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Finding the Balance: Music Performance Anxiety, Flow, and the Undergraduate Recital

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by

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Introduction

Many people experience some degree of performance anxiety - athletes, speakers, dancers, teachers, pianists - but for a singer, the effects of performance anxiety can be debilitating. Imagine this: a vocalist is preparing to sing the first notes of an aria they have painstakingly practiced for months. They look out into the audience as they take a breath in preparation and suddenly, their knees lock. They begin to shake so much that their balance becomes unsteady, but the show must go on! Their first notes squeak out, but because of the shaking, the melody sounds more robotic than operatic. They begin to panic, convinced that the audience members are making fun of them in their heads, and in this panic they forget the words: blanking entirely and standing there as the pianist continues on.

This is many performers' nightmare, and unfortunately I experienced this nightmare scenario in my first solo collegiate performance. These debilitating levels of anxiety persisted through every performance of the first two years of my undergraduate music education degree. In the third year of my degree, COVID-19 made it impossible to perform, so that anxiety largely went away, but the fear of the inevitable undergraduate recital loomed over me.

The undergraduate recital is a degree requirement in music education and must consist of 30 minutes of solo performance. Needless to say, considering my track record with performance anxiety, I was terrified. I began researching ways to quell performance anxiety and found an

abundance of strategies. I instantly felt validated by the thousands of stories of musicians experiencing the same feelings I was feeling and the vast number of researchers dedicated to finding ways to help people access the art of performing. I instantly knew this was a subject into which I wanted to dive deeper for my thesis, and thus I set out on a year-long exploration of my own performance anxiety and methods to potentially lessen its effects in preparation for my undergraduate recital in the spring. This was not only in hopes of lessening my own levels of performance anxiety but also to hopefully help and reassure collegiate musicians who are feeling similar.

Performance Anxiety

Performance anxiety can be summarized as an extreme level of nervousness experienced in any sort of performance setting in front of an audience. A small level of anxiety while performing can sharpen focus, cause the performer to think more critically about their technique, and can be a sign that the performer cares about the performance. However, an above average level of stress can end up impeding a performance and, if experienced regularly, could lead to numerous physical and mental health struggles. In recently published scholarship, researchers have been studying the effects of performance anxiety in many areas, including but not limited to athletics, education, the arts, and music. In musically focused scholarship, the causes of music performance anxiety (MPA) have been identified as being one or more of the following: biological heritability, previous experiences, a learned fear/association, or an exacerbation of other pre-existing anxieties (like panic disorder or anxiety sensitivity). Regardless of the cause, there is no “quick fix” or easy solution to quell performance anxiety, but many researchers, musicians, and caring souls have tried to come up with various remedies and strategies.

Strategies for Combating MPA

Physical Activity

In the study "Physical Activity Helps to Control Music Performance Anxiety", researchers wanted to see if there was a correlation between keeping a regular schedule of physical activity and a lower level of MPA. While they only surveyed 87 music students, they found this correlation to be true. Interestingly, while most other studies of MPA find a higher rate of MPA within women, this study found no correlation between genders. This could be a result of the smaller sample size, but the difference of this study to others in the same field is interesting nonetheless. The types of exercises that participants were engaging in was not specified, but researchers found that a higher frequency of physical activity, especially when maintained regularly, led to a decrease in levels of MPA.

Meditation

More strategies were presented by Frank M. Diaz in the article "Relationships Among Meditation, Perfectionism, Mindfulness, and Performance Anxiety Among Collegiate Music Students". Diaz found in his research that music students who practiced meditation of any style saw lower levels of MPA reflected in their practice and performing.

