

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### PERFORMING

*"The tone of the text should preferably be expressed in your eyes. Your hair and mouth can help you at this, as well as your neck and chin as you raise or bow your head..."*

*"Thus you move and play your instrument in the spirit that the music demands."*

Sylvestro Ganassi (1542) <sup>1</sup>

There are so many facets to performing that to attempt an all-inclusive series of essays in this book would be impossible. Performing is as much an *attitude* as it is an *activity*, and something that must be experienced over and over to learn. This is especially true because each of us reacts differently on stage, and there is no absolute "correct," or "incorrect" stage presence.

Still, there are common traits that we all share on stage, and many of these *can* be taught. Frankly, a good performance by one of your students is the best advertisement that you can have. It says that you are successful as a teacher and coach. It says that you know how to get the most out of your students. That kind of teacher is rare—rare enough that you can easily expand that reputation into a solid teaching career.

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1. Sylvestro Ganassi, *Regala Rubertini* (Venice, 1542-43), ed. Hildemarie Peter, trans. Daphne and Steven Silvester (Berlin: Robert Lienau, 1977), 9.

◇ *Stage Presence*

Stage Presence is a subject that is often ignored. In fact, there are virtually no articles on stage presence in any major music dictionary and it is seldom discussed in lessons.

The reason for this neglect seems to lie in the fact that stage presence is not purely a musical subject; it has nothing to do with the sound or the music, yet stage presence involves a great deal more than simply "existing" on stage. It is a critical element in communicating with an audience and for that reason it *must* be taught as part of a student's formal training.

The current ignorance of stage presence seems to have grown, not from our musical-performance heritage, but from our digital-recording mindset. Since most of us listen to recordings far more often than we go to live concerts, we habitually use only one of our senses (hearing) when we listen to music. As a result, stage presence (which is almost exclusively visual) has become a terribly neglected subject, and only until we consider the importance of stage presence will the effects of this inexcusable neglect become apparent.

In a study on verbal and non-verbal communication we find the following information:

Fig. 1. Statistics on Verbal/Non-Verbal Communication. <sup>2</sup>

<i>Form of Communication results in:</i>	<i>percentage of perceived message.</i>
communication through words:	7%
communication through vocal intonation & inflection:	38%
communication through facial expression & posture:	55%

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2. Albert Mehrabian, Cited in *The Denver Post*, August, 25, 1970. et al.

Some 40 years earlier, the great violinist Carl Flesch made a fascinating parallel between communicating with words and communicating with music: *"The difference between the interpreter of word and of tone, lies, fundamentally, only in the materials which he has to shape, the concrete word or the abstract tone."*<sup>3</sup>

Assuming Flesch's statement to be valid, we can, with some certainty, apply Mehrabian's three categories to performance as in Figure 2.

Fig. 2. Statistics applied to Performance.

<i>Form of Communication results in:</i>	<i>percentage of perceived message.</i>
aural music:	7%
musical interpretation:	38%
stage presence:	55%

Even if we accept these figures as only partially applicable to performance, we find that non-aural communication on stage is a prominent factor. Another study goes so far as to theorize that: *"...judgements from visual cues are more accurate than judgements from vocal [i.e. audible] cues."*<sup>4</sup>

Again, Maestro Flesch says basically the same thing: *"The first impression which a personality makes on us is essentially influenced by its externals as well as by the tone of voice. The moment a violinist appears on the concert stage, his appearance alone gives the public an impression of his human and artistic being."*<sup>5</sup>

A similar observation was made by Igor Stravinsky, who stated: *"One sees music. An experienced eye follows and judges, sometimes unconsciously, the performer's least gesture."*<sup>6</sup>

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3. Carl Flesch, *The Art of Violin Playing, Vol. II* (New York: Carl Fischer, 1930), 70.

4. K.L. Burns and E.G. Geiter, "Significance of Vocal and Visual Channels in the Decoding of Emotional Meaning," *The Journal of Communications*, vol. 23 (1973), 118-2.

5. Flesch; *loc. cit.*

6. Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 51.

In short, our aural senses are not the only ones tantalized (or in some cases, abused) during a live performance. We truly do "see" music. In recognizing this critical fact, we are left with two problems: *what* to communicate, and *how* to do it.

*What to Communicate*  
*Music—7%*

This question is easily answered once we define the rôle of the performer—a subject that branches directly into the study of aesthetics. This will be discussed further in the section "The Middle Man," in Book III, but in short, Plato gives us the best answer: we are to "interpret the interpreters," or for our purposes: *to communicate to the audience that which we feel the composer intended.*

*How to Communicate—Interpretation and Stage Presence*  
*Interpretation—38%*

Again, this will be discussed further in Book III, but a simple answer of how to communicate to the audience is that we must understand the historical and theoretical basis of the piece *and* be technically capable of including those elements in our performance. This does not simply mean didactically hitting all the notes, but also applying an individual sense of interpretation.

