PLAYING OUT OF YOUR MIND

BE ALL YOU CAN BE

AS A MILITARY MUSICIAN

Annie McConnon & Lara Pomerleau-Fontaine et al.

Ed. Thomas W. Jackson, Jr.

CEP
CENTER FOR ENHANCED PERFORMANCE
UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

West Point
Music Research Center

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Annie McConnon; Lara Pomerleau-Fontaine;

Mitchell DeSimone, EdD; Nicholas Caluori

Edited by Thomas W. Jackson, Jr.

Dedication:

This manual is dedicated to all the military musicians stationed all over the world.

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Introduction

For decades, sports psychology has been applied in a multitude of settings outside of athletics. Musicians have particularly benefited from these applications to enhance preparation, performance, and recovery.

While there is a volume of literature connecting performance psychology and music, we identified a need to address the unique performance challenges faced by military musicians when compared to their civilian counterparts.

Some of these include the following:

- Different performance expectations and realities wearing a military uniform as musical ambassadors of the Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
- Uncontrollable variables outside the scope of traditional performance settings
- Fulfilling extra duties and responsibilities in addition to their primary musical missions
- Performing at an elite level in a variety of ceremonial, musical, and outreach missions

This collaborative project began in the summer of 2022 between the Performance Psychology Program (PPP) at the Center for Enhanced Performance (CEP) at the United States Military Academy (USMA) and the West Point Music Research Center (WPMRC). Over several months, the authors conducted a thorough intake of experiences as an Army musician. They were able to observe and sit in on a variety of rehearsal and performance settings in marching groups, popular music, concert band, and support staff. They also analyzed the aggregate survey feedback from musicians in all service branches of the DoD and DHS into focus areas based on real-life experiences and concerns of military musicians.

This manual shares the same mission as the PPP, which is to educate and train servicemembers (SMs) in performance enhancement techniques that foster their full development. The West Point PPP integrates five mental skills around a unifying conceptual understanding of the psychology of improvement and success. This educational model provides a systematic approach to empowering individuals and organizations.

Playing out of your mind means performing in your own, unique, effortless state of complete control with focus and confidence: free of mental chatter, worry, and distractions. In the words of Dr. Nate Zinsser (2022, p.8), it is “a sense of certainty about your ability that allows you to bypass conscious thought and execute unconsciously.” This definition is still heavily involved in our work at the Center for Enhanced Performance.

As the director of the PPP, I am happy to introduce this worthwhile endeavor to you. I hope it helps empower you with useful information, references, exercises, interventions, and applications to be all you can be and play out of your mind.

Kathryn Longshore, Ph.D.
Director, Performance Psychology Program
Center for Enhanced Performance
United States Military Academy

PART I: Be In Tune with Yourself

"Start where you are, use what you have, do what you can."

- Arthur Ashe

Purpose: This chapter is designed to help you gain an understanding of where you are at this point in your career as a military musician and guide you in creating a road map for where you want to be.

Whether you are new to the Armed Forces or a Senior Non-Commissioned Officer, the opportunity for personal learning and growth is always present. However, as Ray Dalio, founder of Bridgewater Associates writes in his book, *Principles*, "Knowing how one is wired is a necessary first step on any life journey. It doesn't matter what you do with your life, as long as you are doing what is consistent with your **nature** and your **aspirations**" (2018, p. 231). This section of self-examination will help you get in tune with yourself by providing insight into your individual strengths and growth areas so you can do what is necessary to reach your short and long-term goals.

Before the beginning of each chapter, we will ask that you take a few moments to take stock of your strengths and weaknesses using questions adapted from performance psychologist Don Greene's "Artist's Performance Survey." You can find the full assessment and scoring instructions at the end of the manual.

