



**MUSICIANSHIP FROM THE INSIDE OUT**

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BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA  
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“GIVE A MAN A FISH AND YOU FEED HIM FOR A DAY. TEACH HIM **HOW**  
TO FISH AND YOU FEED HIM FOR A LIFETIME.”

--LAO TZU

How we approach every aspect of being a musician comes from within. From centering ourselves before a practice session to feeling the breath move in and flow out of our bodies as sound, we are focused on the inside.

This handbook provides a creative and fun way for students and teachers to explore together the inner workings of the discipline of music. This booklet sheds light on subjects that are rarely discussed: How do we become great teachers to ourselves? How do we manage performance anxiety? How do we convey authentic emotion? We invite each student to come up with his or her own answers.

Students already know much of what they need to know; they just don't know it yet. When we discover answers for ourselves, when we learn how to learn, when we take risks in front of our peers, when we express our depth as human beings, we are learning life skills that will always serve us.

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Eli K. Epstein

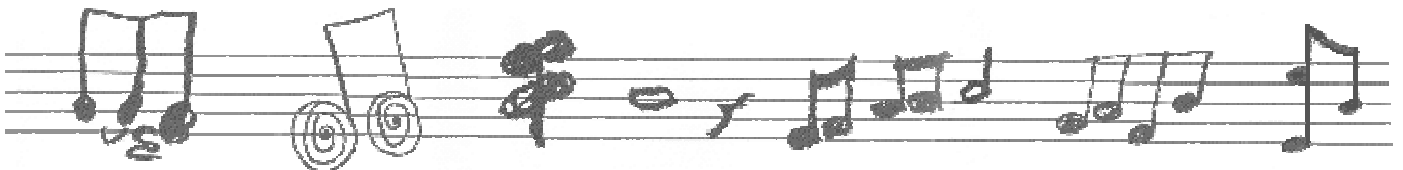




Photo credit: Liz Linder

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# BEING YOUR OWN BEST TEACHER

Practicing well is the foundation for all the progress we make as we get to know music and our instruments better. Yet, how we do that is rarely talked about.

Let's start looking at it from your own life experience. Who's the best teacher (in any subject) that you've ever had? What were the qualities of his/her teaching and personality that stand out for you? How did you feel around this person?

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Now, think about the worst teacher you've ever had. What were the qualities in him/her that made your experience so negative? And how did you feel?

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So, if you could choose (and you can!) which teacher you'd want to have with you all the time, which one would you choose? And why?

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**The truth is, you can become your favorite teacher.**

When we practice alone by ourselves, it's almost like there are two people in the room. When we play something, we may think to ourselves, and even say out loud, "Hey, that was pretty good. But how can I improve on what I just did? How can I *get into it* more? How can I play it the way I hear it in my imagination?"

What would your favorite teacher say to you?

"Hey (your name here), that was really \_\_\_\_\_! You're doing great. But let's work on improving \_\_\_\_\_. And this is how we're going to do it:

\_\_\_\_\_."

Giving ourselves positive reinforcement is essential before we start working on the next step to improve our work.

After you've worked so hard, what does your favorite teacher (you) say? Maybe something like, "Hey, that was really good work. I'm proud of you. This isn't easy stuff and you're really sticking with it!"

And now you're on your way!

In the next section, we will talk about specific practice techniques where you get to use this compassionate, positive self-teaching approach.

# POWER PRACTICING

“THE QUIETER YOU BECOME, THE MORE YOU CAN HEAR.”

--BABA RAM DASS

Since most of us have been practicing from an early age, at some point we need to take stock of our work habits and retool. Our work habits and attitudes shape us as musicians. Without getting too intellectual, I think it helps to think of practicing as programming computer software. Every time we play or sing anything, we're telling our brains, "This is how I want to do this every time." Have you ever noticed if you make a mistake once, it has a tendency to happen again, if you repeat it without correcting it first? When we correct in an immediate and effective way, our brains think, "Oh, that's how she/he wants it. I'll do that from now on."