*Stage Presence—55%*

How a performer communicates beyond the music and subsequent interpretation is done *via* stage presence. In the opening quote by Ganassi, we find this can be done with physical movements "...in the spirit which the music demands." Similar references abound, such as that by Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg: "*I know a great composer [C.P.E. Bach?] on whose face one can see depicted everything that his music expresses as he plays at the keyboard.*"<sup>7</sup>

The above description is an example of a positive stage presence: a player so drawn into the performance, that he conveys a deep sense of personal interaction with the music. Through this, an audience is caught up in the involvement and has little choice but to become equally involved.

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7. Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, *Der Critischer Musicus an der Spree* (Berlin, 9 September, 1749), quoted in C.P.E. Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* (Berlin, 1759), ed. trans. William J. Mitchell (New York: Norton, 1949), 152.

This is most easily conveyed, as we have seen, by physical movements of the body, which complement the musical events in the piece. This suggestion, however, must be tempered with a warning by C.P.E. Bach who says, "*Ugly grimaces are, of course, inappropriate and harmful; but fitting expressions help the listener to understand our meaning.*"<sup>8</sup>

I seriously doubt that there are any of us who have not seen a perfectly acceptable recital enter the realm of the macabre from the player's transmission of terror to the audience. If a performer's *negative* mindset can be transmitted to the audience, it is logical to assume that a *positive* mindset, or "presence," will also be transmitted. This brings us to a vital element neglected in the above statistics: *the attitude of the performer.*

If we acknowledge the deep, even spiritual quality of music, then our motives and attitudes are intrinsic to stage presence, since it is from these that our stage presence will emerge. As the great Russian actor, Konstantin Stanislavsky noted, "*You may play well or you may play badly; the important thing is that you should play truly.*"<sup>9</sup>

Without this communication in performance, audiences will drift slowly away from the concert hall, choosing the equally lifeless (though infinitely more convenient) performances of the recording industry.

I do not mean to sound opposed to the recording industry. It certainly has its place, but it is *not* the same place as that of a live performance. A recording should be considered a documentation of one performance at a given moment. Sadly, it has become (*via editing, etc.*) an example of absolute perfection; a marvelous perfection, not necessarily contrary to a live performance, but a perfection by which, erroneously, live performances are judged!

In concert, the most exciting performances are those where the player—often with a split-second decision—will try a new phrasing, articulation or dynamic, which can alter the entire interpretation of a piece. This instantaneous risk can be extremely dangerous, but—if the player is willing to take that chance—it can result in *tremendous* performances. This is due, in part, to the fact that as his metabolism is sped up (from performance stress, adrenaline, *etc.*), a performer is often more sensitive to ideas that had not occurred to him before. Having the

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8. Bach; *loc. cit.*

9. Konstantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts, 1939), 14.

courage to trust and act on those fleeting bursts of enlightenment on stage is something which only the finest players consistently achieve.

In recording, one *rarely* takes this sort of risk. It's not that recording is devoid of exciting playing, but usually by the time you sit down in front of the microphone, you have gone over the literature thousands of times, made virtually every musical and technical decision, and previewed these decisions with your producer (who, in turn, has made decisions as to possible edit spots, *etc.*). The goal in this situation is 100% consistency. An exacting consistency that, on stage, can result in sterile, boring performances.

While flawless, pristine recordings have raised our expectations of a live performance to an artificial level, worse yet, it has nearly obliterated the element that we normally seek from live concerts: *a spontaneous magic*, which any discerning ear will testify, is nearly impossible to capture in the studio.

Additionally, recordings cannot convey the *attitude* of a performer and it is from this attitude that stage presence will emerge. In short, there are two extreme ends of the spectrum when it comes to a performer's attitude.

The first, and most common attitude is found under the banner of "Knock 'em Dead!" It is a performance more suitably billed as a boxing match than a recital. Unfortunately, a number of guitarists take this attitude; those recitals are little more than a display of technical gymnastics.

While there is nothing wrong with a few pieces chosen to show technical prowess, a current and rather tiresome mode has emerged whereby entire guitar recitals consist of nothing more than "encores." This type of programming, as Flesch states, "*...allows the auditor no time for reflection, it simply carries him away... His art is more calculated to impress the masses than to move the individual.*"<sup>10</sup>

The opposite idea is the passive "Pied Piper" approach—a type of "charm-them-into-Nirvana" approach. While this is perhaps more conducive to a high sense of art, it can produce a weak—even shy—stage presence. In short, both attitudes can be helpful and both can be harmful. It is up to you to see that your students maintain a proper stage presence with regard to "*...the spirit which the music demands.*"

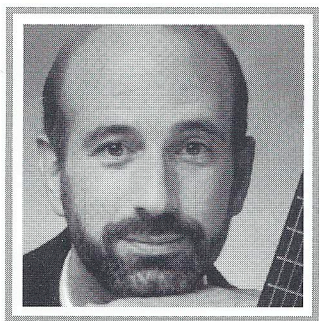
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10. Flesch; *op. cit.*, 70.

