

# **TOWARDS THE LIMIT-EXPERIENCE IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE:**

**A critical survey of popular literature and methods designed to facilitate  
optimal music performance**

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## **Declaration of Originality**

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other university and, to the best of my belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person except where due reference is made in the text.

Peter Knight

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## CHAPTER ONE:

### DELINEATION OF THE TOPIC

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#### Introduction

Optimal music performance, for most musicians, seems to involve reaching a state of consciousness outside of, and different from, that of the performer's ordinary experience. Although this state of consciousness often corresponds with the highest levels of execution, it is important to note that optimal music performance is not necessarily dependent on a particular type of music or the quality of its execution; it is not the optimal performance *of* music. Rather, the term refers to an unusually intense, heightened awareness, which for ease of identification, I refer to as the 'limit-experience.'

The prominent twentieth century scholar, Michel Foucault, described the limit-experience as one that contests or transcends the boundaries and limitations that characterise our everyday lives, leaving us with a reconfigured understanding of the world, one that "tears the subject from itself"(1991:31). When I reflect on this description I immediately think of the most sublime moments I have had in the course of my career as a musician; of those moments when I was completely absorbed in what I was playing, when my sense of the presence of the audience, of the room in which I was performing and even my sense of individuation receded momentarily. When I was 'torn from myself.' This is a state of consciousness quite different from that of my ordinary experience. It is the state from which inspiration seems to flow, and it is the experience of this state that can inspire the self-discipline and dedication that musical endeavour requires. Psychologist and author, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, describes it as "flow"(1990:xi). Importantly, he is not referring specifically to musicians in performance. According to Csikszentmihalyi, human beings seek the limit-experience or 'flow state,' in as many different activities as one cares to name: sports, arts, sex, meditation, drugs, religion, and music, and these experiences have been examined from myriad perspectives. Indeed, the quantity of written material attests to the fact that it is very difficult to pinpoint and precisely describe the phenomenon to which I am referring, as it pertains to lived experience rather than to something we can

measure, reduce or quantify. Most musicians will however report having at least some insight into flow states of consciousness even though they will describe their experience in many different ways.

“Your gaze narrows, your sense of time stops. You feel alert and alive; effort becomes effortless” reports musician and author, Stephen Nachmanovitch (1990:52). In moments of complete absorption, making music can seem easy; it can take us out of the parameters of our ordinary lives and allow us to contact a pure expressive aspect of ourselves. In these moments, performance can be a joyous, uplifting experience. At other times, it can be a torment. Many musicians experience degrees of stress associated with performing that not only inhibit the potential for their enjoyment of the experience, but which can also be hazardous to their emotional and physical health (Fishbein and Middlestadt *et al* 1988; James 1998 cited by Burzik 2002). It is a fascinating paradox that musical endeavour, which holds the promise of wonderful epiphanies, can also deliver performers into inner turmoil and angst. In recent years there has been a proliferation of material written for musicians designed to help them deal with this turmoil and to facilitate optimal music performance.

### **Personal Context**

My motivation for researching the area of optimal music performance stems directly from personal experience; like many musicians, I struggled with performance anxiety and stress associated with performing and practising, and for a long time my relationship with my instrument was characterised by tension. In my early career, musical endeavour was often fraught and yet I was driven as many musicians are, to continue to play and strive for something that I could not then name, and even now struggle to describe. For me this drive to continue to play is at least as interesting as the manifestations of stress that impeded my progress.

I understood intuitively from very early in my trumpet-playing career that music allowed me to express something ineffable. Occasionally when playing in public, my anxiety,

self-doubt, and sense of performing *practised skills* dropped away and I felt as if something had taken me over. It is a sensation that is very difficult to describe, but I recall clearly trying to find words to elucidate my experience of a particularly wonderful performance, at the time the best I could do was to say that I had been ‘carried away by beauty.’ Now, looking back on it, that was quite an apt description. Although I had been nervous before the concert in question, my anxiety faded when my colleagues began to play. I was so entranced by the beauty of the music and of their playing, that I became fully present to the moment, to the sound of each note. As I lifted my instrument, my body seemed to know what to do, to know how to play the trumpet and I heard my own playing as part of the larger ensemble with a sense of its place in the ensemble sound. In that instant my awareness of linear time, and the accompanying sense of the possibility of failure were overwhelmed and I experienced the beauty of music with an intensity that is difficult to communicate. William Blake refers in his epigram, *Eternity*, to, ‘kissing the joy as it flies’ and for me this poetic description comes close to naming my experience.

The possibility of ‘kissing the joy as it flies’ inspired me to continue to play the trumpet even though this positive experience of musical performance, especially in the early years of my career, was so often occluded by the fear and self-doubt that I have previously mentioned. For a long time I felt I was not reaching my potential as a musician and presumed, from the information that I had been given, that the answer to this dilemma was simply to practise more. What I was not fully aware of at this point is that the “quality and nature of the practice activities undertaken”(Reid 2002:104) are at least as important as the number of hours that one spends practising. In my case the frustration and anxiety that I suffered during performance were inseparable from a practice regimen that was inconsistent and also fraught with stress manifesting as creative stagnation and procrastination. Having read many accounts and having spoken to many other players, I have come to realise that there is a commonality in my story that threads through those of many musicians. We are taught, as musician and psychologist, Andreas Burzik, observes, “mechanical handling” of our instruments and a set of “mind oriented skills”(2002). Certainly my earlier experience of instrumental practice, which had more in common with a chore than a creatively engaging activity, relates to Burzik’s description; he writes

that this approach is characterised by a “feeling of disconnectedness with the activity” (2002), and notes that this is commonplace in many music students.

Despite the frustration I describe, my determination led me to explore texts and ideas that were outside the mainstream pedagogical models I was being offered as an undergraduate student. *The Inner Game of Tennis* (Gallwey 1974), which was originally written for sports people, was being informally passed around by students at the time along with a subsequent publication written for musicians around similar ideas, called *The Inner Game of Music* (Green and Gallwey 1986). Both books contained insights that for me were new and which resonated with some of the problems I was having. Importantly, they also opened a whole area of possibility, namely, that looking at aspects of my *experience* of playing music and working on my approach to my instrument in a holistic way was as important as practising my scales.

Since that time I have investigated the disciplines of yoga and meditation as well as numerous texts including Kenny Werner’s *Effortless Mastery* (1996), which is especially popular among jazz musicians, *The Art of Practicing* (Bruser 1997), *Practising in Flow*, which is a workshop series (and website) created by Andreas Burzik (2004), *A Soprano on Her Head* (Ristad 1982), and *Freeplay* (Nachmanovitch 1990). All of this material has enriched my music practice and my life as well as assisted me as an educator to help younger musicians facing similar problems. The inspiration for this project flows from my interest in these texts. My motivation for developing the critical survey that follows, of some of this material, is to create a document that musicians can access to give them some idea of what is available in this area. In addition I hope to contribute to the academic discussion as to the value of this material, which is still regarded with a degree of suspicion by many in the field of mainstream music education.



## **The Research Aim**

This project critically reviews a selection of texts and methods that purport to facilitate optimal music performance and discusses the cultural and historical contexts in which they evolved.

## **Approach to the Research**

It is worth noting that much of the literature dealing with the psychology of music performance (distinguished from that which deals with music cognition) has emerged only in the last two or three decades. In that time, as previously mentioned, there has been a proliferation of texts and methods designed to help musicians overcome performance anxiety, stage fright and negative or ineffective practice habits, and to help them achieve optimal states of consciousness in performance. It is important to critically review this material in order to add to academic discourse in the field and to assist musicians to make best use of the literature and methods available. As far as I am aware there has not been a previous effort made to draw this material together.

My focus in this study, as the title suggests, is on the notion of the transformative potential of music performance for the performer. This emphasis is a response to a negative paradigm that appears in much of the academic literature on the subject (especially in that published by educators' journals and the like) which, in many instances, takes performance anxiety as a starting point and thus a given. This project questions this deficit model of music performance and argues that the limit-experience in music performance can be the norm rather than the exception.

In developing my ideas for this topic I have read as much of the available literature as possible. However, in the course of this project I concentrate on more recent, popular material. I have sought out literature including journals, Masters and Doctoral theses, articles, and scientific studies, but my interest lies mainly in the texts and methods that musicians themselves are attracted to, and in whether they are effective. In addition to

familiarising myself with this material through my reading, I have attended several workshops and undertaken private tuition with a number of leading teachers in the field, including Kenny Werner, Andreas Burzik and Madeline Bruser.

In the course of my research I have spoken to many musicians informally about their experiences with performance anxiety and altered states of consciousness experienced during performance and also of their opinions about the efficacy of various texts and methods they have worked with. Though I do not include this research formally, it has been very useful in gaining a broad impression of musicians' experience of performance, and of their responses to the literature they have read. These conversations have also helped me greatly by alerting me to the existence of numerous authors.

In this project I create a compendium of the following texts and methods with the purpose of developing a comparative analysis:

- *Practising in Flow* (workshop series and website). Andreas Burzik has adapted, for musicians, the ideas Csikszentmihalyi develops in *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Performance*.
- *Effortless Mastery: Liberating the Master Musician Within*. A popular text, written by jazz pianist, Kenny Werner, that draws on eastern approaches to the mind and develops a method for musicians incorporating meditative practice.
- *The Inner Game of Music*. Author and musician, Barry Green, in association with Timothy W. Gallwey uses a model derived from sports psychology that was first presented by Gallwey in *The Inner Game of Tennis*.

In developing my analysis of these texts and methods I review them with the aim of identifying convergent and divergent themes. I examine each with a view to establishing the following:

- How the method describes optimal music performance and what it means by optimal performance.
- What it has to say about perceived obstacles to optimal music performance.
- What sources of information it draws upon.
- The philosophical and psychological basis for the method; I ask what model of the human being is assumed or explicitly stated.
- In addition I give an account of my personal observations of the two methods with which I have had considerable personal experience.