When we practice, we are developing muscular memory. Our bodies have all sorts of muscular memory. When we brush our teeth, pick up food with a fork, and tie our shoes, our bodies draw on hundreds of muscularly remembered tasks. Playing an instrument or singing is no different. At first, learning an instrument may seem foreign and impossible, but after a couple of weeks, our hands, arms, face, and feet seem to know what to do without consciously thinking about every motion. Muscular memory gives us the ability to let go in a performance, let our bodies do what we have taught them so well, and enjoy the ride.

Our minds constantly need new angles to stay interested and attentive. The traditional notion of practice is to repeat and repeat until we get it right. **The mind hates this method!** When we practice the same passage over and over again in the same way, our minds turn off after a few repetitions and we start making mistakes. *When we continuously provide our mind with new angles to look at a difficult passage, our mind pays close attention.* It thinks, "She/he is doing something different here, I better watch carefully." So, the more we can mix things up while practicing, the more focused our mind is and the more effective and efficient our practicing becomes.

The following sections go into more detail about

- General practicing principles
- Physical preparation
- How to “work all the angles”
- Equipment suggestions
- Infusing artistry into practice

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES

**Keep a notebook.** Enter detailed notes about what you learned in your lesson or class. You can then refer to your journal throughout the week. You may be surprised at what you wrote down!

**Regularity of practice** is of utmost importance. It’s much more effective to practice half an hour every day, than an hour every other day. Daily practice is the path to strength, consistency and enjoyment.

## PHYSICAL PREPARATION

**Take a few minutes to unwind before a practice session.** Here is a relaxation technique that works for me. Use this as a starting point. Experiment and develop your own process to achieve a relaxed feeling before you practice.

- Place your feet flat on the floor, get comfortable in your chair, and close your eyes.
- Breathe in through your nose for three counts, and out through your mouth for four long counts.
- Notice the difference between the sound of the breath coming in and the sound going out.
- Repeat this several times.
- Open your eyes slowly.
- Leave the day’s distractions behind you, and begin your practice session with a fresh mind.

**Seek out a room that is comfortable to play in.** The room should be free from distraction and interruption, and acoustically not too resonant but not too dry. We need accurate acoustical feedback from the room in which we regularly play.

**Practice when you are physically and mentally rested.** Effective practicing takes a surprising amount of mental energy. If we're too tired, the practice session may have a negative effect on the other good work we've done.

**Stop practicing before you get overtired.** One of my teachers used to say, "Always do 99% of your physical capacity, never 101%." Negative habits tend to crop up and take hold when we practice tired.

**Exercise!** The best professional musicians I know do regular aerobic exercise. For singers and wind players, being physically fit and toned in the abdominal area makes deep breathing and breath support much more natural and leads to stronger sound production. Exercise is a stress reducer.

**Always warm-up and cool-down.** The warm-up reminds our bodies about basic technique on a daily basis. The best way to stay injury-free is to perform a daily routine, which eases us into and strengthens us for a practice session. Hand and facial muscles, lips and vocal chords, are small and delicate and need to be finely tuned. Think about athletes who stretch and tone their bodies before any practice or event, and then stretch again afterwards, so they're flexible the next day.

## **WORKING ALL THE ANGLES**

**Play passages in s l o w m o t i o n the first time through.** This is much more efficient than running through a passage at tempo and then having to go back and correct many things. *It's the first impression of a new passage that's the most lasting to our bodies and brains.* Use a metronome at a slow tempo to provide structure.

**Change rhythmic patterns** while using a metronome. This is one of the most effective techniques for getting our brains to pay attention.

For example:



**Analyze what happened.** Mistakes are to learn from. When we make mistakes, we need to slow down, go back and solve the issue. Perhaps we don't understand something clearly, or perhaps we weren't concentrating carefully enough. We need to ask ourselves a series of questions, like "Was I singing the right pitch in my mind? Did I breathe deeply enough? What would my teacher say in this situation?"

**Stop on the note that feels unsure.** This helps our minds become more definite about an awkward leap or an unusual turn of phrase.

**Sing (out loud)** passages with expression before you work on them. This gives us a break, and helps us quickly focus our minds.

