

**Perspectives on music performance anxiety at the university level: A
comprehensive guide for educating musicians on effective coping
strategies**

by

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Abstract

This project investigates the cognitive, physiological, and behavioral manifestations of music performance anxiety (MPA) with the goal to create an educational guide of effective coping strategies for musicians. Musicians often face the prevalent obstacle of music performance anxiety (MPA), which can impact their overall well-being and performance quality. I actively experience MPA and understand the various causes and symptoms that come with this challenge.

This paper highlights various coping strategies that have been effective for musicians with MPA. I examine different coping mechanisms like mindfulness, and cognitive-behavioral strategies while also practicing performance exposure therapy and deep breathing exercises. Through reviewing the literature, I identified a potential gap within MPA research; musicians often do not learn about MPA through school or private instruction. Without proper training on MPA, teachers are not prepared to handle those symptoms and students miss out on the support and guidance they seek. Throughout this project, I have learned four overarching coping mechanisms that are accompanied by smaller, practical techniques that support their effectiveness: preparation, student/teacher relationships, performance practice, and breathing exercises.

Keywords: music performance anxiety, multidimensional anxiety theory, tension, self-efficacy, cognitive symptoms, somatic symptoms, exposure therapy.

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Introduction

I was pacing out in the hallway as other students were on stage performing for the divisional; talking with my peers, and attempting to calm the nerves, I was trying to make light of the performance I had coming up only minutes away. I'm still nervous, palms sweaty, and a little jittery, although, this is the least nervous I had ever been before a performance. Soon, I hear the audience burst into applause and that's my cue—I grabbed my things, took one last breath and made my way on stage to perform the Copland Concerto from memory. The pianist sits down while I am adjusting my reed, we play a tuning note, and it's off to the races. I stood there nervous but confident, and I thought to myself "I've played this a hundred times before, just play the music." With my eyes trained on my spot in Kirmser hall I played the very first note, so far so good, I thought, my tone is immaculate, the reed's responding well, and there's no sign of vibrato in my sustained notes. That is, until I had my first memory slip, my heart started racing, and I was covering it well, the audience could not even tell I was completely lost and scrambling to catch a note. I thought, "This is it; I have to stop and start over, I don't know where to go." Fortunately, I was quick on my feet, jumped to a spot that I knew well, the pianist caught me as if nothing went wrong. The rest of the movement was okay, I played a couple wrong notes and ultimately made it to the end of the piece. Once I finished the piece, I was relieved but incredibly disappointed in myself. What I thought was going to be a great performance turned out to be the scariest experience of my performance career.

Music Performance anxiety and stage fright affect many individuals in the performing arts community. Although people often use the terms interchangeably, they describe distinct phenomena. Stage fright refers to a general feeling of apprehension that can affect individuals across various disciplines (McGrath et al., 2016) In contrast, McGarth et al. (2016) define MPA as an "experience of persisting, distressful, apprehension about, and/or actual impairment of,

performance skills in a public context, to a degree unwarranted given the individuals aptitude, training, and level of preparation” (p. 1). Music performance anxiety manifests through a range of symptoms, including sweaty palms, elevated blood pressure, trembling, accelerated breathing, lack of concentration, and self-doubt. Unlike stage fright, MPA evokes physical, mental, or behavioral responses as a result of exposure to unfamiliar conditions.

The cognitive and somatic responses associated with MPA stem from a broader framework known as the “multidimensional anxiety theory.” Miller and Chesky (2004) define this theory as the physical and mental responses musicians exhibit when experiencing MPA, with symptoms ranging from mild to severe. Tension is a typical response to MPA often eliciting physiological symptoms that can have a negative or positive influence on the performance. MacAfee and Comeau (2023) report teachers “observing MPA symptoms such as worry, memory difficulties, dry mouth, shaking hands, increased bodily tension, upset stomach, and elevated heart rate (p. 36)

The primary purpose of this project was to examine MPA on a deeper level. Through this process I identified potential gaps that exist in current MPA research and synthesized multiple books and articles into one practical resource for teachers and students. This resource outlines four MPA coping strategies that are curated from my review of literature, and personal experience. By examining preparation, student/teacher relationships, performance practice and breathing exercises, this project offers an in-depth look at strategies that help students manage their MPA. Designed to be both clear and accessible, it also provides music educators with a practical framework they can effectively implement into their existing teaching techniques.

Students can apply each of these coping strategies into their own individual practice and are encouraged to confide in their private teacher for assistance. Musicians often use these

approaches both in preparation for the performance and in real-time when symptoms arise. Some strategies can be integrated into the students' individual practice while others require long-term planning and may benefit from the guidance of a private instructor. In this context, the teacher plays a critical role, as they work closely with their students on a daily basis and are often first to recognize early signs of MPA.

