

# MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT

June-July 1989

Text of Articles

## NERVE CONTROL

by Burke Schuchmann

Your heart races as you attempt to bring the reed to the mask that was your face . . . Your instrument is held with spastic plastic fingers that no longer seem to belong to you . . . Arms are too heavy and too light at the same time . . . Your bow feels as graceful as a telephone pole. You tighten up, feeling out of control and distinctly not at home on the stage. Of all the things that can lessen our enjoyment of chamber music workshops, performance nerves are close to, if not at the top of, the list.

It is a false assumption that there is nothing we can do about excessive nervousness short of taking beta blockers. From my experience as a performer and teacher, I feel that the control of concert nerves is as attainable a skill as any other in our craft. Mood control can and should be practiced, just as one would practice spiccato or breath control.

Before proceeding with practical solutions, it is important to consider just how concert nerves affect us. Usually, we become waylaid by technical details; notes become overly important, while tunnel vision distracts us from our colleagues. There are a myriad of fearful flights the mind can take, not the least of which is the awareness that whatever we are doing is being done in front of a room full of eyes and ears. One's self looms up out of proportion; we panic and fear gets a grip. Feelings reminiscent of those dreams of showing up at school in the nude leave us emotionally exposed. "Get me out of here," the mind seems to be saying.

Fortunately, what we do as musicians is re-creative. The key to controlling the jitters is to think of our role as that of a servant, both of the music and the audience. Passing the ideas and feelings in a composition to the hearers, we become, like a good story-teller, only the intermediary. This shift of focus from ourselves to the music takes the pressure away from our egos, and lets the music flow through us. We become the music we play, as a method actor becomes the character he or she portrays: windows on the world of music, to be looked through, but not noticed.

Following are some exercises for the practice of nerve control. They include mental, physical and musical preparation for performing.

Before a performance, some form of meditation is necessary. One meditates to get in touch with one's intuitive, spiritual self. When performing, the mind needs to be at an almost subconscious level, for it is on this level that

continued on page 7 we feel and interpret music. Let your intellect and emotions focus each other. Make yourself like a child, reactive, not self-aware.

In this state of mind, focus your attention on the dramatic content of the piece. On a feeling plane, what does the music have to say? Practice keeping this larger picture in mind, avoiding worry about technical hurdles or what anyone thinks of your playing. No one will miss your intent if you keep your mind and heart concentrated on playing musically; whereas, if you go only for the notes, and miss, then you may end up with nothing. No matter what level you are at, you are not just an instrumentalist. You can and must be an artist right from the beginning.

As a rehearsal exercise, play a passage through for its dramatic effect. Let's say the passage you've chosen has a mysterious quality to it. Play it again, but this time make the room you're in, the walls and all the space within, feel mysterious. Then, with an audience, let it still be the room to which you play, inclusive of everyone in it.

Playing through a piece without stopping is another effective form of practice, very different from the typical rehearsal. This is your chance to practice sustained concentration and involvement, making the gist of the music your focal point. Don't work on details up the the last minute before performing if you can help it, since detail work tends to break one's focus.

A musician is an athlete as well as an artist. No athlete would ever think of competing without stretching first; likewise, I suggest stretching before every concert. Use broad, slow motions, taking big slow easy breaths, in through the nose and out, gently, through relaxed lips.

Through stretching, we find out where we're most tense. Do an inventory of your whole body, especially your face: most stress is reflected in the face. If it is tight, stretch your jaw muscles by moving your jaw back and forth. Touching your toes is very good for relaxing neck, shoulders and arms. To stretch your arms and hands, shake them gently from the shoulder. One can invent exercises specific to one's instrumental needs; just remember to keep breathing deeply.

Eventually, through meditation, stretching, and breathing slowly, one can regulate a racing heart and the amount of adrenalin coursing through one's veins. But, while controlling nerves can be learned like any skill in our craft, conquering them completely should not be our goal. We need that little bit of adrenalin. A proper use of nerves is what helps us play at our best in performance, rather than at our worst.

Practicing nerve skills is like sight-reading in that it is situational. Grab every chance you can get to play in front of people, even if it's just one person, but treat each time you do it as a real performance. Remember, become a window for the music to pass through to the listener. It is our sense of function that is the key to successful nerve management and to fulfilment as an artist.