**Practice passages with eyes open, and then eyes closed.** When we close our eyes we hear more keenly. Also, the notes we are less sure of become clear to us. We can open our eyes, revisit these specific places and practice them slowly and carefully. We then close our eyes again and see how we do. Every passage is very deeply learned when we go through this process. It's an excellent way to prepare for auditions.

**Work sdrawkcab (backwards).** Most people start practicing at the beginning of the first movement of a given piece. Try starting at the last section of the last movement and work backwards in sections. *This keeps the mind interested and helps us learn each piece thoroughly.* Our concentration is usually best at the beginning of a practice session, so working backwards or from the middle ensures that all passages will be given equal concentration.

We can do this with excerpts as well. Look at the Beethoven *Fidelio* example. Break the excerpt into short segments. Start with the last segment and work backwards. The openings of Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* and *Till Eulenspiegel* also lend themselves well to this method.

Beethoven: *Fidelio* Overture

Horn in E

The musical score is divided into six segments, numbered 1 through 6, for practice purposes. Segment 1 is in bass clef. Segments 2, 3, 4, and 5 are in treble clef. Segment 6 is in treble clef and marked 'Adagio'. Performance markings include 'p dolce' and 'cresc.'.

## EQUIPMENT

**Use a metronome** at least 70% of your practice time to develop a strong inner pulse, and maintain a disciplined practice atmosphere.

**Use a tuner regularly.** Tuners give us objective feedback about intonation (how our pitch matches up to standard pitch) just as metronomes give us feedback about tempo and rhythm. Intonation can be elusive and tricky. Room temperature can play havoc with intonation on all instruments. Many professionals I work with are constantly checking their pitch on a tuner.

When playing long tones in a warm-up, check on the intonation tendency each note has. Does the pitch go up or down when you play louder or softer? Try hearing the correct pitch in your mind before you play it into a tuner. Often, we need to recalibrate our hearing with a good standard. If you don't have a tuner, try checking your pitch with a well-tuned piano, or electronic keyboard.

**Record Thyself.** If we sing or play a wind instrument, our ears, mouths, and nose are connected and we really don't hear ourselves the same way the audience does. It's the same phenomenon that happens when we hear a recording of our speaking voice. The usual reaction is, "I don't sound like that!" The process of learning how our playing sounds to a listener takes time, experience, and good feedback. We want to make sure our sound is projected and clearly articulated to the audience. A decent recording device can give us objective feedback about many aspects of our playing that we can't always hear in practice. It's like having a second set of ears. But like everything, use moderation in recording.

## ARTISTRY

**Involve the artist side of your brain.** Although it's important to be analytical about technical matters, don't lose sight of the fact that *we are artists, not machines*. Sometimes a technical issue can be overcome by singing a phrase out loud. *When our brain knows what the musical goal is, it finds a way to reach that goal.*

**Emulate great singers and string players.** Listen to lots of recordings; go to lots of live concerts. When working on Bach, Mozart, or Wagner, listen to vocalists sing works by those composers. See how other artists convey the moods in these different styles.

**Develop a vision of how you ultimately want to sound.** What is your dream horn sound, or bass baritone sound, or violin sound? What words would you use to describe your ideal sound on your instrument? Ideal staccato? Ideal legato? Once you have your artistic vision, go for it!

**Perform the impossible.** The way we improve as musicians is by stretching ourselves beyond what may seem possible. How can I make this legato as smooth as a clarinetist? How can I slur up to a high note and diminuendo like that great singer I heard? How can I sound as powerful and as warm as Fischer-Dieskau when I play this Brahms solo? How can I make my lip-trills sound like a great soprano singing Mozart? How can the sound on my instrument become my natural voice ?

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

**Let's be encouraging and positive with ourselves.** When a conductor or teacher says, "That sounded terrible, you had better shape up," it tends to make one feel anxious and uptight, and negatively affects our playing and our attitude.

**Practice is about change, and change can only happen in a positive atmosphere.** When a teacher or conductor says, "Okay, you're doing very well, there are just a couple of things we need to address," we can more easily make the necessary adjustments from a positive suggestion. Yet many of us talk to ourselves in a negative way when we practice. I think it's important to learn to be gentle, encouraging, challenging teachers to ourselves. This is what empowers us as performers.