Literature Review

MPA Awareness

There are varying definitions researchers consider to be performance anxiety, Kenny (2011) defines MPA as the experience of marked and persistent anxious apprehension related to musical performance that has arisen from underlying biological and/or psychological vulnerabilities” (Kenny, 2011 as cited in MacAfee & Comeau, 2023 p. 34). McGrath et al. (2016) defines MPA as “experience of persisting, distressful, apprehension about, and/or actual impairment of, performance skills in a public context, to a degree unwarranted given the individuals aptitude, training, and level of preparation” (p. 1). Given the difference in definition, statistics on the prevalence rate of MPA may vary depending on the case study.

Fernholz et al. (2019) states that music performance anxiety (MPA) is one of the most frequently reported disorders among musicians. “The prevalence rate is estimated between 15-25%” (Fernholz et al., 2019 p. 3). A study conducted at the University of North Texas found that 83% of students reported experiencing performance anxiety when performing (Miller & Chesky, 2004). Krawehl and Altenmüller (2000) investigated MPA prevalence through self-report and 38% reported symptoms at all performances, while 60% reported symptoms from MPA only sometimes (Kraweh & Altenmüller, 2000 as cited in Fernholz et al., 2019). Although prevalence rates may vary, research suggests that the occurrence rate falls between 15%-60%. In addition, the impact of music performance anxiety reaches beyond the stage, frequently affecting performers mental health.

Student Mental Health

Given the close relationship of stress and anxiety, mental health concerns often overlap significantly with MPA symptoms (Osborne et al., 2005). Osborne et al. (2005) found that “a

career as a professional performer involves continued evaluation by experts, peers, and audiences” (p. 324). Musicians who endure that much scrutiny become more susceptible to anxiety and mental health issues. Osborne et al. (2005) notes as students mature, they will experience an increase in retrospection and self-evaluation in areas of great interest, like music, which will likely enhance anxiety and self-criticism (Osborne et al., 2005).

Multidimensional Anxiety Theory

Miller and Chesky (2004) define the multidimensional anxiety theory as “two different components that can be distinguished in the anxiety response: (1) a cognitive component characterized as negative expectations, lack of concentration, and images of failure; and (2) a somatic component referring to the perception of physiologic symptoms such as sweaty hands or tension” (p. 12). The somatic and cognitive responses that musicians exhibit when experiencing MPA manifest in symptoms that range from mild to severe. Steptoe (1982) reports that “trembling, hyperventilation, nausea, and diarrhea are common even in mild cases” (p. 537). Beyond these physical symptoms, MPA coincides with other focal anxieties, like a fear of spiders or heights, with tension serving as the underlying connection between these various types of anxiety (Steptoe, 1982).

Tension

Researchers identify tension as a somatic response that arises from the presence of performance anxiety; the body when experiencing tension reacts with “sweat gland activity, salivation, loss of muscle control and uneven breathing patterns” (Steptoe, 1982 p. 537). While tension could have possible negative impacts on performance quality, Sieger (2017) explains that “if a musician is confident in his or her ability, some degree of anxiety ‘may be healthy and even enhance performance’” (p. 36-37). Sieger also asserts, however, that tension reaches a threshold

where it shifts from enhancing a performance to hindering it. An individual's comfort level, threshold, and environmental factors determine where tension transitions from beneficial to detrimental. (Seiger, 2017; Simoens et al., 2015; Steptoe, 2001).

Coping Strategies

Understanding the physical and cognitive responses to MPA enables musicians to identify effective coping strategies for mitigating MPA. Musicians can apply these strategies during preparation and in the moment prior to the performance to reduce symptoms. Some of these strategies integrate into the student's individual practice while others require long-term planning and may need help from their private instructor.

Preparation

One coping strategy is self-efficacy, "the belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals" (Moody, 2014 p. 14). Moody (2014) claims that "the personal belief in one's ability to cope with anxiety-arousing events, people, or objects affects anxiety reactions and behaviors" (p. 15). Self-efficacy helps students manage their cognitive responses to MPA, although it may require long-term, consistent practice to achieve the desired outcome. Students can practice self-efficacy by setting attainable weekly or monthly check points for their progress that lead to the completion of long-term goals. This strategy aims to lessen the severity of the cognitive response to MPA; therefore, making it a longer training process. Researchers have found that the stronger the student's self-efficacy beliefs are, the more their anxiety dissipates (Bandura, 1982; Moody, 2014;).