### **Limits to the Research**

As noted above, there has been a burgeoning of material related to the area I am investigating. In a study of this size it would be unproductive to attempt a detailed examination of all of the texts and methods available; instead I concentrate on three authors, two with whom I have had direct contact.

The length of this thesis also limits my ability to explore the psychology of optimal music performance in any depth. Fortunately however, there are authors the reader can refer to for detailed analysis of this area (Sloboda 1985; 1988; Rink 2002). In addition I am unable to undertake a meaningful critique of the significant amount of neurological research that has been written about optimal performance and the physical manifestations of stress such as ‘stage fright’ that prevent optimal performance. Much of this literature attempts to explain the phenomena I am concerned with in physiological terms and has little to say about how we experience altered states of consciousness and performance anxiety. It is, therefore, of less interest to me since my aim is to concentrate on material that can offer practical assistance to musicians.

## **Synopsis of Content**

Chapter Two attempts to arrive at a description of the quality of consciousness experienced by musicians in optimal performance.

Factors that appear to impede optimal music performance including aspects of music education and contemporary music performance culture are dealt with in Chapter Three, which also briefly examines performance anxiety or stage fright.

Chapter Four offers brief studies of the two books, and the workshop method outlined above, which have become popular in recent years and claim to facilitate optimal performance for musicians.

In Chapter Five I conclude by identifying themes common to these three methods, and areas where the methods diverge, in the context of a broad overview of the popular literature pertaining to music performance and current mainstream music pedagogy.

## CHAPTER 2:

### THE EXPERIENCE OF OPTIMAL MUSIC PERFORMANCE

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#### Introduction

In this chapter I attempt to arrive at an understanding of the quality of consciousness experienced by musicians during optimal performance or the ‘limit-experience.’ Although such experiences are essentially non-verbal, I need to use words to encapsulate something of their essence and to arrive at an understanding of what is meant by the limit-experience in music performance. Although a definition is difficult to pin down, it is important, in order to fully appreciate the emergence of the texts and methods I am examining, to develop an understanding of the altered states of consciousness that musicians seem to access when they reach optimal performance. To do this I draw on the work of various authors.

#### The Examination of Consciousness and the Behaviourist Perspective

Many would question the viability of attempting to understand optimal music performance in terms of the *experience* of the performer. Although it is no longer dominant, the behaviourist view of the human condition, which developed from the ideas of John B. Watson, has significantly influenced the way we understand the mind in Western culture.<sup>1</sup> B.F. Skinner, one of the most influential of the behaviourists, postulated that it is not productive to attempt to understand the human being by investigating inner processes (1953). I examine the behaviourist perspective and its influence on music education in more detail in Chapter Three, but it is worth noting at this point that the behaviourist view regards “the whole realm of an individual’s inner life and experience [including the possibility of altered states of consciousness] as... obscure and irrelevant since it is inaccessible to exact observation and measurement”(Davey 1970:69).

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<sup>1</sup> Behaviourism has had a specific influence on education and thus on the way we learn music. Teachers who accept the behaviourist perspective believe that the behaviour of students is a response to their past and present environments and that all behaviour is learned and can be shaped by what is termed *operant conditioning*.

Although it is true that there is much we do not yet understand about the states of consciousness that I have been discussing, there is abundant evidence to suggest that they do exist and that they are relevant to a discussion of optimal music performance (Wilber 1993:187). Stanislav Grof, one of the pioneers of modern psychology, has experimented extensively with non-ordinary states of consciousness, referring to them as “the transpersonal dimensions of the psyche”(1998:67). Grof induced these states of consciousness in subjects through the use of drugs, including LSD. Later he developed a drug-free technique called “holotropic therapy”(1988:59) for inducing these states, which involved breathing exercises and focused body work in an attempt to test whether the reactions he observed in the LSD tests were the result of “chemical psychosis” or whether they reflected “genuine properties of the psyche.” He reports “seeing the entire spectrum of experiences characteristic of psychedelic sessions.” Grof concludes: “...transpersonal experiences have many strange characteristics that shatter the most fundamental assumptions of materialistic science and the mechanistic view”(1988:69). Although Grof and Wilbur do not write about musicians *per se*, their findings have important implications for the way we approach our understanding of psychological aspects of music performance.

### **Altered Consciousness and Music Performance**

I take off and wail long notes jerking the squawk into the end of them to form a new beat, have to trust them all as I close my eyes, know the others are silent, throw the notes off the walls of people, the iron lines, so pure and sure bringing the howl down to the floor and letting in the light (Ondaatje 1984:130).

Michael Ondaatje captures something of the nature of the limit-experience in music performance in this passage written about the Creole trumpeter Buddy Bolden, who lived in New Orleans at the turn of the twentieth century and who was an important early influence in the development of jazz.<sup>2</sup> I turn to a poet for a description of altered

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<sup>2</sup> Bolden was the leader of one of the many traditional New Orleans brass bands of the time. He is credited as having ‘started’ jazz by improvising his own melodies during the customary four measure ‘breaks’ or stops in the music instead of stating the melody.

consciousness (and to Ondaatje for a description of altered consciousness in music performance), because often it is in poetry that the subtle nuance of experience is best expressed. As I have previously noted, the limit-experience is one of transformation. Ondaatje attempts to *inhabit* Buddy Bolden's mind in the moment of transformation as he plays trumpet in a traditional New Orleans street parade. Bolden has to 'trust them all': trust the musicians, trust the audience, trust the music, and trust the very notes he is playing. He relinquishes his sense of himself as he 'lets in the light,' which not only transforms Bolden but which also marks the beginning of a musical tradition that has had a transforming effect on our culture at large.<sup>3</sup>

Ondaatje's description of Bolden's experience of music performance links with Stanislav Grof's notion of 'transpersonal dimensions' where consciousness expands "beyond the usual ego boundaries" and transcends the "limitations of time and space"(1998:68). Grof observes that during transpersonal experiences one may access "instant intuitive information"(1998:71). This certainly appears to describe the process of making music. In the case of Buddy Bolden, his intuition was so acute that he seemed to perceive the possibility of a whole new genre of music despite having had little formal music education. Indeed, many musicians who have experienced altered states of consciousness during performance, will report that they were able to extend beyond the perceived limits of their capabilities. Roland cites the experience of a concert pianist: "Sometimes, it's one of those miraculous situations... you are transcended to another plane... you know you can't put a finger wrong, you know that whatever you're going to do is going to be OK, and because of that you can take risks"(1997:73).

We can easily recognise characteristics of the 'transpersonal dimensions of the psyche' in descriptions of musicians' experience of optimal performance, as well as in Foucault's notion of the limit-experience being one where the subject is 'torn from itself.' But we can also recognise a similarity between the state these writers refer to and that described in everyday parlance when we hear someone say they 'lost themselves' in an activity, or

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<sup>3</sup> It is commonly accepted that jazz music has had an immeasurable impact on contemporary culture. Peter Conrad states, "jazz overthrew the sacred inevitability of tradition" (1998:367).

when someone says ‘I lost all track of time.’ This can happen in an experience as mundane as, for example, watching sport on television; we become so engrossed that our sense of linear time drops away and we ‘forget ourselves’ for a while. This is, however, an essentially passive experience and very different from that which is available to the musician, because through music not only can we ‘lose ourselves,’ we can also ‘find ourselves’ or at least discover hitherto hidden potentials. This reflects the nature of the limit-experience, which is said to be one of transformation.

Csikszentmihalyi notes this difference, drawing a conceptual distinction between ‘pleasure’ and ‘enjoyment.’ He observes that ‘enjoyment’ is characterised by our active participation in activities such as music performance, whereas ‘pleasure,’ he claims, is characterised by passivity, such as in the example I gave of being absorbed in a television program. ‘Enjoyment,’ according to Csikszentmihalyi, leads to flow states, during which “concern for the self disappears, yet paradoxically the sense of self emerges stronger after the flow experience is over”(1990:49).

This altering of one’s sense of ‘self’ does appear to be an important characteristic of the limit-experience. The perception of duality, the distinction between subject and object, to which we are accustomed in our everyday consciousness becomes blurred. Burzik, writes of optimal music performance and describes a “deep feeling of well-being and harmony [where]... action and consciousness have become one”(2003:714). Nachmanovitch observes, “[f]or art to appear, we have to disappear”(1990:51), noting that the “ordinary self is left behind and a form of heightened awareness arises”(1990:53). When we are ‘carried away by beauty’ (to reference my description of optimal music performance), we experience what Elaine Scarry calls “radical decentering”(1999:111) or “unselfing”(1999:113). Scarry writes that these experiences cause “a cluster of feelings that normally promote the self... to fall away.” When our sense of self ‘falls away’ we are opened up to the possibility of experiencing and *sharing* music on a profound level and creating music of the highest order. Pianist Keith Jarrett describes his experience of the intensity of music performance at peak levels: "I have courted the fire for a very long



time, and many sparks have flown in the past, but the music on this recording speaks, finally, the language of the flame itself" (2000).

## **Conclusion**

As mentioned in the introduction, my aim in this chapter is to arrive at an understanding of the limit-experience in music performance. Descriptions such as those offered by Nachmanovitch, Burzik, and the other authors I have cited do not offer a definition, but they do exhibit common characteristics that provide insights into the experience of optimal music performance. Importantly, they refer to an experience that appears to be intensely positive and desirable and associated with a feeling of effortlessness. Yet despite being described as desirable and feeling effortless, the popularity of texts such as *The Inner Game of Music* seems to suggest that optimal music performance – far from being the norm – can be as elusive as it is difficult to define.

