

STAGE FRIGHT WORKSHOP NOTES / SOURCE MATERIAL

From Stage Fright, the Natural Classical Guitar and Barry Green material

First of all, it's important to understand what is the cause of stage fright. It's similar to any other fright: if we know we are **not able to control** something, we get fright. Just to give you an easy example: you are happily driving your car, you know how to do the various things, in a word, you can control your car. But, suddenly, the road is icy, slippery, you want to turn left but the steer doesn't work, your car goes straight. You start getting some fright, so you want to stop it but because of the ice the brakes have no effect; you get more and more fright because now you know you can't control what's going on and eventually you and your car end up against the rail of that curve (my experience, I told you).

The same thing happens when playing an instrument. The more you know you can't control the technical aspects of what you are doing, the more you are going to worry about it. In fact, we tend to get more nervous about difficult things, because most of times we are not sure we can control them.

First of all, it's necessary to solve the problems concerned with the physical side of playing. So here, for each of these universal fears, there are **causes and cures** explained, together with practical **exercises**.

How to use the natural body balances and movements to get to master difficult things, have a **flowing sense** and in control, how to **prevent stiffness**.

But don't just read it, **do it!**

IV) THE MENTAL ASPECTS OF STAGE FRIGHT

1.THE FEAR OF NOT BEING LOUD
ENOUGH or TOO LOUD

a. *Hearing*

b. *Listening*

2.THE FEAR OF NOT BEING FAST ENOUGH OR IN TIME

3.THE FEAR OF MEMORY LAPSE

4.THE POWER OF WORDS

5.THE POWER OF IMAGINATION

Causes and cures: tips to practice fast passages, how to learn a piece to **play by heart, which words create a mental state of tension**, while others help to **create ease** and **flexibility**, so you know which ones to use when talking, teaching, even thinking about playing. How to use your imagination for help with this and to create your musical communication.

V) THE SOCIAL ASPECTS OF STAGE FRIGHT

THE FEAR OF NOT BEING GOOD ENOUGH

Causes and cures: I personally think that this is the most difficult fear to overcome, because even when you have got rid of the technical problems that made you insecure, still there is the **fear of** other people's **judgement**. This applies to many aspects of life, but it's especially true of playing an instrument, it's the identification of one's personal worth with the "goodness" of playing.

I personally think that another way to help reduce stage fright is to try to eliminate this **attitude of fierce criticism**, so prevalent especially among music students and no-longer-students. The more you criticize, the more you are bound to be nervous when your turn to play comes, especially in front of "friends" or people you know, because you are aware of what they would think of your performance and, what's worst, of you as a person. So, why not try and **stop criticizing** other players for every tiny mistake or other things? I adopted this attitude, "OK, that's the way he/she plays, it's their choice, it's not my job to judge other people's playing, it doesn't make me a better player so what's the point of criticizing?" By the way, I've found it useful not only for music, but for other situations, it makes me more tolerant of other people's faults and less worried about their judgement.

VI) CONCLUSION

1.THE ART OF PRACTICING

2.SUGGESTIONS FOR EXAMINATIONS, AUDITIONS,
COMPETITIONS, PERFORMANCES

3.THE SALIENT POINTS IN PRACTICING

Playing and practicing is more a matter of **mental attitude**, not a mechanical thing, it's about what we mean to do with it. Here is some general advice about how to practice (see why practicing itself can be a major cause of stage fright), prepare for performances. So change your attitude and you change the results. Read quotes from the famous violin player **Fritz Kreisler**, who was famed for not practicing much, see what he says about relying on muscular exercise only and about practicing before a performance.

Other things you can do

When I was working on this, I did all sorts of musical things, which could, in one way or another, be helpful in improving my playing: I started playing with all styles of players, in pub sessions, churches, learned to play by ear (and more..., you'll see later on), just to regain that genuine feeling of doing it for pleasure, without worries.

We get used to think that if we make a mistake it's a **tremendous crime**, so we focus our attention only on not making any error, forgetting the musical communication. Of course, it's nice not to make mistakes, but if that becomes your only concern, oh, what a boring drudgery!

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One learns from mistakes, so, something else you could do to overcome stage fright, is find situations to **play where you are allowed to make mistakes** because people are not there to judge you but they are only willing to receive and enjoy your music.

When speaking with my students or other players who say they get nervous, I advise them to go and play at their church during a function, or play at an elderly people's home or play for little children, easy things to make them enjoy it, have fun, tell them a story. Even if you make some mistakes, so, what's going to happen? They'd never notice it but they **would love you** for the gift of music that you can give them, they'd ask you for more music and this will help you to build confidence in yourself, in your ability to play and to communicate and you'll be able to play more and more demanding pieces.

Then you can go home and practice the passages that need improvement. And if you can play by heart, without reading the music, much better, so you can look at people right in their eyes, *"talk"* to them with music, smile. Start with something simple and enjoy it. If you still need some practice in performing your piece in front of an audience before a big event, the final touch, for many the scariest thing you can do is some **busking**. Yes, go and play in the streets, there you have an audience, the situation is challenging, it may be noisy, people coming and going, a lot of distractions, you may have to cope with the idea of "what will they think of me?" (but who cares what they think?), but if you can cope with this, then performing in any other situation will seem easier.

