

# Christian School Finals Competition

## Giving the Audience Everything

*By: Michele Ross*

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### **CSFC Event Highlight – Music (900-999)**

The Christian School Finals Competition music events (900-999) provide the opportunity for Competition participants to communicate through various styles of music and musical instruments as well as demonstrate talents in composition. The music events at CSFC are judged on a variety of components including choice of music selection, technique, intonation and accuracy as well as other criteria that make it easy to place focus on the technical components of each event. However, not to be overlooked is the performance itself.

Well acquainted with the intricacies of performing, Michele Ross draws from her many years of performing professionally to connect the science of performing with the outcome of giving the audience everything, every time. While her article concentrates on musical performances, the information she provides on understanding and managing performance anxiety

is equally useful for those participating in dramatic arts (1000-1099) and athletic (600-899) events.

### ***Giving the Audience Everything***

An old adage among performers goes something like this, "If you are not a little bit nervous before performances, then you have lost respect for your audience." While your audience is a key part of your performance, not all nervousness is beneficial. Let's investigate this a little more.

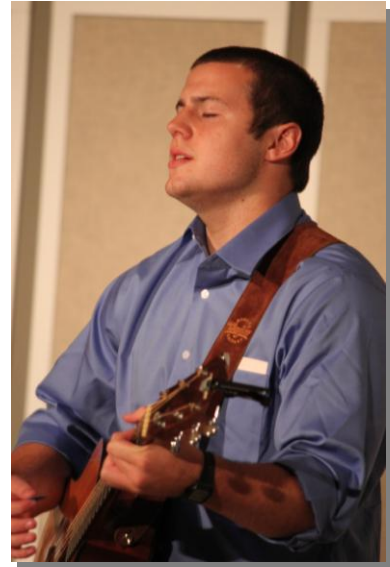
To better understand performance anxiety, a short science lesson is needed first! The front part of the brain (frontal lobe) is responsible for reasoning, planning and goal directed behaviors. A more interior and lower part of the brain (amygdala) is associated with emotion and gut responses. As we mature, the relationship between these two parts of the brain changes. For example, in adults, the frontal part of the brain carrying out the thinking functions such as planning, judgment, insight etc. tends to have greater influence over the emotional part of the brain, causing responses to be more reasoned and less emotional. While in contrast, the emotional or gut-response region is more highly activated in adolescents. So how does this connect with performance anxiety?

To arrive at the answer, let's look at two scenarios. You have an upcoming performance for which you have prepared well. However, shortly before the performance you start to feel a little anxious. You don't

know what the audience is like. How will they receive you? What if you don't measure up to their expectations? Maybe you should have selected different music. What if you have a horrible performance? What if....? What if....? What if....? Suddenly, you are gasping for breath and you don't even remember your music.

Now, contrast with this scenario. You have an upcoming performance for which you have prepared well. Shortly before the performance you start to wonder about your audience. Though you may start to feel a little anxious, you know you want to give your audience a great performance. You recognize the opportunity you have to touch each of them through your performance. You take a few deep breaths and once again mentally go through your performance including your successful finish. You smile, walk out on the stage and give the audience a performance they can't stop talking about.

What is the difference? In both situations the performers prepared well and cared about their audience. The difference is in each performer's thoughts. In the first scenario the performer became overly concerned about audience's perception of the upcoming performance. The emotional center of the brain was in overdrive. In contrast, in the second scenario the reasoning or frontal lobe of the brain helped the performer organize thoughts rationally thus allowing the focus of the performer to be the goal of giving the audience a great performance.



Because of our earlier science lesson, we now understand the relationship between the logical/reasoning portion of the brain and the emotional portion varies at different ages. However, knowledge is power. This knowledge can be used at any age to understand our reactions, to change the way we approach performances (or other circumstances in life) as well as to reduce performance anxiety.

If you find yourself in the first example, and honestly everyone does now and then, changing your thinking can change your outcome. Proverbs 23:7 instructs that as we think in our heart, so are we. Following through on this Biblical truth, visualize yourself physically moving through every step of your performance successfully. This is called "creating your pathway" and provides the optimal opportunity for your body to follow the same pathway in the actual live performance that follows the visualization. Here are some additional tips to help:

- Remember, as a performer you are always putting yourself on the line for critique. However, not every critique is valid. Take what you need and forget the rest. In fact, kick it out of your mind. Recall past successful performances. If you have been successful in the past, there is no reason to believe you will not be successful again. Do not dwell on "what ifs" or failures.