## CHAPTER 3

### OBSTACLES TO THE LIMIT-EXPERIENCE IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE

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#### **Introduction**

Kenny Werner states: “music unencumbered by unhealthy constraints, induces a state of ecstasy in the musician”(1996:43). However, as he later points out, all too often this is not the case for many musicians. In this chapter I discuss the ‘unhealthy constraints’ or obstacles to which Werner alludes. To this end I briefly examine the culture of performance in Western music traditions and factors that have influenced its development, including historical ideals of music performance, behaviourism in music education, the rise of perfectionism, and the effects of contemporary mass culture. I also outline the phenomenon of ‘stage fright,’ or ‘music performance anxiety,’ which is mentioned in much of the literature I am concerned with for this project, as one of the major barriers to optimal performance.<sup>4</sup> This discussion, while by no means exhaustive, provides a context that is essential for my study of texts and methods that purport to provide solutions to these issues.

I am aware, that having discussed optimal music performance, my examination of factors that obstruct optimal music performance may appear to set up an ‘either/or’ binary. This is not my intention. There are of course many musicians who do not experience stage fright to the degree that it becomes counterproductive, or the ‘flow’ of optimal music performance. However, for the purposes of this project, it is necessary to give an account of these extremes.

#### **The Experience of Music Performance Anxiety: A Personal Account**

In Chapter Two I referred to my experience of optimal music performance as ‘kissing the joy as it flies’ and it is this feeling that I hope and aim to achieve each time I perform. However, even now there are occasions when negative self-talk and performance anxiety

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<sup>4</sup> In most of the literature on this subject the terms ‘stage fright’ and ‘music performance anxiety’ are interchangeable; ‘music performance anxiety’ is also often given the acronym, ‘MPA.’

combine to prevent this possibility. Importantly, in my experience, it is the *combination* of factors that I describe which can create problems. In fact, I am almost always nervous before performing and find, that despite the negative connotations often associated with this state, it can be positive and helpful. Anxiety, when experienced as ‘excitement’ can help a musician to ‘rise’ to the occasion, and so it is for me. It is a delicate balance however, and at times this nervous/excited feeling transforms into fear fed by negative thoughts and projections of possible future outcomes. I recall an experience when, as an undergraduate student studying improvisation, I had to give a classical recital with a pianist. The music I had chosen was not difficult and I could execute it in my practice room reasonably well, but when it came to performing the piece in front of my peers my anxiety increased to a point where my legs were shaking and I felt I could not breathe. I began to project catastrophic outcomes: ‘What will they think if I make a mistake...? What if I really can’t play at all? I can hardly breathe now and I’m sure it’s going to get worse... why did I agree to do this in the first place...? I’m not a classical player... what will my accompanist think when he discovers I can’t play...? They’ll fail me for sure and then I’ll fail the subject...I think I might faint...’

Of course I did not faint, and I could play, and I even managed to play the piece without any major problems. My *experience* of this performance, however, was horrific and damaging. My negative self-talk had developed to a point where it was out of my control and as I was in an unfamiliar performance situation, playing unfamiliar music, I had few positive experiences to draw on to counter this internal monologue. In the end, while I produced a passable performance, it was mechanical and uninspiring. Certainly in the midst of all of that negativity there was no room for inspiration. When so much of my attention and energy is focused on potentially undesirable outcomes I find that I stop listening, and rather than allowing myself to be ‘carried away by the beauty’ of the music, I rely on rote learned responses.

## Understanding Music Performance Anxiety

My experience of stage fright is mirrored in the reports of many other performers, and it appears that this phenomenon is a major problem for musicians. Performance anxiety is described by violinist and author, Kato Havas, as “one of the most destructive elements in the performing arts”(1989:3), and there is a body of evidence that supports her claim. A 1988 study analysing medical and psychological difficulties reported by musicians in 48 orchestras discovered that music performance anxiety was the problem most often mentioned and most frequently regarded as likely to affect performance outcomes (Fishbein and Middlestadt *et al* 1988). Since the 1970s, when music performance anxiety was first made the subject of scientific enquiry (Wardle 1975), numerous books, articles, theses and papers have described, measured, and analysed ‘MPA’ and its physical manifestations. However, there seems to have been less attention paid to its underlying causes, possibly because there is no consensus on this matter. In the discussion that follows I examine elements that may represent causal factors.

It is vital, at this point, to appreciate the importance of the relationship between performance anxiety and the temporal nature of performance. The sense of threat experienced by the anxious performer resides in the possibility of *future* failure and in the concomitant shame associated with failure. In the discussion that follows I examine not just the physical manifestations which accompany the *possibility* of failure in music performance but also why, for many performers, the possibility appears to be as threatening and debilitating as this comment by an unnamed musician clearly indicates: “The platform does something to me. The vacuum up there seems to suck the marrow out of my bones, to numb my fingers and worst of all, to put my memory out of commission”(Havas 1989:2).

Salmon and Meyer argue that the physical manifestations of music performance anxiety are indistinguishable from those of anxiety associated with other activities, but also point out that the meaning of the word anxiety is so widely used that it may have “ceased to have a clear definition”(1992:121). Certainly the concepts of stress and fear are difficult

to disentangle from what we know as anxiety. Researcher, Dianna T. Kenny, observes that the word ‘anxiety,’ which was once specifically applied to describe a response to a threatening situation, has now become interchangeable with the word ‘stress,’ which, she writes, used to be “distinguished as a characteristic of the environment.” She continues, observing that the term ‘fear,’ is however “much clearer in its usage”(2004a:38) and is associated with our response to a clear danger. While music performance anxiety is difficult to define and hard to measure, it is well established that its extreme form it manifests in physical symptoms, which may include muscle tension, shaking, sweating, increased heart rate, and nausea (Roland 1997:4) and that these symptoms appear in response to a perceived threat or danger (Goleman 1998:55).

As noted previously, however, a certain level of anxiety can be helpful; this ‘helpful anxiety’ or ‘arousal’ is known as “adaptive anxiety”(Salmon and Meyer 1992:125). In contrast, what is commonly known as ‘stage fright’ correlates to the psychological description of ‘maladaptive anxiety,’ and also links with what Kenny distinguishes as ‘fear.’ Salmon and Meyer describe how a “maladaptive response” can interfere with performance:

Consider a pianist who feels overcome with stage fright. Initially, he or she may experience an appropriate degree of anxiety evoked by the prospect of being watched by others. This response may cause the performer to become more alert and careful while playing. But if the intensity of the anxiety spirals out of control – well beyond the level where it had been helpful – it may cause the very problems, such as technical errors or loss of motor control, that the performer feared to begin with (1992:125).

Salmon and Meyer’s description relates to my experience, in which the physiological symptoms of anxiety increased as my thoughts became more chaotic, creating another source of anxiety (‘I can hardly breathe, how will I play?’). This self-perpetuating quality of anxiety is an aspect of stage fright recognised in literature concerned with music performance. Roland notes that anxiety may ‘feed off itself,’ becoming “stronger even though the ‘threat’ hasn’t changed”(1997:11).

## **The Primacy of Enjoying the Act of Performing**

The ways we measure and evaluate our performances as musicians have a large bearing on how we experience the moment of performance and on whether we register the possibility of failure as a ‘threat.’ In the personal account I gave of stage fright, I was much more concerned about what I perceived as the ‘danger,’ represented by the judgement of my peers and the assessment panel, than the act of performing itself. As such I gave myself little chance of entering the flow state of consciousness.

In his examination of activities, including music performance, which produce the flow state, Csikszentmihalyi notes that the ordinary state of mind tends towards entropy, which “interferes with the smooth run of psychic energy”(1990:58). He is referring here to the general ‘busy-ness’ of our minds. In his schema, the engaged absorption in ‘enjoyable’ activities has an ordering and thus quieting effect on our minds, decreasing what he describes as “episodes of entropy”(1990:58) and increasing the strength and richness of the sense of self. As I have previously mentioned, he uses the word ‘enjoyment’ in a very specific way: enjoyment is characterised by *active* engagement and participation in a task that one finds challenging and importantly, “intrinsically satisfying”(1990:48). Once again Csikszentmihalyi’s choice of words is very specific, and the ‘intrinsic’ satisfaction one finds in an activity is the key element in his analysis of the phenomenology of enjoyment. He describes the experience of a sports person: “...the challenges of competition can be stimulating and enjoyable. But when beating the opponent takes precedence in the mind over performing as well as possible then enjoyment tends to disappear”(1990:50); as a result, he concludes, performance can be negatively affected.

Although the performance of music is very different in many respects to sporting competition, it is widely acknowledged that when we are not fully engaged in the music we are playing then our performance suffers. The general clutter, or ‘entropic’ state of the ‘ordinary’ mind, is not conducive to optimal music performance, and the path to creating a more ordered or focused state of mind (and a higher level of execution) seems to lie in our absorption in the *intrinsic* enjoyment of performing. In the personal experience I

described, I was preoccupied with *extrinsic* concerns relating to how my recital would be received by my peers and examiners, and so my ability to perform and to *enjoy* my performance was diminished.

### **Anxiety and the Culture of Distraction**

Although music performance anxiety is a widely acknowledged problem, as I have mentioned its underlying causes are less understood. According to a number of the authors I have researched for this topic, general stress levels associated with environmental factors may play an important role in problems, including performance anxiety, which affect many musicians today. Broadly speaking, contemporary life is stressful; mass culture does little to promote the possibility of ‘flow’ in our lives and in many ways may actively inhibit the possibility of optimal experience in activities such as music performance. “We are taught to be bored, to seek easy entertainment, to ardently desire the ephemeral,” writes Nachmanovitch, “shorter and shorter attention spans are inculcated in us by the rhythms of society, which become increasingly nervous and jittery”(1990:130). Csikszentmihalyi points out that the “patterns of stimulation”(1990:163) offered by the modern world, especially those involving the passive consumption of the mass media, deprive us of psychic energy and vitality that could be put into activities that provide opportunities for growth, such as playing music, and “leave us more exhausted, more disheartened than we were before”(1990:163). His observations link with author, Anthony Storr’s view, that in contemporary life “human beings suffer from stimulus hunger as well as stimulus overload”(1992:28).

