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Educator Series

WIND INSTRUMENTS



Frank Gabriel Campos

A former principal trumpet of the Texas Baroque Ensemble, the Dallas Chamber Orchestra, the Bear Valley Festival Orchestra, and the Madera Symphony Orchestra, Mr. Campos has been a member of the Fort Worth Symphony, the Fresno Philharmonic, and the Monterey County Symphony. He is a former featured soloist with the University of North Texas One O'Clock Lab Band and the Dallas Cowboys Band, and he has been a soloist at the Ottawa International Jazz Festival, the Montreux Jazz Festival, the Sacramento Jazz Festival, and others. He has been a member of the Texas Brass Ensemble, Sonare Early Music Consort, the New York Early Music Society, and the Skaneateles Summer Music Festival. He is a founding member and former first trumpet of the Dallas Brass.

Mr. Campos is a member of the board of directors of the International Trumpet Guild, and serves as the editor and primary contributor for the "Clinic" column of the International Trumpet Guild Journal. He is an active clinician, adjudicator, and soloist in both the jazz and classical idioms, and a Yamaha Artist.

Mr. Campos is professor of trumpet at Ithaca College's Whalen Center for Music. He earned his bachelor's degree from California State University at Fresno and did graduate work at the University of North Texas, where he won the Outstanding Masters and Outstanding Doctoral Student awards, as well as the Hexter Prize for Outstanding Graduate.

Overcoming Fear

By Frank Gabriel Campos

Butterflies, nerves, shakes – these are some of the terms used for that feeling many of us know as we walk out onto the stage to perform. For some performers, these feelings can be so intense that they cannot be overcome, and the result is a disaster. It is common, in fact, for musicians to so dislike performing because of these feelings (and the resultant musical “crash and burn” that is often the result) that they have given up music and gone into other fields. Is there any way to control fear, focus our attention, and relax under the stress of performance?

Performance anxiety is actually our body's natural reaction to danger, commonly called the “fight or flight syndrome.” It is an automatic survival mechanism, and it is triggered by fear. When we become anxious, the body releases powerful hormones that speed up the breathing and heart rate, shut down the digestive system, divert blood to the large muscles, and make the body tense. This usually results in shallow and rapid breathing, nausea, clammy skin, excessive tension, loss of fine motor coordination, and an inability to concentrate on the task at hand. It doesn't matter that one is in no physical danger while standing on the stage – the body responds to real or imagined threats in the same way, and that way is clearly counterproductive to high level performance. This response is not always a bad thing – it could someday save your life – but it is an inappropriate physical strategy for the context of a performance, and we must teach our body another strategy that will help rather than hinder our efforts to function effectively as performers.

One of the most important keys in overcoming the effects of fear is to understand that anxiety is diminished when you reduce muscular tension. Dr. Edmund Jacobson, a well-known author of several books on the relationship of the mind and body, went so far as to say that if the physical effects of an emotion are eliminated from the body, then the emotion itself will be removed! The way to eliminate stage fright, then, is to relax. Though this is not usually possible to do on command, we can learn to relax on command, and that takes practice.

There are several different types of relaxation techniques – more than can be covered in this short article – but they seem to have a few main points in common. The first is that you must practice, preferably at the same time each day. Bedtime is a good choice, but it is important that you remain awake to complete the exercise. If your schedule will allow it, try taking some time during lunch or right before dinner, which will have the added benefit of energizing you for the remainder of the day and evening. The place you choose to do the exercise should be free of distractions and interruptions.

To begin, lie down and get as comfortable as possible, breathing deeply and slowly. Put your attention on your feet, and imagine they are as heavy as lead, sinking into the bed. (Another technique is to imagine you are made of wax and are melting on a warm beach.) As you feel the tension leave your feet, do the same thing to your ankles, calves, thighs, and upward to the shoulders, neck, head, and face. At this point you should be completely relaxed, feeling peaceful and at ease. What you must do now is find a way to remember this feeling in order to reproduce it during periods of high stress.



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There are several ways to trigger your relaxed state at any time you please. The first requirement is a "cue" or "anchor," which might be a word, an image, a touch, or virtually anything you wish. Whatever you choose will be the trigger that puts you in the state of relaxation, and it must be associated or "anchored" to the sensation you now feel. This is accomplished by simply focusing repeatedly on the cue while in the relaxed state. A mantra or word such as "Om," "Loose," "Ease," "Deep," or "Peace" is a good choice. Some people touch their thumb and forefinger together, while others picture a positive memory from the past, such as a particularly successful performance experience. One technique that works especially well is to focus on breathing. Inhale deeply and then release the air through a small opening in the lips. Do not push the air out, but remain relaxed and let it flow out as if sighing in relief. This is a particularly effective cue for wind players, as the very act of inhalation and exhalation can be anchored to a relaxed and peaceful state.

Whether we are conscious of it or not, anchoring is a part of our lives and happens regularly and automatically. For example, the things that trigger powerful feelings or memories from the past are often as simple as a familiar aroma or perhaps a tune that we heard repeatedly during a period in our lives. With very little effort we can use this technique to consciously modify our behavior for our own benefit. This brief article will give most readers enough information to successfully overcome performance fears; however, those interested in more detail should seek out books on neuro-linguistic programming by Richard Bandler and John Grinder.

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