

**“Less Fear – With the Aid of Music!  
More Communication – With the Aid of Music!”**

**Arts Education Program “Performance Training/PT” – Developing  
Communicative Competences through Radical Prevention of  
Negative Stage Fright and Aggression**

**Ernst Smole**

Workshop: Contextualising the  
„Road Map for Arts Education“

International Center of Arts, Science and Education/IFKBW  
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in cooperation with  
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The following project is really cost effective, as it nearly costs no money; but in turn, “Performance Training/PT” asks all participants to show engagement, have confidence and - most important – to be an advocate of human kindness.

According to futurologists, the phenomenon of fear will be the main problem of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whereas fear as to be seen as one of the main reasons for aggression on the one hand, effective fear management can prevent emotive conflicts on the other hand. If we think about the frightening trombones of the city of Jericho for example, it becomes obvious in how far the domain of music has always been intertwined with the phenomenon of fear. Today, it is not the music itself that is alarming musicians; since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century musicians are under considerable strain. While going on stage as a solo-performer, professionals not only have to live up to the refined records of their skills, but also the contact amongst the musicians is really competitive. As fear is the main reason for mental diseases, it is not surprising that 75 percent of all European professional musicians are mentally or

physically ill. Hence their medical condition impacts their ability to play instruments, as scientific investigations have proven that sensing fear disables musicians to move their hands freely; instead they rather hold on to the instrument. Of course enhancing methods of relaxation can ease fear generated diseases, but to tackle the problem in its roots musicians have to lose their fears themselves. As permanent performance training of adults cannot lead to a sustainable abolishment of permanent anxiety, it becomes clear that effective programs have to start with children education.

The project “Performance Training/PT” establishes radical prevention of extreme stage fright, which causes negative consequences such as aggressions, and accomplishes sustainable communicative competences. To do so “Performance Training/PT” uses the natural ability of children to perform. Whereas most programs of music education believe in the idea that public soloist performances are a privilege of the most gifted and most diligent young musicians, international studies proof that music education, which continues the „early pre-musical childhood performance tradition“, mostly prevents extreme fear sensations. Building up on this knowledge “Performance Training/PT” conceptualized an early musical education to be used by schools, in which all children are encouraged to perform in a natural, relaxed and fun way. Although this conception sounds quite simple, not only the young musicians, but also the teachers, schools and parents are challenged; instead of pointing out a few exceptional performers, a common concert presents a whole range of talents. In that way the innate joy to play music in front of an audience and interpersonal skills of accepting and valuing a heterogeneous group of people are trained. “Performance Training/PT” also includes the acquisition of music theory. Innovatively, theoretical background knowledge is not spatial-temporally separated from music classes; thus verbal communication of children is skilled by asking the young musicians to express their ideas and feelings about the music pieces they perform. Therefore the interdisciplinary interaction of artistic, cognitive and emotional knowledge building and the introduction of experienced public performances decrease the risk of suffering from extreme stage fright and fear in general.

The smallest auditorium of schools anywhere in our world, the most modest and simple classroom will be the most important, the most touching concert hall of the world: children, performing music without fear, but with the maximum of pleasure and authenticity! Besides owning the capacity of tackling stage fright, participants of

“Performance Training/PT” will be able to deal with fear in a much more constructive and positive way.

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Member of several commissions and juries of Austrian government since 1982

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Dear Sir or Madam,

The latter described project "Performance Training/PT" is as simple in its structure as it is complex in its theoretical background; "Performance Training/PT" combines the following disciplines:

Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Teaching Psychology, Pedagogy, Cultural Sciences, Sociology, Musical Education, Medicine.

Hence, the submitted abstract of 500 words can neither describe the intention of establishing the project in its fullest, nor can the summary explain the chosen way of implementation. The questions "why such a project?" and "why it is conducted in this specific manner?" have to be answered to guarantee a complete understanding of "Performance Training/PT`s" conception.

Therefore I ask you to kindly accept an additional and more detailed description of "Performance Training/PT", which is commented by footnotes.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards,

Ernst Smole

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<sup>1</sup> In German „Auftrittspraktikum/AP“

<sup>2</sup> This Education program started in 1985 at the „Johannes Brahms School of Music of the city of Mürzzuschlag (Austria) - JBMS“. JBMS is official acknowledged by the Austrian government. (law for private schools 1962). The „School of Music of the City of Krieglach (Austria)“ works also with this program since 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Lat. „radix“, “root”. This Education program starts with the roots of early development of children.

