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Stagefright

By Tom "Ketchfish" Inglis

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We all know the feeling of terror when we take the stage. That hyper-aware place where your thoughts become jumbled, your voice quavers and your palms sweat. If you say, "Oh, not me! I never get stage fright" I say you're lying or you've never been on stage. Performers in general and musicians in particular are insecure by nature. That's why we seek the spotlight in the first place, to gain validation from others. Don't worry, it doesn't have to paralyze your performance or worse, keep you from performing at all. You may not be able to banish it completely, and you may not want to as it can be used to your advantage. Read on McDuff and I'll pass along the words of wisdom I've absorbed in my years of dealing with stage fright and discussing it with other professional musicians.

MENTAL IMAGERY

The very first line of defense against stage fright is using your own mind to blunt it's impact through mental imagery. Remember what that last audience looked like the last time stage fright negatively affected your performance? Now change that picture in your mind. Imagine those scary people all in their underwear. Briefs and boxers with little pink cupids and superman underoos. They look ridiculous don't they? The more ridiculous the better. They don't seem all that threatening any more do they? The next gig you play, just as you're about to play, take a look at the audience and choose their mental underwear. Then close your eyes for a moment and really try to form the mental picture. They may wonder what the hell you're laughing about but they're not going to seem very threatening.

PREPARATION

Be prepared and you will not feel so insecure. Practice, practice, practice. Know your parts before you get to rehearsal and use the time in rehearsal to fit the parts together. That's what rehearsal is for. Take a few minutes before the show to run over the first few numbers in your head or on your instrument quietly, preferably in private. Once you have the momentum going by playing a couple very well prepared songs, the rest of the show is a piece of cake. You'll have the confidence borne of success to carry you through the rest of the evening.

MEDITATION OR DEEP BREATHING EXERCISES

Try this little exercise for relieving stress. Take a slow, deep breath through your mouth. Really fill those lungs up. Hold it just for a half a second and breathe out through your nose very slowly until your lungs empty. Repeat this a few times. Don't you just feel the stress ebb away? Your perception

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becomes clear. You become calm and centered. You've just increased the oxygen level in your brain, increasing it's power and clarity. Feels good, doesn't it?

MANTRA

Oh Mantra sounds like a mystical word doesn't it? It's just a phrase that you repeat over and over. With each repetition, you believe it more. You can make up your own but, as goofy as they sound, here's some I've used that worked for me.

"I'm a musician and you're just regular people. You wish you were me."

"Tonight is the night of my best performance ever"

"Damn, I'm good!"

"Every female in the house wants me"

"You look pretty stupid in your underwear"

Okay, I made the last one up on the spot but you get the idea. Take a self-affirming thought, turn it into a phrase and repeat it over and over in your mind.

BE ON TIME AND INSIST YOUR BANDMATES DO THE SAME

Feeling frantic trying to get set up in a hurry, starting the show without a sound check, having the club owner watching you get ready to play, etc. These add an enormous amount of stress to the beginning of your show. If you have a bandmate that constantly shows up at the last minute or late, fire him and replace him. This person is no pro and he'll drag you down. If you are always late, shame on you! Buy a watch. Leave your house an hour early. Grow up, there are other people's reputations depending on you. I make it a point to be the first person to arrive at a venue. but I don't go inside until the second person shows up. That way I don't feel nervous in an unfamiliar place with only strangers around me.

DRINK WATER

No alcohol before the third set. (or none at all) And no pot smoking, it makes you paranoid. Save it for after the show if you must partake.

ESTABLISH A PRE-SHOW RITUAL

Rituals are comforting. They make you feel comfortable in a place and in your mental space. I insist that set up be done 15 minutes minimum before show time including all sound checks. This 15 minutes is mine and I suffer no interruptions. I go to the dressing room or my car and do deep breathing 5 X. I then run over the first two songs in my head. I then do my mantra. At 5 minutes before the show I grab a bottle of water, hit the bathroom and splash my face. I time my arrival to exactly show time and count down or cue the first song. No talking, no intro, just go. The goofy people in their underwear KNOW you're a professional, there to entertain them.

