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Music Performance Anxiety: A Comparative Analysis of Treatment Options for the Vocalist

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Music Performance Anxiety: A Comparative Analysis of Treatment Options for the Vocalist

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Annotated Bibliography

Abstract

Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) is a multifaceted social anxiety disorder that affects a significantly large population of practicing and professional musicians. If untreated, it can have detrimental effects on the performer and their career. MPA is multifaceted in that it encompasses cognitive, physiological, and behavioral symptoms. Because of its multifaceted nature, there is not one specific intervention or treatment option for MPA, but multiple interventions that have been studied and tested as potential treatment options. While the body of research on MPA has expanded since the 1970s, there is a disparity of research in the literature that focuses solely on vocalists. Unlike other musicians, a vocalist's instrument is within the body, which is also the source of MPA symptoms. Through a comparative analysis of MPA intervention literature as well as vocal pedagogy and performance practice literature, this paper seeks to investigate which MPA intervention strategies are likely to be most effective for vocalists.

Dictionary / Encyclopedia Articles

1. Hargreaves, David, Anthony Kemp, and Adrian North. "Psychology of Music, VII: Social Psychology." In *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 2nd ed., Edited by Stanley Sadie. Vol. 20, *Pohlman to Recital*, 558-61. London: Macmillan, 2001.

The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians is a prominent reference encyclopedia for the scholarly study of music, with each entry written by scholars in the field. In the essay for the social psychology of music, Hargreaves, Kemp, and North discuss the impact that social and cultural contexts have on musical behavior at the level of the individual, social groups, and broader cultural groups. The authors draw upon Farnsworth's early landmark text, *The Social Psychology of Music*, as well as multiple findings from Anthony E. Kemp and Donald L. Hamann, both scholars in the field with works published in *Psychology of Music*. While the evidence is outdated for the pace of research in the field of the social psychology of music and Music Performance Anxiety (MPA), it is a foundational text to draw upon when considering the social nature of musical behavior and how that relates to the experience of social anxiety disorders, namely MPA.

While MPA is not specifically analyzed in this source, as the authors assert this is out of the scope of the article, it is important to note that they mention the growing body of literature surrounding MPA. This raises the question: if the research literature on MPA was established and known by scholars of the social psychology of music during this time, why was there not an entry submitted in *The New Grove* for it? Though MPA is not analyzed, the effect of personality differences on musical behavior for the individual is. Hargreaves, Kemp, and North assert that musicians, on a general level, are dependent on certain characteristics, including introversion, independence, sensitivity, and anxiety. Their view of anxiety as not an exclusively negative characteristic for the performing artist is important to keep in mind when considering the treatment of MPA, as removal of any anxiety altogether may not be the solution. Another significant finding they note is the differences in personalities of different types of musicians, namely vocalists as compared to instrumentalists, which "display a consistent profile of

extraversion, independence and sensitivity that may reflect the task of singing in which the singer's personality is itself projected rather than the character of an external instrument.”

Dissertations and Theses

2. Binkley, Brandy L. “Vocal Tension: An Exploratory Study in Teaching Techniques of Selected Sources and Experts.” DMA diss., University of Maryland, 2012. Proquest Dissertations & Theses Global.

This dissertation seeks to answer the question: What techniques do vocal pedagogues use to address unwanted vocal tension and is there a common approach to addressing this type of vocal tension? The dissertation begins with a literature review of past and present vocal pedagogies and treatises, while the second half consists of findings from the author's interviews with 11 college voice professors, seeking to find out how they address vocal tension with their students. As a result of the evidence used through a literature review and interviews, Binkley saw that there is not a unified or comprehensive approach, nor a literature source, that addresses the various aspects of unwanted vocal tension, and calls for such a source to be created.

Although MPA is not addressed in this dissertation, it gives insight into the various types of unwanted tension experienced by vocalists specifically. The physiological symptoms of MPA can produce physical tension in the body, and therefore can create vocal tension, creating an overlap between the two areas of study. Understanding that there is not one solution or approach to vocal tension, as it can take on many forms, can aid in understanding the multifaceted nature of MPA as well as the search for reliable treatment options for MPA, specifically for the vocalist. Brandy L. Binkley received her DMA from the University of Maryland, where she completed this dissertation.

