

## The (im)possibility of Performance with(out) Fear. Part 2.

### The Pendulum, Fish and Eagle Arms.

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*Last month's article focused on "knowing the enemy": witnessing one's nervousness and its manifestation before coping with it. This month's article will focus on coping with nervousness and its manifestation as tension on a physical level.*

#### Tension

When a situation is stressful (in our case, a performance, concert, audition, exam), we tend to do two things: we hold our breath or we breathe shallowly. Either way, our body tenses up. Whenever I give a workshop, I always ask "Where do you feel tension in your body?" Invariably the answer is: in the neck, shoulders and in the back.

So I would like to offer here a few exercises and techniques to alleviate tension.

#### Tension in the Neck

You probably already know some useful exercises such as head rotation, shoulder lifts and shoulder rotations. Let us try an exercise specifically designed to release tension in the neck: **the pendulum**

*Drop your chin to your chest. Slowly turn your head to the left and then to the right as you breathe deeply in and out. Feel the stretch at the back of your neck.*

This exercise can easily be done waiting in the wings (where the simpler, the better)

#### Neck, Shoulders, Back, Chest.

One result of tensing the neck is that the shoulders go up and we round the back and collapse the chest. The **Eagle Arms** exercise is a great help:

*Bring the left elbow over the right and intertwine the arms until palms come together. Now with your hands together this way, move your arms - from side to side; up and down; circling them in one direction and then the other. Finally repeat the whole exercise, this time bringing the right elbow over the left and intertwining the arms until palms come together.*

This is one of the only exercises that will open the upper back and release tension stored there.

## **Fish**

Another exercise I find extremely helpful and use a lot is **the fish** (adaptation of a yoga pose)

*Sit in a chair with your spine erect. Your two feet should be firmly planted on the floor. Hold the sides of your chair, as shown in the illustration. Inhale, and, pushing on the chair with your hands, lift the chest towards the ceiling, bending the torso backwards.*

## **Release by building**

Another technique I find very helpful is “tension release.” You build tension in a group of muscles, increase tension and then release. Creating tension actually exaggerates the feeling of release, which is what we want to highlight. Let’s try one example: create some tension in the hands by making a fist, squeeze the fists, increase the tension, hold it for 5 seconds... let it go and take a deep breath. You can repeat this exercise with tensing shoulders, arms and so on. Rather than being overwhelmed with tension, these simple techniques help you to act and take control of the situation.

In next month’s article we will look at some breathing exercises as well as how to use the mind efficiently to eliminate mental blocks.

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