**Build the foundation brick by brick.** Every time we practice well, we build on every other effective practice session. Before we know it we've had hundreds of effective, positive practice sessions. Our brain and muscular memory retain this excellent work and we develop a solid, reliable, focused, positive approach that leaves us free to express and enjoy ourselves as we play or sing.

**"WHATEVER WE REPEAT, THAT IS WHAT WE BECOME." –ARISTOTLE.**

If we regularly infuse quality, artistry and gentleness in our daily practice, our playing becomes full of consistency, beauty, and confidence.

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*“Mistakes are your best friends. They bring a message. They tell you what to do next and light the way. They come about because you have not understood something, or have learned something incompletely. They tell you that you are moving too fast, or looking in the wrong direction.*

*Mistakes might be detailed instructions on how to take apart and rewire physical motions, muscle by muscle. Or they might show you where you have not heard clearly, where you have to open up the music and listen again in a new way.*

*Examine a mistake as if you had found a rare stone. Run over the edges with your tongue. Peer inside the cracks of it. Hold it up to the sun, turning it this way and that. When you have learned what you can from it, toss it away casually, as if you didn't expect to see it again. If it shows up later, be patient and polite, and make a new accommodation. A mistake knows when it isn't needed, and eventually will leave for good.*

***The goal is not to make music free of mistakes. The goal is to be complete in learning, and to grow well.”***

--W.A. Mathieu. *The Listening Book*. Boston and London: Shambala, 1991.

# MANAGING PERFORMANCE ANXIETY-GOING FOR OPTIMAL PERFORMANCES

“COURAGE FACES FEAR, AND THEREBY MASTERS IT.”

~MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

All performing artists have to deal with performance anxiety at one time or another. There are many helpful strategies we can use to deal with this issue that's rarely talked about or addressed.

The "fight or flight" reaction occurs in almost everyone when faced with a stressful situation. When we get up to perform what happens inside our bodies? What happens to you?

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## GAINING CONTROL OVER OUR PHYSIOLOGY

Adrenalin is a common physiological response to stress. Adrenalin mobilizes our bodies to get away from "danger." Our heart rates can go up, breathing can get more shallow, and sometimes our mouths can feel dry—this is all normal and common.

Most performers learn how to deal with and manage these physiological responses. What do you already do to manage a faster heart rate?

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## **LOWERING THE HEART RATE**

Usually paying attention to our breathing is key to slowing down a racing heart. When the body senses danger, the heart starts pumping faster so blood is flowing to all parts of the body. Athletes actually benefit from the adrenalin response, but performing artists need to learn how to lower their heart rate. Deep, measured breathing has been scientifically proven to do this.

Here's an exercise that works for me:

- Breathe in for 3 long counts.
- Pause.
- Breathe out for 4 long counts.
- Repeat this a few times.
- Now increase the pause time.
- Breathe in for 3 counts, pause for 2 counts, and breathe out long for 5 counts.
- Now, increase it further: Breathe in for 3 counts, pause for 5 counts, breathe out for 7 counts. Repeat this a few times.
- This practice can dramatically lower our heart rate, and "trick" our bodies into thinking there is no danger here, because we're breathing so calmly.

## **REDUCING MUSCULAR TENSION**

There are places in our bodies that usually hold tension when we're under stress. These places include the muscles around our eyes, our stomach, and our legs.

Here's an exercise that can ease the tension in our "mobilized" bodies:

Close your eyes:

- Breathe in, and as you breathe out, release the muscular tension in the space between your eyebrows.
- Breathe in, and as you breathe out, release the tension in the muscles around your eyes.
- As you deeply inhale and slowly exhale, release the tension in the following areas:
  - the hinge of the jaw,
  - upper and lower neck,
  - shoulders, arms, hands, fingers,
  - upper back, lower back, upper chest,
  - lower abdomen,
  - buttocks, pelvis,
  - upper legs, calves, ankles, feet, toes,
  - each vertebra of the spine,
  - neck, scalp, and brain.
- Then, in your mind's eye move through all the muscle groups, and as you breathe in and out, release any tension that's remaining.
- When you feel more relaxed, you may want to keep your eyes closed and visualize yourself performing with great poise and ease.
- This systematic tension reduction routine works well with daily practice. After regularly repeating this for many days, weeks, and months, the body gets used to it and starts relaxing automatically as we begin the process.