For this chapter, reflect on the following questions from Dr. Greene's survey and rate how they relate to you on a scale of 1 (untrue for you) to 5 (very true for you):

- I have a strong inner drive to be my best. _____
- The level at which I perform is very important to me. _____
- I have a strong will to succeed. _____
- I am driven from within. _____
- I am committed to be the best I can be. _____
- Sometimes success isn't worth the effort it requires. _____
- I'd probably do better if I were more self-motivated. _____
- I don't always have to do my absolute best. _____
- I know that I will be successful. _____
- I am very driven for my own reasons. _____
- I am committed to doing my best. _____
- I would do almost anything to succeed. _____

Section One: My Nature

"Self-awareness is the ability to take an honest look at your life without any attachment to it being right or wrong, good or bad."

- Debbie Ford

Achieving excellence as a military musician goes beyond technical mastery of your instrument. Possessing a solid understanding of where you are in the present and where you want to end up as you progress in your career can have significant, positive impacts on personal and professional growth (Gould, 2021). This understanding, also known as self-awareness, involves recognizing, and reflecting upon one's thoughts, physical sensations, emotions, and behaviors, in both the present moment and in hindsight. A 2011 study conducted by Terry Clark and Aaron Williamson with undergraduate and postgraduate musicians identified that enhanced self-awareness led to a greater feeling of self-confidence when performing. As musicians engaged in mental skills training that increased self-awareness, they were able to identify the unique, individual behavioral patterns that facilitated success in their previous successful performances. Additionally, they were better able to reduce unhelpful behaviors present during less successful performances, facilitating the development of more productive, unique routines prior to and during performance (Clark & Williamson, 2011). In addition to identifying helpful and inhibitive behaviors, self-awareness can also enable musicians to identify and manage performance enhancing, and performance inhibiting, emotions during performance, ultimately increasing the likelihood of more frequent and more sustained periods of enhanced performance (Cowden, 2017). Although the importance of self-awareness has been documented, a study by Diana Alan (2016) reported that 71% of musicians assessed themselves as lacking awareness regarding the utilization of mental skills to improve their performances.

Looking outside the music domain allows for the consideration of a much broader range of research to be applied in a musical context. For instance, athletics research illustrates a connection between athletes' ability to recognize their emotions and their capacity to maintain peak performance levels (Cowden, 2017). Similarly, if musicians can objectively identify their negative thoughts and/or their emotional state, those musicians are better equipped to alter their course of action to minimize the manifestation of negative performance outcomes. This proactive approach can help increase the likelihood of objective and subjective success and reduce the risk of performance breakdowns (Cowden, 2017).

Before embarking on the journey towards your musical aspirations, taking stock of your current position in your career is essential. Cultivating self-awareness by assessing your strengths, and your areas for development, is a fundamental first step in your journey. Use the space in Figure 1.1 below to identify your **strengths** and **growth areas** as a performer.

