

Performance Nerves

Music

What nerves do to the body, and the preparation that reduces them.

Most of the work happens in the weeks before, not the minutes before.

1

Over-prepare the openings

The first eight bars of everything, memorised cold. That is where nerves peak.

2

Practise under pressure

Play for one person, or record yourself. Both raise the stakes safely.

3

Rehearse recovery, not just the piece

Deliberately stumble, then continue. Recovery is a skill.

4

Slow the breath out

A longer exhale than inhale lowers heart rate within a minute.

5

Reframe the sensation

The physical signs of excitement and fear are identical. Name it as excitement.

ON THE DAY

Arrive early, play in the space

Eat something

Warm up gently, do not cram

Focus on the first note, not the whole piece

Some nerves are useful — they sharpen attention. The goal is to manage them, not to eliminate them.