The listlessness and ennui that mass culture promotes can numb us to the possibility of the limit-experience, as can the enervating, ‘free-floating’ anxiety that accompanies “ever multiplying sense impressions and popgun impacts on our nervous systems”(Barfield 1970:65). In the discussion of factors that obstruct access to the limit-experience, one naturally thinks of the phenomenon of performance anxiety, but the listlessness I describe also makes it virtually impossible to reach optimal performance. Salmon and Meyer note that a degree of anxiety or ‘arousal’ is vital to optimal performance. They suggest that

somewhere between the extremes of listlessness and stage fright is an “optimal state of activation,” referring to the “Yerkes-Dodson Relationship” which describes the proportionality between “task efficiency and level of activation” (1992:131). They conclude that lifeless or distant performances are likely to involve a “low level of activation” (1992:130).

This phenomenon, which I will characterise as a ‘lack of engagement’ on the part of the performer, is complex and difficult to pin down as it is defined by factors that are absent, including passion, ‘presence’, energy, and vitality. Their absence in some performers may be symptomatic of the general cultural malaise that Nachmanovitch describes, but may also represent what author and psychologist Daniel Goleman calls “the trade-off between anxiety and attention”(1998:54). Goleman writes, “[w]hen anxiety is at large in the mind, even if capped by an artful mental manoeuvre, there is a cost to mental efficiency. Denial compromises full unflinching attention.” Goleman’s view appears to be supported by Salmon and Meyer’s observation that the behaviour of a fearful performer may alternate between anxiety and depressive symptoms that manifest as hopelessness and lethargy (1992:81).

### **Man as Machine: Behaviourism and Perfectionism in Music Education**

Andreas Burzik seems to concur with the views of Nachmanovitch, Csikszentmihalyi and the other authors I have noted, when he points to an “overall cultural problem in the Western World”(2002). Broadly speaking, he is alluding to the positivistic notion of the ‘mechanistic’ universe and its accompanying tendency to view the human being as a machine. This, he argues, causes problems for musicians in that it emphasises extrinsic models of perfection, especially the attainment of a set of skills and the musician’s ability to *perform* these skills unquestioningly, or ‘mechanically.’ He surmises that many of the problems experienced by musicians that hinder optimal performance, including stage fright, stem from this mechanistic approach to learning in which, “the focus is mainly on the motoric effort of getting somewhere rather than on the perception and awareness of what actually happens in the process”(2002).



The approach to learning described by Burzik is a legacy of behaviourist psychology (outlined in Chapter Two), which, it seems, continues to influence much of music pedagogy and therefore exert a strong effect on our culture of music performance. By way of analogy, John Davey discusses how a pigeon can be made, by the use of a complicated system of rewards, to move its head in a set of elaborate movements, and comments, “The same basic procedure is built into the ‘teaching machines’ now being widely used in schools and colleges. Here the reward is not a grain of corn, but some sign from the machine that the student’s response to a question was correct”(1970:69). Though his observation was made over thirty years ago, it still appears to be relevant today.

The ‘cultural problem’ described by these authors contributes to performance anxiety and other stress related issues in music performance precisely because it places emphasis on the *extrinsic* evaluation of performance. Consider this statement by Csikszentmihalyi: “When children are taught music the usual problem arises: too much emphasis is placed on how they perform, and too little on what they experience.” He continues, referring to the pressure to achieve results that many parents place on children learning to play music: “in doing so they succeed in perverting music into the opposite of what it was designed to be: they turn it into a source of psychic disorder”(1990:112). Although he is referring to the relationship between parents and their children, his statement is relevant to the dominant cultural paradigm of music performance, which over-emphasises results and perfection rather than honouring process and experience.

At this point it is worth noting that I am not advocating a relativist position on music performance, or a less rigorous approach to music endeavour and pedagogy. The work of Burzik, Csikszentmihalyi, Storr and others, seem to support the notion that a greater emphasis on ‘process’ and ‘experience’ in fact leads to ‘better’ executory outcomes. Importantly though, this rebalancing also encourages the musician to connect with the original concept of music, which has been described by author, Lydia Goehr, as “a philosophical quest for the cultivation of the soul,” and a “quest for freedom”(2002:1).

Much of contemporary culture, in music performance and education, is at odds with Goehr's description. The whole point of instrumental competitions and eisteddfods, which currently proliferate in classical, popular, and jazz music, is to reduce musical expression to something measurable and quantifiable. As such, these events appear to contribute to the cultural paradigm that Burzik points to as being problematic. In the same way, examinations and numerical results for university recitals are also reductive, and encourage the performer to constantly measure him or herself against a narrowly prescribed model of perfection. This links with the Skinnerian view that complex, high-level human behaviours such as speech and music-making are created by the same 'shaping' or 'operant conditioning' that can be applied to a pigeon – recall Davey's analogy – or a dog, as in the famous experiment by behaviourist, Ivan Pavlov.

Given this performance environment, in which merit is judged, writes John Blacking, "according to signs of immediate productivity and profits [or exam results], and postulated usefulness"(1973:9), it is little wonder that many musicians develop problems such as stage fright and find it hard to be present to the possibility of transformation in the moment of performance.

### **Changing Ideals of Music Performance**

The historical antecedents which inform our contemporary performance paradigms and that have led to the culture which many claim causes problems for musicians today, are largely unacknowledged in much of the literature concerned with music performance. According to philosopher and historian, John Lukacs, we apply historical thinking "either consciously or otherwise"(1997:5) to every kind of human experience. The lack of reference to the history of changing ideals of music performance in the literature that I am concerned with for this project suggests that musicians apply this historical thinking unconsciously. However, this history, as I will show, is expressed in what appears to be ever increasing levels of performance anxiety experienced by musicians today, and in the response to this phenomenon that has led to the creation of the texts and methods to which I refer in this project. Lukacs states: "We are human repositories of *all* mankind's

historical experiences in the past”(1997:248 original emphasis). Obviously, an exhaustive analysis of the historicity of knowledge is beyond the scope of a project of this size, but it is possible to provide an overview of the historical context of the phenomenon of perfectionism that I am investigating.

Around the beginning of the nineteenth century our understanding of music performance and the role of the musician underwent a fundamental transition. Lydia Goehr notes that, the “...pre-modern, fluid and continuous relation between compositional and performance activities was conceptually transformed into a rigid distinction between them”(2002:138). The pre-modern musician was expected to interpret the music he was playing and to add embellishments: “performance practice was conditioned by the expectation that musicians would bring to fruition a fully shaped composition *through performance*”(2002:139 original emphasis). In this way each performance of a work was necessarily unique and this uniqueness, if you will ‘humanness,’ was highly valued. In subsequent developments more value came to be placed in the works themselves rather than in their “transitory and fleeting [and therefore imperfect] performances”(2002:141). The musician came to be regarded as a mere conduit for the creative expression of the composer: “Performers and their instruments should be heard but not seen, [and] ‘heard’ only as imperfect pointers towards the transcendent”(2002:144). This model is summed up concisely by Igor Stravinsky: “The secret of perfection lies in [the performer’s] consciousness of the law imposed on him by the work he is performing”(1942:127). Hindemith apparently went so far as to recommend that, “performers should never try to express their own feelings”(cited by Goehr 2002:144).

Obviously I am describing here a formalist model of music performance. In practice, despite the shift that Goehr points to, the performer’s role in classical music at elite levels is more fluid than this ideal would suggest. In jazz music the roles of performer, interpreter, and composer are less delineated and personal expression is more highly valued, and yet, even in jazz, we can see something of the residue of the formalism Goehr

identifies in the reductive and fragmented manner in which the idiomatic vocabulary of jazz is taught in many universities today.<sup>5</sup>

### **Recording Technologies and Perfectionism**

The perfectionist performance culture that has developed, in part as a result of the changes I describe in the way we view the act of performance, is also nourished by the effects of new technologies. The development and refinement of recording techniques has created new pressures on musicians to produce the ‘perfect performance.’ Often, contemporary recordings of classical music are the product of the splicing together of the best sections of a number of ‘imperfect’ renditions of a piece, and many popular music recordings are the result of overlaying or overdubbing of each instrument, so that it can be treated and ‘perfected’ separately. In the area of improvised music forms such as jazz, which is my specialty, there are fewer opportunities for splicing together different performances. However, the basic principle I have been discussing is still applicable, given that most albums of recorded jazz are made up of the best hour of music produced in up to two or three days of playing.

The results of these processes are recorded ‘performances’ with no mistakes, with the quality of ‘human-ness’ all but expunged and where many of the elements of chance, inherent in the ‘live’ performance of music, have been controlled or eliminated. The argument about the aesthetic merits of such recordings, and whether recordings with all the blemishes and errors edited, are artistically superior, is not one I wish to enter in this discussion. Rather, I am interested in simply noting how the intervention of recording technologies and the widespread distribution of technically ‘perfect’ recordings has helped to *objectify* music. Where technical perfection, and the “perfect performance of music”(Goehr 2002:134 emphasis added) – as distinct from the “perfect musical performance” – were ideals that musicians began to aspire to after the turn of the

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<sup>5</sup> In the last forty years, as jazz and improvised music streams have become popular in most major music courses, formal systems have developed to facilitate the teaching of the melodic and harmonic syntax of idiomatic jazz improvisation. While some maintain that this has led to an overall improvement in standards of musicianship, others argue that it has led to a generic and unexpressive approach in many younger players.

nineteenth century, in the latter part of the twentieth they became a reality at least in recorded music. The difficulty that this has created is that the expectations of audiences, critics, as well as musicians' expectations of themselves have risen to a level that is virtually impossible to maintain.

