

MENTAL PRACTICE AND IMAGERY FOR MUSICIANS

Lecture/workshop by Malva Freymuth

March 8, 2001, E-400 HFAC BYU



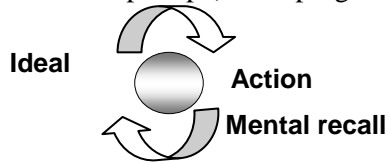
Malva Freymuth

PART I: The Basics

DEFINING MENTAL PRACTICE: A technique for optimizing practice time, enhancing performance, and preventing injury

FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS:

- Three-step loop (motor program--visualizing):



Think of a flashlight. When you point the beam at a close object you see a small area very clearly. But when you pull away you can see more. Need to pull back to see how the whole body is included in the practice time.

- Quality of mental representations:

--Vividness (strengthen gaps--play then recall. Mentally go through whole phrase)

--Accuracy (think accurately--if you don't, you will be programming in distortions. Be objective. Be aware of distortions - the old saying that practice makes permanent)

--Flexibility (Incorporate changes which can be minute and subtle. Avoid old patterns. Would be like a muddy trail with ruts. Stay away from the ruts to keep from slipping in.)

- Balance mental and physical practice:

--Breaking up physical repetitions enhances attention and assimilation, reduces fatigue. Fatigue = injury Long, unbroken practice times - 2 hour practice with 25 min rest = 1 hr practice + 15 min rest + 1/2 hr practice + 10 min rest + 15 min practice + 5 min rest + 15 min practice = decreased strength and stamina

--Consistent pacing - 2 hour practice with 30 min rest = 20 min practice + 5 min rest + 20 min practice + 5 min rest + 20 min practice + 10 min rest + 20 min practice + 5 min rest + 20 min practice + 5 min rest + 20 min practice = stop while you still feel good. During rest periods you can stretch to increase your circulation, do self-massage, drink water (keep hydrated). Be "athletic" in your approach to practicing. Athletes have a daily training regime. Think of your health.

PART II: Introductory Training



BYU Organ Students

Centering: Circulation, Breathing, Postural balance, Stretching, Energy flow (Close eyes and create mental images that would facilitate these things)

Auditory: Echoing, Miming, Centering musical impulse, Mental leadership, Recall/projection - (Mentally and physically practice away from the actual instrument. Think of how you want something to sound. "Dance" on the pedals. Play slowly enough so you can do it mentally and physically. Project [mental] then play [action].)

Kinesthetic: Wholistic playing, imagery for postural balance, movement quality (Your body should have natural movements. Your whole body supports your playing. Have a sense of "lift" like a singer. Have a sense of balance. Think of a fire hose going through your arm to put out a fire. Keep

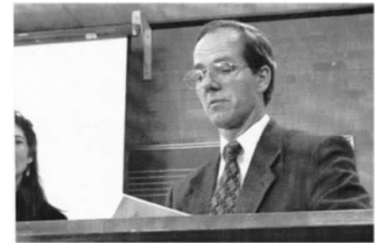
yourself aligned. Think of a fir tree--your feet and ankles are the roots, legs up to your neck as the trunk. Think of branches all around you supporting you. Rub hands together to feel the energy. Tap fingers together, then expand awareness, notice what your shoulders are doing, etc.)

Visual: Viewpoints (internal, external) --"communicate" with listener. Imagine you are playing for a kind person sitting across the room. Feel the music surrounding both of you. Step outside of yourself. Be your own teacher.

Printed music (see and "hear") --Printed music is a map to sound. Need to translate what's on the page to what you hear. Imagine the sound you want. Memorizing helps you to get away from printed page so you can interpret the music better.

PART III: Practice Strategies

- **EARLY TO LATER STAGES OF LEARNING:** move from segments to Gestalt
- **PRACTICING:**
 - Set goals but be flexible in attaining them
 - Focus your attention
 - Choose the right amount of material (Work on a few notes to a whole page depending on your goal), lasting impression ("TV commercial principle" - to create a lasting impression in the brain something must be repeated 3 - 5 times. If it's more than 5 times, "tracks" are erased in the brain.) Need a sense of completion, of finishing your goal.
- **MODELING & VERBAL CUEING:** cognitive technique
 - Role models (empathize with performer)
 - Tape yourself playing and play it back. Notice your body reactions to what you're hearing. This may be an indication of what you do when you play.
 - Write focus points on your music as you play - "relax," "extend," "slow down," etc.
- **MANIPULATION OF TEMPO IN YOUR MIND:**
 - Real time (imagine realistically)
 - Slow motion (imagine not up to tempo. Can work through difficult spots in your mind slowly.)
 - Ideal tempo (imagine how it should sound)
 - Fast forward (imagine mentally, practice rough spots, check sequencing, different entrances and the character of the piece, energetic to peaceful, practice moving through motions--changing stops, etc.)
- **ELIMINATE NEGATIVE REPRESENTATIONS:** Will influence performance, undermines confidence, need a strong and clear mental representation. If you're relying on "muscle memory," it's like relying on a moth-eaten quilt to keep you warm.
 - Sensory awareness - Negativism and stress are defined by our perception and interpretation of the situation--seeing a glass half empty or half full. Choose which side you want to be on. If you're worried about a performance, mentally say to the audience, "I'm glad to be here. I want to share this music."
 - "Thought stoppage" (cut short negative thought by thinking of a stop sign)
 - "Black box" (mentally put negative thought in a black box by seeing yourself writing it down and putting the box on a shelf)
- **POSITIVE ATTITUDE TRAINING:** affirmations, train yourself
- **PRE-PERFORMANCE:** center, breathe, connect, know and project music (to combat stage fright, picture playing in a place you love and feel comfortable in.)
- **CREATIVE IMAGERY:** right brain, intuitive, symbolic, (self, ensemble, teaching), "inner journey"
- **TEACHING:**
 - Coach mental in every lesson (student can't access the sound because they can't access the image) - right and left brain learning
 - "Bridging"
 - Be aware of your word-choice (the word "stretch" is more stressful to say to a student than to say "go there")
 - Be aware of posture
 - Modeling



Dr. Don Cook introducing Malva

PART IV: Dealing With Injury

- Misuse/overuse injuries prevalent: 50% of professional orchestra members and 76% of full-time musicians experience pain when playing. Mental practice will reduce injury.
- Mental influence* over involuntary body functions; placebo effect
- Effective imagery to support healing: physiological processes, treatment modalities, "final state"



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Mental Practice and Imagery for Musicians

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