## DEALING WITH A DRY MOUTH

If you find your mouth dries up a little, this is a common adrenalin response. You might want to bring a cup of water on the stage. I know a famous trumpet player who used to pushed a small piece of sugar-less chewing gum into a back molar, and kept his mouth irrigated by touching it with his tongue during rests. If this is an issue for you, you might want to try this method in a rehearsal first.

## CULTIVATING A SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTHERS AND OURSELVES

How do you listen when others perform?

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This is important to explore because *how we listen to others, is how we think they listen to us.*

What are the ways you *want* others to listen to you?

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How can we change our attitude to be that way when we hear others perform?

How can we look for the best qualities in what someone else is doing?

- Is their sound beautiful?
- Is there a touching turn of phrase?
- Do you get chills when you hear a certain passage?
- What qualities do you love?
- If the performer makes a noticeable mistake, do you put them down or cheer them on like they might be playing a sport-- "That's okay, that's okay, pick yourself up and run, run, RUN!"

The way we listen to others perform is directly related to how we think they're listening to us. If we develop a positive and kindly attitude toward others, that will spill over into a positive generous attitude towards ourselves. This exercise reduces our perceived sense of danger. Attitude is everything.

## **HELPFUL SELF-TALK**

How do you talk to yourself before and during a performance? What would be the most helpful things to say to yourself? What do you imagine your best friend or favorite relative would say to you?

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What would you say to your best friend *before* a performance?

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Whom would you most want to perform for, and why? Your best friend? A close relative? A little brother or sister?

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How do you think they would listen to you?

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If they listened with love, encouragement, kindness, generosity and warmth, how would that feel to you?

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How do we recover after making a mistake? What would your best friend or favorite relative say to you to help you get back on track?

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What would you say to your best friend after she/he made a mistake?

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It might help you to imagine that you're performing for your favorite person or being, and that you're playing for only them. They love you unconditionally. They'll encourage you and support you no matter what. When we imagine them sitting in the audience smiling and enjoying what we're doing, we want to give our best.

## DEFINING OUR PURPOSE AS PERFORMERS

What is your purpose as a performer? This is really important to think about.

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Is it to impress other people or is it more about sharing your work and talent? We work hard to get up there onstage and perform, but why are we really doing it? These are questions worthy of long-term contemplation.

A musician once said, “The *more* I try to impress people, the *less* I impress them.”

# Dealing with PERFECTIONISM

When we perform, many of us think it has to be perfect. Yet, since we're human, we all make errors and mistakes. Most arts disciplines strive for perfection, and teachers and directors keep raising the bar. So how do we get ourselves off the perfection hook and still feel good about our performance and ourselves?

Your ideas:

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What can we say to ourselves that will be encouraging, true and beneficial?

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Sports psychologists have looked into this and have said it helps to think of a simple phrase or word list that's very positive and can shift our mind set easily into the positive.

For example, in baseball, when a relief pitcher comes in at the bottom of the 9th inning with the bases loaded and has to get the last out to win the game, what can they say to themselves to perform at their best in a high pressure situation?

What do you think?

It might go back to what their purpose is. Why are they working so hard to do what they do?

It might be as simple as, "***I LOVE BASEBALL!***"

Try to come up with a simple phrase or word list that helps you feel more positive and courageous. Here's a word list example: "Self-possessed; Strong; Warrior; Star". Try a few phrases or word lists and see which one works best for you. You can repeat your "mantra" as often as you need to.

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Another way to look at it might be to announce to yourself, "I'M IN A PERFECTION-FREE ZONE!"

"Whatever happens, I'm okay because I am beautiful just for who I am."

Sometimes, as performers, we wonder before a performance, if our best stuff will be there when we need it. This phrase works for me: "My high level of ability and artistry will be there, without going to the extreme of perfection."