As a teacher you must help students to develop their own sense of stage presence; to be able to tastefully move with the music, and to build an attitude that is balanced between grotesquely overt and embarrassingly timid. Have them practice with each other—perhaps even writing brief—and tactful—“reviews.” *But work with them!* They are not likely to learn this from anyone but you.

In closing, it is interesting to note that the passive and active attitudes from which stage presence will emerge, are similar to the crook and staff held by the ancient Egyptian Pharaohs. The idea was, if Pharaoh could not gently shepherd his flock with the crook, he would beat them into reverent submission with the staff!

Every performer must decide what proportion of either attitude is best to produce the most effective stage presence. However, we would be wise to remember the problems Pharaoh encountered from his constant use of the staff.



## Six Golden Rules for Conquering Performance Anxiety

David Leisner

Performance anxiety can begin so innocently. First you notice someone in the front row tapping his feet. You wonder to yourself whether you're really maintaining a steady beat. Then someone else whispers something to her neighbor, and you worry that perhaps your hair is disheveled or your tie is crooked, or maybe you're making those funny grimaces again that you thought you'd conquered. Worse yet, they are probably discussing how strange or inappropriate your interpretation is, or they are commenting on how many notes you are missing (you are missing a lot by now). Oh, your teacher is really going to yell at you. And your girlfriend or boyfriend is going to be very disappointed. Your students aren't going to know what to say to you because this is going so badly. Your hands are shaking or sweaty or cold. Maybe you're not cut out for this stuff after all...

Sound familiar? Believe me, you're not alone. Performance anxiety affects almost everyone, from the beginner to the most seasoned professional. It is truly remarkable what paranoid ingenuity most of us generate during performance in order to defeat ourselves.

It all begins when our minds wander. Some distraction, usually minor, occurs, and we become less and less able to concentrate. The results are nervousness, memory lapses, technical errors and general discomfort with and, ultimately, fear of performing. The whole mess can often be avoided quite simply by thinking a few essential thoughts before going on stage.

A few years ago, after experiencing a string of unpleasant performances much like the description above, I did a lot of soul-searching about what kinds of thoughts and feelings were distracting me in performance and what advice I could give myself to counteract them. The result was Six Golden Rules that summarize issues crucial to successful concentration in performance.

I meditate on these a few minutes before going on stage. Ever since the beginning of this practice, I have had very few concentration lapses in concert and have found performing to be far more fun and satisfying than ever. In addition, my students and all those with whom I have shared these ideas have had similar benefits, and have been astonished at how quickly their performance anxiety dissolved.

### GOLDEN RULE ONE

Before performing, you must first remind yourself that you have practiced to the best of your ability. You have used your practic-

ing skills in the most effective way you know at this time. True, your playing can always be better, but given all the circumstances that have led to this moment, you have, in fact, done your best.

Now the time to practice has passed. Rather, you are going to use your "automatic pilot," which you have been training during practice sessions. The automatic pilot (a.p.) is at work, for example, when you learn the fingering for a piece. When you repeat and reinforce the new patterns, the a.p. retains them, so that when you go on to practicing, say, dynamics, you don't have to think too hard about the fingering.

*Performance anxiety affects almost everyone, from the beginner to the seasoned professional...*

The most comforting aspect of the a.p. is that it works all by itself. It is indeed automatic. So when it is time for you to perform, all you need to do is trust your a.p. to do most of your work for you. No effort or thought is required to bring back all that you have practiced. It will be there for you.

### GOLDEN RULE TWO

Do not judge what just happened or is about to happen. Self-judgment during a performance is futile because it takes you out of the present and into the past or future and destroys the natural flow of your thoughts and physical actions. Whether the judgment is positive or negative, it introduces a verbal aspect into an activity that is most successful when it is non-verbal. Reserve judgment for after the performance, preferably after you have listened to other people's reactions.

Rather than judge your playing, simply observe it without

*continued on page 50*



# The 6 Golden Rules Summarized

- 1 **You have practiced to the best of your ability.** Trust your automatic pilot to do most of your work for you.
- 2 **Do not judge** what just happened or will happen. Only motivate and observe (non-verbally).
- 3 **Do not second-guess** any audience member's reaction to your playing, as your perception will probably be inaccurate. Please yourself only.
- 4 **Be in the music,** in the moment. Be on stage, not in the audience. Be in the giving mode, not the receiving one.
- 5 **Single out one aspect** of your playing that is the top priority among things you need to be reminded of at this time.
- 6 **Enjoy!** Let your emotions for the music be present. Let your excitement for the music be present.

verbal description, and motivate your intentions. When you are about to make a crescendo, for example, intend to do it and then feel it as you are doing it. There is nothing verbal about this process. You are, rather, putting intention into action—that is, motivating.