## WORKSHOPS FOR THE LOVE OF IT

by Dieter Bergman

Summer music workshops are a way of life for a select but fairly large group of amateur musicians, with at least 85 workshops in the United States this May alone. Most of the reasons for their popularity are fairly obvious. They provide an inexpensive vacation in which everything is prepaid and arranged. Lovely campuses often surround you. Dormitory life reminds you of youth and the carefree life. You have a near-guarantee of meeting like-minded people, and you talk to anybody from the first moment like an old friend. There is an annual re-confirmation of old friendships.

There are also deeper needs that seem to be fulfilled by these workshops. Regular chamber music at home is limited by work schedules, distances between players, telephone bother (how long do you give the stupid answering machine to call you back?) and too few week nights. And there are family demands, those routine disturbances of life that measure your acceptability as a father, mother, sister or brother.

At the workshop, in contrast, you can usually play to your heart's content. I and others I know have been known to play twelve or more hours in one day, into the wee hours. Many of these aficionados find the annual pilgrimage to the workshop-temple more exciting than Super Bowl or Mardi gras. Once, driving back from Arcata on a Saturday morning, I was so sleepy at 9 a.m. that I thought I would rest 10 minutes under the redwoods at Richardson Grove, with my arms folded under my head. I woke up at 6 p.m., freezing in the shadows, arms paralyzed, unable to orient myself and get started for another hour. What else in life can voluntarily absorb you so much that your adrenalin nullifies ten hours of needed sleep?

I used to drive home with friend Dorothy (8 hours from Eureka to San Francisco with a swim and a meal at Benbow's Inn), and we would discuss every one of the 75 people that we had known for two to ten years, bringing each other up to date on their playing, their divorces, their stage fright, their latest jokes, their obsession with Boccherini and what have you. These people actually became family, and tragedies, trysts, and other legendary stories of an intimate nature were developed and reevaluated every year. It was much like a high school reunion, except that in your high school class you did not care for almost everybody. This was a true encounter group, enhanced by the need to express yourself with panache in an enterprise that is not your main achievement in life.

It is important in chamber music workshops that one get out of the habit of a few friends and a few composers and their preferred pieces and become exposed to a wide variety of new musicians and new works. It is astonishing how, after a few days, one starts playing much better than ever, and comes to like the most unlikely modern works and the strangest fellow-musicians.

And one keeps on playing in one's dreams, at a restaurant, in the shower and on a walk through the redwoods.

One of the most amazing things about a workshop is the powerful leveling process that we force on ourselves and each other. I remember one prima donna amateur (let us say a pianist) who walked in with a chip on his shoulder and much bragging about all his accomplishments ("I said to George Solti, 'George', I said, 'you are full of crap the way you take these tempi.'"). This guy was so angry at all us raw amateurs (and also at his own being wrong so often), that he walked out of the workshop. Almost! Instead, after awhile he became like a lamb (oh, half a lamb) and enjoyed himself no end.

The point is: in a workshop it barely matters whom you know, how good you think you are, or how good you really are, since everybody ends up celebrating mass in his or her own style at the altar of goddess Music. As long as you are honest and just love to play and do your best, she will reward you every time with an almost uncanny improvement of your playing and your love of music, and with an inner joy that very few things in life can equal.

One more thing: None of your friends and family back home quite comprehend why you give up your precious vacation time for these strange Rites Of Summer. Why do you do it? Nothing you accomplish at the workshop has the slightest influence on your income, your promotions, your social status, your friendships or your love affairs (I mean those at home). It is completely irrelevant to external success. And that is why it is such a wonderful change of tune. Just go play your heart out, and discover Bartok.

IN THE AUGUST ISSUE:

More Party Music for Strings by Lois Decius

On Teaching Creativity by Alice Parker

SUMMER WORKSHOP SURVIVAL GUIDE - Part I: Avoiding Aches and Pains by Léonie Jenkins, M.D

So you've signed up, selected your classes, polished your instrument, bought spare strings, paid your tuition, maybe even bought the plane ticket, and you want to enjoy every minute of your approaching summer workshop. It would be a shame to waste any time on bodily aches and pains or stress symptoms. So, here's your survival guide.