Performance Practice

In addition, students can apply other effective coping strategies to gain control of their somatic MPA symptoms. Bellinger et al. (2023) conducted a study with students who used

“Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy.” In this study, they evaluated MPA and the use of virtual reality exposure therapy they utilized seven different virtual reality scenarios, “*A. Auditions in front of a professional jury in a big concert hall, B. Audition behind a folding screen in a big concert hall, C. Audition in front of a professional jury in a smaller concert room, D. Concert in front of an elderly audience in a smaller concert room, E/F. Audition in front of a class of music students, G/H. Audition in front of the conductors and ensemble members I. Live-recording for a television broadcast in a recording studio*” (Bellinger et al., 2023 p. 6). These seven scenarios present a range of anxiety-inducing situations designed to reflect the diverse experiences of musicians, as they may invoke different levels of MPA responses. (Bellinger et al., 2023) This coping mechanism provides students with an outlet to gain performance practice and fosters desensitization of real performance settings. Another approach to performance simulation, exposure therapy, utilizes three separate techniques: imaginal, interoceptive, and in vivo methods to desensitize the high-stress performance situation (Garner, 2014). The “imaginal” technique focuses on the sensory perception of the performance, the “interoceptive” method requires students to artificially simulate their symptoms. Before applying this strategy, students need to identify their symptoms to effectively simulate their reactions to experience the full impact of this technique. The “in vivo” technique requires students to perform in low-intensity situations and gradually move on to high-intensity scenarios to desensitize their perception of performing (Garner, 2014).

Building on the concept of MPA coping strategies, MacAfee and Comeau (2023) conducted a quantitative content analysis of both scientific and non-scientific literature to identify the five most common strategies music teachers use to support young musicians with MPA. They identified these coping mechanisms as “*(a) preparation; (b) open communication;*

(c) realistic expectations; (d) exposure to performance; and (e) deep breathing” (p. 37). These strategies incorporate a variety of targeted techniques that work toward the overarching goal of minimizing MPA symptoms. While all of these strategies are accessible for both students and teachers, open communication necessitates active communication between them, requiring teachers to actively foster a strong relationship with their students.

Student/Teacher Relationships

MacAfee and Comeau (2023) examined how undergraduate music programs address MPA focusing on music professors’ perceptions of the phenomenon and its influence on their teaching. Their findings highlighted that “teachers were the primary resource for addressing student MPA” (p. 35). While many might consider music professors the most logical source for help, MacAfee and Comeau (2023) reported that “most teachers felt unprepared to help students manage MPA as they lacked formal training and had not been taught MPA coping skills by previous teachers” (p. 35). With many variables to take into consideration, gender, age, and future aspirations, it can be difficult for teachers to gauge what coping strategies are best for their students. “Johnson (2004) admits that while she recognizes that boys and girls may need different MPA strategies, she does not know how to provide that for her students” (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023 p. 36).

Music performance anxiety is a challenge within the performing arts community that can be detrimental to the careers of musicians. Although this trend may be widely recognized, many music educators find themselves unprepared to address these issues with their students due to a lack of training in the field. Music educators should understand MPA and receive the proper training to formulate appropriate coping strategies tailored to each student’s symptoms and responses. This report aims to raise awareness and offer practical resources for both students and

teachers to effectively reduce MPA responses. I have carefully curated these resources from my search for effective coping strategies and personal experience with MPA.

Research Synthesis

I have consistently experienced MPA in various situations, however; a particularly significant moment that served as a wake-up call occurred just over a year ago. This experience inspired me to dig deep and find the most effective coping strategies in order to reduce my MPA symptoms. Having had this revelation in the first year of my master's, I concluded that other students may be facing the same dilemma without access to adequate resources. The following four coping strategies stemmed from research on MPA and my personal experiences.

Student/Teacher Relationship

Before attempting to find coping strategies to help mitigate my MPA symptoms, I had to identify the problems that were arising from MPA. I noticed shallow breath support, an accelerated heart rate, and inconsistency in my technique. Once I identified these problems, I approached my professor for guidance in determining which coping strategies would be the most effective. Taking that first step—confiding in my professor—was essential to my success in finding and integrating coping strategies to overcome my symptoms. Davidson et. al (1998) notes “if a child does not establish a good personal relationship with their teacher, it may be particularly detrimental to long-term commitment” (p. 8). As an adult student, I still find it crucial to build a strong relationship with my professor, who consistently fosters my musical growth and supports my overall success. When I began at Kansas State University in the fall of 2023, my professor created a warm and welcoming foundation for our future relationship. As she built that rapport, I became comfortable enough during my lessons to express my concerns and share how MPA was affecting me.

The first strategy in my guide for managing MPA emphasizes the importance of students having a healthy relationship with their teacher. To receive the necessary support, they need

when experiencing MPA, students must vocalize their symptoms to their music teacher and/or private instructor. To facilitate this, teachers need to establish a relationship to facilitate trust between them and their students. As discussed in my literature review, teachers can foster this connection by validating fears, normalizing MPA, and sharing personal experiences with the students (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023). Additionally, teachers can strengthen their relationship with students by sharing personal interests, such as their favorite color, favorite genre of music, or if they have any pets. Davidson et al. (1998) found “in the early stages of learning the personal characteristics of teachers are important to promote musical development” (p. 17). King (2024) advises music educators establish personal relationships with their students, because this also impacts musical expertise and commitment to music education (King, 2024). Once trust between the teacher and student is solidified, opportunities for exploring solutions for MPA can be more openly discussed and applied to student performance.