## **Conclusion**

The objectification of music, changing ideals of performance, perfectionism, the stresses of contemporary life, and other factors that I have discussed in this chapter, all seem to have a profound effect on musicians in performance and during practice. Although the full relevance of this background will become obvious in the chapters that follow, I wish to note at this point that much of the knowledge I have been discussing in this chapter is important to this project precisely because many of the popular texts created to assist musicians do not deal with it. As I will demonstrate, this has implications for the validity of some of these methods.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **BRIEF STUDIES OF THREE METHODS DESIGNED TO FACILITATE OPTIMAL MUSIC PERFORMANCE:**

1. *PRACTISING IN FLOW*
2. *EFFORTLESS MASTERY*
3. *THE INNER GAME OF MUSIC*

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I present the fundamentals of three methods that have become popular in recent times. As mentioned in Chapter One, I examine each method with a view to establishing how the method describes optimal music performance, what it has to say about perceived obstacles to optimal music performance, what sources of information it draws upon, and the philosophical basis for the method. I also give an account of my personal experience of the two methods with which I have had significant contact. However, at this point I am not offering a critical commentary or attempting a comparison of the ideas contained in each of the methods, this analysis is presented in Chapter Five.

#### **1. PRACTISING IN FLOW**

#### **Overview**

*Practising in Flow* is the title of a workshop program run by musician, psychologist and teacher, Andreas Burzik, who is based in Bremen, Germany. The ideas and methods presented in *Practising in Flow* are designed to facilitate optimal music performance through developing a greater awareness in our approach to instrumental practice. Burzik's method is aimed at "generating flow experiences"(2002) and is an elaboration of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow, which I have previously outlined. Csikszentmihalyi's ideas have become influential in current thinking about music

pedagogy, and there are currently several educators from different countries who run workshops presenting his concepts in the context of music practice and performance.

Burzik presents *Practising in Flow* in universities and schools around the world, and in 2003 he visited Melbourne enabling me to participate in the workshops and also to undertake some private tuition.

### **Optimal Music Performance and the Concept of Flow**

Burzik's workshops are, as I have noted, focused on the manner in which we *practise* our instruments and our *experience* of that practice. It is routinely assumed that the executory quality of any given music performance is a function of innate talent combined with the amount of time spent practising one's instrument, but as Reid (2002) suggests, this is perhaps an erroneous assumption. A large amount of time spent practising will not guarantee a 'good' performance. Indeed, Burzik claims that practising without a high degree of awareness can cause a number of problems including, notably, physical injury, which is now, along with music performance anxiety, a significant complaint among musicians (Fishbein and Middlestadt *et al* 1988).

*Practising in Flow* is built on Burzik's claim that practising with greater focus represents the most effective path to optimal music performance. It emphasises the *quality* of consciousness the musician brings to the practice task over the amount of time spent practising. This quality of consciousness is described by the notion of flow. Burzik outlines the seven elements identified by Csikszentmihalyi as essential components of the flow experience and relates them to music practice:

#### *Clarity of goals and feedback*

Activities that produce flow experiences, observes Csikszentmihalyi, are those that generate a clear sense of the participant's progress towards a defined goal. Burzik illustrates this point with the example of the game of tennis, in which "the success or failure of any move is immediately perceived"(2003:715). He compares this to the goals

and feedback that are intrinsic to musical utterance; if our aim is to create a ‘beautiful’ sound then we are constantly measuring the sound we make against the sound we wish to make. It is, however, important to register the distinction between the *intrinsic* goals and feedback to which Burzik refers, and *extrinsic* goals such as impressing colleagues and winning competitions, which as I have previously discussed, may in fact create distractions that obstruct optimal performance.

*A high degree of concentration on a limited field*

In order to achieve flow, according to Csikszentmihalyi and Burzik, we need to create the conditions that enable us to concentrate fully on the task.

*A balance between task and challenge*

To facilitate the flow experience it is important to be challenged but not overwhelmed by the task at hand. This requires the musician to engage with the material (s)he is practising. Often musicians practise exercises and routines out of a sense of obligation. This can lead to drudgery and boredom if the material is not challenging enough, or impatience and frustration if the task is far beyond the musician’s capabilities. Csikszentmihalyi describes this equilibrium between task and challenge as “the flow channel”(1990:74). Based on his extensive study of flow experiences in hundreds of people ranging from artists, musicians, rock-climbers and surgeons, to farmers and assembly line workers in many different countries and cultures (1990:4), he concludes that the flow experience is associated with a “sense of discovery”(1990:74). This starkly contrasts with the approach of many musicians, as observed by Burzik, where “practising very often becomes strained because it is primarily directed by a *preconceived* idea”(2002 emphasis added).

*A sensation of heightened control*

While the three elements already noted describe the conditions that promote the possibility of the flow experience, the ‘sensation of heightened control’ refers to the subjective experience of flow. The key word here is ‘sensation.’ During a flow experience we *feel* as if we are in control, which is distinct, Burzik points out, from



‘controlling’ or *trying* to control what we are doing. The paradox he observes links with the experience of optimal performance described by many musicians as this comment by a concert pianist cited by Roland suggests: “On a really good night, I can almost listen to myself playing... there’s like a fund of the subconscious that will take it over and it will work. It can be so easy”(Roland 1997:73).

#### *Effortlessness of action*

This also links with the experience of the pianist cited by Roland where, according to Burzik, “all necessary decisions arise spontaneously from the demands of the activity without any deliberate reflection”(2004).

#### *An altered perception of time*

I have previously mentioned that this is a commonly noted aspect of optimal experience; recall Grof’s notion of the ‘transpersonal dimensions of the psyche’ and his observation that such experiences transcend the “limitations of time and space”(1998:68). Burzik offers a neurophysiological explanation for this phenomenon: “Because the right-hand side of the brain, primarily used for creative tasks is activated and both parts of the brain are operating in a largely synchronised way... any type of analytical, left-hand-brain-type thinking recedes into the background”(2004).

#### *The melting together of actions and consciousness*

Again the work of Grof is relevant and accords with Csikszentmihalyi’s notion of the flow experience, in which the sense of one’s individuation recedes.

## ***Practising in Flow: A Description of the Method***

As I have previously outlined, *Practising in Flow* aims to facilitate the flow state during practice and performance, and is based on four principles:

### *1. The contact with the instrument*

Rather than focusing on holding the instrument in the ‘correct’ way, Burzik encourages the musician to develop an awareness of the ‘quality’ of touch applied to the instrument in an effort to attune the musician’s focus on the points where the hands actually touch the instrument. These points he calls “sound forming points”(2004). Focusing on these points, according to Burzik, assists in the optimal transfer of energy from the body to the instrument ensuring that the musician does not create undue muscle tension. This facilitates better tone production and lessens the chance of physical injury. He writes of playing the violin, “feedback from the pads of the fingers can lead to the optimal angles of the hand, wrist and arm. Just by looking for the best point of contact, the body organises itself”(2003:715).

### *2. The development of the sense of sound*

Burzik claims that many musicians have an underdeveloped concept of sound, which is the result of an overemphasis on technical ‘correctness’ and a lack of attention paid to the sensual experience of ‘tone.’ He suggests that music practice becomes more effective through deliberately focusing on the sound we make and that this focus creates the possibility of intense flow experiences. Here again, the notion that through creating awareness the body ‘organises itself,’ is important.

Burzik links this notion with the principle of synergetics (Haken 1996), which is used in physics and neuroscience to describe how order arises in a dynamic system. He compares the musician’s body with other “open, dynamic systems”(2002) that occur in nature and states that the ‘development of the sense of sound,’ and the ‘contact with the instrument, both represent “critical variables”(2002), which can be utilised to bring the ‘dynamic system,’ at play in the creation of music, into an efficient, ordered state. This principle

contrasts with the rigid, positivistic view of the ‘body as machine,’ which as I have mentioned, appears to cause many problems for musicians in practice and performance.

### *3. The feeling of effortlessness*

In Chapter Two my discussion of the experience of optimal performance established that, for many musicians, optimal performance was accompanied by a feeling of ‘effortlessness.’ Burzik’s *Practising in Flow* method emphasises the *cultivation* of this sensation through creating greater awareness of how it *feels* to play a note or a passage. The notion of ‘effortlessness,’ he warns however, is not to be confused with “relaxedness or slackness but [relates to] a body feeling which is unstrained, easy and flowing”(2002).

In the workshop I attended, Burzik spent a considerable time working with a student on a passage of music, asking him to become aware of the moments in the piece that were not comfortable. He described these moments as ‘holes’ and explained that by working with a greater awareness, moving the focus from ‘sense of sound’ to ‘contact points’ to ‘feeling,’ we can uncover ‘holes’ in our understanding, even of material we think we know well. He demonstrated this process, which involves monitoring our ‘feeling’ for each note of a passage without judgment or negative self-talk, by asking the student to simply note whether the feeling for each note was ‘good’ or not as he played through the study material. Each time the student reached a ‘hole’ Burzik simply suggested he play the sequence again, at his own pace, until the feeling he registered for that sequence was ‘good.’

### *4. Playing around with the study material*

For many musicians, practice becomes drudgery as they ‘work’ on routines and pieces through of a sense of obligation and a notion that there is one correct way to learn to play an instrument, Nachmanovitch writes:

Mastery comes from practice; practice comes from playful, compulsive experimentation (the impish side of Iila) and from a sense of wonder (the godlike side of Iila). The athlete feels compelled to run around the track just one more time.

This level of performance cannot be attained through some Calvinist demands of the superego, through feelings of guilt or obligation (1990:73).