To conclude, **you can do something** about stage fright, **improve** your playing and **enjoy** yourself when you play, feel the emotion of making and giving music to your listeners, cause emotions in your listeners.

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Start giving your music to everyone, see the nice comments you might receive...

and people dancing to your music...

and you'll feel much more confident and able.

I found these books I mentioned very useful and if you have any doubts about how to solve some problems and so far you haven't found answers, I warmly recommend them to you!

If you want some more help and tips, I do teach guitar and bass. This is the way I teach and I see that my pupils have a nice tone from the very beginning, enjoy themselves much more, learn more quickly. Playing is not just doing all the right notes, as [Kató Havas](#) says:

"It is important to realize that our responsibility as musicians lies just in this - in the lifting up emotionally and aesthetically of all our listeners, regardless of whether they are examiners, auditioners, or members of an audience. If all our energies were channelled into giving people, through the medium of music, a deeper understanding of their own potential as part of the wonderful mysteries that the universe contains, we would not only do justice to ourselves as musicians, but stage fright would be banished from the face of this earth forever."

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You can never prepare too much. You need as much knowledge at your disposal as possible. When the time comes, nerves will be in the distance. Extra work gives you a backlog of possibility to feed off of, knowing no stone has been left unturned.

Don't practice mistakes.

Learn first, then practice what you have learned.
Spend a great deal of time listening to a piece before attempting to play it.

Practice away from your instrument.

Use the **STOP** method:

Stop-take a break.

Think-reevaluate.

Organize

Proceed- get back to work.

Practice slow

Internalize by singing what you want to learn.

Don't over think, just play.

Focus on the music. Not what others think.

Focus on what you have accomplished and what you can do.

Enjoy your anxieties.

Play with an uncluttered mind.

When you desire to have a good performance, visualize it and you will believe it to be.

A solid, focused warm up routine.

Don't panic-focus on one thing at a time.

Remind yourself of what brought you to this moment.

Believe in yourself.

To perform fearlessly, don't be worried about how your music is received.

Only concern yourself with being honest and convincing.

Awareness.

Will/commitment.

TRUST

LAUGH

BREATHE

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Reduce your fear and anxiety associated with public speaking or performing

Lessen your anticipatory anxiety, prior to public speaking and performing events

Reduce avoidance of public speaking and performing opportunities

Learn ways to calm your physical symptoms and empower your mind set when facing this challenge

Increase feelings of confidence and ease when speaking or performing and create the possibility of coming to enjoy the experience!

- 1.) Breathing Patterns.
- 2.) Visualize The Audience Clapping At The End.
- 3.) Practice Out Loud And Within Your Mind.
- 4.) Video Tape Your Self, And Work On Things You Need To Work On.
- 5.) Use Positive Affirmations.
- 6.) Possible Use Body Language Gestures Or NLP (Neuro-linguistic Programming) Communication Techniques.
- 7.) Tell Yourself Your A Brilliant Player,
- 8.) Imagine That You Were In The Audience Watching, And Thinking "I Wish I Could Do That", Then Realize Your Amazing! - I'm (whatever age), this is what I do!

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OVERCOMING STAGE FRIGHT

What follows is a thumb-nail sketch of ideas and suggestions

Aims at presenting an overall approach to the art of playing music with minimum effort if not effortlessly. Here are 10 'principles' which appear in the following order:

- Let Nature Support Your Playing
- Increase Mind/Body Awareness
- Develop Natural Concentration
- Cultivate Dynamic Relaxation
- Apply the Play-Relax Technique
- Refine Your Guitar Skills
- Learn from the Masters
- Use the Mind Over Fingers Approach
- Share Your Enjoyment of Music
- Evolve from the Guitar to the Self

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An Overview

"The best guitarists make playing look easy. In fact, it is easy for them". But how could it be possible for the average guitar player to reach that distant goal of effortless playing? Simply, by allowing nature play her part. The cooperation between nature and guitarist can yield excellent results. Delving into each of the above ten principles, we observe the following:

1. Let Nature Support Your Playing

The imperative 'do less, accomplish more' is the main theme of the first chapter of this book. I hold the view that the 'principle of minimum effort' is the root idea of successful guitar playing; and in order to reinforce this view, I marshal some philosophical ideas from the East, such as Yoga, Taoism, and Zen Buddhism. We learn that nature loves economy and minimal effort. Therefore, we should let nature to do her work every time we take the guitar and start playing a piece of music. Example: An intelligent woodsman splits a log easier by allowing the natural force of gravity to help him bring down the axe. Similarly, the intelligent guitarist finds it easier to press down the strings with his/her left-hand if he/she allows the natural weight of his/her arm to provide much of the pressure.