Preparation

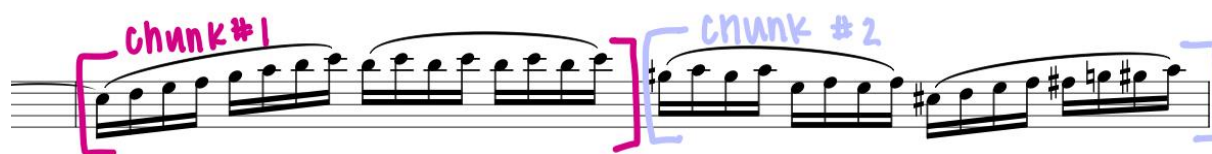
That supportive foundation with my professor, allowed us to brainstorm different techniques and coping mechanisms to help me prepare for my next performance. One of the first effective ways we found to confront performance anxiety was preparing thoroughly. MacAfee and Comeau (2023) note “one way to cope with anxiety is being well prepared for each aspect of the music: structure, basic technique, interpretation, memory and performance” (p. 39). Musicians can prepare in three keyways to reduce their MPA symptoms. These include long-term and short-term goals and using targeted practice techniques that promote effective and efficient retention. “Practice that supports sensory perception, mindful repetition, and continuous investigation into the compositional and performance facets of the piece is essential to the successful acquisition and retrieval of a music work” (Garner, 2014 p. 55).

Practicing involves more than just notes and rhythms, the musician needs to embody the piece of music and have a good sense of the compositional construct. (Garner, 2014) also explains how the amygdala plays key role in effective practice by integrating re-formulated updated information that concerns the piece. Garner (2014) notes “elaborative rehearsal” or practice interweaves new layers of knowledge by increasing the production of myelin, with each rep of the work. This creates a type of “tapestry” in the memory that becomes stronger allowing the performer to endure the pressure of the performance and the anxiety that accompanies it. Below are several targeted practice techniques commonly found in performance practice.

Isolate

Garner (2014) provides two effective practice techniques that should reinforce the memory and help build endurance, (a) isolate; and (b) audiate (Garner, 2014). Musicians can use the isolate technique to break down troublesome passages into smaller chunks. Isolation helps the brain to process material and form reliable muscle memory to form. Musicians can isolate chunks as large as one measure or as small as three to four note passages.

Figure 1. Isolating larger sections



This excerpt from *Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A mm. 65-66* (figure 1), demonstrates breaking down a larger technical passage into two separate smaller sections. This allows the musician to practice each one individually before adding them together and transitioning between both sections.

Figure 2. Isolating smaller sections



Figure 2 is the same technical passage as before but focuses on measure sixty-five, isolating each beat. This facilitates a more meticulous form of practicing and motor learning. Both approaches are effective, although successful implementation depends on the musician's determination about which technique will be the most beneficial.

Audiate

The second technique, audiation, involves having students sing the pitches of different passages that may have an unusual harmonic function. This method proves especially beneficial for brass, string, and vocal musicians, who must audiate the pitches in their head before they play. Most other instrumentalists, like woodwind players have buttons and/or keys to push down that provide the correct pitch. However, woodwind players may not need to audiate to find pitches, singing through the music still strengthens their sense of pitch and phrasing. Audiation helps students hear the pitches in their mind and builds confidence in their understanding of both the technical and harmonic aspects of the piece (Garner, 2014). Students can also practice audiation through auditory perception and central auditory processing (Garner, 2014). Auditory perception is the “organization and interpretation of sensory information,” for musicians this can be deciphered as the musical interpretation and organization of the melody and harmony (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Central auditory processing is the “perceptual processing of auditory information,” this helps musicians interpret the sounds they hear like pitch, timbre and rhythm (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.).

Long-Term vs. Short-Term Goals

The second strategy in the preparation phase involves setting long-and short-term goals, which play a large part in solo performance preparation. Short-term goals can be checkpoints within the music or individual practice goals. For example, when learning a new piece of music, students can create small daily or weekly goals as it pertains to their objectives. Whether that looks like your student setting a goal to learn the first fifty measures of their solo within a week or setting a much smaller goal for a forty-minute practice session to play a specified section ten times without making a mistake. These structured goals create a clear and efficient practice plan, helping students progress more productively. This approach boosts retention rates and builds healthy muscle memory.

