

# Heywood Studios Annual Spring Recital

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Each spring, Heywood Music Studios hosts its annual recital. Typically, our recitals are 'theme recitals' with all students selecting repertoire based around a central subject matter. Our annual event is an opportunity for the student to demonstrate to family and friends the accomplishments and progress they have mastered throughout the year of study. Therefore, to showcase their talents, students began in February and March selecting appropriate and challenging music by mutual consent of instructor and student. During lessons, we practice appropriate recital etiquette and performance techniques. Each student performs one piece from memory for the audience. All students ages 5-18 are required to participate.

Because Heywood Studios tries to provide multiple performance experiences for their students, the recital is always free and open to the public. Flash photography and videotaping of the program is permitted, however it should not interfere with the performers.

## ***Piano Recitals Don't Have To Be Scary!***

Piano recitals are a valuable tool for helping piano students achieve their musical dreams. Too frequently, however, parents mistakenly believe their child's upcoming piano recital is some kind of an initiation test, and sadly project this attitude to their children. But nothing could be further from the truth. Here is the real truth about piano recitals parents need to know.

Piano recitals are a valuable tool for helping children succeed in piano, because they establish a goal that gives students power and direction. What would it be like if your child could walk up to the recital piano and play their best simply because they know they can? Of course It would be wonderful! So why not let them?

## **Stage Fright**

Waiting backstage, the familiar symptoms return. The palms moisten, the stomach becomes queasy, the heart beats harder and faster, breathing becomes more shallow, the knees feel weak. "Here we go again," you think to yourself, disgusted that the cycle is seemingly beyond your control. Is it possible to overcome the body's natural defense mechanisms? To use the surge of adrenalin in a positive way to enhance instead of hinder a performance? Of course it is. It just takes some understanding and practice.

### **Fight or Flight: The Human Body in Survival Mode**

Those familiar feelings are caused by the production of adrenalin. Your brain receives those primal impulses and your body goes into "fight or flight" survival mode. Your body is reacting to perceived danger - it is primed for anything. Response time is quickened; senses are fine-tuned. You can jump higher, run faster and play daunting technical passages. Although your body is telling you to run, you must stay and complete a performance. So how do you minimize the negative effects of adrenalin? By changing your perception, by viewing the physical changes as excitement, not panic. By learning to slow down, breathe deeply and focus that additional energy into a passionate and exciting performance. This takes practice.

### ***Prepare! Prepare! Prepare Again!***

Lack of preparation is a leading cause of stage fright. If a performer is unsure of his or her technical ability to pull off a successful performance, that adds even more pressure and jitters.

Here is the most common explanation parents give

for not wanting their children to participate in piano recitals, and an alternative to this perspective.

**Q: "I'm afraid my child will be embarrassed if they don't perform well."**

Okay, so you're afraid. That's understandable, but is it a reason? Here's a better way to look at it. As a parent, what is your goal? By attending piano recitals, children have the opportunity to become more confident, and to learn from their mistakes. Do you want your child to grow in confidence and learn to fly, or stay wrapped inside a psychological cocoon? If your goal is to help your musical child learn how to fly, and overcome their worries and fears about performing, follow through with effective parenting habits that support this goal.

Having a successful piano recital is all about planning and perspective. Piano students learn planning by setting goals that create a map to success that will achieve their piano dreams. Following through with good habits that support their piano goals is how students can prepare to play well at their piano recital.

There are strategies parents can use to help their children in piano learn to set goals. But first, here is a good way not to help your child overcome worries about performing. Never try to scare your child into practicing with hyperbolic failure stories about what people in the audience will think of they bomb at the recital! Stick to the facts; and don't give this monster permission to live in your kid's head. Fear isn't a good piano teacher.

Instead be positive and show your child how to gain perspective and overcome their fear. If they are worried, redirect their focus by asking how they would like to feel at the spring recital? For example, *"Would you like to feel confident about playing in your recital?"* Follow up by stating the facts clearly. *"You know, Jeremy, you don't have to be afraid. You have a choice. There are things you can do. What do you think you could do to ensure that you play the way you want to at your recital?"* If your child hesitates, get them to use their imagination by asking, *"Well if you did know, what do you think it would be?"*

You can follow up further by asking, *"How would your life be different if you weren't afraid to perform in front of an audience?"* And, *"Do you think there will be other times in your life when you'll need to share what you know in front of a group of people?"*

In this way you'll be empowering your child with

valuable tools for success. Instead of caving in to fear, use this effective plan for helping your child overcome piano recital worries. I guarantee your child's confidence will grow as they begin to use their piano wings!

### *Stage Fright Solutions*

**Act the Part.** Performing is as much "acting" a part as it is executing a technical feat. A tool I've used with my students is having them attend a live performance featuring a professional artist on their instrument. Have them pay attention not only to the "music" being performed, but the "music" being portrayed - paying attention to the body language, posture, and breathing of the person on stage. Then have the students do an "imitation" in their lesson. Amazingly, the body becomes more relaxed, the breathing deeper, posture is better. The students have reached outside of themselves and removed the internal pressure by pretending to be someone else. Giving students something external on which to focus actually improves focus on the task at hand, which is a secure, confident performance. Also, I encourage students to have practice 'recitals' at home—with family, friends, stuffed animals. Do the entire routine—outfit, bow, etc. I recommend students have several 'practice' performances in advance so they know exactly what to expect. The more "real time" performance practice the student has, the less frightening the actual performance will be.