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## Summary

The following project is really cost effective, as it nearly costs no money; but in turn, "Performance Training/PT" asks all participants to show engagement, have confidence and - most important – to be an advocate of human kindness.

- a) Worldwide, fear will be the main problem of 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- b) Fear is the main reason for aggressions.
- c) Fear-generated non-communication raises problems of fear and aggression.
- d) Arts education projects are able to reduce not only problems related to fear but also aggression and help to develop positive communicative competences.
- e) In this context the presented program "Performance Training/PT" is a unique means for millions of young people all over the world to detach themselves from stage fright and fear in general.



## INTRODUCTION

According to futurologists fear will be the main problem of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; the following arguments will underline this supposition:

- Each kind of strangeness produces fear. As the ongoing development of fast growing public transportation generates migration, more and more people are confronted with previously unknown cultures, which might cause clashes of identity.
- The amount of cataclysm does not increase, but omnipresent media not only raises awareness about such catastrophes, but also exaggerates them. Hence masses get the subjective impression that local and global menace is increasing.
- Presumably climate change did not shift more dramatically like it used to vary within the past million years, but the change of climate generates fear. Because of the changing climates there will be heavy migrations, which will generate conflicts of displacement and distribution in favoured areas of the world.<sup>4</sup>
- The increasing gap between “rich and poor“ generates fear.
- Although most Western states do profit from social insurances, employment decreases.
- The increasing pressure to perform and the need to provide high quality generate heavy fears of failure in all parts of our life.
- All in all we can conclude that the latter arguments will generate extreme fears of the future.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. the climate-generated migration of Semitic populations from in the past green, aqueous and fertile south of today Arabia going northern to Nil, Mediterranean and Euphrates & Tigris on account of becoming climate-generated desert in the south of the Arabian Peninsula 4000 years ago.

- In turn fear prevents barrier-free communication; such reaction to fear is shocking as communication is indispensable for de-escalation strategies.
- Questions of religion and philosophy of life were not regarded as most important during the last centuries. But today religious identities seem to become a crucial part of public life again and therefore might generate different fears.

### 1) Aggression

Fear is the main reason for aggression. Aggression in turn is a fear-generated preventive act of violence struggling for space, food and other resources.

### 2) Fear – a positive Factor

On the other hand, sensing fear and controlling its symptoms of aggression can prevent danger.

Hence the objective is not to prevent fear at all, but to create an effective “fear management”.

### 3) Fear, Aggression & Arts/Music

The realm of art approaches life from a different angle. The technical interaction of tension and relaxing, of bright and dark, of consonance<sup>5</sup> und dissonance<sup>6</sup> symbolizes the interplay of fear, aggression and de-escalation.<sup>7</sup>

### 4) Music and Fear I

Throughout history acoustic phenomena are used to generate fear:

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<sup>5</sup> Lat. „consonare“, „sounding together harmonizing“

<sup>6</sup> Lat. „dissonare“, „sounding different“

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Fuge (lat. “fuga” – “flight”). Kind of musical polyphony, one part flees from another.

- The fear-generating and destroying trombones of the City of Jericho
- The original “Janitscharenmusik”<sup>8</sup>
- High-tech “Trombones of death“, which were used to displace the original inhabitants of South America from their home countries.
- In several cities of Europe, disturbing music is used to chase away beggars and homeless people from public squares.

## 5) Music and Fear II

In the past 200 years music became more and more professionalized. For example, compositions became more difficult, so only persons practicing their instruments many hours a day were able to perform.<sup>9</sup>

Symphonic orchestras were dominated by non-professional musicians till the 19th century. Today symphonic orchestras completely consist of professionals.

The development of new styles of playing instruments helped musicians physiologically to control the instrument, but besides the bodily strain, very demanding and difficult compositions generate psychological pain that shows in (stage) fright.

High quality CD and DVD productions are produced in professional recording studios. Such electronic perfection of the actual performance pedals musicians while playing live-concerts; and pressure generates fear: failing in a live concert that is attended by 1.000 listeners is an extremely discouraging and bad experience for a musician. The following symptoms will appear:

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<sup>8</sup> The original historic music of war of the Turks. This kind of music was intended to bring fear and fright to the enemies. The oboes were simulating the whinny of the horses, piatti the sound of the swords, drums the stamp of the horses and the noise of the cannons and guns. „Janitscharenmusik“ later changed to central European „classic music“ and was used by Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

<sup>9</sup> Many of the famous compositions were too difficult to play in the time of their origin, so the Violin Concerto D-Dur op. 61 by Ludwig van Beethoven, or the Violoncello Concerto op. 104, h-moll by Antonin Dvorak. The most famous soloists of their time said to these composers: “Too difficult, we cannot play!”