Long-term goals serve a similar purpose but span a longer period of time and often involve more substantial objectives. For instance, a student preparing to memorize a solo can establish memorization checkpoints tied to specific dates. A private music instructor can assist to keep the students accountable throughout this process. By aligning long-term goals with a performance date, students can reduce last-minute stress and panic practice. Over the course of three months, I started to see improvements in my consistency as I implemented these weekly and monthly goals for memorization.

Performance Practice

The third strategy that musicians must focus on when preparing for a performance, is performance practice. This section utilizes the technique of “exposure therapy,” wherein repeated, random practice of performance situations gradually desensitizes the student to the stress associated with performing on stage (Garner, 2014). Exposure therapy breaks down into three sections: (a) imaginal; (b) interoceptive; and (c) in vivo (p. 57). Consistently working

through each section will reinforce the rehearsal of performance anxiety coping mechanisms. In my lessons, we incorporated low-intensity performance exercises with randomly selected faculty or students watching. On some occasions, I did not know I would be performing for faculty or students until I arrived at the lesson. This process helped me identify sections that were not fully committed to memory and areas where my breath support was insufficient.

Imaginal

Imaginal therapy practice takes place in the student's mind and focuses on the sensory perceptions of the performance (Garner, 2014). Musicians imagine the smell of the hall, the feel of the keys, the sensation or timbre of their instrument. If the student knows where they are performing, teachers can encourage them to search for pictures of the hall or room. The student can observe the size of the space, how close the audience is, and how much room on stage they have to stand or sit. By compiling all this information, the student can perform a mental run through of their music while considering the visual of the hall, including all of the sensory perceptions of smell, feel and sound.

Interoceptive

The second part of exposure therapy is interoceptive, where students artificially replicate their symptoms to simulate their MPA (Garner, 2014). To effectively practice this technique, students must first identify their symptoms to recreate them accurately. For example, if a student's symptoms include accelerated heart rate, they can run two to three short-distance sprints to get their heart rate up. Running also simulates shortness of breath or shallow breathing and sucking through a narrow straw can produce a feeling of dizziness or light-headedness. This technique requires some creativity to be most effective. When used correctly, it gives the student a chance to perform under pressure. By conjuring their symptoms and performing under the

added pressure, the student becomes comfortable performing under stressors. The more they perform in these situations the more familiar they become with their bodily response and the more they learn to control the symptoms they feel in the moment.

In Vivo

In vivo is the last aspect of exposure therapy, simulating the actual performance itself (Garner, 2014). This part of the technique starts with low intensity experiences and gradually progresses to higher intensity performance situations. One practical approach involves having the student perform in front of one or two peers who they have positive relationships with. This provides the student with a supportive and encouraging environment, which can be important to students with MPA. Later, the student may play for a larger group of students in a larger performance space, slowly adding pressure but at the same time the student is adapting to the circumstances. The teacher may also add more impromptu performances, providing the student with the element of surprise and activating their MPA symptoms. By doing this, the student must figure out how to control their symptoms in the moment, but the more impromptu performances they do, the quicker the student will master controlling their MPA.

Breathing Exercises

The last strategy for coping with MPA, deep breathing, is used to regulate the autonomic nervous system (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023). During a performance, a wind player with inadequate breath support can significantly harm the quality of the performance. Bodily tension triggers reactions from the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system, which contribute to this issue (Kenny, 2011). There are several breathing techniques that work well with regulating the heart rate and the sympathetic/parasympathetic nervous systems including “centered

breathing, box breathing, and breath awareness” (p. 41). I discovered that these breathing exercises helped me reduce my elevated heart rate, which had been affecting my breath support.

Centered Breathing

Centered breathing involves focusing on rhythmic breathing while thinking positively. The idea behind this technique is to sync the heart, brain, and nervous system to reduce stress (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023). How students could practice this technique is matching their breath to their heartbeat while reinforcing self-encouragement and thinking positively. Successfully performing on stage is as much a mental game as it is physical. Going on stage with negative thoughts and energy will not help the student who is already experiencing MPA symptoms. This breathing exercise can help encourage students to think more positively and help reduce the stress that comes with those symptoms.

Box Breathing

The second breathing technique that I personally use when experiencing MPA symptoms is box breathing. Dr. Amy Guffey, clarinet professor at Kansas State University, taught me this technique during my time at Kansas State University. This exercise also helps reduce a musician’s heart rate and centers them mentally and physically. The first step is to breathe in through the nose for a set number of seconds, this can range between four to eight; I personally prefer six seconds. After breathing in for the chosen number of seconds, the student holds their breath for the same amount of time. Next, the student exhales through the mouth for the same duration. After expelling all the air, the student will hold the remaining breath for the same number of seconds. At the end of that first “box” the student repeats the process on a continuous loop until they feel their heart rate and breathing has settled into a consistent comfortable rhythm. This exercise not only helps control the heart rate but will inherently teach them to

regulate the autonomic nervous system and promote relaxation (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023).