Meditation has been proven in many studies to help lessen anxiety and increase concentration, which are both key elements of MPA. In performance, the desired state is calm and relaxed while also being focused and engaged. Both of these sensations need to be intense but honed into specific areas of your body. For example, in vocal performance, the ribcage needs to be grounded and ready to engage within the tone or feeling of the vocal line, but the larynx

and throat need to be calm and relaxed to encourage the best, clearest sound. This is much easier said than done when performing, especially if the vocalist is feeling physical manifestations of anxiety. Meditation leads the performer to become centered on their breathing, allowing for a more relaxed physiology and better performance outcome.

Managing Perfectionism

Additionally, Diaz's article also dives into the sensation of perfectionism and how it is often one of the greatest enhancers of performance anxiety. Perfectionism is striving obsessively to omit all mistakes from a creation or activity, no matter how unobtainable that perfection may be. Even though music is a fluid and constantly created art form, with beauty in the imperfections and additions, musicians may be overcome with the need to do everything correctly. This can become especially tricky in performance, as once a mistake occurs, more mistakes are likely. It is easy to become obsessed with said mistake and lose track of the progression of the music or to become disengaged with the emotion of the piece. Diaz discusses becoming aware of cycles of perfectionism in different aspects of life and the process of breaking them. The idea is as follows: if one can begin to let go of the need for perfection, they can begin to admire the beauty in their mistakes. Music is an art form rife with imperfection and improvisation, so to try and take away those moments is robbing the music of its creativity and freedom.

Applying the Research

As I prepared for my recital, I decided to apply each of the techniques in the research I read: physical activity, meditation, and exploring perfectionism. I started by keeping track of my

physical activity in fall term. The article I was referencing for this self-study did not specify any type of physical activity as being better or worse for quelling MPA, so I aimed for 30 mins of cardio (running/jogging) three times a week. This is something I already try to maintain, as running increases my connection to the breath, but I wanted to see if adding in the intentionality of tracking my running sessions and staying aware during them would help my performance anxiety. I believe it did help my breath control, especially on days when I ran before a lesson, but it had no effect on my performances or my levels of anxiety during them. Additionally, physical activity is not a strategy that's open and accessible to every performer, so I continued searching for other strategies.

I had similar results with meditation. My goal was to complete three mini (10 minute) meditation sessions a day during winter term: one in the morning (within the first hour of waking up), one before practicing, and one before going to bed (within an hour of starting my wind-down routine). I meditated as a way to manage anxiety in high school, so this was a schedule that seemed familiar and manageable to me; I was excited to start meditating again and hopefully reach a more grounded sense of self like so many people who meditate talk about.

In the first week or so, the new routine helped me feel more in tune with myself, but after a few weeks, meditation began to feel more like a chore, especially before practicing. I dreaded the "waste of time" before beginning to practice, which I very quickly realized meant it must not have been doing much for me, however I kept up the routine until the area recital for the term, hoping to see some form of payoff. I meditated the morning of the performance and 15 minutes before going on stage, but my nerves felt no different than the nerves from fall term's area recital. I still shook, had an ungrounded stance, and felt like an intruder in such a lovely recital hall. Additionally, I was frustrated that meditation was seemingly not working for me. I enjoyed

the quiet time of reflection and sitting with my thoughts, but I found it increasingly difficult as performances and deadlines were approaching to keep a clear head and keep distractions at bay. This was especially hard when meditating before practicing: I could not avoid spending the time going over what had to be done in that particular practice session, and the more I tried to clear my head, the worse it got, to the point where I was putting myself through stress before even beginning to practice.

Moreover, the time I spent meditating was meant to open a pathway for lessening my own perfectionism. As Diaz discusses in his article, once one begins to notice their own patterns of perfectionism they can begin to strive for the beauty of imperfection, but meditation did not open this door for me. I was able to reflect on my perfectionism in other ways throughout the year, but silent, unprompted time before practicing only increased my desire for flawless performances. I would list everything I would need to do in upcoming practices to achieve that perfect performance instead of reflecting on ways I could break that aspiration.