First, consider that you are about to exchange a practice schedule of, say, an hour or three a day, for all the woodshed time you can squeeze in, in order to

catch up with that flood of new music. And instead of a couple of hours a week of ensemble time and rehearsal, it's going to be several hours a day. The chairs, the music stand, the light, and the space around you aren't always to heart's (or lower back's) desire; for an hour it may not matter, but for four hours, it will. The meeting and melding of a new performance group is one of the joys you came for, but it can be stressful, too. And the schedule may not coincide with your own sleep-wake cycle, especially if you stretch it at the shank of the evening, with those parties!

Here are some suggestions for avoiding overuse syndromes:

Most obvious, warm up! This means increasing your practice time gradually before the workshop begins, and warming up yourself and your instrument before each rehearsal.

Make your playing situation as comfortable as possible. Take along a cushion, back rest, footstool, whatever it takes; the ear and hand cannot absorb what the bottom cannot tolerate.

Be sure your glasses are ideal for the distance from your eyes to the music desk; that usually amounts to an arm's length away. (You can select a pair at your local drug or department store if you have no serious astigmatism.) If glare from bright light (those marvelous outdoor rehearsals!) is a problem for you, you may find a yellow tint for your glasses is a help.

Get your bodily playing equipment in the best possible shape before the workshop; a visit to the dentist to smooth off a front tooth for a wind player can make an enormous difference in endurance. A layer of plastic wrap over the teeth (before you've worn a hole in your lip) may also help.

Once you've arrived at the workshop, there are ways to ensure that stress (inevitable) doesn't become distress (mostly preventable).

Take reasonable breaks during rehearsal time, and use them to stretch. A little aerobics, like running in place, takes very little time and gets rid of that stiff-from-sitting feeling. Get your fellow ensemble players to massage each others' shoulders. Other frequently overused parts, such as forearms and hands, also respond to massage. Quick tutorial on massage: start stroking -- toward the body and in the direction of the flow of the veins -- upstream from the sorest part, and gradually work down to include the sore spot. You're trying to move over the underlying muscle, not to rub the skin; that's why a little oil helps.

Your psyche may need some relief from overload, too. Most workshops are in surroundings that lend themselves to taking a walk, finding a place to meditate, taking in some beauty. In creating anything, a musical performance no less than more static art forms, breathing in is as necessary as breathing out; be sure you take time to do it.

Not to be forgotten: those parties! Late hours and alcohol are stressful; try to balance off the fun you're having with your capacity for both.

Above all, enjoy! That's why you're going.

## SUMMER WORKSHOP SURVIVAL GUIDE - Part II: Staying Energetic by Madeleine Denko

It's June, when a musician's fancy turns to summer workshops: those idyllic, uninterrupted weeks of playing music, listening to it, talking with other musicians about it. It's possible to immerse yourself in its charms completely, living music nearly 'round the clock.

But while these weeks of intense practice and performance are sublimely nourishing for your musical self, they can also be hard on the rest of you. It's tempting to practice through meals, foraging for chips or candy bars at campus snack machines. And the allure of playing with your quartet for just one more hour may cause you to ignore your body's cry for a walk, a swim, or sleep. With so much music to play, though, you need a healthy diet, exercise, and rest to keep your life in balance.

The following guidelines will help you stay well so you can play your best during your workshop experience.

Take time to exercise. As every musician knows, playing an instrument is strenuous. Depending on which instrument you play, your arms, fingers, face, mouth, neck, back and lungs can get quite a workout. In a workshop setting, you may be playing much longer each day than you normally would. As a result, you'll be more likely to get fatigued. Muscles and joints may get tight or suffer from overuse.

For this reason, it's important to make time to exercise, working the big muscles you don't use when playing. Those that are overworked need a rest and those that haven't been used need a chance to move. Make time for at least 20 minutes of exercise each workshop day. Afterwards, you'll find your body, mind, and spirit refreshed and ready for more music. Choose an activity that you enjoy -- walking, swimming, bicycling, and jogging are good activities that work out the kinks and clear the head.

East a nutritious, low-fat breakfast. A low-fat breakfast can help you perform your best at your morning workshop sessions. As Judith Wurtman, Ph.D., a research scientist at MIT and author of *Managing Your Mind and Mood Through Food* (Harper & Row, 1988), says, "When supplied with the proper nutrients and energy just as circadian rhythms are about to peak, your body is a little like a runner with wind at his or her back — effortlessly able to go a little faster and a little farther than otherwise."

You might start your workshop day with a breakfast of low-fat yogurt, juice, and a small bran muffin. A bowl of dry cereal with low-fat milk and fruit is another healthy choice.