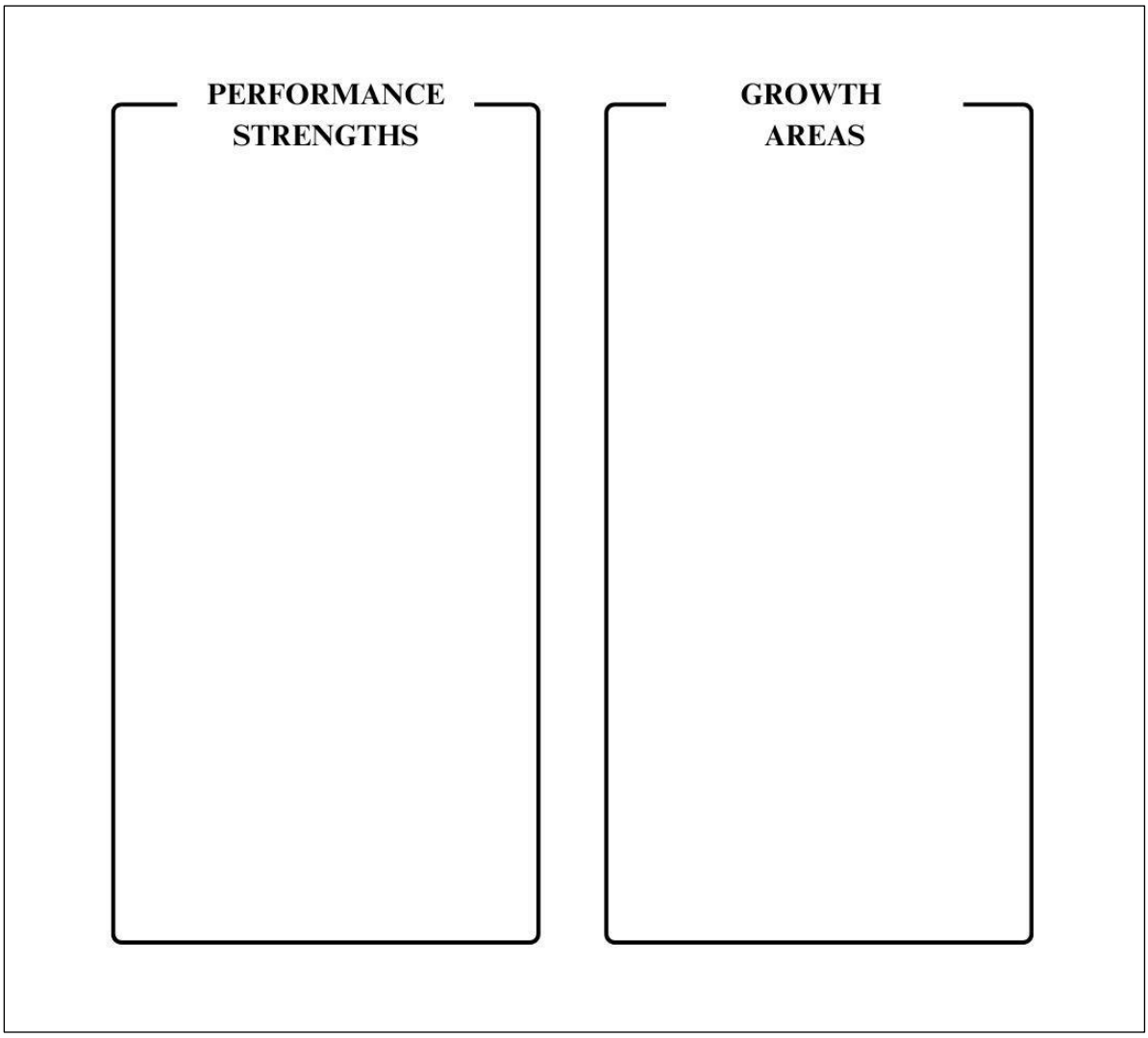

Figure 1.1

Let's take a closer look at the identified growth areas. Identify a moment (or a few) where you engaged in those behaviors you wish to improve. Put yourself back in that situation and use the following prompts while reflecting on the behavior(s) listed in the growth areas column.

1. What are you thinking when engaging in these behaviors?
2. How do you react?
3. What do you focus on?

How our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors interact with and influence one another can be evident in a performance context. This relationship between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors is known as the mind-body connection. Research regarding the mind-body connection illustrates how the way you think influences the way you perform. Dr. Nate Zinsser, former director of the Center of Enhanced Performance at the United States Military Academy, describes the connection as a cyclical relationship between conscious thoughts, unconscious emotions, an individual's physical state, and performance execution as illustrated below.