- Disgrace of listeners
- Disgrace of colleagues in the orchestra
- Disgrace of medial publicity (newspapers etc.)
- Fear to lose the employment in orchestra
- Losing reputation
- Losing of self-confidence and self-esteem
- Aggression because of multiple fears
- And finally in the worst case: being unemployed (changing the employment)<sup>10</sup>

In Europe approximately 75 % of professional musicians are mentally or physically ill.

Fear is the main reason of mental diseases. As playing an instrument means the synchronisation of relaxation and producing much energy at the same time<sup>11</sup>, fear hinders professionals to coordinate their hands freely.

Fear produces a human “clasp reflex”, which is part of the survival strategy in our gene-pool.<sup>12</sup> The need to hold on to an instrument prevents relaxation and mobility in playing music. The human “clasp reflex” also prevents the production of “music-necessary energy” – all the energy goes to the attempt to swipe the hands together. These effects and the following unsuccessfulness create fear and frustration.

The acute and chronic consequence is that several kinds of permanent pathological cramps are caused. These cramps affect not only parts of our body which are important to play music<sup>13</sup>, but also cause secondary and tertiary diseases.

It is a huge problem that diseases in playing music are systematically immanent in playing several instruments. Especially while playing high string instruments<sup>14</sup> musicians suffer from cramping hands. Also young musicians are affected by music

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<sup>10</sup> Professional symphony orchestras seem very young today, because musicians leave the orchestra to take another work without so much stress and fear (e.g. teaching).

<sup>11</sup> Not only playing fortissimo needs much energy, but also playing piano!

<sup>12</sup> For example babies keep the finger of the mother with much energy!

<sup>13</sup> For example cramping of jaws of players of piano or string instruments.

<sup>14</sup> 80 % of professional musicians playing violin has music generated diseases, especially when they are not very young (problems with jawbone, dermatologic affects, problems with shoulder, arms, fingers etc.)

generated problems, which influence their individual health<sup>15</sup>, as the techniques of playing instruments (especially violin and viola)<sup>16</sup> became rather harmful since the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>17</sup>.

Methods of relaxations are helpful to moderate such music generated diseases, however

the optimal way to prevent these problems is to prevent the main cause of psychological pressure, which is music generated fear.

Especially amongst older and more experienced musicians, it can be monitored that a more profound performance routine decreases feelings of fear before going on stage.

#### 6) "Positive Stage Fright" versus "Negative Performance Fear"<sup>18</sup>

Traditionally Germany, Switzerland and Austria distinguish between the following two concepts:

Positive stage fright: This individual feeling<sup>19</sup> with its symptoms of high mental and emotional tension forces much concentration<sup>20</sup> and produces adrenalin. After having experienced a successful scene musicians have the feeling: "We want to repeat the performance!"

Negative stage fright: This problematic individual mental<sup>21</sup> and physical experience<sup>22</sup> creates stress and prohibits high-quality performances, as it mostly predicts failing

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<sup>15</sup> Study of the Music University of Vienna: 50% of 350 students complain about music generated interferences of their individual feeling).

<sup>16</sup> Traditional Chinese violins (they are much different to European violins) keep violin in much more positive ergonomic kind like keeping violoncello. In traditional music of Kasachstan instruments like our violins also are played in Violoncello style.

<sup>17</sup> The traditional kind to keep violin has its roots in the time it was not used to play positions higher than 3<sup>rd</sup> position.

<sup>18</sup> In German we say „Positives Lampenfieber“ and „Negative Auftrittsangst“. In English both is used to be called „stage fright“.

<sup>19</sup> „Fever“ means a bit subjective „high body temperature“ as a result of mental tension and concentration.

<sup>20</sup> Listeners feel concentration as tension, like „Faszinosum“ (lat. "fascis" bundle; concentration is a kind of „bundling mental energy“).

<sup>21</sup> For example mental blackouts

while being on stage. Having experienced extreme stage fright, musicians say: “No, I never will perform in a public concert anymore!”

If you experienced a “positive stage fright” or a “negative performance fear” can only be determined after having gone on stage.