It was at this point, halfway into the term, when I concluded that meditation is not a strategy that works for my personal MPA, but I have no doubt that meditation works wonders in many people's lives. There will never be one magical solution to performance anxiety because no one person is the same. Everyone has different experiences, different relationships to stimuli and situations, and thus there are a million different ways to ground oneself and help lessen MPA.

Beyond the Research

Although strategies such as physical activity and meditation did not garner results for my own MPA, a couple of things did help lessen my MPA levels. First, in discussions with my

mentors, they all suggested including a personal touch to the recital, something I could look forward to and something that could "make the night my own" as opposed to another intimidating degree requirement. I had many different ideas of what this personal touch could be, but in the end I decided to compose a piece for a four part choir and soloist. I rewrote a piece I had written the year before that is very near and dear to my heart and was never meant to be shared, but it felt right to share it in such a special moment. My friends and I put in hours of dedicated work in the weeks and down to the hours before my recital, and although it was looking like it wouldn't come to fruition, my piece *Change of Address* premiered at the end of my recital and I could not have been happier with the result. Through this choral piece, I was able to showcase multiple facets of my artistry, which made the recital feel more authentic. Due to everyone's busy schedules and the rampant nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, my friends and I had to record our parts and mix them virtually as opposed to performing live. The piece may not have gotten the live choral performance I had envisioned for it, but even just hearing a recording of the piece was a powerful experience that reinforced my own artistic image and felt like a perfect celebration of all of the work I have put in this year.

The Concept of Flow

Another strategy that has become increasingly prevalent in managing performance anxiety and MPA research is the concept of flow. Flow experiences occur when a person is so enveloped in their craft (music, art, dance, athletics, etc) that they lose all track of time and the outside world while still being fully in the moment and performing at the height of their ability. Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, the term's originator, defined flow even simpler, as "focused absorption in an activity". While Csikszentmihalyi did not envision flow as an exclusively

musical experience, many have adopted some of flow's concepts in their own journeys into decreasing MPA.

In the article "The Relationship Between Performance Anxiety and Flow", which was the diving board that launched my research into the topic of flow, the authors examine music students' proneness to flow and compared that to their experiences of performance anxiety. They discuss one's state of arousal and how the goal in diminishing performance anxiety should not be to eliminate all anxiety. A balance of nerves and excitement is needed as it keeps the performer focused and engaged. Additionally, both nerves and excitement indicate that the performer is deeply invested in the outcome of the performance. If there is not a sense of investment in a performance, the performance will suffer.

The authors discuss a technique that could lower levels of MPA and boost proneness to flow experiences: decreasing negative self-talk. It is so easy, especially for musicians or anyone in a creative field to constantly critique their work, but in an attempt to better their craft, they run the risk of clouding their heads with defeatist and overly harsh opinions. Analyzing oneself during practice is an important preparatory step to performance, but it is important to balance criticisms with things going well. That way, progress can be constantly celebrated without becoming stagnant. This idea of decreasing negative self-talk works hand in hand with Diaz's discussions of perfectionism. If the bar is set too high, or there is seemingly no way to succeed, anxiety is much more likely to occur.

Applying Flow Concepts to Music Practice

In seeking out ways to bring flow into the practice room, I found the oboist and educator Eve Newsome. She created the Flow Music Method, which is a series of fourteen tips, a style of

warmup, various articles, and a coaching philosophy, all aimed at helping musicians tap into their personal musical goals while also bringing a sense of exploration and fun into practicing.

Newsome divides her fourteen flow tips into different categories: warmup, repertoire practice, performance, and troubleshooting. In her warmup method, Newsome first suggests creating as optimal and comfortable of a practice environment as possible. Then, before beginning to sing, the vocalist should walk around the space, keeping keen awareness of the body and breath. Once these are all in line, the vocalist should begin to sing without tension, letting simple melodic lines flow out with improvised ease. The goal is not to create something showstopping, but to explore one's personal range and its quality on any given day. It is meant to facilitate an environment of creativity and exploration before diving into repertoire, a space where there is no 'right' answer, only singing for singing's sake. There are a set of questions that can help guide the warmup which ask the singer to examine what they can feel, what they can hear (and if they like it), and the ease at which they are creating sound. This is to give the singer sensory feedback, which allows them to stay in the moment.