Students are encouraged to perform this exercise five to thirty minutes prior to the performance, when their MPA symptoms tend to peak. In addition to box breathing, research also suggests the following breathing exercise also helps alleviate MPA symptoms.

Breath Awareness

The last breathing technique is breath awareness (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023). Students will need time to effectively master this exercise as they become more acclimated to their breathing tendencies. To practice breath awareness students will observe their breathing pattern while experiencing MPA symptoms. They should not attempt to change the way they breathe; instead, they will simply listen and feel for how often they breathe and how deep or shallow their breaths are. By focusing on the breath, students can foster a meditative state that will reduce stress and help concentration. As they continue to practice this technique, they will become more comfortable observing their breathing and focusing on the quality of their breath. It can take time to master this technique, especially young students who may find the symptoms of MPA overwhelming.

Results

Drawing on the four coping strategies of preparation, student/teacher relationships, performance practice and breathing exercises, I created an infographic handout summarizing the key insights of this project.

MPA Infographic Handout

Figure 3. MPA infographic handout: front

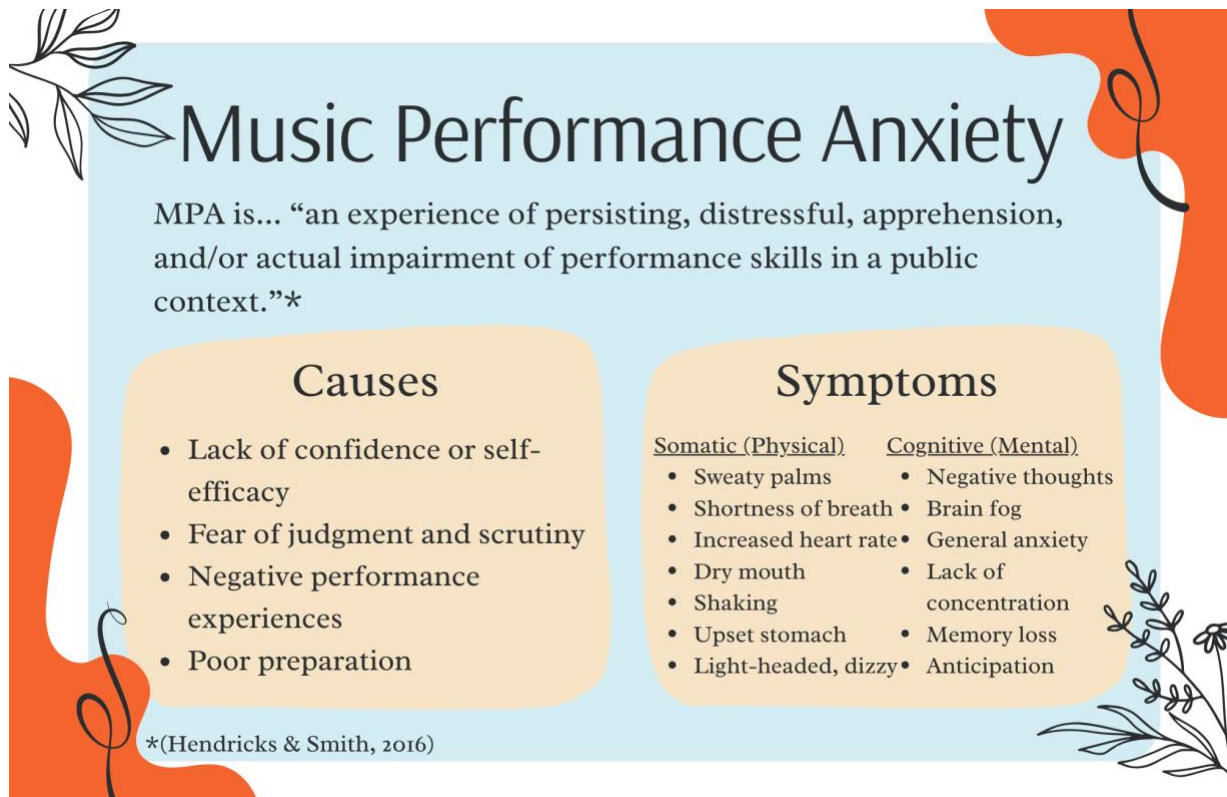


Figure 3 represents the front side of the handout, this will provide students and teachers with a brief overview of MPA including a list of causes, and examples of somatic and cognitive symptoms. These lists can provide insight for both students and teachers on what to look for in themselves and in their students. The examples of symptoms may also act as validation for

students who may be experiencing shortness of breath, or dry mouth while performing but are not sure where these symptoms are coming from and why.