## SUMMARY

- Prepare your part as deeply as you can. (See **POWER PRACTICING.**)
- Plan your arrival so that you can get to the performance space with adequate time to spare.
- Take time to unwind before a performance.
- Sit quietly, feet flat on the floor, breathe in...pause...breathe out.
- Notice if any areas of your body are holding tension.  
Jazzy shoulders ;-)
- Repeat the words you've come up with that are true and comforting to you.
- Visualize your favorite person or being that you are performing for.
- Imagine them smiling as they listen to you.
- Give yourself encouragement and support by repeating your positive phrase or word list every few minutes.
- Know that courage is not the absence of fear; courage is going on in spite of the butterflies.
- Remember that everyone gets butterflies. These are strategies to "get our butterflies flying in formation."
- Managing the stress of performance takes practice and experience. Try to create opportunities to perform frequently.
- Performing will get easier for you.

# BEYOND THE NOTES: AUTHENTIC EXPRESSION FROM THE INSIDE OUT

*“Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don’t live it, it won’t come out of your horn. They teach you there’s a boundary line to music. **But man, there’s no boundary line to art.**”* --Charlie Parker

We have to ask ourselves why we go through all the work, searching, and discipline to develop our technique, become our own best teacher, and manage performance anxiety. For me it’s about replacing old limits with a freedom to express our feelings, our stories, and ourselves with our audience. Now that we have the tools, we can fashion a work of art that connects our hearts to the hearts of the listeners.

*“Craftsmanship teaches the actor how to walk on stage and play. But true art must teach him how to awaken consciously his subconscious creative self...”* --Stanislavski

All musical inspiration starts out as a feeling, or group of emotions, or a story the composer wishes to convey. Mendelssohn’s “Nocturne” from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is a love song; Beethoven’s *Seventh Symphony* feels to me like a dance of all humankind; the opening to Tchaikovsky’s *Fourth Symphony* is a tragic and serious fanfare. Some music makes us want to stand up and march, while other music makes us feel that we’re witnessing great beauty.

***The keys to authentic musical expression are being able to (1) identify the feelings behind the notes, and (2) draw from our imagination and our own personal experience to convey those feelings.***

In this chapter we will:

- Get in touch with our own basic feelings.
- Learn about Fire and Water energies and how they help us identify emotions in the music.
- Learn specific techniques to convey genuine emotional energy through our sounds, such as:
  - Emotional Memory
  - Physical/Emotional Body Visualization
  - Scene Visualization
  - Story Writing
  - The Magic “IF”

## GETTING IN TOUCH WITH OUR BASIC FEELINGS

It helps me to think of experiences in my life that I can pour into the music I play. So, to begin, let’s think about some basic feelings.

Describe a time in your life when you felt **excited and happy**:

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Now, write about an experience in your life when you felt very **sad**:

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A time when you felt very **strong and powerful**:

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A situation in your life when you felt **angry**:

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A time when you felt **quiet and peaceful**:

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## IDENTIFYING THE EMOTIONS IN MUSIC

It's easier to identify the emotions in the music if we divide all music into either **FIRE ENERGY** or **WATER ENERGY**.

(These concepts are presented in "Return to Child, Music for People's Guide to Improvising Music and Authentic Group Leadership," written and compiled by James Oshinsky, 2004.)

**FIRE ENERGY** includes two categories of strong fiery feelings.

**"YAY! Energy"** covers feelings of extreme joy, excitement or surprise, exemplified by Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" from *Messiah*.

**"HEY! Energy"** covers feelings of power, anger, and assertion, as illustrated by "Darth Vader's Theme" by John Williams from *Star Wars*.

**WATER ENERGY** (also known as "oooo" energy) includes tender, warm, quiet emotions. Imagine holding a baby and singing a lullaby. Remember how you've felt after a long, hard cry. Imagine talking quietly to your girlfriend or boyfriend late at night. Good examples of "oooo" energy are *Silent Night* and Gershwin's "Summertime" from *Porgy and Bess*.

