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Experiences of Musical Performance Anxiety in Final-Year Undergraduate Music Students:

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Abstract

Musical performance anxiety (MPA) is a common problem for musicians. However, the majority of work in this area is quantitative in nature, meaning that analyses of musicians' individual experiences are lacking. This study therefore explored the subjective experiences of performance anxiety in undergraduate music students through the use of semi-structured interviews. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyse the experiences of four undergraduate music students, including how MPA feels, how it is dealt with, and what causes it. Three themes emerged from the analysis: the psychological impact of the audience, issues of trust, and the musical identity. These results are compatible with several quantitative studies and contribute an original idiographic perspective on how music students experience and understand MPA. This has implications for both amateur and professional musicians: If the underlying mechanisms are better understood, it may be possible to introduce interventions to help musicians cope with their anxiety.

Experiences of Musical Performance Anxiety in Final-Year Undergraduate Music

Students: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Performance anxiety, colloquially known as 'stage fright', is defined as 'the experience of persisting, distressful apprehension about and/or actual impairment of performance skills in a public context, to a degree unwarranted given the individual's [...] aptitude, training and level of preparation' (Salmon, 1990, p. 3). Performance anxiety is commonplace amongst those in performing areas of study and employment, including music (Deen, 2000; Ryan, 2003), sports (Hall & Kerr, 1998; Hanton et al., 2002), and drama (Wilson, 2002). However, there has been a notable lack of qualitative research on how musical performance anxiety (MPA) is experienced by musicians. The present study seeks to address this gap using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2009).

The symptoms of MPA can be physical and cognitive/affective. Physical symptoms can include tremors and raised heart rate (Brantigan et al., 1978), dry mouth, and hyperventilation (Studer et al., 2011). Cognitive and affective characteristics include memory difficulties (Abel & Larkin, 1990), inability to concentrate (Kenny, 2011), and persisting, distressful apprehension (Salmon, 1990). In the longer term, MPA is associated with lower levels of confidence (Craske & Craig, 1984), lower self-esteem, and reduced performance quality (Ryan, 1998, 2004).

MPA can have positive or negative effects. Yoshie and Shigemasu (2007) argue that mild levels of anxiety can increase the quality of a performance, while preoccupation about mistakes and failure before a public performance may lead to debilitating anxiety and decreased performance quality. Similarly, Larrouy-Maestri and Morsomme (2014) found that the quality of a music performance can be reduced or increased if the performer experiences stressful conditions. Furthermore, they argue that the quality of a sung performance requires control of the fundamental frequency of the voice, which is particularly sensitive to stress.

Estimates of the prevalence of MPA vary, ranging from 15% (Wesner et al., 1990) to 59% (van Kemenade et al., 1995). However, this may be due to differing samples, as some studies use students and others professionals. Furthermore, the type of performance may skew these estimates: Those in orchestras may experience different levels of anxiety to soloists, for example. Women display higher levels of MPA than men (e.g. LeBlanc et al., 1997; Lewinsohn et al., 1998; Osborne & Franklin, 2002), although again this may be due to sampling, with women more likely to agree to take part or to admit experiencing MPA.

The severity of MPA ranges from 'normal everyday healthy aspects of stress and anxiety that are intrinsic to the profession' (Brodsky, 1996, p. 91) to experiences close to panic (Kobori et al., 2011). In a study of music students (Fehm & Schmidt, 2006), 73% judged anxiety as negatively impacting their performances, and 86% felt that further help was required in order to cope with their anxiety. Similarly, Egilmez (2012) found that 60% of piano students could not concentrate on playing during a stressful exam situation, leading to decreased performance quality.

Some musicians may turn to undesirable coping mechanisms in order to ease their performance anxiety, such as taking non-prescription drugs (Fishbein & Middlestadt, 1987) or alcohol misuse (Dobson, 2011; Fehm & Schmidt, 2006). The use of beta-blockers can have the opposite effect of creating adverse mood states (Hayes & Schulz, 1987; Head et al., 1996). It is therefore of utmost importance for psychologists to research the area of performance anxiety more thoroughly in order to promote both preventative measures and coping strategies.