Burzik's view of practising accords with Nachmanovitch's statement, indeed, developing a creative approach during practice is an integral component of *Practising in Flow*. Having established 'contact' with the instrument and 'contact' with the sound, Burzik suggests that the musician approaches the study material in a 'playful' way so as to maintain and foster a feeling of engagement and effortlessness.

### **Personal Experience of *Practising in Flow***

Demonstrating a playful and creative approach to study material occupied a large part of the *Practising in Flow* workshops I attended. Burzik encouraged participants to slow the tempo of the music and experiment with ornamentation, slurring, staccato, and playing with different nuances of emotion such as anger or joy. This approach to practising has the effect of maintaining our engagement with the study material and also enables the musician to facilitate the 'balance between task and challenge,' which Csikszentmihalyi identifies as an important element of flow.

I had a direct experience of the effectiveness of this approach when Burzik invited me to work with him in front of the class. His sensitivity to the quality of my focus was acute and several times he stopped me while I was playing to remind me of the fundamentals of remaining relaxed and aware of the *Practising in Flow* critical variables: 'good feeling,' 'contact with my instrument,' and 'sound.' Once this awareness was properly established the change in my playing and my physical attitude was striking. When we began to work in detail on the piece I had brought in, the relaxed and focused approach Burzik helped me to embody was immediately evident in the sound and phrasing I produced.

### ***Practising in Flow and Stage Fright***

The phenomenon of stage fright was not specifically dealt with in the *Practising in Flow* workshops in which I participated. Instead, Burzik dealt with this area in a separate forum entitled *Stage Fright*, which I also attended and in which he offered a number of strategies for dealing with this specific problem. These strategies are modelled on exercises used by professional golfers and other sports people and employ techniques such as kinaesthetic rehearsal and creative visualisation. I will mention these techniques again in my description of *The Inner Game of Music*, which is also influenced by sports psychology. However, more interesting than describing the techniques themselves, is noting the simple fact that they are not integrated into Burzik's methods for facilitating optimal performance. This seems to imply, that while acknowledging performance anxiety is a major problem for many musicians, its 'removal' does not necessarily lead to optimal performance. This is a theme I return to in the concluding chapter of this study.

## 2. EFFORTLESS MASTERY

### **Overview**

*Effortless Mastery* presents a method designed to help musicians “move from the comfort zone of limitation and blossom into their higher selves”(Werner 1996:12). When he mentions the ‘higher self,’ Werner seems to be referring to the states of altered consciousness (discussed in Chapter Two) that it is suggested musicians access during optimal performance and that have been labelled variously as ‘flow,’ the ‘limit-experience’ and the ‘transpersonal dimensions of the psyche.’ His method incorporates meditative exercises and visualisations that draw on Eastern approaches to the mind such as those found in Zen Buddhist and Taoist spiritual thinking.

Werner teaches his method in workshops and in one-on-one lessons. I have been fortunate to have recently had the opportunity to participate in an *Effortless Mastery* workshop, and have also taken a number of private lessons with Werner that dealt in detail with the application of his ideas.

### **A Brief Description of Kenny Werner’s *Effortless Mastery* Concept**

*Effortless Mastery* develops techniques that musicians can use to assist them to perform and practise from a more relaxed physical and mental state. Werner proposes that by methodically working on this aspect of musical endeavour, and by integrating this work as part of a balanced practice regimen, the musician is freed to unlock his or her potential and creativity.

The term, ‘effortless mastery,’ Werner defines as “the effortless execution of music... If something can be done perfectly every time, without thought, it is said to be mastered” (1996:99). The key words here are ‘without thought.’ According to Werner, if we try to *consciously* control our actions then we sabotage ourselves by creating unnecessary tension and distraction. Werner argues that it is this quality of ‘not thinking’ that

distinguishes great performers from the rest, but that all musicians can nurture this quality in their own practice, and free themselves from constraints that prevent them from fully developing their talents.

This ‘effortless,’ ‘unthinking’ quality of action, according to Werner, proceeds from a quality of consciousness he describes as “the space”(1996:77). He argues that if we can learn to play music from ‘the space,’ then mastery will manifest in our playing. As I have mentioned, Werner’s notion offers yet another description of the altered states of mind we have associated with what is often referred to as the limit-experience. However, he adds another dimension, which is that of spirituality, and it is around notions of spirituality that his entire concept revolves: “There is a place inside each of us where perfection exists. The genius, God, lives there. All the creative possibilities of the universe are to be found there. It is the innate ability of each of us to be God”(1996:77).

Another attribute of ‘the space’ that Werner emphasises, is the quality of ‘detachment.’ Throughout *Effortless Mastery* he quotes Eugene Herrigel’s *Zen in the Art of Archery* and other Zen texts regularly. The message, contained in the Zen approach to life and spirituality, is central to Werner’s concept in relation to music making:

The right art – is purposeless, aimless! The more obstinately you try to learn how to shoot the arrow for the sake of hitting the goal, the less you will succeed in the one, and the further the other will recede” (Herrigel cited in Werner 1996:146).

### ***Effortless Mastery and Obstacles to Optimal Performance***

Another of the points central to *Effortless Mastery* is that mastery is not something we learn but something we access; it describes a *quality* of action rather the manifestation of a *quantity* of learning. Werner points out that some musicians seem to practise endlessly and never improve and proposes that the key to mastery is not just about learning more complicated music and more advanced techniques, but about examining the obstacles that prevent us from accessing the quality of ‘effortlessness’ in our approach to music.

For Werner, the primary obstacle to optimal performance is fear. He devotes a large proportion of his text to a discussion of fear in five chapters with titles including: *Fear: The Mind and the Ego*, *Fear-Based Practising*, and *Fear-Based Teaching*. During the workshop I attended, and in my lessons with Werner, he also accorded a significant amount of time to the discussion of fear and how it affects us in music practice and performance.

Although music is commonly regarded as a gift from the gods, many suffer great pain and fear in attempting to play it... Why is this so? As stated before, many of us have formed an unhealthy linkage between who we are and how we play. We fear being inadequate and that leads to ineffective playing, practising and listening. Fear closes all doors to the true self, that brilliant centre where ecstasy lies (Werner 1996:51).

The notion of ‘fear,’ as it is referred to in this passage and throughout *Effortless Mastery*, is different from the experience of the fear of failure that I have previously associated with the phenomenon of performance anxiety. Fear, according to Werner, is the *underlying* explanation for many of the problems that musicians face. He argues, for example, that one of the reasons why many musicians practice ineffectively is that they subconsciously fear ‘letting go’ of their imperfections. The fear, to which Werner refers then, is ontological fear; fear that is intrinsic to the human condition. This is distinct from Dianna T. Kenny’s description, cited earlier, which states that fear is understood to be a response to a perceived threat (Kenny 2004a). While this may seem to be a semantic distinction it is important to an understanding of modalities such as *Effortless Mastery* that the specific forms of usage of these key words is identified.

### ***Effortless Mastery: the Method***

The method proposed by Werner in his book does not claim to lead to a state of mind that is free of fear; it does however aim to lessen the effects of fear in music performance. He proposes a stepwise method that facilitates a state of deep relaxation, or meditation, and guides the musician to learn to learn to practise their instrument without disturbing this state. To this end, Werner develops four exercises in stages, the first of which involves



the musician relaxing using the simple yoga method of concentrating on the breath. This meditation is accompanied by positive affirmations: “Every note I play is the most beautiful sound I’ve ever heard”(1996:128) and “[m]usic is easy”(1996:126). The aim of these affirmations is to replace “negative belief systems,” which can “inhibit success and growth”(1996:125), with positive belief systems.

Having developed the ability to enter and maintain a state of relaxation, the ‘second step’ consists of the musician simply touching and holding their instrument and observing whether the meditative space is interrupted by this contact. The method suggests that the musician works with this simple exercise daily for a number of weeks, or until the instrument can be held and placed in a playing position without being distracted from ‘the space.’

The ‘third step’ involves practising playing random notes whilst maintaining ‘the space.’ The challenge in this stage of Werner’s process is learning not to judge the notes played, in a habitual reductive manner. When the musician finds their mind wandering back to customary patterns Werner describes as “a programmatic search for acceptable music”(1996:147), he instructs the musician to release their instrument, take a deep breath and reorientate him or herself to ‘the space.’

The fourth and final step in the *Effortless Mastery* method is to practise working on musical tasks that are difficult, developing them until they can be played ‘masterfully’ and from ‘the space.’ Here, similarities with Burzik’s *Practising in Flow* concept, which will be further examined in Chapter Five, are worth mentioning. Werner recommends that the musician play the study material out of time and notice the moments where conscious control is required to perform the task. The musician then repeats the task until able to perform it effortlessly. This is remarkably similar to Burzik’s exercise, which asks the student to concentrate on whether the feeling for the passage is ‘good’ or not.

## **Personal Experience of *Effortless Mastery***

After first reading *Effortless Mastery* a number of years ago, I began to do the exercises on a daily basis as part of my practice regimen. Initially I was sceptical as to the value of devoting my practice time to meditation and the other activities that Werner recommends. Like many musicians my default approach is to practise *more*, and Werner (again, like Burzik), asks that we question the presumption that *more* is necessarily *better*. In the beginning my misgivings seemed to be borne out, as the exercises had no discernable immediate effect on my playing. Despite my cynicism however, I had reached a point of frustration in my playing and practising where I felt that nothing was working, and so I persisted with the four-step approach outlined in the book.

It was with some surprise then, when after a number of months, I began to register that in fact aspects of my playing and of mental approach to playing were changing. The differences in my physical relationship with my instrument were noticeable. While in the early weeks of practising the first step, I had to concentrate in order to remain in a state of relaxation as I touched and held my instrument, after a time I found that picking it up actually triggered a state of relaxation. This, I feel, has had a profound effect on my playing. I have also noticed that now, even if I am nervous before a major performance or recording, when I actually come to play, a sense of calm comes over me: more often than before, it feels as if my body ‘knows what to do.’

