

# STAGE FRIGHT?!

## “What if I...?”: The dissection and psychology of stage fright

*“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”*

Well, FDR may have been right, but, then again, he never sang barbershop with only three other people in front of an audience, did he? Stage fright has many layers, and all or a few can contribute to a less-than-stellar performance - or enhance it! Our plan is to go DEEP... down to the very core with a glimpse into the psychology of why we get stage fright and how much of it, interestingly, may be our own fault... and, therefore, *we DO have control over solutions*. We'll delve into concepts like trust, fear vs. anxiety, perception, hope, expectations, and how they affect our performances, both positively and negatively. We'll share experiences and ideas, and help you find solutions, surrounding the very real issue of stage fright, which we've all felt at one time or another. This class is not for the faint of heart. Bring comfortable shoes. Binkies not provided.

### **STAGE FRIGHT -**

the intense **feeling** of being subject to public scrutiny  
and the **belief** of failing to deliver.

Stage fright has **no correlation** with talent or ability.

<b>CAUSES</b>	<b>SOLUTIONS</b>
<p><b>1. Negative self-talk</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>Catastrophising</b> - creating catastrophic scenarios like: “I’m going to faint”, “I’ll fall off the stage” Awfulizing.</li><li>- <b>Self-handicap</b> - creating excuses which evolve into self-fulfilling prophecies that increase the need for additional excuses, like: “I’m going to get sick” SO “I can’t go to rehearsal”</li><li>- <b>Self-sabotage</b> - don’t attend rehearsals, damage the instrument, get drunk the night before</li></ul>	<p><b>1. Replace with positive self-talk</b></p> <p><b><u>STEPS FOR DEVELOPING POSITIVE SELF-TALK</u></b></p> <p><b>A. Choose a mantra</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Make it believable/possible/realistic</li><li>- Make a connection between the words &amp; the belief</li><li>- Must be specific</li><li>- Must use repetition</li><li>- Out loud</li><li>- Make it a habit</li></ul> <p><b>B. Practice multiple scenarios with mantra</b></p> <p><b>C. Create a positive image/visualization</b></p> <p>Image + the right words = powerful combo with a belief</p> <p><b>Ellen’s Mantra:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. I sing tenor as clear as a bell with proper breath support</li><li>2. Singing a high post within a powerful uptune tag OR a high post with a soft tag in a ballad</li><li>3. HCNW stage</li></ol>

## 2. Physiological

While forming a memory (rehearsal) neurons (brain cells) don't always fire the same way each time, and/or they fire off at different times throwing off the thinking by a microsecond.

## 2. Out of our control :(

- Practice **never** makes perfect; it can make it permanent
- How boring would it be if all neurons fired with perfection?!
- Stephen Curry - League MVP 2 years in a row, yet misses 3-pointers all the time.

## 3. Bad anxiety = body's reaction to a challenge (fight or flight)

A lot of blood & adrenaline rush to our core, restricting blood flow to extremities thereby, "cold feet", dry mouth, sweat, shakes, etc.

## 3. Stress prep for good anxiety

- Physiological responses to anxiety can help us perform
- Experience of anxiety is shaped by how we come to terms with the physical cues of anxiety

Anxiety has 3 variables:

1. **Trait anxiety** - anxiety levels depend on the person
2. **Task mastery** - practice
3. **Situation stress** - quartet vs chorus

The above vary independently. Whether or not anxiety is detrimental or beneficial depends on how the 3 interplay. Therefore...