The underlying causal and maintaining factors of performance anxiety are poorly understood (Latané & Harkins, 1976). Several potential causes of MPA have been suggested. Kenny et al. (2004) argue that living and working in an environment of constant social evaluation may heighten musicians' anxiety, and that the extent to which musicians feel exposed and the likelihood of detection of errors in their performance contribute to high

levels of performance anxiety. Fehm and Schmidt (2006) found that the mere presence of an audience can influence levels of MPA, although anxiety levels were also influenced by the status of the audience: Audiences with a high level of professional knowledge elicited higher levels of anxiety through the perceived high importance of their judgement. Furthermore, musicians work in a highly competitive environment, where negative evaluation by peers, reviewers and audiences is part of the occupation and might contribute to anxiety (Wells et al., 2012). Similarly, Kenny and Osborne (2006) note that becoming a professional musician requires the acquisition of near perfection, demanding years of training and constant, extreme self-evaluation. This intense self-judgement is likely to teach musicians to detect even minor mistakes, leading to reduced confidence and increased anxiety.

In order to understand better how MPA is experienced and understood by musicians, and to add a qualitative and idiographic angle to the literature on MPA, we interviewed music students about performance anxiety. IPA is well suited to this purpose because of its focus on subjective lived experience and individual sense-making. Based on epistemological ideas from phenomenology and hermeneutics, IPA is a qualitative method to examine individual first-hand accounts of lived experience. It uses a characteristic "double hermeneutic" of the researcher making sense of how the participant makes sense of experience, and aims for an idiographic analysis of each person's account before any attempt to consider commonalities across cases (Smith et al., 2009). This enabled us to do justice to idiosyncrasies in the experience of MPA, but also to move towards an understanding of its essence.

In our interviews and analysis, we examined the research questions of how MPA feels and how it is dealt with, how musicians make sense of its causes, and how the presence of others is experienced by the performer.

Method

Participants

Four final-year undergraduates were recruited from the same university music department to take part in individual interviews. All participants were singers: three females (Emily, Harriet, and Louise, aged 21, 21, and 22 years, respectively) and one male (Mark, aged 23). All names have been changed to ensure anonymity. Participants were informed that they would be taking part in an interview study examining performance anxiety and would be asked questions about their experiences of MPA.

Interview Schedule and Procedure

Participants were interviewed in a practice room in the music department. They were informed that they did not have to provide an answer to any question they did not feel comfortable answering, and that they did not have to give a reason for this. Informed consent for audio recording, transcription, and the analysis of interview data was obtained prior to the interview. Interviews were audio-recorded using a mobile telephone; no notes were taken during the interview to minimise any potential distraction.

A semi-structured interview technique was adopted, as recommended for IPA (Smith et al., 2009). Interviews began by asking participants to describe how anxiety feels and when nerves typically begin. Each interview then explored possible causes and consequences of these feelings as understood by each participant – for example, how nerves were dealt with during the performance, and any possible involvement of previous experiences, the type of performance, level of expertise, genre of the piece, comfort zones, and performing alone or in a group.

The length of interviews ranged from 13 to 22.5 minutes, with an average length of 19 minutes. This is short by IPA standards (probably because interviews focused on a phenomenon with which participants were very familiar and about which they would have

thought in depth before the interview), but still yielded rich and useful data. The interviews were transcribed using a playscript method.

Data Analysis

Analysis began during the transcription phase. Initial notes were made manually line-by-line to gain familiarity with the data and to establish the types of things that seemed important to the participant. From these notes, emergent themes were developed for each participant, which explored the recurrent ideas throughout the participant's responses. These were then compared across all transcripts to establish any connections, similarities and differences between the participants. The emergent themes were in turn examined for overriding connections and clustered together to form superordinate themes. Quotes from the transcripts were then chosen to illustrate each theme.

<div align="center">

Results

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Two superordinate themes were identified as being common to all four participants: the psychological impact of the audience, and issues of trust. A further theme, the musical identity, was common to three of the four participants. For sub-themes and illustrative quotations, see Table 1.

Theme 1: The Psychological Impact of the Audience

Sub-themes in this area included fear of negative judgement, the supportive audience versus the musical or critical audience, competitiveness, and how many people are present. Negative psychological impacts of the audience are exacerbated by the fear of negative judgement – a theme that was present in all participants. But it seems to matter who is in the audience:

It's worse with music audiences, erm, when they're musicians and you're performing in front of them- or singers, when you're performing in front of singers, that's really hard, cause it's quite judgemental (Emily: 26-28)

Here, Emily describes her feelings towards performing before different types of audiences, considering performing before fellow singers particularly stressful. This is based on her fear of being negatively judged by them, perhaps due to a belief that fellow musicians can notice small mistakes that non-musical audiences would not. Her idea of this type of audience as being particularly judgemental also suggests that they might be looking for mistakes in the performance, rather than simply enjoying it.