Eat a balanced diet, avoiding high-fat foods. When you're immersed in rehearsal or practice, it's easy to forget about regular meals. The temptation to fill the gap in your stomach with high-fat snacks like chips or doughnuts should, however, be avoided if you want to play your best. High-fat foods, linked with heart disease, cancer and strokes, are also slow to digest, diverting blood and oxygen from other parts of the body, including the brain. Eating them will make you feel sluggish and mentally foggy.

Carry fruit with you for snacking during your workshop day. If possible, pass up lunch meats, hard cheeses, whole milk, regular yogurt, fatty beef, lamb, pork and pork products. Other high-fat culprits are avocados, croissants, all fried foods, and creamy soups.

Meals that will help you stay healthy and alert so you can play your best include low-fat proteins such as fish, skinless chicken, very lean beef, low-fat cottage cheese and yogurt, tofu, and lentils. Round out your meal with a vegetable (without cream sauce) and a carbohydrate like bread, rice, potatoes, pasta, or corn.

Enjoy yourself! A summer workshop is a chance to revel in days of music. Stay healthy and have a wonderful time!

## Editorial

### THE FREELANCING PROBLEM

"Evenings open for freelancing!," one workshop brochure tells us. "Ample time will be available for freelance playing," says another, and a third: "Participants may form their own groups for recreational playing in the afternoons."

Ask an experienced workshop participant, "What have been the high points?," and probably the first or second response will be "The freelancing." But ask a few honest first-timers, about two days into a workshop, how they like freelancing, and chances are the answers will include "What freelancing? The good players all have their own cliques. Nobody wants to play with me!" or "It's too humiliating to stand around hoping for an invitation. I watched TV."

All too many experienced players fill up their whole week's schedules the first day with people and pieces they already know. It's natural enough—we're thrilled to be back together with our old friends, and we're probably secretly a little apprehensive about being left out ourselves. But natural or not, everybody loses from this practice. The ones who are left out suffer real frustration and embarrassment, and the in-groups miss out on chances to make new friends and discover new music.

Many workshops cultivate a family-style atmosphere of friendly acceptance and mutual supportiveness in their formal programs, which carries over to some extent into freelancing. Some also provide a bulletin board where

anybody can put up a sheet suggesting a piece, time and place, with blanks for the needed instruments that anyone is free to fill in. I'd like to see some workshop try the notion of a committee drawn from participants with responsibility to encourage freelancing participation. Other good ideas may already be in use: please share your experience in the pages of MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT.

T.R.

#### WHO READS MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT?

As we completed our first year of publication, we realized that we no longer knew most of our subscribers individually. Our mail track showed that you live in 40 different states of the U.S. and in five other countries, and we knew from our correspondence that you are active, enthusiastic musicians with a wide variety of tastes and interests. But who are you, what are your musical interests, and what do you really want from us?

To answer these questions, we mailed a questionnaire to 500 readers in March 1989, with questions about your musical activities, your opinions on this periodical, and your personal characteristics. The response rate was a phenomenal 23%. The first thing this tells us is that our readers are enormously loyal and supportive of our efforts. Thank you.

Who are you? The typical reader's age is 60, with well over 16 years of education. While a third are retired, the majority of those employed are in professional, technical, scientific or management positions. Over a third of you have traveled abroad in the last year. Ten percent of our readers are working professional musicians, two-thirds consider themselves to be recreational musicians, and the remainder are both.

What kinds of music do you make? Twenty-nine percent of you sing, 14% dance and a whopping 97% play one or more instruments. Sixty-eight percent of you are involved in chamber music, while 29% are primarily orchestral or band players and 8% are church musicians. A majority of this publication's readers sing or play three or more times a week. Attending concerts is a far less frequent activity, averaging less than once a month. Seventeen percent of you compose music, and 10% conduct. While 44% belong to local performing organizations, only 15% belong to national instrumental societies, and 12% belong to the Amateur Chamber Music Players.

The average reader owns four musical instruments, of which the most popular are piano and violin, followed by recorder, viola, cello, oboe, clarinet, flute, guitar and harpsichord in that order. You also own a marvelous variety of other modern, historic and folk instruments. Thirty-nine percent of our readers have a home computer — they're more popular than cellos — but practically none of you seems to have turned it into a musical instrument by acquiring a MIDI.