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2. Increase Mind/Body Awareness

In this chapter we find ourselves in deeper water. We may have a very good guitar teacher, excellent instruction books, and a large collection of fine recorded guitar pieces. But the value of all these things is limited if we are not aware of what takes place in our mind, our body, and in the music we are playing. Here I'll use the act of eating of an apple with the playing of the guitar: "To get the full value from eating an apple, your full attention needs to be on the apple; to get the most enjoyment from playing the guitar, your full attention needs to be on the guitar". This can only be done if we settle our mind and relax our body. 'Settling the mind' means 'emptying it'. A completely 'empty' mind with no disturbing thoughts is like a tranquil lake with no ripples on its surface. Conclusion: Having a settled mind and a relaxed body enables us to play the guitar with minimum effort and to become aware of the subtleties of the music we are playing (tone production, color, dynamics, articulation, etc.).

3. Develop Natural Concentration

This chapter stresses the importance of natural concentration, which enables us to focus our attention on one aspect of guitar playing at a given moment (a melodic line, a rest stroke, a shift of the left-hand, etc.). Good concentration translates into good playing. The technique of natural concentration can be derived from the practical teachings of Yoga.

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4. Cultivate Dynamic Relaxation

Here the discussion is on the question of balance. The author makes the point that, when we play the guitar in complete accord with the principle of minimum effort, we find ourselves in a balanced state of mind and body. Aldous Huxley has called this balanced state 'dynamic relaxation'. Its main characteristic is the balance of opposite tendencies (activity and rest, tension and relaxation) in both mind and body. The author recognizes the prima facie paradox of this state, but at the same time he believes that it is possible for activity to be combined with relaxation. In this state of dynamic relaxation (balancing the opposites) we feel completely relaxed, even when playing demanding pieces of music. Again, the author touches upon the philosophies of the East, which he analyzes with some examples.

5. Apply the Play-Relax Technique

The 'play-relax' technique is based on an ancient idea that, if we want to achieve a specific result, we must master its opposite. The followers of Taoism say "empty and be full." Leo Brouwer, the Cuban guitarist-composer, recommended the same approach to his students. There is no doubt that the proper guitar playing demands proper relaxation. But what is 'proper relaxation?' The author says it is "the balanced alternation between playing and not playing." A good guitarist knows how to take full advantage of the opportunity to relax his/her hands and fingers "between the notes and the playing movements." When a balanced alternation between playing and not playing is reached, guitar playing becomes almost effortless.

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6. Refine Your Guitar Skills

I now speak of the importance of perfecting our guitar playing technique. In my view, we cannot enjoy the benefits of dynamic relaxation if we pay no attention to details, both musical and technical. Lack of emphasis on details, such as good tone, effortless flow of fingers, damping of unwanted notes, shaping melodic lines, etc., makes guitar playing less satisfactory and less enjoyable. The beauty resides in the details (see the colorful structure of a butterfly wing, the fine veins of an oak leaf, etc.). And while I take the trouble to enter into the subject of details, I also deal with tone color, articulation, natural fingering, making left-hand connections, etc.

7. Learn from the Masters

Undoubtedly, imitating good players is one of the most natural ways of learning to play the guitar. The child learns the mother tongue by imitating the mother. Similarly, the guitar student learns directly from the teacher by imitating him/her. Having a fine teacher and using him/her as a model, the student avoids the common mistakes that most self-taught students make. A good teacher is able to make maximum use of the student's artistic potential. Examining the imitative learning process, I do not neglect to mention how the masters learned their craft. There are other natural ways of learning, such as regular, goal-directed practice, breaking down technical problems, intelligent repetition, memorization techniques, slow practice, the use of metronome, and other techniques from which we get the most benefit in an enjoyable way.

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8 Use the Mind Over Fingers Approach

Here we find the common opinion (it was also expressed by F. Sor) that good and effortless guitar playing requires skill, not sheer strength. Many guitarists believe that by making their fingers strong through endless repetition of exercises and musical pieces, they will eventually play the guitar well. But, according to the author, this is not necessarily so. [Note: Yet Morales states that Barrios, in order to master a new piece of music, he played it consecutively 100 times without error!] The author suggests that the best approach to 'sharpen' more effectively our guitar playing technique is through 'mental picturing' and 'mental hearing'. The key is: 'visualize and let it happen'. This interesting approach is analyzed in some detail in this chapter.

9. Share Your Enjoyment of Music

"It is natural to share your enjoyment of the guitar with others. It is unnatural to be afraid and keep your talent to yourself." This, certainly, makes good sense. However, common sense also tells us that the guitarist should not play for others if he/she is not thoroughly prepared. The salient point I make is this: When we are playing for others, the extra enjoyment we (and the others) draw comes from "a special kind of energy exchange" between the player and the audience; and when that occurs, the guitarist and the audience "become perfectly synchronized with the rhythm and feeling of the music." I suggest various steps we can take in order to overcome the fear of playing for others.

10. Evolve from the Guitar to the Self

Finally, we learn that the guitar is something more than just a musical instrument; it is an excellent means of self-development. When we study it intelligently, it can help us learn to concentrate better, to memorize more easily, to improve mind-body coordination, to perform well while remaining relaxed, to get along well with others, and to harmonize ourselves with our environment. I believe that, in the final analysis, guitar playing is a subtle discipline that helps us to reach not only our full mental, physical, and spiritual potential, but also to become happier human beings.