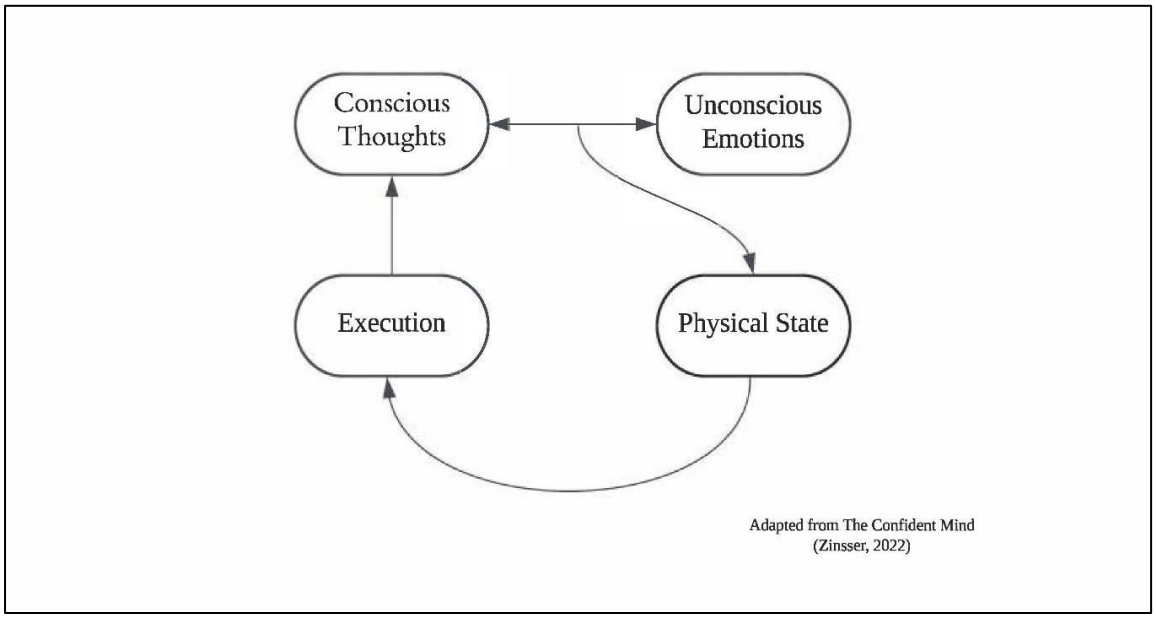

Figure 1.2

This model, discussed frequently at West Point's Center for Enhanced Performance, illustrates that the way you think influences the way you feel, how you respond physically, and finally, how you perform! Furthermore, the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors is bidirectional, meaning that our thoughts and feelings impact behaviors, which then impact our thoughts and feelings. Hence, the way you think is likely to decrease or increase your level of performance just as much as a poor/successful performance can cause negative/positive emotions and cognitions (Zinsser, 2021). This finding was specifically highlighted in a study that was conducted by Terry Clark and colleagues (2014) who wanted to further understand the influence of thoughts and perceptions on musicians' performance. They found that musicians who perceived their performances as going relatively well reported feelings of happiness, were focused on the task at hand, and engaged in limited, negative self-talk. On the other hand, when musicians perceived their performance was falling short of their own expectations, their self-talk was more negative, which was perceived as being a factor that contributed to making mistakes and hindering their performances from reaching their full potential. These findings display how positive or negative self-talk influences how one perceives their ability to execute something, which in turn, influences actual performance. Given the fact that multiple musicians from the study did not feel a sense of control over their self-talk, the authors highlighted the importance of training musicians to learn how to effectively use self-talk to positively influence their self-belief, and in turn, positively influence their performances.

Think of a moment in your career when this cycle unfolded on the stage. How did your thoughts positively or negatively influence your emotions, physiology, and execution? Conversely, how did your performance impact your thoughts and/or emotional state? As you develop a level of self-awareness about the interplay of thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and performance, the next section will provide you with another foundational skill necessary to guide you where you want to go in your career.

Section Two: My Aspirations – Goal Setting

"Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible."

-Tony Robbins

The practice of setting goals is an essential skill that guides an individual's trajectory toward personal and professional pursuits by creating a sense of direction. Likening it to an azimuth, setting goals provides a precise direction for you to follow. It helps you identify a clear and specific path toward your desired personal or professional outcomes. Research strongly supports the notion that goal setting is an effective method to increase motivation, confidence, and performance (Locke & Latham, 1985; Gould, 2021). In music, goal setting has been directly tied to an increase in focus, self-efficacy, and motivation (Hatfield, 2016).