#### 7) Traditional Prescriptions versus “Negative Performance Fear“

Relaxation methods are helpful; many musicians take beta blocker and psychotropic drugs. The abuse of alcohol seems to be the most common means amongst musicians to lose fear; but instead of solving the anxiety related problems, patients are even more challenged due to the follow up outcomes of alcohol abuse.

To effectively lose stage fright and fear in general, permanent performing training has no sustainable effects, if you start in adulthood.

#### 8) “Performance“ in Early Childhood

Babies and little children are natural “performing artists first-class”. Birth also is a performance, but a very important and professional one: baby and mother do an exquisite performance, whereas “listeners” – midwife, doctors, nurses, father – happily applause and express their pleasure.

This is the character of public performance: we act in front of an audience – one<sup>23</sup> person or more, and in return, listeners give us a feeling of success while applauding, giving presents or paying money.

The whole early childhood is a permanent public performance: each success in walking and each new spoken word get applauding, as well as it stimulates the attention of family and friends; newly learned skills create benefits for the child and are rewarded. This intensive attention lasts until children speak rather perfectly. At

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<sup>22</sup> There can be fear producing feeling “strange” the fingers on the instrument, tremor, losing the feeling for distances (changing positions in string instruments), problems with perspiration, feeling panic.

<sup>23</sup> Maybe sometimes also in professional concerts

this moment children have the maximal competence and routine in performing and learning<sup>24</sup>. Looking at children who received the complete attention and to children who missed such attentiveness, there are distinct differences in the children's behaviour.

## II)THE PROGRAM

As already mentioned, when reaching the stage of a perfect native speaker children have to be regarded as high level "performing artists"; the following reduction of attention brings also a reduction of performance routine and learning competence<sup>25</sup>; at this point "Performance Training/Auftrittspraktikum/AP" starts.

Today, music education starts at the age of 4 or 5 years in many countries. At the beginning there are "moving-exercises" like singing and playing easy instruments.

Public soloist<sup>26</sup> performances are a privilege of the most gifted and most diligent young musicians. They have to study an instrument for several years to reach a traditional "concert standard"; problematically during these years of studying musicians do not perform public soloist concerts – so that the continuity of public performance is interrupted.

And in this problematic intermission of soloist performances "extreme stage fright" appears!

International studies and experience tell us: children<sup>27</sup> at the age of 10 years, having permanent soloist performance training, which continues the "early pre-musical childhood performance tradition", have best chances to be free from extreme (stage) fear all over their life!

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<sup>24</sup> In this time, when the attention of the family is reduced, also the competence in learning is reduced. The competence in learning must be reactivated when entering school. In the Jewish tradition of education there is no temporary „stop“ in the development of learning competence. Children – especially boys – visit a special kind of school, called „cheder“ (this means "room"), this tradition found its roots 4.000 years ago. This could be one of the reasons of the important contributions of Jews in science and arts.

<sup>25</sup> Learning speaking early is important for the "feeling well"of parents!

<sup>26</sup> Solo: Each musician plays his line alone. Tutti: Several musicians play one line together.

<sup>27</sup> Minimum 6 times in 10 months

Although the idea of an introduction of early performance experiences seems to be really obvious, it's practical application is rather difficult: the behaviour<sup>28</sup> of teachers, school managers and developers of education systems has to be changed. To let **all** students of violin, trumpet, recorder or piano classes perform six times per year, as it is intended by our project, everyone is challenged – firstly the children, but also the teachers and the school organisation! It has become naturalised that only the most gifted children may perform publicly: so next to the talented musician, the reputation of the teacher is estimated really high. Letting all children perform publicly in a soloist manner three times a year means to define the level of the teacher anew, as all of his students will perform independently of their skills.

This philosophy postulates a maximum of honesty and openness of all participants: children, teachers, parents and the school management!

These six public soloist performances are much work for the teacher, but it means also much more acknowledgement for teachers as there is no monotony<sup>29</sup>.

The character of these soloist public performances can be presented by means of public lessons<sup>30</sup>, traditional student concerts or solo concerts together with an orchestra.

The maximal duration of student concerts is 40 minutes.

Worldwide, children and teenager sing in choirs or play music in orchestras. But playing or singing together does not solve the problem of extreme stage fright or general fear. Solemnly soloist performances can tackle fear related psychological problems.

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<sup>28</sup> There is great risk that teachers bring their own stage-fear to the children with hectic and pressure!

