

# 10 Quick Stage-Fright Fixes ...for Tonight's Gig

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Are you nervous about an upcoming gig? Is it your first one? Your first gig as lead singer? The biggest or most important gig you've played yet? Or just a regular gig that you should be used to, and you don't know why you're nervous at all?

Most of us have had stage fright. I certainly have. In fact, I got nervous enough once to totally pass out. Years later, I came within seconds of doing it again. (Fortunately, the song ended just in time.)

I know the sound of wind whizzing through your ears and your sense of hearing tunneling down to nothing. I know that lightheaded, dizzy, tingly feeling that says if you don't get off stage soon, you're going to check out involuntarily. I know how it feels to shake so hard inside that your voice sounds like you're sitting on a washing machine. So if you feel terrified, believe me, *I know how you feel*.

**But I got past it. And if I can get past stage fright, you can too.**

Many of the techniques I've used to overcome nervousness for stage performance are based on my mental training for sixteen years of nationally competitive waterskiing. But many of those techniques required practice over a period of days, weeks, months, or even years. And – let me guess – you want to deal with the nerves NOW.

This is why I have gathered ten “quick-fix” techniques into this booklet. You can choose from these to help you *tonight*.

**Before you go any further...**

The best way to use this booklet is to skim through it and pick the 3-5 techniques that speak to you most. Sit quietly for a few minutes and spend some time with those techniques. Pick the one or two that you like the best and write down a word or short phrase in LARGE LETTERS on your set list, so that you can remind yourself of it throughout the set.

Let me say it again: **Write down a short reminder of the technique or two you're going to use, and take that reminder on stage with you.**

Don't assume you're going to remember it. After all, you've had stage fright, so you know how the brain tends to short circuit. Don't rely on a short-circuited memory to remember how to get out of that short circuit.

I have tried all of these techniques, and they all help me. I'd like to hear what works for you. Please email me at [info@VoiceAndPerformanceCoach.com](mailto:info@VoiceAndPerformanceCoach.com) and let me know.

If you would like further mental training for the stage after this mini-book, be sure that you're signed up for my [newsletter](#). Besides receiving weekly free voice, mind, and performance tips, I'll also let you know when I have released other aids to get you not just past stage fright, but even better: into the **zone of peak performance**.

Now, let's get going.

# Real One-on-One Connection

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***This might work for you if...***

The audience seems like a huge mass of judgmental energy.

***How long it takes:***

Just a couple minutes, to reflect on the words below.

Have you ever met a grizzly of a man, and he turns out to be a teddy bear? Or have you met a standoffish woman who later turned out to be your best, most supportive friend?

We think that some people are fearsome beings when, known as individuals, they are not.

And we often assume only the worst when we are faced with an audience. We see the audience as a huge mass of impersonal, judgmental energy.

But remember: an audience is made up of a lot of *individuals*. A mother whose kid just passed his math exam. A teenage girl who's in the depths of her first major crush. A twenty-something guy hiding his insecurity behind a tough, sarcastic front. The actual audience depends on you and your music, but regardless, you are performing for people with a bunch of stories, concerns, joys and worries just like yours. They're just as human as you are.

Connect with each person, one at a time, and you can break down that perceived big wall of energy into supportive connections with each person. Even if you can't see individual faces, imagine them. Imagine connecting with one person at a time, rather than a huge group.

Go in there knowing that the big grizzly bear of an audience is actually just waiting to give you a bear hug... of applause.

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# Give in Order to Receive

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## ***This might work for you if...***

You feel like you could be okay on stage, as long as you feel like the audience is “there” with you.

## ***How long it takes:***

Just a couple minutes,  
to reflect on the words below.

When does it feel best to give?

*When you are the one who gives first.*

And when do you get the biggest gift in return?

*When you have given with no strings attached.*

This is true in all human relations, including the relationship between you – the performer – and the audience.

Don't send out thoughts of “what do you think of me” or “listen to my great interpretation of this.” Think instead, “Let me share this with you” and “I love how this goes – let me sing it for you.”

When you make eye contact, don't look at the audience waiting to receive approval. Look at people confidently, to *give* to them – your message, your smile, your emotion, whatever. It doesn't matter if they *want* to receive. What matters is your act of giving.

And be expansive with your giving! Imagine your energy (or your aura, your music, your emotion, or whatever word works for you) taking up space inside the entire room, all the way into the far corners. Under tables, around corners, and behind the bar. Give indiscriminately, fully, and completely.

Once you start giving positive energy, you receive it back tenfold.

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# A Safe Boundary

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## ***This might work for you if...***

You feel like you could get through the gig if you could just feel safe.

## ***How long it takes:***

A minute or two.

There will always be distractions when you perform. And you may feel distracted by audience members not paying attention, or not being supportive. You can still feel safe and focused by constructing a "safe zone" inside a specific mental boundary.

Your boundary encompasses you and your performance area. It allows your music and energy to traverse outward, and allows only positive energy from the audience to come back in. If there are any external distractions, such as audience members who aren't completely entranced by your performance, they don't affect you. All that matters is your safe zone and the good music and positive energy that is permitted to cross its boundary.