- **Befriend** the adrenaline effects by knowing:
  - a. The audience never knows
  - b. The performance will trump the adrenaline effects (if you let it)
  - c. You're giving energy to the performance
  - d. Relabeling the physical experience of anxiety breaks the cycle of fearing fear itself

## 4. Medications

- **Anxiolytics** (anti-anxiety) - alcohol, cannabis
  - Diminishes performance
  - Addictive
  
- **Stimulants** (give energy) - cocaine, caffeine
  - Addictive
  - Long-term effects
  
- **Beta blockers** (controls symptoms) - nadolol, oxprenolol, propranolol
  - Side effects serious
  - Efficiency unclear

### MISCELLANEOUS SOLUTIONS

- **Exercise**
  - Endomorphins
  - Better than drugs
  
- **Nature**
  - Fresh air
  - Open sky
  
- **Sleep**
  
- **Breaks between rehearsals**
  
- **Deep proper breathing**
  
- **Systematic desensitization** - satiation to prove it's harmless

# Why are we doing this to ourselves?

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF STAGE FRIGHT

### STAGE FRIGHT

The intense **feeling** of being subject to public scrutiny and the **belief** of failing to deliver.  
Stage fright has **no correlation** with talent or ability (**a possible mantra?**).

### Examples of the best with the worst

- **Laurence Olivier** - during soliloquies, he'd have someone stand in the wings so that he wouldn't feel alone
- **John Lennon** - puker
- **Richard Burton** - shakes & sweat
- **Barbara Streisand** - forgot words during a live performance in Central Park, N.Y. that haunted her for 27 years, during which she gave no live concerts
- **Carly Simon** - stuck pins in her hands & had the band spank her to get her mind off the negative self-talk
- **Donny Osmond** - had a bucket handy before every show

### Four ways to experience stage fright:

1. People with extreme stage fright - intense fear & regrets
2. People with casual stage fright - anticipatory fear & shame
3. People with lesser feelings of stage fright than casual - cut short the arc of their career - are in demand for speaking engagements
4. People who crave the limelight - they still get stage fright

## Rational vs Irrational Fear

A **rational** fear is a fear of something that is:

- **Truly** dangerous.  
Can cause death, severe injury, dismemberment, illness, or ruin someones reputation.
- Something dangerous with a **high probability** of occurring.
- A fear of a dangerous situation which is seen **clearly** and **undistortedly**.
- A fear resulting from **well-examined** conclusions and evidences and based on the law of probability.

An **irrational** fear is the fear of something that is:

- **Harmless**. What is feared can not cause death, injury, illness, dismemberment, or ruin someones reputation.
- Something potentially dangerous, but whose probability of occurring is **extremely low** or not possible.
- A fear where the danger is **misjudged** or **magnified**.
- The fear resulting from a **misperception** of the situation, a **faulty** jump to conclusion about the possible danger or a **failure** to examine the evidence.

## Irrational fears/anxieties within ourselves

### AND (therefore) within our control

- Showing vulnerability
- Less than perfect
- Not accepting yourself & your mistakes as human
- Have to prove yourself to others

## COGNITIVE THERAPY -

Seeks to rationalize bad thoughts to good thoughts in order to alleviate a conditioned fear

Where does our attention go and do we need to divert it elsewhere?

1. From **Self** to...
2. **Audience**
3. **Music**

### **Questions to ask to divert irrational fear/anxiety to a rational rationale**

- Do you **really** think the audience will be disappointed in your performance?
- Do you **really** think the audience will be disappointed in **you**, personally, **if** you make a mistake?
- Do you **really** think that the audience will think any less of you, **if** you make a mistake?
- Do you **really** think the audience's **intent** is to scrutinize and criticize and find fault with your performance?
- Do you **really** think the audience's **intent** is to scrutinize and criticize and find fault with **you**, **personally**?
- **If** you find out somebody is placing negative judgment on you, **are you responsible** for their reaction to your performance and/or you?

### **10 tips to reduce stage fright:**

1. Shift the focus from yourself & your fear to your true purpose - contributing something of value to your audience
2. Stop scaring yourself with thoughts about what might go wrong
3. Refuse to think thoughts that create self-doubt & low confidence
4. Practice ways to calm & relax your mind & body
5. Practice healthy lifestyle habits
6. Visualize your success
7. Prepare & practice
8. Make connections with your audience - make eye contact
9. Assume a confident, self-assured posture
10. Give up trying to be perfect & embrace mistakes as a human condition