

## **Stage Fright, what is and what to do about it.**

Stage fright is mistakenly considered to be something only amateur and beginner musicians or actors suffers from. Stage fright though is something we all felt at one point or another. In its mildest forms we experience it as 'been excited' for a performance, speaking for an audience or camera. A fear of under perform.

Curiously enough professional musician also seem to 'develop' stage fright after many years of podium experience. One might wonder how is that possible? Actually stage fright comes about due to a disturbance of our body use.

To prepare to the demands of a performance is not only done on stage, during rehearsals or training, it is mainly the way we use ourselves in our daily lives.

One needs to be conscious of the way one uses his/her own body, bring in a balance between actions and reactions of the body and mind, a balance between movements and thoughts, be aware of the mind and body unity and consciously work with it.

The Alexander technique is a powerful tool which makes it viable to stay open and observe all reactions of the body and mind in relation to daily life's happenings: happiness, excitement, fear, mind wandering, tiredness, discomfort, pain, frustration, sadness, stress, etc.

Through the Alexander technique one gains a conscious control of body and mind.

When about to give a performance it is natural to feel excited about it, the longer we wait the more excited we feel. All that excitement can accumulate in the body in the form of unreleased energy.

During the performance itself one is bound to feel a release for the enormous amount of energy which the excitement of anticipation has produced. One can feel extremely strong and confident in his/hers capacity to deal with the 'emergency', yet for having a good performance the releasing energy needs to be

directed.

On the other hand that unreleased energy can become such a frustration for the body that getting to the stage or to 'the danger area' can become an impossibility.

Too big a dose of excitement and all the unreleased energy can be translated into the body as fright, which is a form of panic, and anxiety.

Anxiety is an unpleasant combination of cognitive, somatic, emotional and behavioural components.

The cognitive part recognises danger, somatically the body is preparing to deal with the cause of the threat, the 'fight or fly reflex' or 'panic reflex'.

When in panic we instinctively can rely on what kept us alive throughout times: the 'panic reflex' also called the 'fight or fly' reflex.

The panic reflex takes form of pulling the back of the neck closed, disturbing the head, neck and trunk relationship. The panic reflex is easy to observe on animals: think of a cat about to get into a fight, its head is pulled to the back and while its whole body is getting ready to fight or to get away of source of the fright.

The relationship between our head, neck and trunk, i.e. our primary control, organises the reflex of posture and movement.

When the neck is free the head is allowed to be poised in a subtle way on top of the spine and the whole intricate web of musculature of the body will naturally find the right amount of tension so that the desired movement can happen, including the free movement of breath.

When about to give a performance the over excitement can be translated into the body as fright and if one is not aware of it the head will be pulled to the back disturbing one's primary control, making it hard to breath.

Before (and during) the performance the whole organism is getting prepared for immediate action, the body will produce the necessary adrenaline, which is a hormone released into the bloodstream in response to physical or mental stress, and the chemical processes that normally will help you to adjust to a dangerous

situation in this case will disorganise you and make the waiting time a torture, after all when one is about to perform fight or fly the cause of the threat is not something one can afford to do.

By learning how to consciously say no to the pull of the head one is able to stay alert and have a conscious control of the emotional patterns that goes on through the body. Of course one won't stop 'feeling', never the less it is possible to have the overflow of emotions and energy under control.

Emotionally, anxiety causes a sense of dread or panic and physically causes nausea, and chills.

Behaviourally, both voluntary and involuntary behaviours may arise directed at escaping or avoiding the source of anxiety. These behaviours are most extreme in anxiety disorders.

However, anxiety is not always pathological or maladaptive: it is a common emotion along with fear, anger, sadness, and happiness, and it has a very important function in relation to survival.

Anxiety brings a disturbance in the breathing patterns, which leads to fear. Anxiety leads to hyperventilation.

Hyperventilation is no more than an unstable breathing rhythm.

One gets to have unstable breathing patterns due to unconscious erroneous habits.

An acute state of hyperventilation freezes, paralyses you. The level of gases increases and decreases too much, the person is losing too much CO<sub>2</sub>, the O<sub>2</sub> level is than too high. The body can't get used to it.

The body has a sympathetic side responsible for the 'flight or fly' pattern and a parasympathetic side, responsible for digestion and reproduction.

Hyperventilation happens when the parasympathetic depresses and the sympathetic stays alert.

When the organism is used well breathing is not an issue. 'The thoughts give shape to the phrases which accommodates the breath'.

When thinking about the breath from the Alexander principle one can not

separate the use of one's whole body. When the body is free, the breathing will be free, eventually one helps the other: a freer body provides a freer breath and a freer breath helps to have a freer body.

The way we use ourselves determines the way we breath and the way we move.

Movement is using what is given to us by nature, using all reflexes.

Reflexes are a kind of puzzle that brings parts together and all together they create movement. Reflex is movement.

When shortening or narrowing the body due to unconscious habits one misuses the reflexes.

The awareness of how one uses one's own body increases the possibilities of reflex. It is possible to re-educate, recover or reorganise reflexes.

The Alexander technique brings about the consciousness of the way one uses the body, one gets to be aware of the unnecessary muscle tension and through out the movement one is able to say no to that extra tension reorganising one's reflexes.

The Alexander technique brings the awareness of the way we use ourselves in our daily lives and provides the best preparation for the demands of the performance, one is able to have the 'panic reflex' and fright under control, to 'tune up' the survival mechanism and use it into one's own benefit, being able to release and let the energy continuously flow during the performance.

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