

Guide for stage fright (without guarantee 😊)



Do you want to feel good on stage and to be able to play to your full potential?

Every person wants to have a positive experience on stage. However, it is possible that the emotions that precede the event trigger unwanted reactions in the body: trembling, sweating, dry mouth, accelerated heartbeat, breathing deficiencies, muscle tension, dizziness, etc.

If these reactions in the body affect and disrupt your performance, preventing you from having a positive experience, then you can learn to manage stage fright.

What you need to know:

These reactions are natural and even play an important role in a person's presence on stage. They can be associated with positive feelings such as joy and enthusiasm, instead of fear and helplessness.

Stage trauma is often associated with a perceived negative event in the past. The emotional response – the basic feeling in this case is FEAR (and the result may be, for example, disappointment).

In the case of a positively perceived event (success), the emotional response is JOY as the basic feeling, and the result is satisfaction.

"Fear is that part of emotional behavior, which most influences the sequence of mechanical movements, mental state and breathing process. If a component part of this "chain" of systems is blocked, blockages occur in other parties involved in the interpretation process. The body signals by behavior, what happens on an emotional level." (*The role of the body in Interaction with the Instrument*, Bistrița: Născut Liber, 2015).

The breath plays a key role in managing stress.

What can you do?

You can develop a discipline by doing what gives you strength, confidence and safety. I invite you to search and I hope you will find what is effective for you. Here are some suggestions:

Mental and emotional level:

Feelings of insecurity and fear will be replaced by positive feelings. These need to be practiced, same as you study and repeat notes and passages. Already when you practice, you include emotional balance, safety and/or joy in the learning process. It is your decision whether you free your thoughts or take control of them, deliberately using them in the process of creation. Uncontrolled thoughts often tend to be negative, or associated with similar emotions. You can create positive thinking patterns (affirmations) that are repeated as often as possible.

New neural connections will be built in the brain, which will manifest in the body as positive reactions/emotions.

Examples of affirmations:

- I CAN play the piece, the program – this means that I have prepared everything it needs, I have practiced correctly, efficiently (for this you can ask for the help of people you trust: teacher/s, accompanist, colleagues with whom you play, etc.
- I KNOW the music to be played (full score, accompaniment).
- I FEEL well, safe, and free.
- I CAN DO IT!
- My emotions and feelings are allowed to appear, they are important to make music, I share them with the audience.

You need to know that it is not the events themselves, but the emotions associated with them that are decisive. The way YOU INTERPRET and integrate them as your own experience has a decisive effect on what YOU DO. Become aware of your strengths and weaknesses. In mental training (of athletes, for example) it is important that everyone knows and uses his qualities and abilities. Where weaknesses are shown, improvements can be made. It means that the experience becomes a positive one, and the helplessness turns into success.

Physical level:

All young students and professional musicians who have responded to the request to share strategies with which they are successful in managing stage trauma use the breath successfully.

Breathing is the only directed process at the vegetative level which we can consciously influence to restore a sense of balance, order and safety.

Briefly explained: When the body is in a state of stress, breathing is short and superficial, and the body reacts to the given situation. The result is the insufficient removal of carbon dioxide from the lungs. However, the body needs to be fed oxygen at the cellular level to ensure the right exchange between the body and the environment (chemical regulation). Therefore, EXPIRE consciously and prolonged. Inspiration will take place as a natural reaction, and air will enter the body if the necessary space has been created.

Breathing exercises:

(always exhale through the mouth, as if through a straw, and inhale through the nose)

1. Expiration (exhale all air). Inhale for 4 seconds, and exhale for 4 seconds. Repeat a few times. Extend the exhalation time with 2 seconds to 8 or 10 seconds.

- Expiration. Inhale for 4 seconds and exhale for 8 seconds. Short breaks after inspiration and exhalation. Then shorten the inspiration time and extend the exhalation time. Model (expire, then start):

Inhale (I)	Exhale (E)	I	E	I	E
4	8	4	8	4	4 (seconds)
4	10	4	12	4	10
4	8	2	8	2	10
4	10	2	2	2	12

This exercise trains and increases respiratory capacity. It can be performed in a second attempt with only 1 second for inspiration.

- Expiration – short pause – maximum inspiration. The air is retained on the feeling of fullness, during which the force obtained by inspiration is moved to the center of the abdomen (the center of gravity of the body) and the pelvic diaphragm is activated. Exhale quickly (with ffuu/hhoo or silent). Repeat three times, let your breath return to normal and, if necessary, repeat the exercise.

Feeling good and being in a good physical shape (tonus) is very important in order to be able to use your full potential on stage. What does that mean to you?

The professional musicians from whom I've asked their opinion, consider the following things to be important

- Getting enough sleep, going refreshed to the concert (important also for practicing), fatigue reduces concentration and focused attention, leads to muscle tension, and breathing is affected.
- Sufficient hydration of the body (drink plenty of water, sweetened drinks are less recommended).
- Eating gently before the concert (feeling hungry decreases efficiency), bananas (rich in fructose, potassium and vitamin B6) are the most commonly consumed fruits ☺.

Body loosening

Simple exercises that help reduce tension: the gentle shaking of the body (relaxed knees, lifting on the tips and rhythmic descent on the foot), rotating the joints, stretching or light jumping.

Other methods or practices that can help both physically and mentally:
Progressive muscle relaxation after Jakobson, Dispokinesis, Tapping/EFT,
Meditation, Yoga, Qi-Gong, Autogenic Training, Feldenkrais, Alexander
Technique, etc.

While practicing:

Relax deliberately the parts of the body which are not actively involved in the movement (for example, fingers that are not involved in playing). In breaks, body tension is located and relaxed as much as possible (raised shoulders for example).

Whatever you decide to approach, remember: not what you know, but what you DO is essential to you. Only what you have practiced and repeated often can be activated and put into action at the crucial moment.

Before the concert:

- Create a short quiet moment, do breathing exercises.
- In your mind, prepare for the concert, put on pause what is unimportant, create the total presence on stage
- Imagine the concert situation in a positive way, including the pleasant feeling during and after the event (enthusiasm, joy, gratitude)
- Accept symptoms of stage fright and direct your attention to the breathing.

On stage:

- Exhale and inhale deeply 2-3 times.
- Focus, imagine the sound, put yourself into the mood of the piece/part you are about to play.
- While interpreting, you constantly focus on what is happening in the present moment, as well as your sensory experience (feel the contact of your fingers with the keys, strings, bow, etc.).
- Accept mistakes. You can only influence what happens in the next moment, let go of what has just passed.
- Give your music to everyone or to individuals in the audience.

And the most important thing: ENJOY !