Applying the Research

I brought this warmup technique into my practice 2-3 times a week and it welcomed a newfound sense of creativity and freedom into my practice sessions. I often felt trapped in a very specific and regimented set of warmups, but this warmup was unique in that it put all of the control in my hands to do whatever I wanted, but also took away a lot of the decision-making that held me back in previous practice sessions. It can be hard to decide how exactly to warm up my voice in the 'best' way, but the flow warmup allowed me to warm up in small steps: first by prioritizing my body, breathing, and the space around me, then by easing into singing. I would

normally set a key for myself, start by singing something reminiscent of a tonic triad, then go from there. On some days, I would end up singing a melody that had been stuck in my head, but on most days I created something new and exciting. After ten minutes or so, I would move on to the more regimented warmups I was used to. On days when I implemented this flow warmup, I felt more prepared to try new things within my repertoire and I felt more confident in those risks and experiments. I was able to expand the things I considered myself able to do through simple improvisation and sensory awareness.

Newsome details seven helpful tips for repertoire practice. The three that resonated most with me are “dream up imaginative ideas”, “enjoy yourself”, and “focus on connection”. I tried to keep these tips in mind during each practice session.

Allowing imaginative ideas to come into my practice time set off one of the most dramatic shifts I have seen during my time in voice lessons, both in regards of vocal progress and of my enjoyment of practicing. It acts as an extension of the flow warmup: when I would allow myself to improvise new ways of doing things, I would find myself unlocking exciting new details of a piece or the characters within them. Newsome encourages musicians to imagine a story, character, or emotion for the music and to explore ways they can bring those out in performance. Most of my pieces already had an established character, either from the larger works they were from or from my own imagination, but Newsome’s push encouraged me to go farther.

At the beginning of the year, I was a pretty stoic performer: standing in one place, looking awkwardly around the room, but after hours of dedicated character work in the practice room, I began to add choreographed motions and detailed expressions into my pieces, which brought them to life and made them more fun to perform. In the days before my recital, I was

able to push even farther with these creative ideas and became fully enveloped in the characters, to the point where a lot of the motions and expressions were no longer choreographed, but came out naturally when I was engaged in the piece. My excitement for the recital was able to blossom through this creation of different characters, and as I became enveloped in their mannerisms, I began to experience joy when performing.

Newsome's tip of enjoying yourself while practicing seems so simple, but it is something I never paid much attention to. Practice time has always seemed like it needed to be rigid, focused, and detailed 100% of the time, but I did not realize until reading Newsome's work how taxing that exclusion of fun had truly been. For me, this tip goes hand in hand with the previous tip. Once I began bringing creative ideas into my practice, I was also able to imagine creative ways to express ideas, almost as if I were teaching them. I began to create metaphors and physicalizations to solve problems that were coming up in the music, like in the folk piece *Rich and Rare,* arranged by Barbara Poulshock. There are many leaps and sustained pitches that were tricky for me, as this piece is written largely in my passaggio, the area between my high and low vocal registers. To aid myself in some of the trickier spots, I created many different gestures that felt in character for the piece and illustrated the vocal technique needed to execute the line successfully. A melodic line on the text "a bright gold ring on her hand she bore" tended to sink in my voice, so in practice I began lifting my hand up while singing the line, like a fair maiden holding out her hand to be kissed by a prince. I had so much fun bringing these bits of flair into my practice that this particular gesture stuck - I wore a bunch of sentimental rings for the recital and held out my hand on this line as I had done in practice. This made me feel grounded and present in the moment while also presenting me with an opportunity to be silly and potentially break any built up tension.