Louise shares these concerns, stating simply that 'musicians are notoriously strict in their criticism of other musicians'. She further explains:

Musicians can be competitive and judgemental, so you kind of… sometimes you can be a bit worried that people are going to turn round, and they're not afraid of turning round and saying "that was really rubbish, you went really wrong there, sort it out now" (Louise: 65-68)

Fear of negative judgement is linked to competitiveness in these statements, suggesting that there is a lack of a supportive atmosphere when performing in front of fellow musicians. It is possible that this is specific to students, who are encouraged to provide feedback on each other's performances. However, Louise appears to be aware that her fears are to a certain extent unwarranted. She believes that, as a performer, she is more critical of herself than the audience is.

You put so much pressure on yourself, you- you assume that people are going to judge you massively because you've gone wrong, and you probably judge yourself far more than they do (Louise: 13-15)

Similarly, Harriet struggles with nerves when the audience is made up of people she knows:

I get more nervous when I'm er, about to sing in front of my peers, rather than people that I've never seen before and will never see again (Harriet: 20-21)

When I perform in front of people that I know pretty well… I've always got more nervous than strangers (Harriet: 46-47)

The fact that she reports less severe anxiety when the audience is made up of strangers suggests that her fear may be based to some degree on ideas of group rejection, similar to those experienced by Louise. She reports that *who* is in the audience has more impact on her nerves than *how many* people are in the audience:

When I've done shows before, I don't mind how many people are there, because I don't know them necessarily (Harriet: 40-41)

Mark, on the other hand, finds the number of people in the audience to be more fear-inducing than who is watching. When describing a previous performance in which he felt very anxious, he claims:

The only reason I felt stage fright was just because of the number of people… I'm more concerned about what people say after the- after a performance as opposed to during a performance (Mark: 7-9)

This relates again to the theme of fearing negative judgement; it can be argued that the sheer number of people who may be judging his performance is a significant part of what caused his performance anxiety in this instance. Mark suggests that the primary cause of his performance anxiety is the fear of negative judgement, even going so far as to state that the performance itself was not anxiety-provoking.

> I'd just sort of be apprehensive about what people would be thinking or saying about
> me after the performance. It's not to do with the actual performance itself (Mark: 15-
> 17)

However, it is important to note that Mark is unique in this sample as he no longer suffers with MPA to the same extent: 'years ago it was different, I used to get bogged down' (Mark: 215-216).

Theme 2: Issues of trust

The difficulty of trusting others was common to all four participants. This can be divided into the sub-themes of difficulty trusting parts of their performance to accompanists and to other performers such as choir members, and a sense of lacking control over aspects of their performance. Mark describes the impact that not trusting an accompanist has on his performance:

> …then your performance isn't about singing the best that you can sing, it's about
> worrying about what the other person's going to do, and that's obviously
> subconsciously going to take away from what you're going to do as a singer (Mark:
> 200-202)

These ideas can be interpreted as Mark feeling he has a lack of control over how his accompanist performs, and consequently over how well his performance might be viewed by the audience. He also recognises that his own preoccupation with his accompanist's performance affects his own, regardless of any mistakes made in reality. It is important to note that the accompanists in many performances given by the participants are fellow students rather than experienced professional accompanists. The anxiety caused by concerns about accompanist errors may therefore be specific to student singers.

The negative impact of worries about the accompanist on the performance was echoed by Harriet:

I had this other lady yesterday and she took the piece double the speed in the concert, erm, and she did it in the rehearsals, so I suppose yesterday I was more nervous because the rehearsal didn't go to plan and even though I'd given her the tempo so many times, she just took it at her speed (…) and I felt that the- the performance hadn't gone to how it should have been (Harriet: 188-195)

Both Mark and Harriet felt negatively affected by a real or anticipated mistake made by their accompanist and believed that their performance suffered as a consequence. Harriet also describes a discrepancy between how she felt the performance should have gone and how it went in reality, and suggests that this was because of mistakes made by the accompanist. She also highlights the sense that the rehearsal had not gone to plan as a contributing factor in her experience of MPA, suggesting that previous experiences of performances going wrong can have a debilitating influence.

