

NOTES

A MUSICIAN'S REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

PERFORMANCE LOG



Royal Conservatoire
The Hague

Preparing performances

Learning a piece of music or improving skills requires a period of exploration until the new skill or piece becomes more automatic. You will notice that you are not as consciously busy with steering, controlling and correcting your movements and the technical details; your mind is freer to focus on music, expression and the effects you want to make.

At the end of this phase of learning you are not necessarily ready to step onto the stage. Playing is not the same as performing. Performance preparation is about **practicing trust**. Are you able to play your piece well if others are watching? When your teacher is in the room? During an exam? When the performance is recorded for live radio?

If a particular passage or element is not going well every time, go back to using exploratory methods on that passage or element, until it feels more comfortable and 'in your body'.

Before a performance spend time practicing performing, using mental imagery exercises to prepare yourself for the event, and most importantly, do practice in which you are practicing your musical intentions – with deliberation, nuance and detail.

By asking yourself one or two weeks before a performance how prepared and confident you feel, and what specifically concerns you, gives you a chance to steer the final stages of preparation. A good question to ask a few weeks before a performance is: *What would it take for me to look forward to this performance?*

Having a performance log helps you to look at your performances over time – not only how they went, but how you prepared them and what insights they bring about you, your playing and your performing. Use the template provided here, adjust it or make up your own. It is important to formulate a clear goal or intention for each performance and for each piece. Then you can ask yourself what you need to focus on during playing (something you have hopefully practiced). What makes a good performance? The list of aspects displayed in the log sheet prompt you to formulate what you believe to be as important factors for a successful performance.

Many people make the mistake of deciding to aim for a perfect performance – this generally brings stress – resulting in physical tension and anxiety, which ultimately doesn't help you to play well. An even worse goal is to not make mistakes. This invites you to focus on mistakes! And to give up when the first error happens. A useful goal for performances in general is to be convincing. Ask yourself what the music is about, what you are communicating to the audience. Know exactly what every phrase and note needs to sound like and say. Then you have something relevant and positive to focus on during playing that can inform and enable your mind-body system to produce optimal results.

A performance is a unique learning moment, and can be approached as either a threat or an opportunity. You have a chance to share something with the world. Whatever happens in your performance, it will yield valuable information for the next one!

Susan Williams

Performance log sheets

Fill out a sheet for each performance and develop an overview of your performance preparation process.

Performance log

.When/where:

.What:

Intention/goal:

Focus:

1–2 weeks before

How prepared do I feel? 1 | _____ | 10

How confident do I feel? 1 | _____ | 10

What concerns me?

Important aspects for this performance (make a list below)

Afterwards: assess each aspect

- Engagement ☹ | _____ | ☺
- Expression ☹ | _____ | ☺
- ☹ | _____ | ☺
- ☹ | _____ | ☺
- ☹ | _____ | ☺
- ☹ | _____ | ☺
- ☹ | _____ | ☺
- ☹ | _____ | ☺
- ☹ | _____ | ☺

What went well?

What did I notice?

What do I take with me for next time?

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