The emphasis on connection in Newsome's flow music method resonated with me deeply, especially considering the importance and the program of this particular performance. I have known since the beginning of college that my undergraduate recital would be a prominent moment in my collegiate year. The recital is meant to be the cherry on top of a delicious cake of musical progress, but factors like being graded on the performance and the finality of the whole event can add a bitterness to the cake of musical progress. It is nearly impossible to not become completely overtaken by the stress and pressure of this one performance. The main piece of advice I continued to receive from mentors leading up to the recital was to stay in the moment as much as possible. Regardless how many mistakes occur, I was reminded that this night was meant to celebrate my accomplishments and progress, and no amount of wrong notes or fumbled entrances could take the progress I had made in the past four years away from me.

One of my anxious tendencies when performing is to blank - my mind wanders and I lose track of where I am in the music. This is the last thing I wanted to happen during the recital, so thinking about things like my connection to the pieces and to the audience were helpful. One of the most jarring parts of performing are the people staring, waiting to be wowed, so in my practice I envisioned different audiences, different reactions, and different people in the seats to more accurately predict how I would react to and connect with different audiences. This allowed me to work through the potential 'worst case' scenarios: I was able to construct a plan in case anything went awry, but I was also able to realize my own resilience when things go wrong.

Beyond the Research

The pieces that I programmed for my recital were all very special to me. There was a thematic throughline of grief, honor, and healing that reflected the emotions I have been

processing this past year. My family has undergone a lot of loss, and in times of great pain I turn to music. I crave to connect with music that expresses the same feelings I am feeling, and through that I begin to forge a path to healing. I chose some pieces that exemplified this greatly and required a lot of emotional labor to perform, and I balanced those selections out with more lighthearted and fun pieces, but by recital time, every piece on the program had found its own special spot in my heart, and all of them connected back to grief in some way. I had spent so much time with the meaning of each piece, interpreting the text, the story behind it, the composer's life story, anything I could find to give me a deeper look into the worlds of this music, and it all paid off in the final recital performance. I was truly able to get to the root of my emotions and portray them on stage while also not letting them overthrow the performance. I showcased the pieces and their emotions as I saw them in my head and was able to create a moving experience for the audience and myself.

The Recital

Departmental Requirements

After months of preparation, my undergraduate recital was performed on April 27, 2022 in Lincoln Recital Hall. The undergraduate recital for vocal majors must be 30 minutes of mostly classical repertoire, with exceptions made for folk music, musical theater, and student compositions. This music is typically accompanied by a pianist and performed memorized. The undergraduate recital is meant to act as a showcase of a student's progress and accomplishments during their time at the university. It is meant to be a night of great honor and pride, but it also comes with a fair amount of stress, as it is a requirement to graduate. Any slip-up has the potential to change a student's future.

MPA Management in Performance

There were various complications in the days leading up to the recital, including a health scare, my mom's flight being canceled, and various technical difficulties that caused the recital to start fifteen minutes late. Despite all of these hiccups, the show was able to go on with my mom in attendance, me in good health, and the event live streamed to friends and family out of state!

However, because of the technical issues, I was overwhelmed and on edge at the start of the first piece, so I experienced a few MPA symptoms, like shaking and wandering eyes, but once I settled into the piece (specifically when I heard the beautiful piano line) those symptoms faded away and I was able to leap into the emotions of the piece. Next, I was able to tap into the more flamboyant and dramatic side of my performance persona within the folk pieces programmed, which brought me even further into the moment and caused me to have fun performing, a phenomenon that rarely happens.

It was during the first piece of my foriegn language set that I believe I entered a flow state. At this point in the program, I was no longer worried about doing everything right or about impressing anyone in the audience; I was more focused on having fun and showcasing the hard work that had gone into the night. In this state of flow, I was singing the pieces exactly as I had in lessons, potentially even better, while also forgetting that I was nervous. I lost track of time while still singing the words and staying on pitch and in time. Everything was going well, and as an added bonus, I was enjoying the experience!

