

Reconciling the Body and Mind for Optimal Music Performance

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Relaxation

Awareness of Breathing

Progressive Relaxation

Auto Suggestion

The Relaxation Response

1. Quiet environment
2. An object or phrase upon which to dwell
3. Passive attitude
4. Comfortable position

“Lie Down”

1. On a carpeted floor or mat, lie on your back with your feet flat on the floor.
2. Elevate your head with paperback books about 2 to 6 inches.
3. Let gravity pull down on your muscles and lengthen your spine for about 15 minutes daily.

Balanced Posture

When the body is free and relaxed, the mind is free to think clearly.

Let the neck go free (freedom at the nodding joint)

Allow the head to go forward and up (from the crown of the head)

Allow the torso to lengthen and widen

Balance on the sitting bones, or “rockers”

Study “Body Mapping” Techniques

Practical Use of Mental Rehearsal and Imagery Techniques

Incorporate All of the Senses

Aural, visual and kinesthetic senses are the most important for musicians. Don't neglect the senses of taste, touch and smell.

Visualization

Imagine an upcoming performance. See all of the details and incorporate our senses. Imagine even the physiological effects of nervousness and see yourself overcoming them. Visualize a successful performance in which you feel good about yourself, the music that has been created and the audience's joy in experiencing it. Visualization may be done from either an internal or an external perspective, or a combination of the two.

Mental Leadership

Think ahead rhythmically, letting the mind guide the muscles. Hear and feel a phrase in exact time before playing it. Helpful in learning new pieces, practicing registration changes.

Miming

Mime motions of playing while hearing the sound in the inner ear and paying careful attention to muscular movements. For singers, have them mentally sing through a part while another is rehearsing, or mentally hear a phrase before singing.

Verbal Cueing

Write cues in the score and think them aloud as you get to that passage; later, the cues can be imagined rather than spoken.

Creative Images

Think of the images or characters that the music evokes; play a movie in your mind that corresponds to the piece. Use analogies for yourself, when teaching, or working with a choir.

Mental Practice with a Metronome

With the metronome clicking, hear a passage of music in your head at the desired tempo with precise rhythm. Hearing the passage with the metronome before playing it will assure stronger rhythm in the physical execution.

Altering Tempos of Mental Rehearsals

Mentally rehearse a new piece at the desired final tempo. Skim through simple sections and mentally rehearse the more difficult sections or memory posts.

Memory

Include aural, visual and kinesthetic elements; During the initial stage of memory, alternate rehearsing a passage mentally and physically until the segment is securely memorized. Rehearse the piece mentally, imagining the sound, muscle movements and visualizing the score; incorporate mental representations within the physical practice. Away from the organ, imagine playing the piece; if there are sections that are unclear, these require more practice at the instrument.

Additional Resources

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The Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique available from www.alexandertechnique.com; Internet, accessed April 2005.