Essays in Collections

3. Hruska, Emese and Arielle Bonneville-Roussy. “Personality and Individual Differences.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Music Performance*, Vol. 1, edited by Gary E. McPherson, 604-29. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022

This chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Performance* analyzes the psychology of personality and individual differences (including age, gender, and experience) in musicians and the role it plays in the behavior of musicians, especially when it comes to performing. Genetic, socio-demographic, and psychological factors, including motivation, perfectionism, and anxiety, are discussed. Hruska and Bonneville-Roussy ask the question: Are musicians “that different from each other and from the rest of the population” (p. 605)? When examining personality, the authors adopt the “Big Five” theoretical framework developed by scholars Paul Costa and Robert McCrae. This framework includes five factors of personality: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Research has pointed to extraversion (or lack thereof) and openness to experience as being characteristic of musicians. Hruska and Bonneville Roussy recognize that musicians experience various levels of MPA, “making it a key topic in the theme of individual differences” (p. 620). When discussing anxiety, they note that “not all musicians find anxiety harmful when performing,” which suggests that not all experiences of anxiety while performing have negative effects. This might point to a treatment option for MPA that doesn't seek to remove *all* feelings of anxiety in a performer, such as Acceptance and Commitment Coaching (see source # 9).

In addition to drawing from numerous studies and scholars on the social psychology of music, including author Bonneville-Roussy's research findings, Anthony E Kemp's research on the differences in personalities of musicians is cited here in addition to being discussed in *The New Grove's* entry "Psychology of Music: Social Psychology." Emese Hruska received her PhD in music psychology at the University of Roehampton, London, with her doctoral research focused on self-concept, perfectionism, and MPA. Arielle Bonneville-Roussy received her PhD in social and developmental psychology at the University of Cambridge and also holds degrees in clarinet performance. Her research focus in music psychology is on motivational factors that predict performance persistence, and wellbeing of musicians.

Scholarly Journal Articles

4. Asner, Marie. "Overcoming Vocal Performance Anxiety." *The American Music Teacher* 36, no. 4 (February 1987): 40-1.

This article is written from the vocal educator's perspective to an audience of other vocal educators and gives practical advice on how to help vocal students get ready for a performance. Marie Asner, a voice teacher and frequent contributor to this journal, speaks from successful experiences as an educator rather than being research based, as no outside sources are mentioned. While her advice is not scientifically based, it provides insight into what remedies vocal educators were using at the time. Remedies discussed include drinking warm liquids, practicing in front of a mirror, watching students to see if their head tilts a certain way (affecting tone and muscle stiffness), avoiding certain foods, and getting good rest. The most notable treatment options discussed are relaxing shoulder and neck muscles through stretching, addressing any middle back tightness, mentally visualizing a positive memory, being an encouraging presence as an educator, and having students discuss their experience with "nervousness." These interventions are notable precursors to MPA interventions that are now studied and research-based, including bodily-kinesthetic treatments, meditation, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). It is also important to note that the treatment options proposed address the various aspects of MPA: cognitive, behavioral, somatic, and emotional, confirming the multifaceted nature of MPA. While treatment options are discussed, the cause of MPA and how it affects vocalists uniquely are not addressed. Furthermore, MPA is only explicitly mentioned in the title and is addressed elsewhere in the article as "jitters" and "nerves." This may indicate a specific perception of MPA that lacks seriousness, which would confirm what other scholars say about the stigma around MPA.

5. Burin, Ana Beatriz and Flávia De Lima Osório. "Interventions for Music Performance Anxiety: Results from a Systematic Literature Review." *Revista de psiquiatria clínica* 43, no. 5 (2016): 116-131.

This systematic literature review analyzes the effectiveness of various MPA interventions that have undergone experimental study, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), virtual reality exposure, biofeedback, yoga, meditation, music therapy, and the Alexander technique (p. 116). Findings from this systematic review indicate that CBT is both the most frequently studied intervention and the intervention with the highest effectiveness rate, but its perceived effectiveness could be due to the fact that it has been studied the most. As a result Burin and De Lima Osório state that the other interventions must be researched further. Specifically, they

assert that interventions such as yoga, virtual reality exposure, biofeedback, and music therapy are up and coming in the field of MPA intervention research and should be further examined.

Burin and De Lima Osório draw upon Dianna T Kenny's (2005) "A Systematic Review of Treatments for Music Performance Anxiety" (source #7), echoing that there is still a need for the standardization of instruments used to test MPA in future research, stating that future research "should focus on the methodological refinement necessary in order to create stronger evidence on the efficacy of MPA-related treatments" (p. 116). Ana Beatriz Burin and Flávia de Lima Osório are affiliated with the Department of Neurosciences and Behavioral Sciences of the Ribeirão Preto Medical School, University of São Paulo in Brazil.