Our job as musicians, when we are working on a section of music, is first to decide, is this fire energy or water energy? Then we need to identify **what kind** of fire energy or water energy we're dealing with. Is this exuberant fire energy (Yay!) or indignant, powerful, ominous fire energy (Hey!)?

Here are some adjectives that can help you out:

**Fire energy adjectives:**

**Water (or "oooo")  
energy adjectives:**

Yay!:

triumphant  
joyous  
exuberant  
excited  
surprising  
delighted  
noble  
majestic  
happy  
celebrating  
forthright  
bright  
rejoicing  
exalting  
mischievous  
buoyant  
frolicking  
vigorous  
glorious

Hey!:

alarming  
conflicted  
angry  
assertive  
powerful  
passionate  
lusty  
tormented  
fierce  
stormy  
frenzied  
agitated  
raging  
furious  
sarcastic  
violent  
anguished  
ominous  
rigorous

innocent  
tender  
solemn  
calm  
tranquil  
content  
nurturing  
warm  
caring  
loving  
sad  
sacred  
sweet  
friendly  
mysterious  
nostalgic  
quiet  
sentimental  
gracious  
eerie  
pensive

despairing  
heartbroken  
naive  
seductive  
exhausted  
open  
generous  
kind  
gentle  
melancholy  
prayerful  
longing  
quietly joyful  
timid  
luminous  
elegant  
suspenseful  
awed  
reverent  
wistful  
languid

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## SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES TO CONVEY EMOTIONS

Now that we've defined the mood(s) of the music we're working on, we need to use a few simple techniques to really get into the character. How do we convey genuine feeling through our sounds?

Here are five techniques that are distinct from each other yet sometimes overlapping. We can use them separately and also as complements to each other. Choose the technique(s) to which you are drawn. Choose the ones that inspire you.

### I. EMOTIONAL MEMORY:

*"Only from the heart can you touch the sky." --Rumi*

After we identify the feelings behind the notes, we need to explore, "When was there a time in my life when I felt this kind of energy or emotion?"

**Music reflects life.** Sometimes life feels hard, tragic, and complicated. Other times things seem filled with beauty and simplicity. At times, life may feel very ambiguous and mysterious. We may be put into situations where we need to act with great boldness. When things work out, we feel that all is right with the world; we feel wonderful. In every piece, the composer is telling a story through song and dance. Our role as a musician is to **breathe life into the composer's story with our story.**

Here's an exercise that can help us tap into our emotional memory. Let's have fun with this...remember, there's no right or wrong to how each of us responds to music or any art form. It's deeply personal and individual.

### CREATIVE EXERCISE

Choose a piece that you're preparing to perform, or one you like.

- When I listen to this music, I sense “oooo” energy or Fire energy (circle one).
- My body feels like \_\_\_\_\_ when I hear this music.
- As I listen more, I can describe the particular kind of “oooo” energy or Fire energy I’m experiencing. Here are a few descriptive words that express what I’m hearing. (If you wish, use the word lists above, or come up with your own.)

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- I’m remembering a time in my life when I felt this way, or my body felt this way. When I think about that time, these are the images, feelings, memories that come up for me: (Use words or draw a picture or both.)

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- When you play this music, you can think on these memories, close your eyes, and project those images onto the screen of your imagination to be right there in the moment when you felt those feelings. This activates unconscious inspiration. This is performing with emotional memory.

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“Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!”  
--J.K.Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*

## II. PHYSICAL/EMOTIONAL BODY VISUALIZATION

Let’s keep going! Let’s continue thinking about the piece you used in the above exercise. **Let’s create a person or character that is singing the music in your imagination (or you can imagine what you yourself look like singing the music).**

- People project their moods and feelings through their body language. Look around your classroom and see if you can tell the mood of your friends by observing how they hold themselves. Do they look alert, or tired, or confident, or content, or afraid? **How would your body language look if you were in the character of the music you were performing?**

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- Facial expression is always a big clue about how people are feeling from moment to moment. **What would your face genuinely look like if you were intensely feeling the emotions in the passage you were playing or singing?**

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- People’s body language and facial expression change from moment to moment. So as you perform, have a clear projection in your mind’s eye of **your changing demeanor** as the music progresses.
- Sometimes writing a detailed biography of our character helps us get a clearer picture of how he/she would look and express him/herself. How does knowing your character impact how you visualize him/her physically?