According to Locke and Latham (2002), there are four ways by which goals positively impact performance:

1. Goals direct a performer's focus to a specific task they want to accomplish.
2. Goals help rally effort.
3. Goals help facilitate continued effort.
4. Goals encourage a performer to take risks.

Additional factors that influence effective goal setting include the importance of the goal, task complexity, self-efficacy, and feedback. For example, a trumpet player may choose to focus on the timbre of her sound and the connection of the notes rather than say, "I want to become a better trumpet player." By identifying specific areas for improvement, she can visualize a clearer picture of the desired performance outcome and outline actionable steps towards achieving it. Once her goals are set, the trumpet player's focus in practice will be directed toward the elements needed to improve. Detailing the action steps of how the trumpet player will improve her sound may cause her to employ effort during rehearsal to maintain consistency in sound and breath support throughout. Additionally, having an identified goal may help the trumpet player continue her efforts to improve despite mistakes or setbacks. As the trumpet player improves, she may become more comfortable taking risks, resulting in a unified increase in her execution and self-efficacy.

There is also an interconnectedness between setting goals and motivational factors, such as a performer's anxiety levels and confidence (Gould, 2021; Martin & Gill, 1995). Goal-setting assists in significant performance improvement for those with a performance-oriented mindset (Burton & Naylor 2002; Burton & Weiss, 2008). Musicians with a performance mindset often define success based on learning and personal growth, rather than some external mark of achievement and have been found to have high self-efficacy (Burton & Naylor 2002; Burton & Weiss, 2008). However, outcome-based measures of success do not need to be eliminated. Musicians with an ideal performance mindset will devote their full attention to creating success in the moment and allow the resulting outcomes to come to them. On the other hand, fixating solely on external markers of success, like winning a competition or audition, prior to or during performance, pulls focus toward an uncertain and largely uncontrollable future and away from

creating success in the moment, whether during preparation or performance! To achieve a performance mindset, direct your focus toward the in-the-moment process of preparation and execution; although potentially counterintuitive, this focus proves more conducive to success than an overemphasized focus on the desired outcome. Additionally, focusing on improving specific qualities of your performance that are under your own control will increase your self-confidence through the realization of those goals.

When thinking about setting goals, there are some things to keep in mind. It is important to make your goals both specific and measurable, so you are aware of when you have achieved the goal (Locke & Latham, 1990). For example, use numbers, percentages, or scales; "hit the correct pitch 9 out of 10 times" is more effective than "hit the correct pitch." Additionally, the most helpful goals are a blend of **challenging and attainable**. Your goals should not be so difficult that you continuously fail to achieve them. Moderately difficult goals have been found to produce better performances than extremely challenging or easy goals (Kyllo & Landers, 1995; Locke & Latham, 1990). Optimally difficult goals generate a higher level of commitment, which produces a better performance (Burton et al., 2000). A great long-term goal can be a fantastic motivator, but many performers note difficulty getting started once they are set. Setting process-oriented, short-term goals have been shown to improve the likelihood of achieving long-term goals (Gould, 2021; Locke & Latham, 2002). A combination of short- and long-term goals can help you stay motivated, develop self-confidence, and perform well (Weinberg, 2010; Weinberg, Butt, & Knight, 2001). For example, if you have an end goal of winning an audition, consider what small things you can do day-to-day and moment-to-moment to put you in the best position to reach that goal.

