

DANIEL MOULT

C O N C E R T O R G A N I S T | O R G A N T U T O R

Performance Psychology: A brief summary
RSCM Organists' Courses: 2005 and 2008,
Organists' Review, 2008, revised 2017

1. BE MUSICALLY PREPARED

There's no substitute for 100% secure preparation! This includes fingering and pedalling markings and an inner sense that, all things being equal, we could deliver a totally secure and musical performance. consider murphy's law!...

2. CHALLENGE YOUR THINKING ERRORS

Are you using "black & white thinking" / "mental filtering" / "emotional reasoning"? It's vitally important that we practice "good psychology" - feeling confident and calm when we practice, and banishing negative thoughts immediately, replacing them with positive thoughts. Do you have any positive affirmations to hand for when the demons enter your head? Are you thinking of past successes (not past failure!) in the lead up to the event?

3. HEALTHY MIND = HEALTHY BODY

Good sleep and some moderate intensity exercise leading up to a potentially stressful situation is excellent preparation... Consider lifestyle issues approaching concerts/exams etc (alcohol, diet, sleep, general exertion etc).

4. BE PHYSICALLY PREPARED

Build in Deep breathing – 4262 (in to 4, hold for 2, out to 6, count 2 before repeating ad lib...) and P.M.R. (progressive muscle relaxation) into your pre-performance ritual - even if you think you won't need it!

5. REHEARSE THE OCCASION

What potentially scares you the most (starting the first piece? Overall stamina? One or two particularly demanding passages?) Ensure that you've already visited the occasion in your mind: practice as if you're really in that situation. You should feel the adrenaline if you're practicing this successfully!

6. VISUALISE THE OCCASION

Sit somewhere quiet and undisturbed and picture the occasion in exact detail. you're the cameraman! if you revert to panic or lose control, stop, rewind and re-record! You want an imaginary video of you in 100% control, on top form. it helps if you can experience the room when you practice this - could you do this undisturbed in your venue?

7. RECORD YOURSELF - REGULARLY!

For musical as well as psychological feedback! don't stop when you record yourself. Repeat, repeat, repeat the process. Are you starting to enjoy the music and worry less about your ego if there is a small slip or inconsistency? Good psychological practice - if done routinely!

8. USE POINTS AND / OR ADJECTIVES

Give yourself a 95 or 90% etc score to achieve. Whenever anything is not perfect and frustrates you, say "minus 1%"... you stop point scoring and end up focusing on the music - this should stop the "vicious circle" effect! Use adjectives listed at the top of your score, or over specific sections/phrases: focus on the adjectives, not the notes, if you're feeling unsettled or too mechanical (a danger which can affect us when under pressure).

9. EXPERIMENT ...with these suggestions - some may work for you, some not - but never accept defeat! Keep an open mind on broadening your strategies and review them after each event, if necessary. Everyone can play at their full potential if they learn to harness "nerves" in their favour!

10. PRACTICE... whichever ideas work for you - this should become as routine a part of your practice as technique and repertoire!

© Daniel Moulton 2008, revised 2017

Further reading

- Musical Excellence ed. Williamon, Aaron (O.U.P, 2004)
- The Inner Game of Music Green, Barry and Gallwey, W Timothy (Random House 1986) {also now a dvd!}

- Keeping your nerve Jones, Kate (Faber Music, 2000)
- Golf is not a game of perfect Dr Bob Rotella (Pocket Books, 2004)