Emily also describes a bad experience of performing in which her accompanist made several mistakes during an important assessed recital:

In my last recital… well- my last year end of year recital my accompanist totally screwed up about three of the pieces that I was singing and it- that really knocked my confidence because I knew that I could sing them well and they're my favourite and she'd ruined it (Emily: 109-112)

Emily's use of the word 'ruined' highlights her perception of how badly her performance had gone. She also emphasises her own ability to perform well and compares this with her accompanist's poor performance; thus, the blame is placed squarely on her accompanist rather than herself. She also describes the effect on her confidence, implying that future performance may be affected by this negative experience, as also suggested by Harriet.

Similar ideas were discussed by Louise, who was concerned that a lack of understanding between herself and her accompanist might lead to a failure to convey her own interpretation of the piece to the audience:

It's your emotion and your interpretation of it and if the accompanist doesn't follow that then it's just going to fall flat anyway, and also if the piece has meaning for you, you don't want the meaning to be ruined because the accompanist hasn't followed what you're doing (Louise: 42-45).

Louise approaches the issue of accompanist error from a slightly different perspective, focusing on misunderstandings rather than technical errors. She says that it is important for the performer to convey their own interpretation of the piece, which the accompanist could neutralise if they do not hold the same interpretation. The consequence, as in the other cases, is a sense of a poor performance not under the participant's own control.

Theme 3: The Musical Identity

This theme was common to three of the four participants and was repeated in both Emily and Harriet's interviews. A recurring sub-theme was the use of stage characters to reduce anxiety. This is interesting as the interviewer made no mention or allusion to the use of characters; the concept was spontaneously brought up by the participants themselves.

Mark, by expressing a concern about 'what people would be thinking or saying about me', shows that the quality of the performance is intimately linked to the musician's image and identity. Louise also alludes to belonging and fear of exclusion as a part of her MPA:

Right before a performance, you always assume that if it goes wrong, the rest of the group's going to completely shun you and think that you're awful and never talk to you again and all that, but actually in reality when it does go wrong, they never do that, they're always really supportive (Louise: 130-133)

Louise recognises that her fear of rejection by the rest of the 'group' of musicians is unfounded ('they're always really supportive'), but her statement supports the view that the stakes are high for performing musicians with regard to their very identity as musicians.

Harriet's concern of being judged, too, appears to be linked to her sense of self. She seems to rely on the judgements and opinions of others to affirm her self-esteem and identity as a good singer.

> I don't want to put myself down, I want people to think that actually I am good at it, rather than doing something not so good and then they're like oh, actually she's not a great singer (Harriet: 30-31)

Whereas a good performance therefore contributes to a positive musical identity, a poor performance threatens it. This seems to be at the root of the surprising sense that impersonating a fictional character can relieve MPA: Rather than seeing the requirement to act in character as an unwelcome strain, the participants seemed to draw comfort from it. For example, Emily felt much more comfortable when playing a character in a music theatre production than as a soloist in a classical concert.

> When I do flamboyant characters, I find it a lot better to er, adapt to the character changing and movement around the stage and that, that- that loosens my nerves, is when I'm moving around but when I'm just sort of stood still next to a piano, everyone's like, looking at me, it's very scary (Emily: 13-16)

Emily may find that playing a character while performing eases her nerves because the increased concentration required to act and move around the stage as well as sing distracts from the presence of the audience. However, it may also be that the character acts as a 'shield' from any negative criticism or judgement of the audience. Emily also speaks of drawing comfort from the character:

I got a much better mark when I did the musical than I did when I was doing my

classical pieces, just because I had a character to go along with me the whole way, so

you're not- I know it's sad but you're not really alone in your journey on the stage

(Emily: 40-43)

This extract suggests that Emily feels supported by the character during her

performance, particularly in the phrase 'you're not really alone'. Furthermore, playing a

character is something the performer can control, unlike the performance of an accompanist.

It is also possible that by playing another character, any mistakes during the performance

could be ascribed to the character, rather than the performer. Furthermore, Emily's positive

experience of being awarded a good mark for a particular performance might also boost her

confidence when performing a similar piece or genre, thus reducing nerves and improving

performance. Harriet describes similar experiences of playing a character rather than a

classical piece, stating that she too finds it easier and less nerve-inducing.