Accompanying the changes I have just described is a more generally positive approach to my instrument and to how I feel about my practice; I now think positively about my playing and what I am capable of. In the past, I believe that I spent more time preoccupied with what I couldn’t do and with feelings of inadequacy, which have not disappeared completely, but which have receded in the order of my thoughts noticeably.

As a result I have noticed that I now enjoy practising and look forward to it. My practice has become commensurately more focused and my ability to express myself through music is growing.

### 3. *The Inner Game of Music*

#### **Overview**

As mentioned in Chapter One, *The Inner Game of Tennis* (Gallwey 1974) and *The Inner Game of Music* (Green and Gallwey 1986), were among a number of earlier books that developed a readership with musicians seeking to improve their mental approach to practice and performance. Interestingly, *The Inner Game of Tennis* had been popular with musicians for nearly ten years before Green wrote the latter (in consultation with Gallwey) specifically to deal with issues faced in music performance. The two texts employ Gallwey's principle of "natural learning" (Green and Gallwey 1986), which is based on the following formula, " $P = p - i$ " (1986:23). This formula describes how our performance ( $P$ ), defined as: "the result you achieve – what you actually wind up feeling, achieving, and learning" (1986:23), is the sum of innate potential ( $p$ ), minus interference ( $i$ ). *The 'Inner Game* approach concentrates on reducing this interference, which may include self-talk, performance anxiety, and distractions created by environmental factors.

#### **A Brief Description of the Concepts Developed in *The Inner Game of Music***

Green and Gallwey compare music performance with other "goal oriented activities," including sports and business, and note that in these activities we often place a high degree of importance on what they call "the outer goal – achievement" (1986:39). *The Inner Game of Music* is aimed at creating a balance between 'outer goals' and 'inner' goals that are represented by 'learning' and 'experience.' Commonly, what we feel or learn in the course of the achievement of our outer goals is, according to Green and Gallwey, "secondary and we often don't attach much significance to it" (1986:39). The rebalancing of 'inner' and 'outer' goals, which is at the core of Green and Gallwey's method, is illustrated by a triangle they call the P.E.L. Triangle. The acronym stands for 'performance,' 'experience,' and 'learning.' The authors conclude:

These three issues are very closely interrelated. When you pay more attention to how you feel as you are doing something, it heightens your sensitivity to the feedback you are receiving. This increased sensitivity helps you to learn more rapidly and allows you to adjust your performance to help you achieve your goal. The more successful you are at achieving what you set out to achieve, the more you will enjoy what you are doing (1986:39).

To facilitate a discussion of our experience of music performance and practice, *The Inner Game of Music* divides the musician's inner realm into Self 1 and Self 2. Green and Gallwey are quick to point out that this model of the human psyche should not be confused with common terms such as 'conscious' and 'subconscious mind,' or the neurophysiological division of the brain into left and right hemispheres: "Self 1 is our interference, it contains our concepts of how things should be, our judgements and associations." Self 2, they maintain, contrasts in that it "contains our natural talents and abilities... left to its own devices it performs with gracefulness and ease"(1986:28).

Self 1 is Green and Gallwey's description of the inner voice that provides the self-talk that can distract us from the task we are performing: "If it interferes with your potential, it's Self 1. If it expresses your potential, it's Self 2"(1986:29). They continue, noting that Self 2 represents an "unthinking state"(1986:33). The evident lack of clarity in this description of the psyche is an aspect of *The Inner Game of Music* that I wish to merely acknowledge at this point but which I examine in more detail in Chapter Five.

The main tool, prescribed by Gallwey in *The Inner Game of Tennis* for reducing the effect of interference from Self 1, is awareness without judgement. Green and Gallwey state that 'awareness' is perhaps the most fundamental *Inner Game* skill and note the founder of Gestalt psychology, Fritz Perls' statement: "Trying fails, awareness cures"(cited by Green and Gallwey 1986:43). They describe how we can lessen the effect of distractions by accepting the distractions and at the same time choosing to focus our awareness elsewhere. Practising this manner of awareness, according to Green and Gallwey, brings us into the present moment and allows our potential ('p') to express itself.

The other basic *Inner Game* skills mentioned by Green and Gallwey are ‘will,’ which is defined as “the direction and intensity of your intention”(1986:41), and ‘trust.’ Trust relates to the other two skills but is necessary to their facilitation: “It takes trust to allow simple awareness to take place... it takes trust to explore the will’s trial and error approach”(1986:42).

## **Applying the *Inner Game* to Music Performance and Practice**

### *Awareness*

*The Inner Game of Music* presents exercises under the headings of each of the basic skills: awareness, will and trust. Green and Gallwey describe the underpinnings of the seven exercises designed to hone the performer’s awareness: “By accepting distractions and then consciously choosing to focus our attention elsewhere we increase our awareness of the music”(1986:59). They examine aspects of awareness in the context of music endeavour before describing the exercises, each of which directs the performer to focus his or her attention on a particular aspect of their physical environment or experience, either in the moment of performance or during practice. The headings of these exercises, which include, *Focusing on Sight*, *Focusing on Sound*, and *Focusing on Feelings*, give a clue as to their intent.

The exercise outlined in *Focusing on Sight* goes to the essence of the *Inner Game* method: “Play some music and when you are getting distracted or anxious, use the techniques of looking at your instrument or focusing on the score...What happened to the distractions?”(Green and Gallwey 1986:53). This exercise has a close equivalent in *The Inner Game of Tennis* in which Gallwey instructs the player not to concern him or herself with the minutiae of technique, and instead focus entirely on the ball with the aim of trying to actually see the seam of the ball as it flies over the net. By focusing attention in this way, according to the authors, distractions and interference created by Self 1 are minimised.

### *Will*

A second set of exercises is grouped under the heading, *The Power of the Will* and is directed at helping the musician to clarify their goals. Green and Gallwey claim that when we have clear goals we are better able to draw on our reserves of strength and energy ensuring that our “concentration can be sustained”(1986:67). The exercises they suggest, to improve the clarity of our will and musical direction, deal with specific ‘performance goals’ such as, *Using Physical Cues*, creating an *Authentic Sound*, and hearing *The Music in your Head*. The exercises themselves employ a variety of techniques including kinaesthetic rehearsal in which the musician imagines how it will ‘feel’ to perform the piece they are working on accurately. Creative visualisation is also recommended, in which the performer memorises the aural detail of the piece they are engaged with. These, and the other activities described, are aimed at encouraging the performer to develop aspects of their musical expression and technique by setting very specific goals and responding to the ‘feedback’ provided by those goals.

### *Trust*

The discussion of ‘trust,’ which is the third skill Green and Gallwey mention as fundamental to the *Inner Game*, is more general. The only exercise offered is a short series of multiple-choice questions designed to give the musician insight into barriers that prevent them from trusting themselves. In the main, the chapter proceeds through the use of anecdotes most of which are taken from Green’s experiences as a performer and facilitator, and describe instances of musicians who have overcome these barriers to trust in their own performance careers.

### **The *Inner Game* and Obstacles to Optimal Performance**

As mentioned, according to Green and Gallwey, trust facilitates the other *Inner Game* skills of awareness and will. They claim that a lack of trust in oneself is usually the result of “worries about your self image, the feeling that things are out of control [or] fears about your own ability”(1986:93). This lack of trust is, in turn, one of the root causes of obstacles to optimal performance such as performance anxiety, which are a feature of

Self 1. The solutions the authors offer involve a process of self-examination, in combination with the strategies described earlier, which enable the performer to distract their awareness from interference generated by Self 1 during performance.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

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### **Conclusion**

#### **Overview**

Although the length of this study has limited my survey of the popular literature and methods dealing with optimal music performance to the selection examined in Chapter Four, this selection is representative of much of the material available. The reader will have noticed that even though the methods studied employ different language, nomenclature and emphasis in the communication of their ideas, they also have certain aspects in common, the most obvious being a ‘holistic’ approach to music performance and practice. In this concluding chapter I examine common ground shared by the three methods examined. I also discuss areas where the ideas presented in these methods differ, while broadly contextualising them in terms of other popular literature available and current institutional music pedagogy. In addition, I briefly discuss the strengths and limitations of the methods examined, before presenting concluding remarks.

#### **Measuring Effectiveness**

The exercises described in *The Inner Game of Music*, *Effortless Mastery*, and *Practising in Flow* all contain elements that appear to be of assistance to some musicians. This is evidenced, in part, by the growth in popularity of this literature. I have given a personal account of some of my experiences and have noted that it appears to me that my performance as a musician has been improved particularly by my engagement with the ideas presented in *Effortless Mastery*. However, I acknowledge that it is very difficult to know whether this is in fact the case. There are so many variables operating in my life as a musician that it is hard to be certain whether my perceived improvement is the result of this work only or of one or more of these other variables.

There have been, however, a number of empirical studies ascertaining the effectiveness of various types of interventions that broadly correspond to some of those described in the texts studied. The ‘positive affirmation’ methods suggested in *Effortless Mastery*



align with elements of cognitive-behavioural therapy, in which the patient, or in this case the performer, rearranges the content of their 'self-talk' to reflect a more positive outlook. The few studies conducted into the use of this therapy in the context of music performance appear to suggest that it is effective (Nagel and Himle *et al* 1989; Clarke and Agras 1991). Dianna T. Kenny recently summarised the findings of a large body of research into numerous interventions in the context of music performance and concluded: "Behaviour rehearsal, cognitive restructuring, combined self-instruction and progressive muscle relaxation, and combined self-instruction and attentional training, all had significant positive effects on performance quality"(2004b:48).