6. Cina, Jacy A. "Music Performance Anxiety and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy." *College Music Symposium* 61, no. 2 (Fall 2021): 53-67.

This article provides a research-based analysis of how MPA relates to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), arguing that it is viable treatment options for MPA and can be adapted and utilized in private music lessons. She is able to back up her claim by first defining what MPA is, what CBT is, and how they relate to each other, drawing from scholars in both MPA and CBT fields. Evidence includes recent surveys and studies in MPA, four of which are authored by Dianna T. Kenny, and findings of CBT scholars in clinical practice. Her focus is specifically on adolescent musicians, as research has suggested this is a critical period for the onset of MPA. Cina suggests practical cognitive and behavioral adaptations of CBT to include in private music lessons, including talking with students about their thought patterns regarding performance, working together to find alternative thought patterns, building a pre-performance plan, and having repeated exposure to performance opportunities. Cina acknowledges the lack of MPA studies on vocalists alone, raising a larger question for this discrepancy, but does not try to answer why or address if there is a difference between how instrumentalists and vocalists experience MPA. Jacy A. Cina received a BA in Music from Cedarville University, where she studied Harp Performance, Psychology, and Open Studies in Music and is currently Copy Editor of *Musical Offering*, an online undergraduate journal of musicology from Cedarville.

Why is this source relevant to my topic?

7. Kenny, Dianna T. "A Systematic Review of Treatments for Music Performance Anxiety." *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping* 18, no. 3 (September 2005): 183-208.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10615800500167258>

In this comprehensive systematic review, Kenny draws upon "all available treatment studies for music performance anxiety" (p. 185). Treatments were divided into two categories: psychological and pharmacological. Within psychological treatments, behavioral, cognitive, and cognitive-behavioral treatments were included. Additionally, new therapies such as hypnotherapy, biofeedback, meditation, Alexander Technique, Ericksonian resource retrieval, and music therapy were also included, most of which only had one study of its kind.

Kenny calls for both a standardization in the definition of MPA as well as the instruments used to assess MPA in order to advance future research in the field. A key finding of this systematic review was the lack of a homogenous methodology when testing for the effectiveness of MPA treatments, which makes it difficult to compare treatment types. She also asserts that

“such studies need a sound theoretical basis, drawing on developments in related areas of test and sport anxiety” (p. 206). Due to a lack of standardization, Kenny did not address which treatment was most effective. However, this systematic review proves vital in understanding the trajectory of research in the field of MPA treatments. One of the leading voices in the field, Dianna T. Kenny was formerly a Professor of Psychology and Music at the University of Sydney and is now a consulting psychologist and psychotherapist. According to her website, she is an international authority on the treatment of MPA.

8. Mazzarolo, Isabella, Kim Burwell, and Emery Schubert. “Teachers’ Approaches to Music Performance Anxiety Management: A Systematic Review.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 14, article 1205150 (July 2023): 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1205150>

One of the most current studies in this area, this systematic literature review assessed 9 studies (published within the last two years) that either addressed specific strategies music educators use for their students or what role educators play in addressing MPA with their students. The strategies educators implemented in the various studies included preparation (5), simulated performance (5), positive outlook (5), breathing (5), focused attention (4), open MPA discussions (4), visualization (3), safe environment (2), imagery (2), and pre-performance routines (1). A previous literature survey found similar findings, with preparation, simulated performance, and breathing being the most common strategies implemented. Since these strategies are also common pedagogical practices, the findings point to there being a potential blur between MPA strategies and natural pedagogy practices. While this survey assesses strategies educators are using to alleviate MPA, it does not address each strategy’s success rate. The role of the music educator in the treatment of MPA was unclear, with the studies included having various beliefs. Mazzarolo, Burwell, and Schubert are all affiliated with the Empirical Musicology Laboratory of the University of New South Wales.