## GOLDEN RULE THREE

Do not second-guess any audience member's reaction to your playing. During a performance most of us feel quite certain we know exactly what the responses to our playing are by our teachers or students or colleagues, boyfriend or girlfriend or spouse, critic or some illustrious musician we happen to spot in the audience. More often than not, these thoughts prove to be completely, ludicrously inaccurate and only serve to further remove us from the moment and the music.

An example: I was once playing an informal house concert, with no more than fifteen people in the audience. As soon as I came out to perform, I noticed one person who looked familiar, but whom I could not identify. For most of the first piece, I was not thinking about the music, but rather about who he was. Finally I concluded that he was a respected vocal coach and accompanist I once met briefly. He was undoubtedly going to listen to the Schubert lieder arrangements on my program with an acute perception of detail and, ultimately, I was sure, with

disdain. Not only during the Schubert, but throughout the entire concert, I was obsessed with thoughts like these. Not surprisingly, the whole experience was quite unpleasant for me. Afterward, when he came to speak to me, I discovered that this so-called vocal coach was, in fact, a bassist, and he had nothing but enthusiastic praise for my performance.

Later I thought, "what an incredible waste of energy!" How remarkable it is that the vast resources of one's imagination can be used for such futile, self-destructive mind-games! You probably have had similar experiences. Trying to imagine what someone in the audience is thinking about your playing is useless and distracting. Please yourself only.

## GOLDEN RULE FOUR

Be on stage, not in the audience. Be in the giving mode, not the receiving one. Be in the music, in the moment. These are three ways of saying more or less the same thing.

You cannot be performer and listener at the same time. Leave the response to the audience. Your task is to communicate to the listener what you have practiced, thought about and felt. The most effective way of accomplishing this is by being present in the moment and not by dwelling on any moment that is past or one that has not yet occurred. A good example of this is when you are reading a piece of music that is familiar to

you and your eyes follow the notes at a natural, steady pace. The reading feels easy, and your music-making is accurate and relaxed. This is the kind of forward flow that is desirable in performance.

**GOLDEN RULE FIVE**

Single out one aspect of your playing that is the top priority among things you need to be reminded of at this time. Think about this not when you are performing, but before you go on stage, when you are thinking about the other five Golden Rules. Some people, for instance, may wish to emphasize posture. Some might need to play with less pressure, while others may need a reminder to play more boldly. The variety of issues to consider here is infinite, as they are specific to the individual and they may evolve over time, depending on what is top priority at the moment. Choosing more than one item to consider, however, would only burden your abilities to concentrate, so choose carefully.

**GOLDEN RULE SIX**

Enjoy! Don't forget that your performance is the time when you can finally share with your listeners what you have worked so hard in the practice room to achieve. This is a time of joy and not a time for correcting errors or other faults. Players tend to be too self-critical in performance. The practice room is the place for that. The concert hall is the place for celebrating the music. Let your emotions for the music be present. Don't allow minor details to obscure your feelings about the music. Let your excitement for the music be present. Let the adrenaline and your genuine lively passion for the music come through.