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### III. COSTUME AND SCENE VISUALIZATION

You may think of this as an extension of “Physical/Emotional Body Visualization.” Ask yourself the following questions.

- What is your character wearing? Describe your appearance in great detail of color, texture, and style. What does this say about your character?

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- What would the setting or environment for this movement or passage look like? You can create any movie set or landscape in your imagination. Are you inside or outside? Describe every detail of what it all looks like, smells like, feels like.

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- If indoors, what kind of room are you in? What is the lighting like? Is the room palatial or modest? What colors do you see? Are there drapes or curtains? What textures and fabrics are there? How does the room feel? Warm? Rich? Dark? Cold?

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- What time of day is it? Is it dawn, dusk, high noon, midnight, 3 a.m.? What season of the year is it?

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- Go deeply into the history of the setting. What ghosts live in the people’s minds? What’s the general vibe? What’s the story of this place?

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As you prepare to perform, take a few minutes to get comfortable, close your eyes and imagine yourself as the character in the setting that you've put so much detail in creating.

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## IV. STORY WRITING

Now that you have the character and setting clearly defined, make up a story about this piece of music. Infuse as much detail as possible; use all the senses—sight, sound, smell, touch, and temperature. Use as much feeling as you can in writing your story. Use measure numbers in your description. Here's a portion of an example written by one of my college students:

“The camera slowly lowers down on a man in medieval dress walking through the forest. The camera starts very far away in the sky and as it gets lower, the man and his surroundings come into focus. This happens in bars 1-5 of Claude Debussy's *Premiere Arabesque*. Just before bar 6, the music slows for a ritardando. At this moment, the man stops abruptly in his tracks; an exotic pink flower catches his eye. He begins to remember the only woman he ever loved. Flashes of memories they had together appear in his mind, flowing continuously from one to the next (measures 6-13). In bar 13, his heart begins to beat faster and faster as he thinks about her more: this is characterized by an acceleration in the music. The ritardando just before bar 17 shows the man taking a slow, deep breath to calm himself. He returns to thinking about her, in bar 17, and at bar 19, his thoughts suddenly turn darker...”

Many students have reported that when they have a clearly defined storyline, and follow it as they perform, they get into the music more deeply, and it becomes more enjoyable to share with people.

Please use separate sheets of paper for your story.

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## V. STANISLAVSKI'S MAGIC "IF"

If we don't have emotional memory or a frame of reference about a certain piece we're going to perform, we need to go into the realm of imagination. For example, if we're performing a piece by Shostakovich and he's portraying a brutal dictator like Stalin in his music, then we might need to use the magic "IF." IF I were a brutal dictator, totally self-absorbed, ruthless, paranoid, without conscience, how would I feel? How would I look? How would I hold myself physically? What would my general attitude be? How would I open a door? How would I walk into a room? When we use the Magic "IF" we can get into characters and roles that are not in our true nature. It can be fun to play an evil person.

Before you start to perform, relax your body and mind; get into character; imagine as many details about what it might be like to be that person. Then, begin.

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## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Experiment with each of these techniques:

- Emotional Memory
- Physical/Emotional Body Visualization
- Costume and Scene Visualization
- Story Writing
- Magic "IF"

One technique or a combination of techniques might work best for you. Choose whichever one(s) you are drawn to. Or, you may find a particular technique might work best for a particular piece you're performing.

You may want to **ask for feedback** from your family or friends in the audience. See which methods of conveying genuine expression work best for you.

When we use these techniques and go deep within ourselves, the music we perform becomes personal and spontaneous. Each performance is infused with creative emotional expression that moves listeners on the heart level.

When we express ourselves on the heart level, an amazing and spontaneous connection happens between the composer, the performer and the audience. It's almost like the composer and performers are saying to the audience, "I know you very well... you are just like me." And, when they applaud, the audience may be saying to the performers and composer, "Thank you so much for understanding me."

Have fun with this!

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