Any boundary that appeals to you will do. Here are some ideas:

- A ring of fire
- A group of lions
- A circle of warriors
- A metal cylinder
- An impenetrable force field
- A clear bubble
- A moat filled with alligators
- A protective cone of light

Before you go on stage, construct your mental boundary around you. Understand that no matter what happens, you are safe in your Safe Zone. You can even use a mental Safe Zone for a sense of protection in threatening *nonmusical* situations!

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# Role Play

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## ***This might work for you if...***

You can imagine a singer/musician whose performance you admire.

## ***How long it takes:***

10 minutes now, and then a minute or two before going on stage.

This technique can allow you to access latent abilities and characteristics you do have, but don't yet *believe* you have – such as a level of confidence or a fluid on-stage banter you haven't yet developed. Here's how:

- Think of a musician who embodies the characteristics you wish you had. Local or national, famous or unknown, it doesn't matter as long as it is someone whose performance personality you are familiar with.
- See how this singer/musician performs. Feel how it must feel to be this person. Imagine how they look when they perform, the expression on their face, how they move around stage, what they say, how they play, how they connect with the audience – even how they handle mistakes.
- Now, in your mind, imitate this person. What would this person do in your situation? How would he enter the stage? What would she say between songs? How would this person interact with the audience? Role play as if you are this person.

Spend a few minutes imagining this while you have unrushed private time before the gig. The more detailed of a picture you can create in your mind before you need to call on it, the more powerful this technique will be for you. Then, when it is time to go on stage, take a moment to recall the image of this musician and then to step into it like an actor.

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# Bring in Your Best Self

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***This might work for you if...***

You can imagine creating and meeting your perfect alter ego.

***How long it takes:***

10 minutes now, and then a minute or two before going on stage.

You've imagined role playing – that is, being someone other than yourself.

Relax by closing your eyes and taking several deep breaths. When you're focused, imagine going to meet your Best Self in a place that only you know about - a beach, a desert, a mountain, or a forest, real or imaginary. You're on a trip to meet your alter ego - the You who is always confident, who always figures out what to do, and can always handle whatever comes his/her way. The SuperYou.

Go meet your Best Self. Introduce yourself, and sit down and have a conversation with your Best Self. Notice her level of confidence, and absorb it. Notice how she is just like you in almost every way... but without any of the flaws or weaknesses. Notice how she looks and talks. Ask her questions and listen to her answers.

Then, invite her to come along with you to the gig. She can stand invisibly on stage with you and take over if you start to falter.

The SuperYou represents the best that you are capable of. And the great thing is, you already have the SuperYou inside. You just need to invite that person into your reality.

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# You Are Where You Are Today

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***This might work for you if...***

You criticize yourself, or fear criticism (voiced or unvoiced) from the audience.

***How long it takes:***

Just a couple minutes,  
to reflect on the words below.

One of the biggest causes for stage fright is feeling like you aren't good enough.

So, you want to wait until you're "good enough" to perform? And then you won't be so nervous?

But no one is ever good enough! You are simply where you are today. Next week you'll be in a different place. Next year you'll be in yet another place. There is no magic skill level at which you're suddenly good enough.

And get this: As you get better and better, your ear will improve. This means that as you learn to sing better, you'll become *more* aware of your weaknesses, not *less*.

There is no magic skill level at which the entire audience thinks you're "good enough." Just like your ears will develop over time, your audience consists of people with varying musical ears. Some of them will always think you're great, no matter how new you are to singing. Some of them will never think you're great, no matter how great you become. It's simply a fact to get used to because it will never change.

If you do believe there's some minimum skill level you need to be at to suddenly feel comfortable on stage, you're selling yourself short. Because if and when you do reach that level, you'll stop striving to improve.

But music is a lifelong commitment to an impossible standard. You should be striving to constantly improve.

You can only be *who*, *where*, and *what* you are today. No apologies. Come as you are. That's the best you can do. It'll never be enough... but it will also ***always*** be enough.

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# Step Behind Yourself

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## ***This might work for you if...***

You spend a lot of time “in your head,” caught up in non-constructive patterns of thought.

## ***How long it takes:***

Just a couple minutes now, and a couple minutes before the gig.

This technique can allow for a mental/emotional distance which allows your mind to get out of its own way and allow you to perform. I used this technique in a jazz club several times during a gig which turned out to be one of my best-ever performances. Seeing myself externally allowed me to just “watch” rather than forcibly “create” the performance. Here’s how to do it:

- Normally, you see the world from the eyes on the front of your head, right? Try stepping back and seeing the back of your head. See the scene as if you are standing behind yourself.
- Now step back again. See the back of the head of the person looking at the back of your head.
- Try stepping back again and again, seeing a succession of back-of-heads with the “performing you” in front.

This may seem like one of the stranger mental tricks to try, but perhaps it is precisely that reason that it works so well.

