
*Redefining the Performance:
An analysis of performance practices and their
relation to music performance anxiety*

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Madison Hines

Music performance anxiety (MPA) is a condition that many musicians face during their musical career. Resulting from a combination of behavioral, physical, and cognitive factors, MPA can cause musicians to experience high levels of stress which can negatively affect their performances. Numerous music students experience MPA for the first time in their childhood because they are not properly taught how to handle feelings associated with performance anxiety. In order to develop techniques to alleviate MPA among student musicians, I have investigated performance preparation practices and techniques through interviews with collegiate musicians, surveys, and analysis of texts relating to the psychology of music performance anxiety.

The purpose of this phase of research was to examine how experiences with MPA change as music students progress in their studies. At the beginning of the semester, music students at Kansas State University filled out a survey that covered a variety of aspects relating to MPA, including symptoms, triggers, and techniques that they implement to alleviate MPA. I was then able to interview four students with various backgrounds and experiences with MPA. These interviews provided detailed information about how students view their performances and how their anxiety levels have changed throughout their music career. Several students linked the source of their anxiety to personal pride, expectations, or evaluative situations. Environment also played a key role in their levels of anxiety, including those present in the audience or the location where they were performing. In addition, students were able to explain how other psychological aspects of their personality and background affected their levels of MPA, a key discovery in this phase of research.

This study provided valuable insight on the experiences of advanced music students with MPA in the ensemble and solo settings. It also provided important insight to the psychological factors that affect MPA and solutions that can be used to help alleviate it. Both music students and music educators can benefit from the findings of this study and apply these techniques in their performance preparation practices. While there are many texts that help individuals address their personal experiences with MPA, there is a need for more literature directed towards music educators. In order to continue this investigation, music educators will be interviewed to learn about their experiences with MPA and how they have addressed it among their students. The information from this study will then be compiled in writing during the upcoming semesters to serve as a guide for music educators.