Figure 4. MPA infographic handout: back

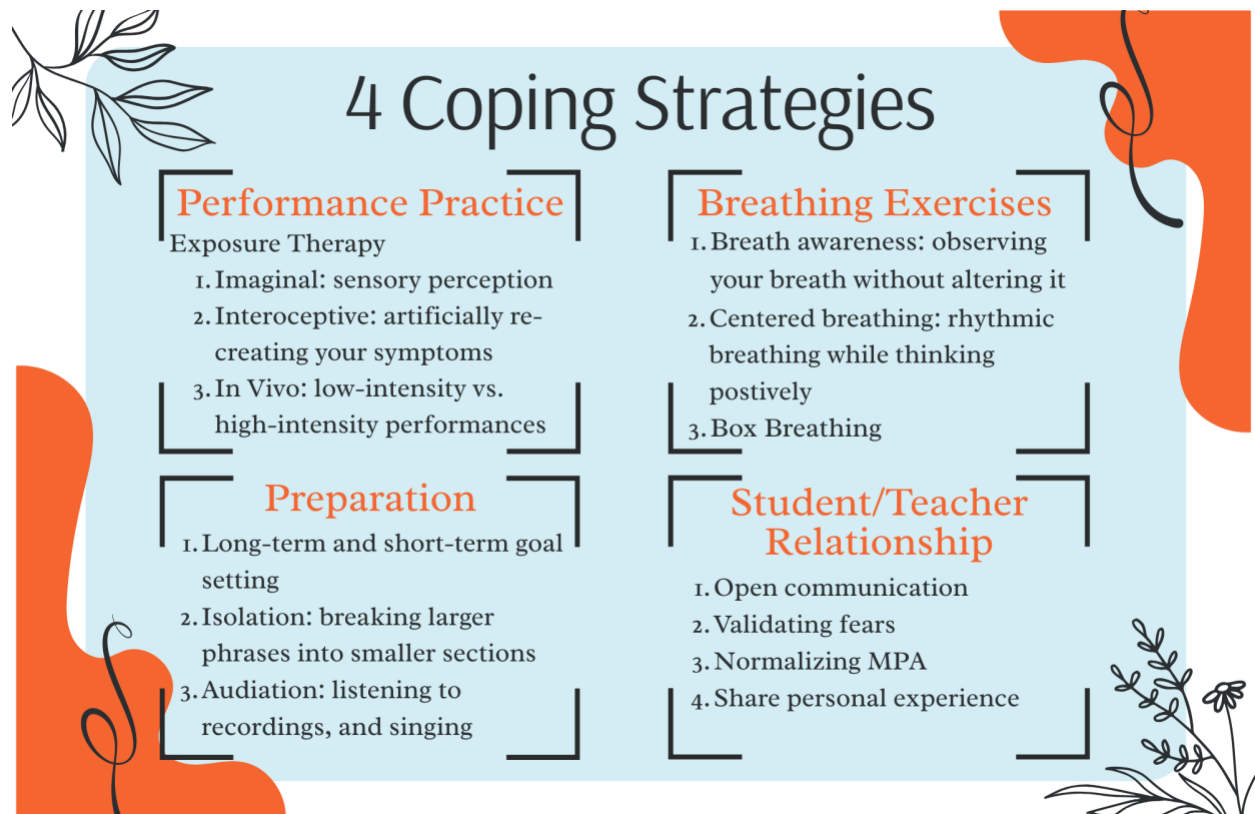


Figure 4 illustrates the back side of my handout outlining the four coping strategies I referenced in my report, including the techniques associated with each overarching idea. When creating this handout I had to consider the varying levels of student/teacher relationships. Some teachers may be highly involved in their students battle with MPA, while others may not have a clue that their students are experiencing symptoms. Therefore, my goal is to disseminate this handout to students and future music educators, as these strategies can apply and benefit both demographics.

Student Purpose

Considering the relationships students may or may not have with their teacher, I needed to organize this handout to be the most beneficial for those students who don't have an open communicative relationship. Therefore, I listed the two most independent strategies on top, performance practice and breathing exercises, these two strategies should be straightforward enough for students to independently apply to their personal practice if needed. Without the support from their teacher students may be able replicate their own symptoms to simulate their MPA or learn how to calm their nervous system utilizing different breathing exercises.

Underneath, I lay out the last two strategies, preparation and the student/teacher relationships which may require help from a private instructor. When utilizing the preparation techniques, students may benefit from the accountability teachers provide when making long-term and short-term goals. When I was working on memorizing music for the concerto competition, I used various long-term and short-term goals, and my professor made sure I was meeting those goals on time. That said, the student/teacher relationship strategy is straightforward with the idea that this includes both student and teacher to have open communication on MPA. This strategy personally played a large role in my process of finding coping strategies and is widely supported in the literature review. Although important, this strategy may not be necessary for all students to be successful in finding effective coping strategies for their MPA. However, a way to be proactive and help future students avoid the possibility of their private instructor being unprepared, this handout is also for current and future music educators.