The final two pieces that were performed live were both very raw and honest depictions of grief from Amy Beach's *Three Browning Songs*. The first, "Ah Love, But A Day!" explores the feeling of calling out to a loved one and asking their opinions of the changing world, and more importantly, asking if they would change along with it. I internalized this piece as reaching

out for guidance from family members that have passed and wondering what they would say back if they were sitting with me. The second piece from this collection, “I Send My Heart Up To Thee” depicts missing a loved one who has passed on to heaven, so someone sends all of their love up to them in a gondola. The stars in the sky, the canals of Venice, and the grand ocean carry this gondola until it reaches them. It is one of the purest forms of love and dedication that I have ever heard set to music. Beach speaks of honoring someone and keeping their love alive through ourselves in such an admirable way. It struck a chord with me from the first time I heard the lullaby-like melody, and even though it is quite high in my vocal range, I was determined to perform both pieces at my recital as a dedication to the loved ones my family has lost this year. Anxious anticipation for the performance of these two pieces didn’t subside until I began to perform them, but once Mrs. Wilson began to play the opening to ‘Ah Love’, I settled right into the emotional knot that encompasses the feelings of these pieces. I was in the moment for every second, and those pieces’ performances served as a dedication that I’m proud to send up to my loved ones.

The final piece of the night was *Change of Address*, which, as mentioned above, I composed for a four part choir and soloist and was recorded and performed digitally by a small group of vocalists I have met through the years at Portland State. Tons of work compiling, editing, and mixing went into to the project in the days leading up to the recital. With the time crunch, I was worried that it would not come to fruition, or at least that it would not sound as good as I was hoping. However, when the piece began to play, it could have just been the relief of being done with the recital, but I felt an overwhelming sense of accomplishment and pride. There’s a part in the piece where the soloist (me) begins a motif that is slowly echoed throughout

the parts, and hearing this play out in real time, even if it was not a live performance, was still an extremely satisfying experience as a composer and as a musician.

Reflecting on the night of my recital, I would definitely say that at least part of the performance was a flow experience. I was fully in the moment for the whole performance, and for most of the night I was too focused on the character of the music and recreating the intonation and expression I had achieved in previous rehearsals to be worried about small mistakes or to be concerned about the audience's perception of what I was doing. At this point, I had met every goal I set for myself leading up to the recital; the only goal left to cross off was to have a fun, memorable experience. Check!

Impacts of the Research

When I started the school year, I felt a sense of hopelessness at the thought of performing my recital. I chose to research MPA in the hope of finding some way of managing these feelings, hoping to block my anxiety and get through the recital. While not all of the strategies that I researched and tested worked for me, my deep dive into MPA over the past year has propelled me to a place as a performer, musician, and person that I could not have pictured at the beginning of the year. I was able to find excitement and countless moments of joy not only in performing but in the nitty-gritty rehearsal work as well. I developed strategies for practicing that made practicing fun and made me feel like I was achieving something each session. This was especially evident as I started to explore the concept of flow. Through improvised warmups, creative approaches to repertoire study, and an emphasis of connection to the body and the meaning of the music, I began to feel like a performer instead of an imposter.

These strides in my performing and practice techniques began to carry over into other aspects of my artistry. I started to realize that in narrowing my view of my own musicianship to only include performing and the work I do exclusively on my instrument (voice), I had been limiting myself from seeing so much of my potential and talent in other areas of music. For example, I recently had to conduct the entirety of Gustav Holst's *First Suite in Eb* for an instrumental conducting class. Because I am still very new to the instrumental side of conducting and because this piece is so highly revered in the band community, I was extremely nervous. For a few weeks before the test, I would listen to the piece every day, some days dedicating time to conduct it, but other days just spending time with the piece, exploring the feelings each different section or mood shift evoked.

