

BA (Hons) Musical Theatre

Assessment Cover Page

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Singing Technique- Anxiety

Introduction:

Singing Technique is vital to achieve a positive singing performance, many factors such as anxiety and vocal pedagogy can have a detrimental effect on a performer's breath regulation and control of the diaphragm. Applying Schon's (1984) reflective practices I will critically assess my progress in my singing lessons. My lack of previous technical singing understanding leaves me becoming nervous and negative prior to the lesson, to support me on this I will be explaining my use of the techniques and research into cognitive behavioural theory (CBT), the Yerkes Dodson Law (1908) and Interoception.

Nerves before a performance is something many performers can resonate with, these nerves are scientifically referred to as somatic anxiety (Reich 1935), causing such mental distress on the body and leading to rapid heart rates, shortness of breath, muscle tension and chest pains. In my lessons using Schons reflection in action (1984), I hope to prevent these symptoms by using 'grounding' and breathing exercises.

The Yerkes Dodson law (1908) shows the connection between performance and arousal (stress, excitement or anxiety) and explains how there is an optimal level of arousal for peak performance. Too little the performer becomes bored, unfocused or underprepared leading to a poor performance, too much and the performer becomes overwhelmed, tense and anxious. Psychological rehabilitation expert Cherry (2026) found that "Increased arousal can help improve performance up to a certain point. At the point when arousal becomes excessive, performance diminishes." This study shows that my negative mindset and anxiousness towards the lesson or performance is having a more detrimental effect in the long run.

The Performance Institute for Cognitive and Behavioural Therapies states "CBT for performance anxiety focuses on identifying and changing negative thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes that can contribute to performance anxiety. This includes the individual to challenge thoughts and replacing them with more positive and realistic thoughts." Applying this mindset shift into a warmup prior to lessons could help me have a

more beneficial lesson. Prior to the application of CBT techniques within my singing lesson, I would frequently enter with negative thoughts, especially with my technical ability and breath control. This type of mindset causes heightened anxiety levels, resulting in muscular tension and shallow breathing, directly affecting my ability to use my diaphragm efficiently. Recently using CBT strategies during a warmup, I began to consciously challenge my negative thoughts and attempted to replace them with the alternative positive and constructive thoughts. A switch in mindset allowed me to reduce my anxiety allowing deeper breathing and vocal stability throughout the lesson. This process demonstrates how cognitive thinking has a direct influence on vocal function and overall performance ability.

A large part of managing anxiety during a performance is Interoception, being aware of internal bodily functions such as breathing patterns, heart rate and muscle tension (Craig, 2002). Developing interoceptive alertness within my lessons has allowed me to accurately identify physical sensations such as elevated heart rate and restricted breathing, recognising these feelings and consciously responding to the internal cues, I have been able to release the unnecessary tension and support my breathing efficiently. Garfinkel et al (2015) states that “increased interoceptive awareness can enhance emotional regulation”, which supports the evidence that recognising physical responses to anxiety and adjusting them will improve vocal stability. This process demonstrates how Interoceptive control allows me to make technical adjustments to improve overall performance.

Using Schons reflection in action (1984) I have been able to respond to anxiety related problems as they occur during vocal exercises. Schon describes reflection in action as the ability to “think about what we are doing as we are doing it” (Schon 1984), with relevancy to my lessons, my interoceptive awareness has allowed me to become more aware of physical indicators like shallow breathing or tension in the upper body. Rather than getting overwhelmed and disengaging myself, I can redirect my focus to techniques such as grounding or regulated breathing, keeping vocal stability. Demonstrating my ability to manage somatic anxiousness and improve on my technical independence while performing.

The importance of reduced cognitive thoughts during a performance has been highlighted within this project, by shifting my focus from technical control only into physical sensation, my breath coordination becomes more automatic. This coincides with research from Beilock and Carr (2001) who state that “performance skills are more reliable when attention is directed away from conscious control and towards embodied awareness”. As a result, vocal teachings that include psychological awareness and technical control support a stronger more consistent performer.

Although these positive improvements show progress, it is critical to acknowledge the limitations of these strategies. Somatic anxiety has not been eliminated fully, particular in high pressure performances such as assessments or shows. This supports the view that managing anxiety is more regulation than removal. Gross (1998) explains “effective emotion regulation involves modifying emotional responses rather than suppressing them entirely”. Therefore, the techniques and strategies require repetition to be embedded within my performances and further development is necessary to ensure my skills stay effective during all performance types.

Conclusion:

While writing this essay I have explored the affiliation between singing technique and anxiety, while focusing on breathing techniques and diaphragm control within my lessons. Applying Schon (1984) reflective practice, I have evaluated how psychological problems like somatic anxiety directly affect a performance. My research into the Yerkes Dodson Law (1908), Cognitive Behavioural Theory and Interoception has shown that technique whilst singing is not dependant solely on physical skill but also the ability to regulate mindset and physiological responses. My use of CBT has allowed me to change my negative thinking there for reducing muscular tension and allowing me positive breath support. When paired with the Yerkes Dodson law (1908) and interoceptive awareness, I hope to use my nerves as an optimal level of arousal and sense when a technical adjustment should be made through reflection in action (schon 1984). This shows that although somatic anxiety has not been fully eliminated, I have

the skills to regulate myself with psychological strategies and can integrate them into my learning to support a consistent and confident performance.

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