9. Shaw, Teresa A., David G. Juncos, and Debbie Winter. “Piloting a New Model for Treating Music Performance Anxiety: Training a Singing Teacher to Use Acceptance and Commitment Coaching with a Student.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 11, article 882 (May 2020): 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00882>

This pilot study was the first of its kind and sought to assess the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Coaching, a version of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), by training a singing teacher with no prior education in psychotherapy on how to use this model with a voice student. The teacher then gave six one-hour sessions to the student vocalist using ACC exercises including: “a body scan meditation to promote mindfulness, a thought labeling exercise to promote defusion, a meditation to promote acceptance of his MPA-related thoughts and feelings, identification of his values and eliciting a commitment to engage with his values while performing, and an exercise to lessen his attachment to a comedic side of himself he often portrayed when anxious, because it was limiting his artistic growth” (p. 5). The results of this study were promising, with the student making “clinically significant improvements” related to psychological flexibility, the main goal of ACC, which included acceptance of MPA-related discomfort and defusion from MPA-related thoughts.

With it being the first study of its kind, there are limitations to its findings and further research must be conducted before ACC can be considered an effective intervention for MPA.

The authors argue that the findings of this study may indicate that educators can play a valuable role in administering MPA treatments, rather than psychologists and mental health clinicians alone, when given the right training. Teresa A. Shaw is a professional classical singer as well as associate lecturer and singing teacher at Chichester University, who was the vocal teacher that received ACC training in this study. David G. Juncos, who administered the ACC training to Shaw, is a clinical and performance psychologist specializing in anxiety orders and has specific expertise in using ACT to treat MPA. Debbie Winter is the founder of the Voice Study Centre and runs an MA program at the University of Wales, Trinity St. David that focuses on the study of vocal pedagogy.

10. Zhukov, Katie. "Current Approaches for Management of Music Performance Anxiety: An Introductory Overview." *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 34, no. 1 (2019): 53-60.

Secondary or Tertiary Monographs

11. Kenny, Dianna T. *The Psychology of Music Performance Anxiety*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

One of the most highly referenced books in the field of MPA, cited by 752 published works according to Google Scholar, *The Psychology of Music Performance Anxiety* is described as "an exposition of music performance anxiety," examining the causes, symptoms, and treatments of MPA that have been studied thus far. While it may appear outdated for the pace of research in MPA, the comprehensive nature of this book makes it a foundational source for any scholar delving into the field of MPA.

Kenny seeks to answer the questions: Why do performers have different experiences and responses to performance? What produces this difference? The book begins with the phenomenology of MPA across genres and musical disciplines, then describes a conceptual framework for MPA. Next, she discusses key theories of anxiety and defines anxiety disorders more broadly. Honing back in on MPA, she defines what it is, how it has been assessed, then analyzes psychological theories that shed light on MPA (i.e. behavior, cognitive, and emotion based theories). Finally, she closes the book with treatment options, and a discussion on prevention and pedagogy. Kenny draws from her own experience with MPA as a musician in addition to an abundance of clinical research and evidence from various fields including psychology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and performance psychology. Dianna T. Kenny was formerly a Professor of Psychology and Music at the University of Sydney and is now a consulting psychologist and psychotherapist. According to her website, she is an international authority on the treatment of MPA.

12. McGrath, Casey, Karin S. Hendricks, and Tawnya D. Smith. *Performance Anxiety Strategies: A Musician's Guide to Managing Stage Fright*. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.

Intended as a resource guide for musicians and music educators alike, this book focuses specifically on interventions/therapies that can be utilized for the treatment of MPA, devoting a chapter on each: CBT, exposure therapy, medical interventions, natural & holistic approaches, and expressive arts therapies. Unlike Kenny's *The Psychology of Music Performance Anxiety*, this book does not provide an examination of the causes and symptoms of MPA. The book begins with an introduction of what MPA is and closes with a chapter specifically for educators' implementation. Additionally, there is an annotated bibliography of further resources for musicians regarding MPA treatment.

What makes this source unique is that it includes self-guided activities and exercises for the reader at the end of each chapter in addition to application tips for educators and first-hand anecdotes of personal experience from the authors. Rather than seeking to determine each intervention's effectiveness, this source seeks to address how each MPA intervention may be implemented. Additionally, they draw from the various fields of clinical psychology, music education, and music psychology in order to discuss each treatment option. Casey McGrath, concertmaster of the Fox Valley Orchestra, received her DMA in performance and literature from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Cellist Karin S. Hendricks received her PhD in music education from the University of Illinois and is assistant professor of music education at Boston University. Tawnya D. Smith, lecturer in music education at the Boston University College of Fine Arts, received her PhD in curriculum and instruction at the University of Illinois and a certificate of advanced graduate study in expressive arts therapy at Lesley University.