### **Visualization.**

Potential memory slips are often a source of anxiety for performers. To remove this internal pressure, students can write a story about the work to be performed, putting specific feelings, actions and pictures with each section. Close your eyes and "run" the story in your heads like a movie. The more detailed the story, the more important communicating that story to the audience becomes. Another version of this is to picture the actual music running through the mind, visualizing the rise and fall of the notes.

Anxiety tends to build in situations where waiting is involved, such as for an audition, or recital performance. Have the student imagine going to a safe place (i.e. a mountain meadow, a deserted beach). Before the performance, have them go off (alone), close their eyes and imagine playing the piece they are performing in that safe place. This takes weeks of practice to be done successfully. There are many wonderful

resources out there with excellent relaxation tips to get you relaxed and focused.

### *Even Stars Get Stage Fright!*

Even the pros have moments of terror about going onstage. Below are some famous performers and their experiences with stage fright:

#### **Renee Fleming**

In her autobiography, the celebrated soprano recalls her unexpected attack of nerves: "Nothing had happened to precipitate it, nothing had changed, but without warning, my throat closed up entirely."

#### **Rod Stewart**

In 1968, the Rod Stewart-fronted Jeff Beck Group made its U.S. debut at New York's Fillmore East theater. Stewart was so nervous that he sang the entire first song from behind a stack of speakers.

## **In Conclusion**

It helps to realize that stage fright is a physical response to something chemical going on in our bodies. We are frightened and our body produces adrenalin. This can happen very quickly. You know it is happening when you feel the rush of sweat to your palms, your heart pounding, or butterflies in your stomach. Once this occurs, it takes a while for the chemistry to normalize, no matter

what you do and your playing will be affected. So it is important to minimize the chemical rush. A little bit is not bad, it can enhance your performance. During the day of the performance I try to have a positive attitude that I am going to enjoy this. I eat something before hand and try to sit quietly and relax. I make sure that I know exactly where I am going and arrive early so that extraneous anxieties do not trigger the rush. When I am waiting to play, I am most vulnerable and watch my body very carefully. I breathe slowly, deeply and calmly. Most important, I imagine the adrenal gland has a valve which I can control. If I feel it is open too much I visualize turning it down, manually. This works! Once I am playing, the pleasure of the experience takes over and I can concentrate on the music and performance.

There are several books and articles regarding your question. The topic you bring up is much discussed - stage fright and self-confidence. [Remember you are not alone.](#)

Some resources are:

1. "The Inner Game of Music" by Barry Green with Timothy Gallwey, 1986, Ancor Press/Doubleday. This book dwells on how to overcome stagefright and uses kind of a Zen approach. I found this book to be very helpful.
2. "Stage Fright in Music Performance and Its Relationship to the Unconscious" by Michael I. Goode, Trumpetworks Press, 2003

## **Reminders for My Recitalists**

Formal performance attire is requested and your appearance and demeanor with the audience is just as important as your performance. Everyone in the audience is coming to hear you perform, therefore show them the same courtesy and appreciate their presence. Therefore, HEYWOOD STUDIOS requests the "dress to impress" please! No gum chewing, eating of lollipops or hard candy.

### **RECOMMENDED RECITAL ATTIRE**

Wear your dress-up clothes! Girls wear dresses (knee length or longer please!) or dressy pants, long hair should be groomed neatly and pulled away from the face (barrettes, pony tails are acceptable); boys wear dress pants with a nice shirt (tie is optional), sweater, or jacket (hair neatly groomed also!). Comfortable, low heeled shoes that will add to your maximum ease in pedal technique are a must. Please do not feel obligated to spend money for new clothes; however, proper attire shows respect to your audience (that you feel this performance is important) as well as your own accomplishments.

**INAPPROPRIATE attire includes: Old tennis shoes, T shirts, jeans, tear away pants, tank tops, low-rise pants, crop tops, sweatpants, sweatshirts, shorts, clogs, super high heel boots or shoes, snow boots, work boots, 'swampers', open-backed sandals or flip flops, rings ( for the piano players), ball caps, glitzy jewelry, large watches, 200 rubber bracelets, swimwear, pajama 'dorm' pants or mini skirts.**

- **Pay particular attention to your hands!** Clean hands and well groomed nails are a must: no nail polish, acrylic nails and no bracelets. If you are wearing short sleeves, no tattoos or marks on your arms (handwriting, etc.).
- All music is expected to be memorized. A memorized, polished performance shows the audience (and your parents!) that you value your lessons and have learned something.
- Participants should arrive 15 minutes early in order to warm up before the program (*do not play your recital piece!*).
- To alleviate lags in between compositions, each performer will be seated in program order in the front row of the auditorium. As one performer leaves the stage on the right, another will be entering on the left.
- **REMEMBER TO SMILE!** Remember to adjust the instrument to your specifications. Enter the piano on the left side of bench, exit on the right (towards the audience). Sit up straight, take a couple of deep breaths, think about your piece and begin when you are ready (believe it or not, the audience will wait for you). Following your performance, you should acknowledge the applause by bowing.



### HEYWOOD STUDIOS Bowing Technique

Facing your audience, place your left hand on the side of the piano, right arm behind your back. **Slowly** bow forward (as if you are leaning over a bar), smile at your audience (you may not rise until you think "*Hippopotamus*"). **Slowly** rise back up erect. **WALK SLOWLY OFF THE STAGE** on the right and return to your assigned seat. **You did it!!**



Student awards and door prizes are presented at the conclusion of the performance portion. Every student will receive a certificate of participation. Group and individual portraits are done at the end of the program.

*Gail A. Heywood*

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