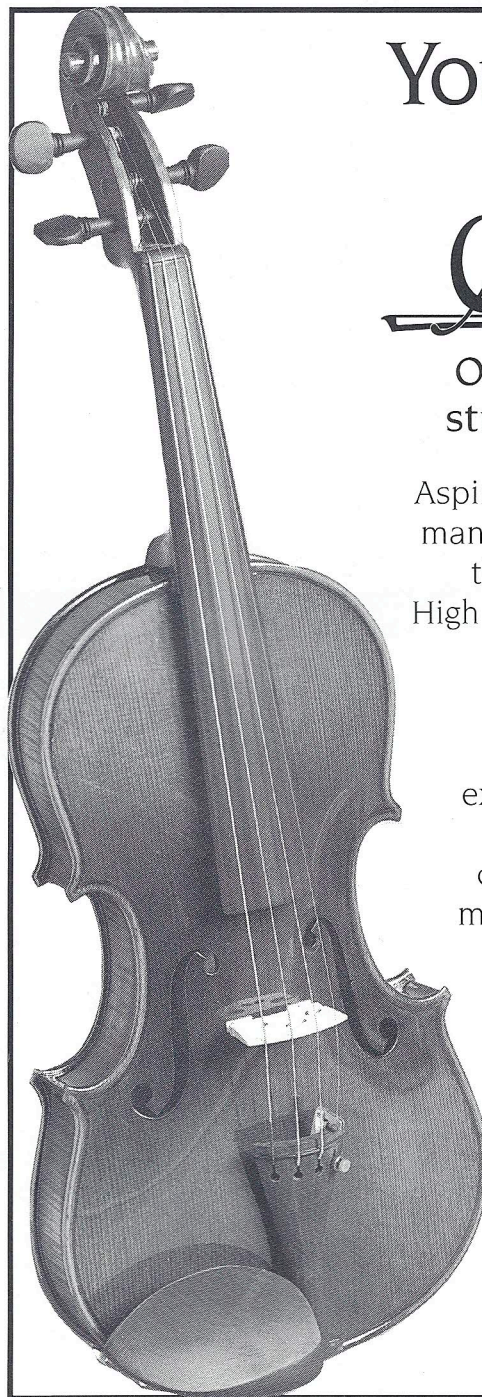
**REVIEW BEFORE PERFORMING**

These are my six Golden Rules. I recommend that you look at them five to ten minutes before going on stage. Think about what each one means to you as an individual. As you look at Rule Three, for instance, you might think about specific

people who might be in the audience and, one by one, remind yourself that you are not going to second-guess their opinions about your playing.

Do this little meditation for just a few minutes and then get back to your warm-ups or stretching exercises or whatever you like to do just before playing. Don't give these ideas another thought. Then go give the best performance of your life. **AST**

*David Leisner is a guitarist, composer, and teacher. Current season highlights include concerts in New York, Boston, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Columbus, Los Angeles, and the Southwest. His works for orchestra, Embrace of Peace and Dances in the Madhouse, each get performances this season. He teaches guitar at the New England Conservatory and Manhattan School of Music.*



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## PLAYING FOR OTHERS

### Multiplying Musical Enjoyment

When they start to play, most guitarists do it solely for their own personal enjoyment. Usually there is no strong intention to play for others when the guitarist feels incompetent on the instrument. However, after the player learns some pieces and has some fluency in the language of the guitar, he begins to enjoy himself and thinks that it might not be so bad to play for other people. He may want to perform just for fun or he may like it so much that he wants to make a profession of it. In any event, when the guitarist is enjoying the music he plays, it is a perfectly natural tendency to want to share that enjoyment. Moreover, there is a tremendous value in sharing that most musicians experience at least occasionally. The value is that the enjoyment of playing for others is greater than just sitting and playing for yourself. The enjoyment is multiplied when you play for groups of people. Obviously the effect is best when the player is in top shape and the playing goes well. Then everyone—including the player—feels uplifted and refreshed by the experience.

No one knows precisely how music creates such a powerful, uplifting effect in a group of people. However, one important factor seems to be a natural orderliness in music when it is well played. A particularly significant part of the orderliness of most music is a steady, but not necessarily metronomic, rhythmic pulse. When that pulse is present, the phenomenon of *entrainment* can take place. We already mentioned entrainment in Chapter 5 where it was defined as a “locking in” to the natural rhythm of the music being played. The result is effortless musical flow. Now, when you introduce your individual musical entrainment into a group, the possibility of group entrainment arises. What apparently happens is that, at certain times, everyone in the group “locks in” to the orderly musical pulse of your playing. Although no one has ever measured it, it seems likely that when group entrainment takes

place, there would be some degree of synchronization (or harmonization) of everyone's brain waves. If true, that would give a scientific explanation of how a whole group of people can be totally enraptured by a musical performance. Be that as it may, with the onset of true entrainment, the entire group becomes focused on the music and acts—at least for a time—as one large, harmonious unit. This creates an exhilarating sense of mental and physical well-being for everyone.

Thus you can see that one function of playing for others is to make yourself and other people happier. But music should not just create superficial entertainment or show. As the contemporary German composer Stockhausen has said:

When a musician walks on to the stage he should give that fabulous impression of a man who is doing a sacred service. In India, in Bali, when a group of musicians are performing, you don't feel they do it to entertain you. They do it as a holy service. They feel a need to make sounds, and these sounds are waves on which you ride to the eternal.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the musician has a very high function in society—that of bringing peace and harmony to an overstressed world. Listening to beautiful, well-performed music gives people a glimpse into a higher realm and gives them a spiritual lift. The beauty of the music takes them outside of themselves at least for a moment and thus helps them let go of their everyday problems. The orderliness of the music seems to create some orderliness in the listeners' consciousness. It makes them realize that there must be some deep level of order and harmony in the universe even though they ordinarily experience disorder on the surface. Thus people go away from a good concert better off than when they came.

As you can see, a musician can have a profound effect on his listeners. That effect can be good or bad, depending on the performer's state of being. In order to have a good influence on people, it is important that the musician practice, perform, and live everyday in a peaceful, harmonious manner. Otherwise he will not be playing his proper social role of spreading joy and upliftment.

