

# Overcoming Performance Anxiety: Mindfulness and Focus in the Age of Distraction

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# *DISTRACTED*

- Quick look through Amazon or bookstores:
- EPIDEMIC of distraction. Why is this important?
- We are constantly interrupted, and we respond to every beep, bell, buzz, etc. from our devices.
- Multi-tasking has its place, but can prevent us from developing centeredness. Calm centeredness is essential to avoid being buffeted about by every challenge.
- Effective performing requires single-minded focus and the ability to ignore any distractions or externals (symptoms of nervousness, audience sounds, piano pedal squeaking, etc.)
- **IMPORTANT:** My students have generally been unaware of how scattered and distracted they are until they begin to study Yoga or to meditate.

# IN PERFORMANCE

SYMPTOMS (dry mouth, shaky knees, butterflies, etc.) are NOT the problem. Our FEAR of them is!

**\*\*In performance what we focus on increases.\*\***

When we focus on symptoms, our brains spiral off into fears, our symptoms worsen and we are increasingly out of the moment, not breathing, not thinking in character.

We are NOT helpless; the symptoms are NOT all powerful, though they can, at first, feel that way.

# PROCESS

Overcoming Performance Anxiety is a PROCESS.

Often those who think they have a major problem with performance confidence are simply unseasoned rookies.

Vital to have numerous opportunities to perform from small studio classes, to parts of recitals, to entire roles and recitals.

Recommend following TWO paths to aid the process:

Resiliency through Centeredness

Develop Olympic Athlete-like Focus

# PORTALS TO CENTEREDNESS

Journaling  
Reflective walks  
Prayer  
Meditation



# Meditation

Free, effective online meditation:

## Guided Meditations – Tara Brach

<https://www.tarabrach.com/guided-meditations>

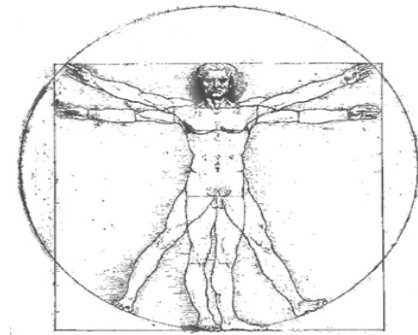
## UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center

[marc.ucla.edu/mindful-meditations](http://marc.ucla.edu/mindful-meditations)

## Guided Meditations – The Chopra Center

<https://chopra.com/articles/guided-meditations>

# BODY WORK



Regular exercise helps with calmness—releases Endorphins

Venues: university sport centers, “Y”s, community centers, commercial gyms, high school continuing education classes

**Many of these same venues offer more meditative body work such as Yoga, Tai Chi, Alexander Technique, etc.**

They assist with living in our bodies and in the moment.

A quick search on the internet will provide information on classes and centers in your area.

***Awakening awareness in the body is the portal to resting in boundless and dynamic presence. –Tara Brach***

# DEVELOPING FOCUS

After music has been learned and the character developed,

## **FOCUS in practice and rehearsal:**

1. Your “other”—draws you in
2. Body—especially breathing
3. Ideal sound—first few measures

Practice one at a time, then all three.



# Practicing Focus

## **In all rehearsals and performances:**

Stay with areas of focus to the exclusion of all else.  
(Our version of “keep your eyes on the ball”.)

This is why it’s so important to develop centeredness  
and learn to NOT respond to every stimulus.

If you are truly focused in all three areas, there will  
be little room in your brain for negative chatter.

Acknowledge and allow symptoms—BUT go back to foci.  
Overtime, guess what goes away? All of those symptoms!

NARROW FOCUS, optimal condition don’t take temperature  
Of the room.

# OTHER AIDS IN DEVELOPING RESILIENCE AND FOCUS

Creative Visualization (Olympic athletes)

Programming yourself for success.

Real-time; details help

Affirmations – positive, established fact



## **Holistic Practice That Triggers Greater Right-brain Activity:**

Real-time score study (programming self)

Bow a violin, conduct, dance study

Bow a violin, conduct, dance then sing

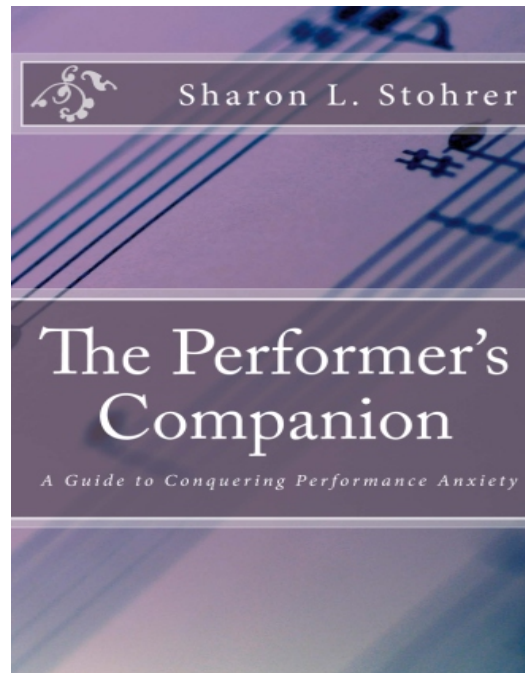
Sensory, whole body practice

# Shameless Plug

## **The Performer's Companion: A Guide to Conquering Performance Anxiety**

by Sharon L. Stohrer

Contributions by Diana McCullough



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