- Remember, you have the mind of Christ and the ability to take every thought captive. (1 Cor 2:16, 2 Cor 10:5)
- Practice and time both will improve your confidence. Make sure to practice a lot and to give yourself time to learn and grow.
- Start to practice in front of different audiences of known and unknown people and include your peers.
- Start to practice long before your performance.
- Rehearse your successful performance mentally.
- Remember, you have something unique to offer to your audience, something only you can give.

As you change your thinking and approach performances in a systematic, organized manner, you will find physical symptoms related to performance anxiety minimize as well.

This is not to say that emotion does not have a part in your performance. Remember, every audience deserves your best. Not only does each new audience deserve your best, but also each repeat audience deserves a performance that is better than your last. With each performance you have the opportunity to impact your audience and provide them with a life changing experience. Now you have reached the part of your performance where you can allow yourself to become emotionally involved. In fact, feel appreciation and love for your audience—for being there and for coming to see you. The key is to give each audience all of yourself in your performance. Do not be lazy in any performance. Here are a few keys steps you can take to provide your audience with the performance they deserve each time.

### **Connect with your music**

Picture yourself getting ready for a performance. You have made your music selection. When you first look at your selection, it is just words and notes on a sheet. This is how a performance begins—as words and notes on a sheet of paper. However, your performance should never end as words and notes on a sheet. They are simply the tools you use to reach your audience. To provide a winning performance, you must connect with your music. To do this, you must seek to discover the significance of each word. The songwriter had a particular reason for and experienced specific emotions when writing the words you will sing. This is called *sub-text*. Try to determine the sub-text in your music selection, and then find a personal connection from your own life. This will change your interpretation of the song, the emphasis you place on words and the way you sing. Your audience will feel and appreciate your efforts. Do your best to never give your audience a performance that is just words and notes. Connect with your music.



## Be seen

Continuing to visualize a performance, see yourself on the stage and look out over your audience. Take notice of how small everything starts to look as your eyes travel to the back of the room. Now walk off the stage to the back of the room and visualize your audience watching you perform. From their vantage point, it is now you who is small. To connect with your audience, they must be able to see you. An energetic performance utilizing theatrical stage movements will help your audience see you and connect with your performance. At first, large movements may feel over-exaggerated, and it is possible to overdo and not look natural. Movements on stage should be appropriate for the mood of the song and the words you are singing, not just big with no purpose or relevance. With practice your movements will flow normally. Filming your performance up close and from a distance will help you develop perspective. When performing, be sure your audience sees you.



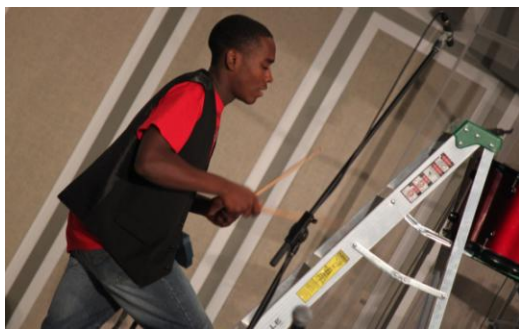
## Make Eye Contact

More than likely you have heard quite a few tricks for making your audience think you are looking directly at them though in fact you really are not looking at them. Forget about everything you have heard, and simply make eye contact with your audience. After all, you are performing for them, so look into their eyes, sing to them and express yourself directly to them. This is extremely important in Competition or in any event that is being judged. Be sure to look your judges in the eye.

## Have a point of reference

Watch good performers and observe how they capture their audiences. A wide variety of performers and performances are available for viewing on Youtube. You will find the most moving performances are those in which the performer gives everything he/she has to the audience. These performances linger on the stage long after the performer walks off. These are the performances that capture an audience.

Watching great performers provides a point of reference. Video tape yourself when practicing and performing. Compare your videos to the performers you have been studying. What changes could you make to your performance? When comparing, remember you are unique; your performance should not be a mimic of someone else. However, by watching others you admire, you can gain a point of reference for measuring different elements of your performance.



## Have fun

While you want your performance to be technically sound, remember to have fun. If you cannot find an element of fun in performing, stop doing it. When you love what you

do, your audience will know and appreciate your efforts. You have a lot to give, so give your best every time, and be sure to have fun!

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#### 2011 Competition Handbook Guidelines:

General guidelines for the music events are listed on pages 146-150 in the 2011 Competition Handbook. In addition, many of the music events have event-specific guidelines, so be sure to check both the general guidelines as well checking in the description of each event you are entering for possible additional guidelines.

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#### Meet Michele Ross:

Michele Ross has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music from Oklahoma City University. She has performed professionally for 28 years and was a member of the Oklahoma Opera and Music Theater Company. Currently, Ross is the music librarian at Oral Roberts University and a private voice and performance instructor, songwriter and music publisher.

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