

## Performance Anxiety in Western Classical Music: A Malaysian Study

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### ABSTRACT

Although performance anxiety is a common problem in life, there are only a few studies on this subject in Malaysia. This article presents the expansion to the body of literature on this important relationship between performance anxiety in Western Classical Music. Millions of people suffer and may experience from performance anxiety, which commonly called as 'stage fright'. Worst of all, it may prevent a musician from doing what they enjoy or quit from performing which can effect the career. The knowledge affecting to symptoms and signs anxiety during adolescence among students could help if possible areas can be highlighted for the mediating and prevention on the subjects which may assist Malaysian youths in the university setting so they can control the emotions and reduce the anxiety.

### KEYWORDS

Performance anxiety; tertiary students; western classical music

### INTRODUCTION

Recently, studying music as formally is one of the high demanding fields in Malaysia. Evidently, the number of candidates undertaking music examinations is very high compared to many other countries (Cheah, 2012). Regardless of musical genre, a musician is the person responsible for performing and delivering the message of the music to the listener. Performance anxiety is affected at this level depending on the individual's ability to control. It may takes months, days or minutes prior to an actual performance and anxiety is not limited to public performances. It can be experienced by a performer who is asked to perform by family members, friends, or instructors. Performance anxiety exists on a continuum and is not an all or nothing construct (Steptoe). Moreover, different performers may experience anxiety to varying degrees and it can impact a performer's affect, cognition, behaviour, and physiology. In this situation, the result from anxiety may reduce the enjoyment when performing and somehow may cause the successful musicians to quit from performing. Unless the musician find a way to cope effectively with debilitating performance anxiety, the anxiety can interfere with performance potential (Green & Gallwey, 1986).

Performance anxiety has been described in different ways, but Pargman (2006) defined it as a specific type of fear that performers experience prior to a performance. Performance anxiety also has been described as persistent apprehension about performing in a public context that can surface regardless of talent, training, or degree of preparation (Salmon, 1990, Wener, Noyes & Davis, 1990). Performance anxiety strikes performers of all ages and skill levels (McGinnis & Milling 2005, Steptoe 1995). This can be explain by the fact that performers when they are demonstrating their skills in a classroom, auditioning, rehearsing or performing in front of an audience, they are regularly being evaluated and critiqued. It is impossible to avoid the evaluation, even if the performers are rehearsing alone in an empty room. In this situation, performers become their own evaluators. Therefore, performers may gain into their characteristics and they may or may not achieve their goal of performance.

Furthermore, this research is to investigate the anxiety in performing western classical music among tertiary level musicians. The researcher is also interested in how young musicians will react in coping their musical performance anxiety specifically towards their performances for the future research. Performance anxiety is found in several performing situations such as solo recitals, recitals and juried examinations. Almost all university of music students are evaluated in the end of academic semester besides performing as in a group ensemble or other performances. Ely (1991) found that regardless of performances situation, the students still experienced heightened as revealed through the personal traits, self-efficacy and self-esteem. Not only among young musicians, the problem of the similar incidence is also found in the professional orchestra members. Based on a survey of professional orchestra members showed 59% reporting past incidents of performance anxiety (Van Kemanade, Van Son & Van Heesch, 1995). Other research has suggested that this problem is prevalent among all sorts of musicians (Cooper & Wills, 1989, Fisbein, Middlestadt, Ottati, Strauss & Ellis, 1988).

The issue of performance anxiety has long been recognised as one of the greatest challenges to professional performers. Academic interest can be traced back from Schulz, 1981 to Williamon & Thompson, 2006 - studies looking at professional and higher education student musicians have indicated that performance anxiety is one of the most frequently reported problems (Williamon & Thompson, 2006), and that it can negatively affect the quality of performance (Dews & Williams, 1989; Fishbein, Middlestadt, Ottati, Strauss, & Ellis 1988; Gustafson & Rawson, 1983; Marchant-Haycox & Wilson, 1992; Schulz, 1981; Wesner, Noyes, & Davis, 1990). Performance anxiety may elicit beneficial affects to the people. As Barlow (2002, p.1249) says "Anxiety is a unique and coherent cognitive- affective structure within our defensive motivational system. At the heart of this structure is a sense of uncontrollability focused on future threats, danger, or other potentially negative events... Accompanying this negative affective state is a strong physiological or somatic component that may reflect activation of distinct brain circuits such as the corticotrophin releasing factor system..." Research also indicates that for some performers a moderate level of performance anxiety can enhance their ability to perform successfully (Steptoe, 2001; Steptoe & Fidler, 1987). However, performance anxiety can become so debilitating that it negatively affects the quality of performances given, and it can ultimately impact the direction of a performer's career (McGinnis & Milling, 2005; Salmon, 1990). The impact of performance anxiety on a performer's career path may be direct or indirect. Performers may decide that it is too difficult to perform because of their anxiety, or they may not be given a choice after being rejected from performing arts programs or turned down for roles for which they auditioned.

