

Stage Fright

Eminem's mouth was dry, his palms were sweating, and his breath came in short gasps. He had cleared his throat so many times it was tight and raw. His insides felt like they were about to implode and his mind whirled in a thousand directions. With his heart drumming in his ears, he forced himself to climb onto the stage in front of hundreds of his peers.

Eminem, the famous rap artist, was experiencing **performance anxiety or stage fright**. Anything that requires public demonstrations of skill can trigger the above symptoms. We all experience some performance anxiety during a job interview, exam, business presentation, stage performance, or speech. We fear is that we will not do as well as we want to, that we will make a mistake and embarrass ourselves. In that first attempt, Eminem could not even speak and was publicly humiliated. He almost gave up his dreams of rapping, but his many fans are grateful he did not.

Of all the students I've taught over the years, seven year old Allison displayed the confidence and ease we all would like to have. When asked to sing for a large gathering, her face beamed and she responded with, "Do I get a mic?" She stepped right up to that mic and she was entrancing. For those of us who are not quite so relaxed in the spotlight there are basic strategies that do help.

Know your stuff. Competence breeds confidence. Thorough preparation, memory work and consistent practice appear to be cliché suggestions, but the well-trained body and mind will operate reasonably well under duress. A seasoned piano teacher advised all of her students, "When you can play this in your sleep, only then will you know it well enough."

Have fun with it! Adopt the attitude that each performance is but one step in a long continuum of learning. Ask yourself, "Realistically, what could happen if I bomb in the worst possible way?" Yes, you will be embarrassed some, but will you still go home to a warm bed? Have coffee in the morning? My observation is that audiences overlook almost anything. Be prepared for a memory lapse and have a strategy. Improvise until you're back on track. Some cover-ups make more sense than others, but presented confidently the audience moves on with you. People assume you know what you're doing!

Think positively! Every day take some time to sit quietly and visualize success. Imagine a chain of positive events culminating with the joy and wonder of sharing your particular gift with others and their enthusiastic

response to it. Utilize the mind-body-spirit practices such as Yoga, hypnosis, Alexander technique, meditation or martial arts to maintain focus, concentration and confidence.

Develop technical skills. This is a lifelong project. Professional performers work with coaches and trainers throughout their whole careers because objective feedback is vital to their continued success. Actively seek helpful information through workshops, lessons, tapes or CD's and books. Use a video camera to record and then evaluate yourself honestly, taking credit for what you do well and noting where you need improvement. Learn from the wisdom and the mistakes of others. Join a choir, a community band, a drama or a dance troupe, take Toastmaster's classes, and participate in Karaoke and jam nights at local venues.

Be kind to yourself and take baby steps. The value and rewards of performing within the safety and expertise of a group cannot be overstated. The Ridge-Meadows area has excellent community performance groups who are warm and welcoming to new members.

Take care of your body. It's just common sense to take care of the body's basic needs - sleep, exercise, good food, and enough water. Treat yourself to massage, Reiki, or therapeutic touch for de-stressing and relaxation.

The next article deals with strategies to reduce pre-performance jitters. In the meantime, consider that the lessons learned here can be applied to the music and dance of our everyday lives, and giving wings to the music inside you improves the quality of life for us all.