A clear mental aural image of the piece and how I wanted to conduct it began to solidify in my head, but I was still stunned with fear. I went up to conduct, almost positive that I was going to fail in front of my peers, but when the serene and all-too-familiar opening melody began from the trumpets, I was whisked away by the music. Not only was I fully enveloped in the music and performing at the height of my own technical abilities (which admittedly are not great, but I was executing everything as I had been taught and as I had practiced), but I was also receiving and adapting to feedback that my professor was instructing as I was conducting. He gave suggestions to adjust my pattern, my expression in the baton, and my stance, all of which I was able to correct without stopping or getting lost. I varied the expressions of my face and body to match the music, and I was especially impressed with my shift from the first to second movement. I had been preparing the first movement for three weeks, but the second movement was something I decided to work on the weekend before the test. I was extremely nervous that it would flounder compared to the first movement, but having heard it so many times in class and

having had rehearsed it so much over the weekend, I was able to transition smoothly from the reflective legato three pattern of the first movement into the high energy sharp two pattern of the second movement.

After releasing the final cutoff, my professor was complimentary and had noticed the progress I had achieved in the past year, all of which felt very good to hear. There are still a lot of areas within instrumental conducting where I can improve, but hearing such positive feedback and having such an engaged flow experience felt amazing and reshaped my own view of my musicianship. Going into that test, I did not feel like I could claim to be a band conductor, or even a conductor at all since it is not a skill I am well versed in, but after that experience I realize that opportunities for growth can also be valuable music-making experiences.

Conclusion: Broader Implications

Though I have worked with flow as a singer and conductor, in three weeks, I will graduate with a Bachelors of Music in Music Education. I want to be a teacher. There is a certain kind of magic that occurs when kids discover different sounds or play an instrument for the first time. Because of this magic and the calling I feel to be a teacher, I have experienced the most intense sense of flow when I am teaching. I feel lucky to have had so many moments in which I am fully enveloped in what I am teaching and what the students are doing. In one experience, I arranged a song that I grew up listening to, *Iko Iko*, originally by James Crawford, and planned to teach it as a mixed ensemble percussion piece. I was terrified in the days leading up to the lesson for many reasons, mainly because I only had ten minutes to teach a whole minute of the song on six different instruments. I had no clue how I would pull that off, but I wrote multiple lesson plans trying to find the ‘perfect’ way to teach the piece. However, once I started passing out

sheet music and the excitement began bubbling up in the room, the lesson happened seamlessly. I stopped worrying about following an exact plan and instead melded my many lesson plans together to meet the students where they were at that day. I continued adapting the lesson, listening to their playing and teaching new material without getting tripped up or worrying if I was 'doing it right', and after ten minutes had passed, the students were playing the section we learned! Every note and rhythm was not perfect, but everyone was smiling and grooving along, which at the end of the day is the true purpose of music.

I started this year anticipating lots of struggles with performance anxiety. While some struggles did occur, there were also many experiences throughout this year where I overcame that anxiety. In choosing to research MPA, I merely hoped that I would have an easier time making it through the recital. As my research progressed and shifted, I not only discovered ways to check off the recital requirement, but I found genuine joy in performing! I discovered how to connect to music on a deeper level, and through that connection to the repertoire I was able to connect to myself on a deeper level as well. Through this year of delving into my own MPA I have been able to fulfill all of my graduation requirements with lesser levels of stress than anticipated and I am able to leave my undergraduate as a better musician and person.

While I understand that a research sample of one is not truly scientific, the discoveries I was able to make this year through reading, research, and my own implementation into practice were truly transformative. I hope that this paper is able to give other musicians struggling with performance anxiety ideas on how to minimize their negative experiences with MPA and that it supplies ample evidence to support every collegiate musician taking the same journey with their own performance anxiety. Everyone deserves to experience the unbridled joy of performing.

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