Each of the three methods examined for this project includes exercises that are aimed at 'behaviour reversal' and 'cognitive restructuring.' 'Attentional training' is also an important aspect of the methods, and especially of Burzik's *Practising in Flow* workshop with its focus on 'critical variables' ('contact with the instrument,' 'contact with the sound,' and 'feeling'). The ideas and exercises presented in *The Inner Game of Music* also combine elements of the 'self-instruction' and 'attentional training' interventions to which Kenny refers. The exercise employed by Werner that focuses on the simple act of picking up one's instrument while remaining in a relaxed state, links with what Kenny describes as "cue controlled progressive muscle relaxation," which she reports has been found to be one of the "most effective treatments"(2004b:42).

Much of this research, however, concentrates on the efficacy of interventions in the treatment of music performance anxiety. While the findings of Kenny and other researchers assert that we know something about the nature of performance anxiety, there has been very little formal research undertaken to ascertain the effectiveness of these, or other interventions, in terms of whether they lead to optimal music performance. An improvement in executory outcomes may coincide with a reduction in performance anxiety, and, as previously noted, the available research suggests that some of the methods examined in this study can be effective in reducing performance anxiety. However, this evidence does not necessarily support the claim that the methods facilitate optimal performance.

## Emergent Themes

Although a quantitative analysis of the methods is impossible without empirical research data, a qualitative and comparative analysis is possible and useful. As mentioned in my introduction, the three methods studied share significant common ground in that all stress that optimal performance is facilitated by the accessing of a particular quality of consciousness, which each claims is achieved through the development of focus, attention, and awareness. Burzik and Werner emphasise the familiarisation with this state during instrumental practice and develop a number of exercises designed to facilitate an experience of it. This notion is supported by a number of other authors including pianist, Madeline Bruser: “By deliberately practising such receptiveness, we gradually become familiar with the experience... and we begin to feel at home in the bright light on the stage”(1999:19).

The guiding principle at work in each of these methods is that by developing our ability to access the state of consciousness that Bruser calls “brilliant awareness”(1999:19), the body is freed to find the most efficient way to complete the tasks required of it in the performance of music. I have mentioned that Burzik describes this as the principle of ‘self organisation’ and relates it to the scientific term, ‘synergetics.’ However, each of the methods examined in the course of this project outlines a similar idea in different language. Werner uses a spiritual model, explaining that the desired state of consciousness, which he encourages the musician to self-induce through meditative techniques, puts us in touch with a ‘higher self.’ In *The Inner Game of Music*, Green and Gallwey call it Self 2, which, in their opinion allows “our true ability and musicality [to] express itself”(1986:33).

Both the *Inner Game of Music* and *Practising in Flow* also emphasise the importance of distinguishing and balancing what Green and Gallwey call ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ goals. Burzik and Csikszentmihalyi use different terminology (‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’) but the notion that learning to connect with our inner experience is vital to the realisation of our musical potential is similar. Indeed, the value placed on the experience of the performer

is a strong theme that runs through much of the literature I have read in the course of my research. Werner, Burzik, Nachmanovitch, Bruser, Green and Gallwey, among others, all encourage the reader to examine his or her musical process, not just in terms of prescribed notions of perfection, but in terms of what educator, Barry Bignell, calls “the ethics of self perfecting,” which he explains relates to an older notion of music making that has its roots in the Socratic ideal of *mousiké*, which is “concerned with music’s didactic role, its ability to teach us about the human condition”(2003:9).

### ***Effortless Mastery and the Work Ethic***

Much current mainstream music pedagogy, which as I have mentioned has been significantly influenced by behaviourism, and which has focused on utilitarian aims that have their roots in the nineteenth century institutionalisation of music, sits uncomfortably with the notion of music as a site of humanistic enquiry. In this context, the recent popularity of *Effortless Mastery* is interesting because the book has become something of a controversy among musicians and teachers. While many that I have spoken to fully embrace Werner’s ideas, there are also many who are suspicious to the point of hostility. The main criticism I have heard expressed is that it is unrealistic to expect playing music to be ‘effortless’ and that musicians who turn to books such as *Effortless Mastery* are looking for an ‘easy way’ through the rigours of instrumental practice. It may be true that some musicians who seek out books such as *Effortless Mastery* are looking for an easy way, but in my opinion the criticism is not a fair evaluation of Werner’s work. Although Werner’s ideas and the language he uses to express them are at times redolent of Californian New Age psychology, his techniques, as demonstrated previously, are sound and have, at least according to anecdotal evidence, been reported to be highly effective.

Perhaps the suspicion that *Effortless Mastery* attracts springs from a pervasive Calvinist work ethic, which is prevalent among many musicians and teachers who appear to place a *moral* value on the amount of work undertaken in the pursuit of a goal (Nachmanovitch 1990:73). Ironically, however, Werner, Green and Gallwey, and Burzik are not suggesting that we practise less, or that we should care less about technique, but rather

that it is essential to examine our practice in pursuit of mastery in such a way that it acknowledges the human capacity for awareness. Nachmanovitch sums up a basic premise shared by *Effortless Mastery*, *Practising in Flow*, *The Inner Game of Music*, and much of the other popular literature concerned with optimal music performance: “To create we need both technique and freedom from technique. To this end we practise until our skills become unconscious... you don’t have to practise boring exercises but you do have to practise something. If you find practice boring, don’t run away from it, but don’t tolerate it either. Transform it into something that suits you”(1990:68).

### **Areas of Divergence**

While there is much about the underlying message and intent in the methods I have studied that is similar, the model of the human being that each presents is quite different. Werner’s view, as noted in previous chapters, is informed by Buddhist and Taoist philosophy, which also influences a number of other authors that I have mentioned who are concerned with optimal music performance including, Ristad, Bruser, and Nachmanovitch. In contrast, *Practising in Flow* and *The Inner Game of Music* reference models provided by sports psychology, which has also had a major influence on literature designed to facilitate the limit-experience in music performance. Green and Gallwey use the idea of two selves in an attempt to explain the workings of the psyche: “Self 1 and Self 2,” they maintain, “do not pretend to describe particular mental structures or areas in the human body or brain. They describe mental and bodily processes in terms of their results rather than their nature”(1987:29). As outlined in Chapter Four, I find this model confusing. Particularly difficult to grasp is the quality of ‘unthinking,’ which they ascribe to Self 2. Their model seems to imply that we can be ‘thinking’ and ‘unthinking’ simultaneously, or at least from one instant to the next, as their description also seems to imply that Self 1 and Self 2 are co-existent.

*The Inner Game of Music* diverges from the other methods not just in terms of the psychological model, but also from the point of view of many of the techniques it describes are designed to help us to ‘manage’ the self-talk and anxiety that accompanies

the moment of performance. On this point it differs from both *Practising in Flow* and *Effortless Mastery* which both develop techniques, which, if successful, assist the performer to change patterns of distraction at a more fundamental level. I have described previously in this chapter, that both Werner and Burzik stress the importance of familiarising oneself, in the practise room, with the state of consciousness, associated with ‘flow’ or ‘effortlessness.’ Indeed, Werner is of the opinion that by the time we actually come to perform it is too late to do anything about performance anxiety or self-talk, and that worrying about whether we are ‘relaxed enough’ in the moment of performance can create yet another distraction. Goleman concurs with Werner when he suggests (as observed in Chapter Three) that the ‘capping’ of anxiety can also entail a cost to mental efficiency: “Denial compromises full, unflinching attention”(1998:54). It appears to me that the *Inner Game* techniques for ‘managing’ Self 1 may represent the sort of “artful mental manoeuvre” that Goleman describes. While such manoeuvres may lessen anxiety, I am mindful of Goleman’s observation that there is a “trade-off between anxiety and awareness”(1998:54) and that this trade-off may in fact inhibit the possibility of optimal music performance.

### **The Facilitation of Experience**

Although Werner and Burzik approach the psyche from very different starting points and develop their ideas using different language, their primary focus is on the relationship between the performer and his or her instrument. Much about Burzik’s workshop reminded me of the work I had done with Werner even though the information presented was couched in different terminology. Both these methods are aimed primarily at guiding the musician towards an *experience* of ‘effortlessness’ or ‘flow’ while playing, and in my opinion, this represents their strength. Although the ideas presented in *The Inner Game of Music* also aim to develop a similarly raised level of awareness in the performer, I believe its authors are less successful in facilitating an experience of this state. ‘Brilliant awareness,’ does not come about through the machinations of conscious thought, but through epiphany: “... I heard the actual sound. I was shocked by its vividness, and by

the realisation that although this brilliant sensory awareness had been available to me for years, I had been missing it”(Bruser 1999:11).

### **Broadening the Discourse: Beyond the Limitations of the Popular Medium**

Through the course of this study I have outlined a number of obstacles to the experience of ‘brilliant sensory awareness’ in music performance, which Madeline Bruser describes. In Chapter Three I also examined factors that may be causal in the phenomenon of ‘stage fright,’ which appears to represent the opposite end of the spectrum of experiences described by performers. In addition, I mentioned that the methods researched do not deal in depth with all of these factors. I note this while at the same not wishing to frame my observation as a criticism of these methods, which are written (or in the case of *Practising in Flow*, designed), with a popular audience in mind. The limitations then, inherent in this material, I argue, are intrinsic to the popular medium in which they exist. Music students do not necessarily want to know about complex notions such as the historicity of knowledge or the ways in which ideals of performance have changed in the last several hundred years. Rather, students want something that will help them to play better and overcome problems such as performance anxiety. This is a perfectly reasonable demand and it would appear that the methods I have studied fulfil that need. Nevertheless, these complex notions do need to be examined if we are to *fully* address, what my research seems to suggest, is an increasing array of problems experienced by musicians. The popular texts and methods examined in the course of this study may assist performers in practical ways, but until the discourse they have set in train is taken up at an institutional level, it will not bring about the cultural changes that the demand for this literature suggests musicians yearn for.

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