### **The Recital Challenge: Grow Musically and Personally**

As a guitarist you have a marvelous opportunity to promote your personal and musical development when you prepare and play recitals. Your development will be furthered no matter whether you play for just a few friends or for

<sup>1</sup>Karl-Heinz Stockhausen, "Spiritual Dimensions," *Music and Musicians* (May 1971), 34.

a big audience, and no matter whether you intend to be an amateur or a professional. Whatever the case, recitals challenge you to really organize yourself, to put your mind and body in good shape, to develop the ability to be calm in the midst of performing (that is, to be dynamically relaxed), and to expand your emotional sensitivity by opening yourself up to others. The recital is an inspiration to do your absolute best. You should not dread it at all, but welcome it and use it as a means to grow.

Initially you may find public recitals, or even playing for friends, to be uncomfortable—in spite of knowing the music well. If that is the case, you will soon realize that just sitting and practicing is not enough to overcome the fear of playing for others. You will become aware of the need to develop your inner self as well. If you suffer in the recital situation, it is nature telling you to make some appropriate changes. For example, if you are nervous when performing, that suggests that you may need to do something to settle your mind and relax your body (see Chapter 2). If your concentration is not very good while playing, then you may profit by practicing the effortless concentration technique discussed in Chapter 3. If you have a heavy, dull feeling during a performance, you may find it necessary to eat lightly or not at all before you play.

The chief realization that eventually dawns on the guitarist who wants to play concerts is that the more he cooperates with the requirements of his body and environment, the more he will be successful in his music making. If you act in accordance with the natural principle of least action and the other principles in this book, you will find relatively little resistance to the fulfillment of your guitar-playing desires. Playing recitals will become an experience that is so enjoyable the player will want to repeat it often. Those magical moments in music that everyone talks about can become a living reality. Such moments make everyone realize that humanity has an enormous potential for happiness and achievement.

It should be plain that playing for others is worthwhile because it challenges you to reach beyond the small fraction of your potential that you normally use. It pushes you toward *full* potential. Take the opportunity to play for other people often—but also *learn* from each situation. Make each recital better than the last. Let your playing evolve to ever higher levels. Remember to aim for the ideal of uplifting and energizing yourself and your listeners so that everyone grows and benefits from your performance.

## PREPARING FOR THE RECITAL

In this part of the chapter we look at some specific ways of mental and physical preparation for recitals. In the next part is a discussion of how you can best deal with the recital when you are right in the middle of it—a topic of no

small interest. In the final section, we consider the attitude toward the recital after it is over and the challenge it presents. Now a look at what can be done *before* the recital.

### Enjoy the Preparation

Enjoyment of what you are doing is undoubtedly the most important thing to remember when you are preparing a recital. If you enjoy your practice and playing, then that will be reflected at your recitals; if you do not enjoy it, that also will be reflected. In order to enjoy yourself the most and be successful, you need to be highly conscious of what you are doing. Even if you are just practicing some scales or arpeggios, be conscious of the sound and how the fingers feel. Being aware of what is happening *right now* in your playing will reap great rewards for your practice sessions and for your recitals.

### Know Your Pieces Thoroughly

Needless to say, it is paramount that you know your recital material intimately in order to play it well. The pianist and writer William Newman says that one must be willing "to go the last mile" in one's preparation of a recital. All the fine artists emphasize the need to study all the details of a piece as well as the overall structure. Then you must *live* with the piece for some time, thinking about it, feeling it, playing it again and again until it reveals its "deeply hidden core," as the harpsichordist Wanda Landowska says. Then you can feel more confident of your ability to play the piece in a recital.

To truly know your recital pieces, it is good to do a thorough study of them as was outlined in Chapter 9. The knowledge gained from that process gives a solid musical and psychological foundation for your performances.

For the sake of good performance, it is of considerable importance that you be decisive and detailed in your fingerings. Once you determine the musical effect desired and find a good fingering to express it, then it is best to stick to that fingering. Of course you should remain flexible, and if a better, more expressive fingering comes to mind, you should be able to change. Just remember that it is usually best to avoid major changes when the recital is only a week or two away—unless you like living dangerously. Experiments with last-minute changes can result in great confusion when the moment of truth arrives.

One area that guitarists often neglect is detailed fingering for the right hand. Many guitarists do it slightly differently each time they play a piece and then they wonder why their fingers become tangled at recital time. The finer players tend to be very specific about right- and left-hand fingerings and frequently pencil them into the score. Some high-level players who know their music like an old friend may take more chances and change fingerings at the last minute (or even during the performance). This is because they like the

freedom of expressing a phrase in different ways according to how they feel it. However, this approach is not recommended for beginning recitalists. It is better to be very decisive in the details of left- and right-hand fingering. It gives you self-confidence when you are on stage. You have the reassuring feeling that you have no "unfinished business" with respect to the details. You have "gone the last mile."

