

Should One Practice Very Much on the Day of a Concert?

Description

Legendary musicians and pedagogues are not in the habit of going out for drinks with sport psychologists. But if they were, I think there would be much to talk about.

As I reflect on everything I learned from my lessons, coachings, and master classes over the years, and filter it all through the lens of sport psychology, I find it interesting and even a bit amusing, just how much overlap there is. Not complete agreement of course, but more than you might expect.

For instance, what would a great pedagogue and a sport psychologist say to the question “Should one practice very much on the day of a concert appearance?”

Here is how artist and teacher [Louis Persinger](#) (whose students included Yehudi Menuhin, Ruggiero Ricci, Isaac Stern, Camilla Wicks, Louise Behrend, Sylvia Rosenberg, Almita Vamos, and many others) responded:

“Generally speaking, it is better **not** to practice too much on such a day. Too much work – long hours of it – would dull the freshness and enthusiasm needed for the actual performance.”

When pressed with the follow-up question “Should one play through his entire program in concert tempo the day of the appearance?”, Persinger maintains this position, replying:

“I would say no. But it might be advantageous to try out certain passages, etc. at the concert speed. I would certainly **not** advise anyone to play through the whole of his program with great intensity, etc. Too often one hears of very conscientious players burning themselves out in their practice and retaining too little in reserve for the highlights of the public performance.”

What do sport psychologists say?

The sport psychologist would agree, pointing to corroborating evidence in sports to back this position.

If you have ever been friends with a competitive endurance athlete, you’re probably familiar with tapering. Tapering refers to the process of strategically reducing one’s training volume and frequency (but not intensity) in the days or weeks before a big race. The research suggests that doing so allows the body to recover and optimize levels of muscle glycogen, enzymes, antioxidants, and hormones for the big day.

Quite a few studies show a significant, if not (occasionally) dramatic boost in performance on race day among those who tapered, while those who continued training like normal up until race day don’t enjoy

these performance enhancements.

Psychological factors are also associated with tapering too. There is often a reduction in perceived effort, mood disturbances are reduced, vigor is increased, all that good stuff. Some athletes even seem to sleep better following a taper.

Take action

So when you are preparing for a big audition, competition, or recital, plan ahead so that you can use the last week or two to begin tapering instead of cramming. Keep the intensity of your practice high, but begin gradually reducing the total amount of grunt work you do, so that you aren't burning yourself out. More run-throughs, spot-checks, and mock auditions, slow work to stay connected with your instrument, and less banging it out mindlessly over and over.

Of course, if you have to cram, you have to cram, but the goal is to plan ahead so it doesn't come to that.

The one-sentence summary

"To go beyond is as wrong as to fall short." ~Confucius

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