USE THE EVIL POWER FOR GOOD

I briefly mentioned the "hyper-aware" state that stage fright can induce. This is your naturally occurring "fight or flee" response to a situation you perceive as dangerous. Your perceptions are heightened, you hear better, you see better...you can perform better. By the way, it's not really dangerous on-stage. I've played some of the roughest bars and biker clubhouses around and the only time an audience member has physically attacked me is when they were an angry husband or boyfriend trying to keep me from taking their woman away from them. Just see who's with that total babe before you hit on her too hard and you're safe.

SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

If nothing else works, see a counselor or doctor. There are many therapies and medications that can help with extreme stage fright. I've heard of many performers who take beta-blocking drugs and swear they do wonders. Don't let your musical talent be stifled.

Ol' Ketchfish is a songwriter and musician with years of performance experience, back to the bad old eighties. He's played every kind of venue from dirt floor barrooms to church halls, from stadiums to small town bandstands. At every gig, he's experienced stagefright and he's found some techniques to use it to his advantage, so can you with a little practice. Check out his website at <http://klik.to.ketchfish> for more information.

Lose Stagefright Over Your Lunch Hour

By Melissa Mayers Lewis

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by: **Melissa Mayers Lewis**

While teaching a two-day Speaking Confidence program to a group of 25 government secretaries, I wanted to give them practice using their personal experience to help others. So I gave them a simple assignment to ponder over their lunch hour: Think of a lesson they'd learned in life and share that lesson with the group when they came back.

A petite woman named Judy nervously came to me as the group was disbursing. Judy begged me to excuse her from this exercise. "Please! You don't understand. I'm terrified! I can't possibly get up and speak in front of all these people," she pleaded. We talked for a few minutes and, with compassionate encouragement from me, agreed to think in a hypothetical way about the possibility of maybe doing the exercise. With a long face and a heavy heart, Judy slouched off to lunch.

When the group came back, I said, "OK, it's time to hear your lessons learned. Who wants to go first?" To my amazement, Judy's hand shot up! "Well, Judy, come on down," I said. She marched to the front of the room like a woman on a mission. She whipped around and, with a determined but gentle poise, she looked out at her colleagues and spoke. "After 30 years of marriage, my husband left me for a younger woman, which was devastating. To make matters worse, he took all our money. So there I was alone in my mid-'50s and practically penniless. (Long, poignant pause.) But, I'm happy to say that today I am literally a millionaire. That's because, out of necessity, I learned to save and manage and invest my money. But none of you should have to learn it the way I did. So take out your pencils, girls. I'm gonna show you how it's done!"

Judy Blew Us Away

She was funny, passionate, authentic, driven, feisty. She shared the mistakes she made, the resources she found, the lessons she learned, the gifts she discovered—all with a magnetic power that held us transfixed. The moment she finished talking, everyone leaped up in a joyful, exuberant standing ovation.

After everyone settled down, I asked, "Judy, what on earth happened to you? An hour ago you were quivering, saying you couldn't possibly speak. Yet you've just held this room spellbound for 10 minutes. What happened?" She paused for a moment and said thoughtfully, "It never occurred to me until today that I could HELP people from up here. All my life I thought that public speaking was about following

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rules and performing and getting everything right. It had never occurred to me I could just stand up and help people."

As Judy discovered, all the posturing and performing is unnecessary. You need a desire to help your listeners—that's it! Any time you speak to a group, it's because you have a message that can help them. Perhaps you can spare them some pain (as Judy did), tell them about a resource they've been missing, help them take advantage of an opportunity, explain something that's been confusing them, make their jobs easier, save them money or time, increase their efficiency, boost their morale, solve a problem, etc. The audience doesn't need to be impressed or entertained. They just need YOU and the

wisdom you have to share.

As Judy learned over her lunch hour, it's about helping people.

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Melissa Lewis turns traditional thinking about public speaking upside down to give people more comfort, confidence, and charisma in front of groups. She is a former comic actress, a certified facilitator of SPEAKING CIRCLES(r), president-elect of the National Speakers Association Kansas City Chapter, and author of the soon-to-be-released book, Upside Down Speaking. For more information, call (913) 341-1241 or visit



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