<sup>29</sup>The main problems for teachers teaching instruments are not discipline problems with the young students, but boredom. One of the most important guidance to actual Music Education is "Wege aus der Eintönigkeit/Multidimensionaler Musikunterricht/MDU" by Gerhard Wolters (Zimmermann, Frankfurt)

<sup>30</sup> Teachers, playing in Auftrittspraktika and thus are permanently together with their young students, have profited from this experience – they have less fear themselves!



## 1) Verbal Communication in “Performance Training“

Playing music and learning about music – music theory – are used to be strictly separated lessons. In the instrumental lesson we practice music, whereas in the theoretical music classes we learn about music theory separately from „live-music“: it seems that theory and practice are completely detached from each other as not only the class schedule distinguishes between time and location, but also emphasises a strictly divided content. In music theory classes we are used to learn music cognitively.

Students playing in the “Performance Training/Auftrittspraktika/AP” learn music theory during instrumental lessons while discussing the compositions they previously performed themselves. Children study together with teachers and parents and find information themselves in the internet; next to acknowledging the most important information about the music at hand, pupils learn about the composer and his cultural background. They are also encouraged to reflect their personal ideas on the composition.

In the “Performance Training/Auftrittspraktikum/AP” children give a short speech about the composition before actually playing a piece of music; of course those speeches are formulated appropriately to their age.

So we have a “maximal sustainable effect”: playing music (emotional/artistic) and learning the theory of music (cognitive) at the same time broadens the knowledge of children more effectively! The public performance combines those interdisciplinary fields of learning and thus reduces the fear of talking and playing in front of an audience.

Important: It is proven that people never forget what they once have said publically<sup>31</sup>!

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<sup>31</sup> Learning psychology confirms these facts.

## 2) Communication x 4!

Only if you are free from negative stage fear you are able to “feel” the listeners and to keep reciprocal communication with the audience. While speaking about compositions, musicians make the same experience!

Today the most profound content will not be remembered by the audience, if the presentation is unstructured and the style of the lecture seems to be boring; because people ask for extremely well presentation skills, it is necessary to start practicing in early childhood! Besides politicians, also teachers, students and professors for example have to cope with public talks, which have to be rousing and enthusiastic.

This is Communication x 4:

- Young musicians tell verbal information to the listeners!
- Listeners give nonverbal feedback!
- Young musicians bring “emotional information” and tension<sup>32</sup> by means of live music to the listeners!
- Listeners again give nonverbal feedback!

## 3) Secondary Sequences of the “Performance Training/Auftrittspraktikum/AP“

- Intensive communication between children, parents, teachers, school management
- Maximum of acknowledgement for performing children
- Much success for young musicians in music competition – they play without extreme stage fright
- Parents: maximum of acceptance!
- Public: maximum of acceptance!
- Maximum of acknowledgement for teachers!
- Speech about compositions brings acceptance also from people who might not be very interested in music<sup>33</sup>!

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<sup>32</sup> Generated by mental concentration.

- Politicians and sponsors: maximum of acceptance! They help to buy instruments, to organize concerts, give help to students to visit music camps etc.

#### 4) Primary Sequences of the “Performance Training/Auftrittspraktikum/AP“

Since 1985 thousands of children finished the latter described curriculum. Many of them became professional musicians. Not one of them got problems with “extreme and negative performance fear”!

One student had to stop playing violin because of skin disease between the age of 17 and 22 years. When she turned 22 she started playing as professional soloist – no extreme stage fright occurred!

It seems that students without “negative stage fear” are better used to handle other “fear-situations” besides stage fright as well.

We hope and think there is the possibility that “performance training” could become general fear prevention.

#### 5) Marks to realizing “Performance Training/Auftrittspraktikum/AP“

In most of the countries all over the world we have different kinds of Music- and Instrumental Education.

Everywhere where Music Education exists, it is possible teach “Performance Training against (performance) fear”.

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<sup>33</sup> Comment of a major: „Fine, so we not only teach fine musicians, but also future politicians with high competence in public speaking!“

The smallest auditorium of schools anywhere in our world, the most modest and simple classroom will be the most important, the most touching concert hall of the world: children, performing music without fear, but with the maximum of pleasure and authenticity! Besides owning the capacity of tackling stage fright, participants of "Performance Training/PT" will be able to deal with fear in a much more constructive and positive way.

Prof. Ernst Smole

Mürzzuschlag, February 26<sup>th</sup> 2010