At this point remember that the method of mental practice (described in Chapter 8) can help you learn your pieces in detail. Spend at least some of your regular practice time sitting quietly without the guitar and practicing mentally. Play your pieces clearly in your "inner ear" and see the fingering clearly in your "inner eye." This method, although demanding of your concentration, is very powerful and will result in a feeling of real command over your pieces when you play them in recital.

### **Planning the Recital**

People talk much about the value of planning in order to make any enterprise turn out successfully, but few do it in an organized manner. With respect to guitar recitals, those who do plan them carefully find it helpful. Planning ahead has the advantage of giving you peace of mind because, at an early stage of your preparation, you make most of your decisions about what you are going to play and in what order. Your mind is then free to work quietly on your pieces. Eleventh-hour decision making is avoided.

By far the two most important aspects of your program are playing pieces that you like and playing them only when you feel very comfortable with them. These may seem to be obvious points, but many guitarists are not conscious of them. You must enjoy and feel deeply about what you play or you will not be able to move others.

One of the first things to consider in your recital planning is whether you will play solo or ensemble music or a mixture of the two. The solo recital tends to be a higher pressure situation for most people, so it may be much more comfortable to start by playing some ensemble music. Guitar duets, trios, and quartets and guitar with voice are all very good for this purpose. Just knowing that someone else is up there with you helps greatly to overcome stage fright. Besides, you will discover that playing with the right partner is very enjoyable. After you have done some ensemble work you will probably feel easier about playing solos. On the other hand, you may feel like doing your "solo flight" right from the beginning. Whatever the case, just make sure you feel relatively comfortable with the recital situation before going into it. No one will enjoy hearing you play if you are not enjoying yourself. Your teacher and friends can give you some help in deciding whether you are ready for a recital—but ultimately the decision is yours.

Decide on the nature of your program well before the recital. Make it concrete by writing down the pieces you want to play, the order in which

they will come, how long each piece lasts, how long the whole program will be, where an intermission should go, and how long it should be. The structure of the program should be carefully planned: it should be well orchestrated, like a good piece of music. It needs to have some kind of shape, some kind of logical progression. Transitions from one piece or part of the program to the next should be smooth. There should be "breathing room" and a feeling of spaciousness in the program. For example, it is not good to have many long, complex pieces in a row without the relief of lighter works. If you are playing a substantial work—such as an entire sonata—in the first half, you might start the program with a short group of two or more light pieces that you know well, then take a break before the sonata by going off stage for a minute or two in order to relax and breathe easily. That kind of break is what gives you a feeling of spaciousness and comfort in a program. It also gives the audience a chance to have a break and relax. No matter how you do it, there should be a balance between the different program elements—between playing and silence, fast and slow, light and heavy, long and short, popular and esoteric pieces. Balancing the relative lengths of each part of the program is also a significant factor.

If you examine programs of top concert guitarists, you will find considerable variety, but there is always some kind of logic to them. Some programs are arranged chronologically, from early to modern, to give a feeling of historical continuity. But other arrangements, based on affinities of certain pieces without regard to period, or on contrast, are also used to good effect. Programs are most commonly organized in sections—perhaps two or three in each half of a full-length program. Each section presents several pieces in some kind of coherent grouping, whether all in one style or all by one composer. One trend today is to present complete works instead of throwing together a piece from here, a piece from there. This "one dog from every village" approach is not always artistically satisfying. For that reason, some guitarists are now performing complete Bach suites, rather than just one or two pieces taken from different suites.

The first half of the program will often progress from lighter works in the beginning to a very substantial, climactic piece just before intermission. Nowadays it is usual for the weightiest pieces to appear in the first half of a concert because audience alertness is generally greatest at that time. It is usually wisest to have lighter fare in the second half. For the same reason, it is good to have the second half somewhat shorter than the first. Besides, if the second half is not so long, the audience will tend to want more. Better to leave them a bit hungry rather than trying to satiate them.

The program from a Segovia concert on page 236 is an example of a nicely balanced and spacious program. The order is not chronological but still it has a certain sense to it based on contrast and groupings of pieces from the same composer or era. The Sor pieces are relatively light in character and in technical difficulty—something to warm up on before the more demanding



*Sonata III* by Ponce. Then there is a brief break, during which Segovia usually walks off stage for a few minutes. Then the first half concludes with some lighter pieces. Note that Segovia has grouped two Sor pieces together and contrasts them with the Ponce. Then, in Part II, he groups some pieces of the classical-romantic era together, which also contrasts with the Ponce.