Using the three different types of goals can help improve effectiveness. Those three types of goals are: outcome goals, performance goals, and process goals (Kingston & Hardy, 1997). **Outcome goals** are the desired finish line in goal setting. They typically focus on the result of an audition, competition, season, or an important event. They also tend to be concerned with winning or losing and, as a result, the performers are often not in total control of whether they achieve their outcome goal. As such, it is important to balance outcome goals with performance and process goals. **Performance goals** focus on how the individual performer will achieve the outcome goal. These performance goals can be mental (e.g., focus), physical (e.g., stamina), or technical (e.g., bowing). Performers are more in control of their performance goals because they are the action steps the performer can take to reach their outcome goal. For example, if you want to win an audition (outcome goal), the things you can do for the month leading up to the audition (e.g., playing through the audition materials with a trusting mindset three times weekly, performing mock auditions for panels of trusted peers once a week, etc.) are your performance goals. **Process goals**, also known as practice goals, are skill-focused pursuits to be set for, and achieved in, each practice and/or rehearsal. Providing small, achievable process goals for every practice session not only focuses the session, but also builds confidence through regular successes and provides tangible, referenceable process steps (e.g., complete two practice sessions daily for 45 minutes each, record two audition excerpts daily for audible reference and evaluation, lighten-up the single-tonguing from measures 25-32 to smooth out the phrase, visualize the audition for five minutes daily while focusing on a specific moment with each sensory input, etc.). These small, process goals are important for keeping the performer motivated toward results they can see and/or hear (Kingston & Hardy, 1997). The chart below details an example of a military musician's outcome, performance, and process goals.