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# Focus on Success

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## ***This might work for you if...***

You are just psyching yourself out by worrying about bad things that might happen.

## ***How long it takes:***

Just a few minutes,  
to reflect on the words below.

You may be psyching yourself out by thinking of all the bad things that could happen on stage. Forgetting your lyrics. Singing a bad note. Not being good enough. You may even be psyching yourself – creating a positive feedback loop for your nerves - just by focusing on your mental state!

But you have the ability to choose your thoughts and choose your focus.

So, simply decide to focus on success. Replace whatever negative thoughts are maniacally cycling through your brain with some positive ones.

Focus on...

- How far you have come.
- How well you sing.
- How prepared you are.
- How confident you are.
- How the music moves you.
- How fun the gig is going to be.
- How supportive your friends in the audience are.
- How amazing it is that *you're* the lucky one to get to be on stage this time.

Look where you're going. That's how you get there.

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# Experience the Nerves

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## ***This might work for you if...***

You have a strong physical sensation of tightness or nervousness that simply won't go away.

## ***How long it takes:***

10-15 minutes.

Sometimes nothing we do makes the nerves go away. So, allow them. Welcome them, experience them, shake through them. Then, dismiss them. Here's how:

- Find a place where you can be undisturbed for ten or fifteen minutes.
- Sit down and breathe in and out slowly ten times. Simply observe if you are unable to take a full breath. It's OK - just breathe slowly.
- Scan your body head to toe, and find places that express your nervousness. Do you feel tension in your forehead? A clamped jaw? Tightness in the sinuses or throat? Are your hands shaking? Is there a knot in your stomach? Is your leg bouncing? Are you fidgeting?
- Each time you find a place where you are storing your nervousness, focus on it without judging it. Just observe: "Oh, that's interesting, my jaw is really tight!" "Wow, my shoulders are hunched!"
- Allow each place in your body to express its jitters even more fully. If your hands are shaking, hold them up and make them shake more and more. If your jaw is clenching, let it clench tighter. If your stomach is tight, tighten it more, until you're tired of holding it. If your voice is shaky, sing as shaky as you can.
- Next, physically release that part of your body. As you do so, tell your hands, your jaw, or your stomach that you appreciate the warning, but everything's just fine. Tell it that if it wants to, it can start to express anxiety again, but you've already received the message.
- Take five slow breaths without thinking about anything except how calm and alert you feel. Get up slowly knowing that although your body may act up again, you have already told it that you've heard - and dismissed - its message of anxiety.

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# Sing or Die

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## ***This might work for you if...***

You're forgetting about the big picture:  
the joy of musical expression.

## ***How long it takes:***

Just a few minutes,  
to reflect on the words below.

What if this performance were the last chance for you to sing... ever again?

What if you knew that tomorrow your voice would be taken away forever? Or that you would die tomorrow?

What if you knew this were your swan song? Would you sing any differently? Would you focus less on your own petty, irrelevant nerves, and more on the importance of the message?

Sure you would.

But the truth is, *every performance actually **could** be your last.*

Less morbidly, every moment is certainly the last one like it. Our lives change constantly. We graduate from different levels of school, we move from city to city, we play with one band and then another, friends and fans come and go.

So, in a very real sense, tonight's performance *is* a swan song. It's a swan song for the moment. There will never be another moment like it. There will never be another night just like this one.

Life is far shorter than we like to think, and it changes far faster than we expect.

What do you have to express that doesn't want to wait until tomorrow... when it might be too late forever?

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## Final Thoughts

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I hope that some of the techniques in this mini-book have resulted in changes not only in the way you approach the stage, but in the way you approach life. Each of these things certainly changed my performance skills, if not my own life. I have tried every single one of these techniques. All of them have had positive effects.

My journey along the path of mental training for performance started in competitive waterskiing. I had been competing for a number of years when I discovered sports psychology at age 23. Soon after starting to visualize and meditate on a regular basis, I started setting local and regional records, winning national tournaments, and achieving world rankings.

Mental training for sports is much like mental training for the music stage (or business, or life). Yes, I do still get nervous sometimes. But, unlike when I first passed out in front of a videocamera and an entire classroom of peers at age 12, now I know I can handle it.

Here are some of the quick reminders that help me in a pinch:

- Remember that most people are on your side. (If it's one of your first times on stage, every single person in attendance is probably pulling for you!) They are there because they want to be there. They will still love you even if you make a mistake.
- You can only be where and who you are today. Be the best you that you can be, today, *without apology*.
- Be grateful for the opportunity to be on stage. Most people never make it even that far.
- Nothing is ever perfect.
- Breathe. Fully and slowly.
- Authenticity is more interesting than perfection. So let go, and **Sing or Die**.

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## What Next?

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Now, it's time to try out one or two of these techniques. Then get out there on stage, and have some fun!

Please drop me a line to let me know how it goes. I want to hear from you. Email me at [info@VoiceAndPerformanceCoach.com](mailto:info@VoiceAndPerformanceCoach.com).

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