The experience on the musical performance anxiety may reflect a stressful situation that is perceived as threatening in some way. "The world's a stage, and every man plays his part" – but for some, centre stage is a threatening and frightening place, and playing one's part is made difficult by the experience of unwanted emotions, thoughts and behaviours. Like Antonio, in Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice," one's part may be sad and unrewarding (Kenny, 2006). Anxiety cannot be separated from the human and it is a common emotion in life. It is somewhat pertaining a rational and irrational, normal and abnormal feeling to the performer. Anxiety can be effects either successful or completely devastating performances depending on the individual's concern. Research has shown, females are two to three times more likely to experience anxiety than males (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) and this relationship appears to hold for music performance anxiety where studies demonstrate that females have significantly higher MPA than males (Huston, 2001; Osborne & Franklin, 2002; Sinden, 1999). Musical performance anxiety is a vital component to the performers. As Caruso (1964) says, "Of course I'm nervous. The artist who boasts he is never nervous

is not an artist - he is a liar or a fool". It is a highly effortful activity which will contribute the musicians to increasingly improve their skills and techniques. In order to develop and sustain expertise in performance musicians need to be physically, emotionally and mentally fit (Papageorgi & Kopiez, in press). The performers should always be ready with a given time of the preparation to assure the quality of the performance is extremely outstanding and recognized from the listeners. The impact of the performance anxiety is a major concern for the musicians on the quality of the performance.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Participants are tertiary Diploma students from Malaysian universities (Universiti Teknologi MARA UiTM, Aswara, Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris UPSI). In achieving objective of this study, specific targeted group of preferred University students level ranges of from 18 – 22 years of age (Steptoe & Fidler, 1987), (Brugues, 2011; Miller & Chesky, 2004) have been identified. University music students are an important population to investigate because they are reported to suffer from high levels of music performance anxiety (Steptoe & Fidler, 1987), and are at a stage in their training critical for the development of skills and future careers (Brugues, 2011; Miller & Chesky, 2004). Kenny Music Performance Anxiety (Kenny et al., 2004; revised 2009a), a descriptive statistics will be used to help generate means (averages), standard deviation, range to indicate the patterns and trends in data as measured by the three research instruments. Kenny (2005) is also recommended the use of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients to determine if there are significant relationships between perfectionistic tendency and music performance anxiety.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Kenny Music Performance Anxiety (Kenny et al., 2004; revised 2009a), a descriptive statistics will be used to help generate means (averages), standard deviation, range to indicate the patterns and trends in data as measured by the research instruments. Kenny (2005) is also recommended the use of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients to determine if there are significant relationships between perfectionistic tendency and music performance anxiety. Based on the results, the K-MPAI has provided us with a measure featuring good psychometrically good measure that makes it valid and reliable instrument for the measurement of MPA on music tertiary students in Malaysia. To determine the internal reliability test of K-MPAI, Cronbach's alpha also was highly recommended. This study has prolonged our knowledge of MPA in an academic context and may provides support for the use of the K-MPAI as a screening tool in future studies and could be contribute to a better knowledge to assess the level of MPA on tertiary students.

## **CONCLUSION**

Research has shown, a review of relevant research suggests that musical performance anxiety is a critical problem for 15% to 25% of professional musicians (Steptoe, 2001). Research has also indicated that musicians that facing with the performance anxiety tendencies to have an experience such as physiological arousal, subjective feelings of discomfort, and overt behaviours (Kenny, 2006). Moreover, western literature on debilitating performance anxiety is proven by associated with the factors similar to those evidenced in social phobia, such as lack of control, the reactions of important others, fear of negative evaluation, judgmental attitudes (Lehrer, 1987), social situations, fear of crowds and catastrophizing (Steptoe & Fidler, 1987). Little has been written about the specific challenges faced by young musicians in Malaysia, therefore, researcher feels these factors may relate to them since musical performance is an integral element in academically and

professionally nowadays in Malaysia. This can be proven with an academic examination and performances, particularly with respect to the evaluative element, potential fear of negative feedback from the audience and potential loss of status or self-esteem when failure is experienced. Nevertheless, the researcher would think the influence from other elements such as social phobia, physiological and behavioural treatment to the musical performance anxiety could give more impact and outcome in defining additional MPA characteristic.

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