I find it so much easier to put myself in that character's shoes and act, but when it

comes to just me on the stage with a pianist, but singing the same song, and I've got

no scenery, no set, I find it so much harder to just get myself into that character

(Harriet: 111-114)

Harriet's description of performing in character appears to be based on a change from

her usual self - both physically, with the presence of scenery, and putting herself 'in that

character's shoes'. She also mentions that it is often expected of singers to perform as a

character, as many classical pieces are written for characters:

You have a different personality (…) being a singer, you have to portray the song as if

the character was singing it (Harriet: 104-106)

Harriet even speaks of becoming 'someone else' during the performance and changing

identity to the point where she is no longer herself – with positive effects:

> I definitely think it helps when you are a character and you're in the costume and you
>
> are that person, and you're not Harriet standing there… I definitely think that helps if
>
> you're someone else (Harriet: 234-236)

This change in identity may serve as a form of protection against the fear of the audience and the idea that they might judge or criticise part of the performance. Louise also speaks of becoming a different character, citing the additional distance between her and her usual self as helpful in reducing nerves.

> The thing about being on stage and performing is that you're meant to be a
>
> completely different other character, you're meant to be whatever the composer
>
> intended, you're not you any more, you are the music and the person in the music. So,
>
> I mean there's always going to be a bit of distance and in some ways the distance
>
> helps you perform and helps take away the nerves a little bit because it does help you
>
> just be a completely different character who's comfortable with being there (Louise:
>
> 120-125)

She, like Harriet, speaks of what appears to be a complete metamorphosis into another character, seen here in the statement 'you're not you any more'. She also speaks of the intentions of the composer as being important in performing a particular piece; in her view, as the composer intended the piece of music to be performed from the point of view of a particular character, it is the performer's duty to play that part and convey what was intended. In addition, the character's sense of being 'comfortable with being there' is helpful in overcoming anxiety: As the character does not feel nervous, there is no need for the performer to feel nervous.

Discussion

To summarise, issues of trust and the psychological impact of the audience, including fear of negative judgement, were identified by all four participants as being involved in

causing and maintaining their performance anxiety. A further theme, the musical identity, was common to three of the four participants and included a link between performance and identity, and the notion of overcoming MPA by performing 'in character'.

The finding that participants felt more anxious when performing in front of audiences made up of fellow musicians suggests that an important cause of MPA is the fear of negative judgement by peers or knowledgeable others. This is consistent with findings from Brown and Garland (1971), who found that people sing for longer in front of strangers than in front of their friends, presumably because they are less embarrassed. Similarly, Fehm and Schmidt (2006) found that the size and status of an audience could have an effect on the level of the performer's MPA, and Larrouy-Maestri and Morsomme (2014) showed that musicians are more likely to feel anxious in conditions in which they are being evaluated. This tallies with the participants' view that not only is the number of people present important, but that who they are matters too, with audiences made up of fellow musicians eliciting the greatest amount of anxiety. It is also in line with Lehrer's (1987) suggestion that MPA comprises several facets, including fear of social disapproval and a judgemental attitude, a theme that was discussed by all participants. As pointed out by Wells et al. (2012), musicians work in an extremely competitive environment, where negative assessment by peers and audience members is part of the occupation. This competitiveness was experienced by our participants too, although it was acknowledged by at least one participant as a fear rather than a fact. Positive experiences of a supportive audience may therefore help in overcoming MPA.

The finding that singers struggle to relinquish control and trust aspects of their performances to others is not entirely unexpected given the relatively amateur status of the participants. This partially supports the findings of Ryan and Andrews (2009), who suggest that singers felt a great sense of control over their instrument (i.e. their voice) and consequently respond with less anxiety, as it is the surrendering of control which the participants found difficult. Furthermore, Kobori et al. (2011) argue that, in classical music,

improvisation away from the score is discouraged, meaning that classical musicians such as these participants may be more perfectionist because they are required to perform without making any mistakes. This perfectionism may explain why the participants were reluctant to relinquish control.

Kenny & Osborne (2006) argue that musical performances demand great levels of expertise in various skills including refined motor coordination, attention, memory, and interpretation requiring years of practice and self-evaluation. Galamian (1952, cited in Neftel et al., 1982) agrees, stating that training of musicians requires constant application of 'the critical eye': the relentless focusing of attention on their own performance. This may lead to the exaggeration of one's own mistakes, which performers assume are noticed by the audience, when in reality this may not be the case. This can be seen in Louise's recognition that she places far more emphasis on her own mistakes than the audience does, and, contrary to her beliefs, the audience is always supportive. Correspondingly, Kenny et al. (2004) argue that working in an environment of perpetual social evaluation may amplify musicians' baseline anxiety, and that the extent to which they feel exposed and the probability of the detection of mistakes made while performing contribute to their high levels of MPA. The participants in our study similarly understood MPA to be linked to evaluation by the audience and the risk of mistakes in the performance – the singer's and the accompanist's.

