once saw an interview with Bruce Springsteen. Asked how he felt before performing, he described it as something like this: 'I feel an adrenaline rush, my heart

to the effect that they have on you.

"So how can you be in control of your reactions when your body has its own agenda? Using NLP you can alter your perception by manipulating your senses to encourage a different experience. You use your senses (seeing, hearing, feeling, etc) to structure your experience of the world, and by making these sensory alterations you can then go from feeling anxious to a more suitable state for your performance." **R**



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### HERE ARE SOME STEPS THAT YOU CAN EXPLORE TO HELP YOU CHANGE FROM A STATE OF ANXIETY TO A MORE DESIRABLE ONE

- 1** Allow any sensations of anxiety to occur without judgment or negative labelling (this will probably already help to reduce the sensations).
- 2** Be aware of the symptoms that you may be having and alter the experience by consciously changing your physiology. For example, if you experience muscle tension which causes you to hunch over, sit or stand up straight instead and breathe.
- 3** 'Reframe' your thought process by changing any negative internal dialogue to a positive and encouraging pep talk.
- 4** If at all possible, try to rehearse or practise in an environment as close to that of

performance as possible, this is known as the 'target context'. At the Institute, students become comfortable with public performance in live workshops, building confidence that they then take out onto the gig circuit. Another tip is that thorough preparation will most usually give us all the self-assurance we need for a performance, with anxiety only presenting itself when we leave things to chance.

- 5** Before a gig, it is useful to find distraction that will occupy the mind and prevent negative thought. Warm up exercises and stretching helps us to relax whilst preparing the body to play. This month's video lesson introduces the free stroke, an efficient method of stick control that promotes relaxation in the way we play.

The more you practise these steps the easier it gets to overcome performance anxiety, making each performance a time to look forward to and anxiety a thing of the past.