Current and Future Educator Purpose

Although the organization of this handout is geared towards the students benefit, this can be utilized by teachers as well. This card will inform teachers of the common symptoms and causes of MPA while providing them with a list of different coping strategies they should reference when providing support for their students. Additionally, this card will provide teachers with a baseline of symptoms they can expect to observe in their students who experience MPA. This handout will also reach future music educators; this will create a foundation of what MPA is and what strategies to start with when entering the classroom. Providing future music students with this knowledge prior to entering the classroom can be beneficial for both them and their future students. Future music educators can prepare to address MPA and create open communicative relationships with their students from the start. Therefore, students may feel more comfortable approaching their teachers about their experiences with MPA and can ask for help if needed. In order to be efficient and effective with who receives this card and when, I have a plan in place to streamline the process of distribution.

Distribution of the Handout

The initial step in the process of disseminating the cards to their intended audience is distributing them in university classrooms. This will reach both the student and future music educator demographic. I will create a lesson plan that I will teach over one class period that will provide students with a well-rounded education on MPA. The content included will be definitions, the multidimensional anxiety theory, tension, symptoms and coping strategies. This information should be enough to lay the groundwork for a surface level understanding of the concept and allows students to conduct further research. At the end of the lesson students will receive the five by seven infographic handout with all of the information I provided in both

figure 3 and 4. The handout is a summation of what my lesson plan will be, that way they will have something easily accessible to reference if needed.

The second step would be to reach out to public schools and present my lesson to high school music students. My goal for the younger audience would be to focus more on the symptoms and coping strategies of MPA. This direction may be more beneficial to them as they are maturing, and self-criticism is at its peak during those years of development (Osborne et al., 2005). I will distribute my handout to the students with the intention of validating their symptoms while providing them with effective coping strategies for them to experiment with. The overall goal of distributing my infographic handouts is to inform students and teachers about MPA, validate students' experiences, and normalize this experience. MPA is one of the most frequently reported disorders among musicians, and it should not be overlooked or feared. (Fernholz et al., 2019) The lesson and handout will hopefully encourage students to embrace MPA and be inspired to find coping strategies that help them control their symptoms.

Conclusion

Recognizing the challenges of MPA symptoms, this project identifies potential gaps in existing MPA research and synthesizes insights from multiple books and articles into one practical resource for teachers and students. This report explores strategies such as *(a) preparation; (b) student/teacher relationships; (c) performance practice; and (d) breathing exercises* while presenting these ideas in a clear and accessible way and gives music educators a practical framework they can effectively implement into their existing teaching techniques.

Drawing from this foundation, I explored additional coping strategies through both research and my own experience with MPA. Musicians can reduce their MPA by understanding its triggers and applying targeted coping strategies. MacAfee and Comeau (2023) outline five common coping strategies teachers use to help students manage MPA: preparation, open communication, realistic expectations, exposure to performance, and deep breathing. Additionally, fostering a strong student-teacher relationship plays a crucial role in effectively addressing MPA.

While creating a strong student-teacher relationship is essential in addressing MPA, many music educators lack formal training in this area. As a result, they often feel unprepared to address MPA with their students and typically base their teaching on their own personal experiences. MacAfee and Comeau (2023) explain that teachers lack formal training and are unprepared to teach their students about MPA. While teachers recognize students may need different coping strategies, they do not know how to provide that resource (MacAfee & Comeau, 2023).

This report presents comprehensible and accessible coping strategies that students consult when experiencing symptoms of MPA, particularly in cases where they lack support or guidance from their teacher. Additionally, it equips music educators with a practical list of coping mechanisms to use when they are unprepared to approach MPA with their students. I encourage educators to engage in ongoing research about MPA to better support their students' development. Given the individualized nature of

MPA, continued research remains essential, as new symptoms and coping strategies will continue to emerge.

In addition to the current research, questions remain regarding the extent to which university programs educate future teachers about MPA. Many music educators enter the teaching profession without formal MPA training, raising concerns about whether higher education institutions are integrating MPA-related curriculum into their programs. The research synthesis highlights a significant gap in MPA education at the university level, which leaves many future music teachers ill-equipped to address this issue in their classrooms. Institutions must take intentional steps to incorporate MPA education within their music curriculum. Only through such efforts can students and music educators fully experience the long-term benefits of this training.

Given my experience with MPA at a young age, there may be other young musicians facing the same obstacles with little to no support from their teachers. My exploration in various coping mechanisms for managing my own MPA has inspired me to disseminate these strategies to students and educators in an accessible and applicable format. If I had the resources that I have now, I could have trained my mind and body to overcome my symptoms. I want to give students the opportunity that I did not have at their age: confidence, reassurance and access to resources that can help them control their MPA.

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