The musical identity was invoked by participants as both a contributor to MPA (via the need to feel accepted as a good musician) and as a possible remedy for it (via the device of playing a character). There is limited research in this area. Yondem (2007) found that MPA was related to the need for approval from others, which corresponds with Harriet's desire to be seen by her peers as a good performer. Durrant (2005) found that singers identified themselves socially as well as musically with a group, arguing that the very nature of communal singing activities make them social functions, and that people obtain social approval and acceptance from these acts. This relates to Louise's (unfounded) fear of being

excluded from the group of musicians. Remarkably, this involvement of identity in the musical performance seems to enable a successful strategy for coping with MPA: the adoption of a character, which decouples the performance from the personal self in the stage experience of the performer, and thereby mitigates the sense of threat to a positive musical identity. No previous research was found in this area, and it would be interesting to see whether the same strategies are employed by more experienced musicians.

Our results suggest that MPA is subjectively experienced as a distressing aspect of performance exacerbated by fear of negative judgement by peers or knowledgeable others, which may involve issues of trust in aspects of the performance over which the individual has no control. However, it can potentially be reduced by the use of characters in performance and by growth in experience. This supports the idea that MPA is primarily socially based and suggests that the musician's identity plays an important part in the experience of MPA and in possible ways to overcome it. Using the strengths of IPA, the present research has thus connected with existing research from a qualitative and experiential angle, as well as highlighting unexpected and under-researched aspects that would remain hidden from other methodological approaches.

However, more research is needed to establish whether other musicians make sense of MPA in the same way. First, our sample was made up exclusively of non-professional music undergraduates, for whom feedback on performance is an integral part of the course. This may have overemphasised the fear of evaluation by knowledgeable others. A similar study among professional musicians may yield different results; as argued by Kenny et al. (2004), most research in this area is conducted on music students but their issues and experiences of anxiety may be vastly different to those of professional artists. Additionally, research by Ryan and Andrews (2009) found that professional musicians with at least one college or degree-level qualification reported less frequent and marginally less severe anxiety than those without. This suggests that confidence may grow with experience, something that Mark

believed to be important in his experience of performance anxiety. Further research using a professional sample would be welcomed to investigate whether experience plays a role in experiences of MPA. Second, although our interviews covered both solo and choral performance, all our participants were singers. Issues of trust in an accompanist, for example, may be limited to this kind of musician. Finally, the literature points towards gender differences that merit exploration. For example, Studer et al. (2011) suggest that women may express their emotions or symptoms more freely than men, or that they might respond to the stresses of performance with different symptoms and emotions.

Notwithstanding this need for further research, our study – by examining MPA from the performer's own point of view – suggests some possible ways to reduce or manage stage fright. The subjective experience of MPA is linked to fear of judgement by knowledgeable and critical others, but may diminish with experience and exposure to supportive audiences. This raises the possibility of using low-stakes, non-competitive and supportive performance environments (e.g. charity events) to prepare performers for the more threatening educational or commercial settings in a kind of exposure therapy (see Abramowitz et al., 2010). Issues of trust, especially in the performance of an accompanist, clearly demonstrate the need to communicate and manage expectations for the performance, and emphasise the work with accompanists as an integral part of singers' training and education. Finally, our participants' thoughts about the musical identity suggest that role-playing different characters in both performance and practice could decouple the performance from the threat to the performer's personal musical identity, and thereby offer relief from MPA. Measures such as these could foster a more enjoyable working environment for musicians.