Then comes the intermission and a decidedly Spanish second half, starting off with a contemplative modern suite. Then come three standards of the repertoire to finish off the program—the last being sure to please everyone. Segovia knows quite well, as most seasoned artists do, that the choice of the last piece is important because, if the concert ends well, then a favorable impression is left with the audience. Thus most artists select an upbeat, happy piece such as *Sevilla* with which to end. Much more could be said about pro-

grams, but it is best for guitarists to find out for themselves what makes a good program by studying the programs of famous artists—both guitarists and nonguitarists.<sup>2</sup>

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# Afterword

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## Performance Anxiety

There is no substitute for preparation. Being well prepared for a performance gives us the confidence and the self-assurance we need to “go on with the show.” However, no matter how well we prepare in advance, there is always that last-minute anxiety from the feeling that we didn’t do enough. I think we’ve all felt this at one time or another, and probably practiced and played the instrument all day the day of the concert, only to feel tired, more insecure, and even more nervous than before! As a result of a tough situation I found a solution for myself that may work for you, too.

It happened when I had to give two concerts for the same organization. The first one was in the evening and the second one was the next afternoon. The entire day before the first performance I had absolutely nothing scheduled, and decided I would just take my time and go slowly through the entire program. I thought I was using my time wisely, but as I practiced, I found little things in the music were giving me problems which had not bothered me before. OH NO!!! My mental composure continued on a downward slide the rest of the day. By the time I settled in for my pre-concert nap I was a mess! Needless to say, I napped not. At the concert that night, I had several memory slips, among some other small problems. With my self-confidence shattered, I awaited the next day’s recital.

The following day I arose late and had little time for breakfast. Since the concert was out in the country somewhere, my hosts informed me we would leave right away to allow plenty of time. It was just time enough, because we arrived at the venue only ten minutes before the downbeat. I sat up my things on the stage, went back and tuned up, and rushed out on stage and played one of my best concerts ever!

The lesson: not only did I not have time that day to play, warm up, or even think about the concert, I also *didn’t have time to worry about it*. Nowadays I actually play the guitar very little the day of a concert. I’ll just tune up that morning, make sure my strings sound alright, and touch-up my nails if they need it. I try to stay in a normal and “happy” frame of mind. If I’m not happy, I find a way to make myself happy. I’ll read, watch something funny on TV, think of things I like doing, go for a walk, call someone on the phone; or anything else that seems like it will do the trick. I try to take a short nap (just fifteen to thirty minutes or so) before I leave for the concert. This clears my head. Backstage, just before the concert, I remind myself of a few things:

1. I think, “This is great! I can’t wait to play!” After all, this is what I’ve wanted to do all my life.
2. I think of what the program is; or better still, I like to have one in front of me to review while I warm up.
3. I warm up with light exercises only: stretches, short scales, and/or selections from the Daily Warm-Up Routine in this book. I don’t “run through” anything.
4. I let myself feel my nervousness and don’t try to get rid of my nerves anymore, or “freak out” when I am nervous. I just expect to be nervous. As with the airline attendants who endlessly hassle me about taking my guitar on board, I have learned to confront nerves on their terms and with confidence. By feeling my nervousness, I’m accepting the fact that I am nervous; but acknowledge only the physical signs, such as a fast heart rate, sweating, lack of sufficient oxygen or even nausea. I focus on each one individually for a few seconds. Some form of steady deep breathing (see description next page) almost always helps these symptoms subside. I refuse to let them conquer me. Unlike the airline attendants, most of the nerves eventually go away! I convert the remaining nerves into excitement about playing the concert. I think to myself, “No more endless repetitions of these pieces; all I have to do is run everything once and that’s it! How easy!”

I like to remind myself of something my teacher, Pepe Romero, told me when I was fourteen: “No matter what, the sun always comes out the next day and life goes on.” After all, the troubles didn’t matter at all, and somebody most certainly walked out of the concert happier than before!

5. Then, I go out on stage and just go for it. I let my “inner player” play the concert for me; that player we all have inside us which usually emerges when we’re playing in front of the TV watching old Star Trek re-runs or the NCAA playoffs!

Also don’t forget that without being nervous we produce very little adrenaline. Playing a concert without being at least a little nervous makes for a lackluster performance.

### *A Simple Deep Breathing Routine*

Inhale deeply and observe how you feel as you hold your breath. Then, fully and slowly exhale while expelling your nerves out with the breath.

## Practice

*Always practice with a purpose.* Practicing without a purpose is like a broken pencil: pointless. Have a clear idea of what you need to practice. Organize the hierarchy of items you want to improve upon. Some are long-term (such as practicing the *Concierto de Aranjuez*) and within those long-term goals are smaller goals (such as improving your tone) that can be accomplished in one or two practice sessions.

*Remember that whenever you play a note on the guitar you have two choices: to improve or go downhill.* If you practice without getting anything done, you’ve either not concentrated hard enough or put too many things on the menu for the day. Next time, focus on smaller goals. Allowing yourself to make even a bad tone on the instrument without taking steps to correct it is not acceptable. Any chance you waste to play something well is a step downhill. There is always something on which you can improve, no matter how small, whenever you pick up the instrument. There is practice and there is playing (going for it). The common thread between the two is the simple discipline we cultivate of striving for that little glimmer of excellence.