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Table 1: Table of Themes

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme	Illustrative Quote
The psychological impact of the audience	Who the audience comprises	I get more nervous when I'm er, about to sing in front of my peers, rather than people that I've never seen before and will never see again (Harriet: 20-21)
		When I perform in front of people that I know pretty well… I've always got more nervous than strangers (Harriet: 46-47)
		When I've done shows before, I don't mind how many people are there, because I don't know them necessarily (Harriet: 40-41)
	The supportive vs. the critical audience	It's worse with music audiences, erm, when they're musicians and you're performing in fromt of them- or singers, when you're performing in front of singers, that's really hard, cause it's quite judgemental (Emily: 26-28)
		Musicians are notoriously strict in their criticisms of other musicians (Louise: 113)
		Musicians can be competitive and judgemental, so you kind of… sometimes you can be a bit worried that people are going to turn round, and they're not afraid of turning round and saying 'that was really rubbish, you went really wrong there, sort it out now' (Louise: 65-68)
		People who are musicians will be more critical of music, purely because they've got the- you know, the more experience in it, they know more what to look for (Louise: 111-112)
	How many are present	I kind of prefer less (Harriet: 38)
		The only reason I felt stage fright was just because of the number of people … I'm more concerned about what people say after the- after a performance as opposed to during a performance (Mark: 7-9)

	Fear of negative judgement	I'd just be sort of apprehensive about what people would be thinking or saying about me after the performance. It's not to do with the actual performance itself (Mark: 215-216)
		You put so much pressure on yourself, you- you assume that people are going to judge you massively because you've gone wrong, and you probably judge yourself far more than they do (Louise: 13-15)
		Ultimately, people want you to do well, but you don't necessarily see it that way, so I guess other people's opinions… or your fear of what other people are thinking causes it (Louise: 15-17)
Issues of trust	Difficulty trusting accompanist/other performers	It's so, so important to get an accompanist you can trust (Mark: 179-180)
		If your accompanist has gone really wrong or something, then you will find it difficult to trust your accompanist not to go wrong in the next performance (Louise: 31-32)
		It's always about trusting someone else to be better than you are (Emily: 114)
		It's hard to rely on someone else to play well (Emily: 109)
	A sense of lacking control over aspects of performance	Then your performance isn't about singing the best that you can sing, it's about worrying about what the other person's going to do, and that's obviously subconsciously going to take away from what you're going to do as a singer (Mark: 200-202)
		I had this other lady yesterday and she took the piece double the speed in the concert, erm, and she did it in the rehearsals, so I suppose yesterday I was more nervous because the rehearsal didn't go to plan and even though I'd given her the tempo so many times, she just took it at her speed […] and I felt the- the performance hadn't gone to how it should have been (Harriet: 188-195)

		In my last recital… well- my last year end of year recital my accompanist totally screwed up about three of the pieces that I was singing and it- that really knocked my confidence because I knew that I could sing them well and they're my favourite and she'd ruined it (Emily: 109-112)
		It's your emotion and your interpretation of it and if the accompanist doesn't follow that then it's just going to fall flat anyway, and also if the piece has meaning for you, you don't want the meaning to be ruined because the accompanist hasn't followed what you're doing (Louise: 42-45)
The musical identity	Group belonging	Right before a performance, you always assume that if it goes wrong, the rest of the group's going to completely shun you and think that you're awful and never talk to you again and all that, but actually in reality when it does go wrong, they never do that, they're always really supportive (Louise: 130-133)
	Self-identity	I don't want to put myself down, I want people to think that actually I am good at it, rather than doing something not so good and then they're like oh, actually she's not a great singer (Harriet: 30-31)
	Use of characters to alleviate anxiety	When I do flamboyant characters, I find it a lot better to er, adapt to the character changing and movement around the stage and that- that loosens my nerves, is when I'm moving around but when I'm just sort of stood still next to a piano, everyone's like, looking at me, it's very scary (Emily: 13-16)
		I got a much better mark when I did the musical than when I was doing my classical pieces, just because I had a character to go along with me the whole way, so you're not- I know it's sad but you're not really alone in your journey on the stage (Emily: 40-43)
		I find it so much easier to put myself in that character's shoes and act, but when it comes to just me on the stage with a pianist, but singing the same song, and I've got no scenery, no set, I find it

so much harder to just get myself into that character (Harriet: 111-114)

You have a different personality […] being a singer, you have to portray the song as if the character was singing it (Harriet: 104-106)

I definitely think it helps when you are a character and you're in the costume and you are that person, and you're not Harriet standing there… I definitely think that helps if you're someone else (Harriet: 234-236)

The thing about being on stage and performing is that you're meant to be a completely different other character, you're meant to be whatever the composer intended, you're not you anymore, you are the music and the person in the music. So, I mean there's always going to be a bit of distance and in some ways the distance helps you perform and helps take away the nerves a little bit because it does help you just be a completely different character who's comfortable with being there (Louise: 120-125)