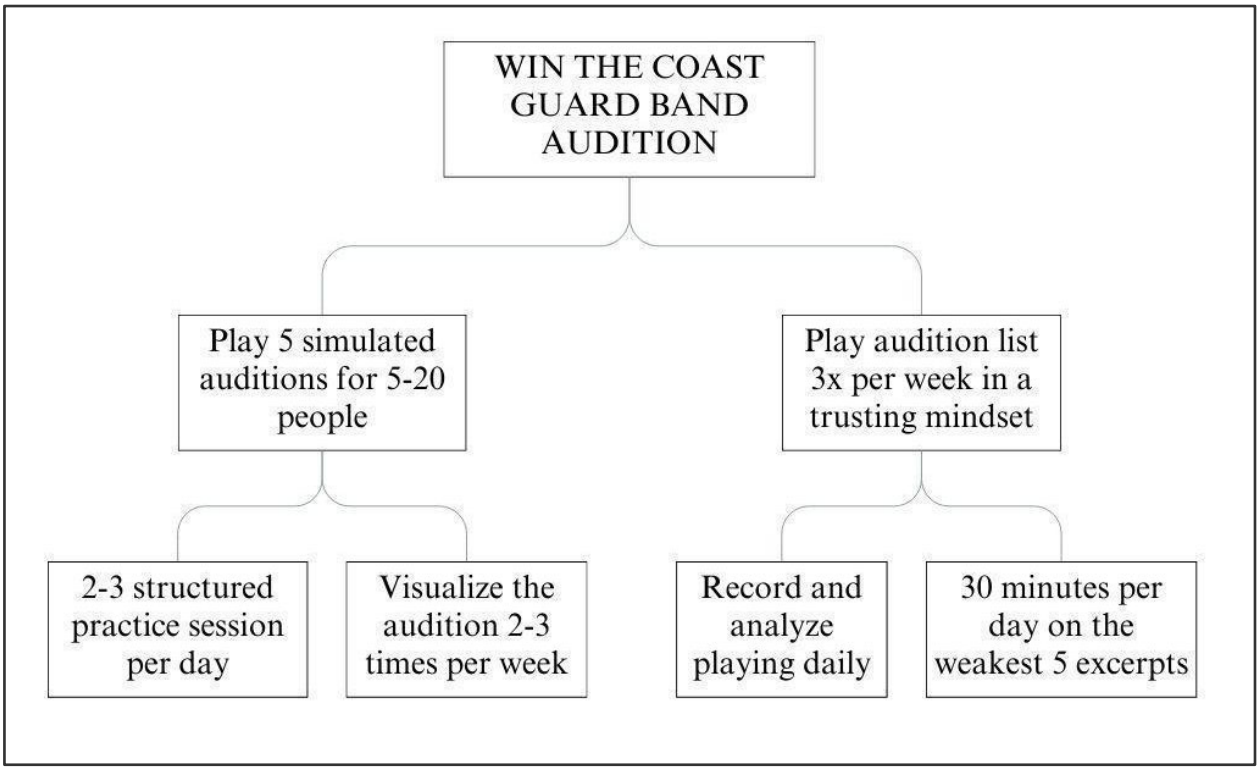

Figure 1.3

A final note on goal setting: your goals should align with the standard of excellence you wish to achieve (Weinberg, 2013). Aligning your goals in this way increases the likelihood that your objectives are challenging and demanding enough to push you to reach the standards you have set for yourself. Aligning your goals with your standards helps you stay focused, motivated, and dedicated to achieving your desired level of excellence.

Now that you are familiar with the types and characteristics of goals, it is time to set your own. The following worksheet provides a template for setting goals.

Remember, your goals should be:

1. **Specific, measurable behaviors.** Rather than, "I want to play well in rehearsal." Try, "I will hit 90% of my entrance notes in rehearsal today."

2. **Realistic, but challenging.** A goal should not exceed the performer's ability.

3. **Include both short and long-term desires.** Both are necessary to stay motivated and improve over time.

Set the Standard of Excellence

Goal Setting for Peak Performance Worksheet

Outcome Goal *(The desired finish line):*

Performance Goals *(Performance standards you set for yourself):*

1. _____

2. _____

Process Goals *(Skill/behavior focused and completely in your control):*

Based on Performance Goal 1:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Based on Performance Goal 2:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Section Three: Aligning Nature and Aspirations

"You only live when you maximize your potentials."

- Clemente Ogedegbe

Now that you have identified both your nature (your strengths and growth areas) and aspirations (your goals), let's align the two and expose the potential you have yet to realize. This section will detail a series of applied interventions directed at reflecting and developing self-awareness.

Self-Reflection Prompts

It is important to take the time to reflect on who you are and ask yourself, "Why do I perform, make choices, practice and make sacrifices to do what I do?" Identity, goals, and expectations are supposed to change and evolve as you advance in your career. Why you are here and what your needs are must align with where you want to go. Utilize the journal prompts in Figure 1.4 below to reflect on who you are, why you chose to go into this field, and what you need to get you where you want to go. Upon completing this first exercise, move on to The Rs on the following pages.

- Why did you choose to become a military musician?
- How did you get into music in the first place?
- What are the obstacles you had to overcome to get here?
- What are your long-term professional goals, and how do your personal and professional values shape them?
- What do you need to be successful?
- What are internal attitudes and tendencies that might be inhibiting success?
- What are external barriers that might be inhibiting success?
- What has challenged you throughout your career?
- What have been your best learning moments in your career so far?
- What have been your biggest takeaways from your career so far?

Figure 1.4

The R's

The R's, adapted from Sport Psychologist Ken Rivizza, is a tool to enhance your ability to recover from mistakes during performances. Developing a game plan for mistakes can help you maintain peak performance when faced with adversity. Let's walk through it together.

1. **Responsibility:** Taking responsibility for your reactions is key to navigating mistakes. Mistakes are inevitable in live performances, but you have control over how you choose to react. This mindset can help you stay composed and move forward confidently.

Have you been taking responsibility for how you handle mistakes during performances? If yes, describe what you currently do to take responsibility for your reactions. If no, what specific action steps can you take to hold yourself accountable and regain control (e.g., acknowledging the mistake without judgment, focusing on the next note)?

2. **Recognize:** Recognize your current state when a mistake happens. Are you calm and focused, or tense and distracted? Pay attention to what helps you recover quickly and what hinders you from staying in the flow of the performance.
What factors support your ability to recover from mistakes (e.g., staying connected to the rhythm, using mental cues)? What factors interfere with your recovery (e.g., perfectionist thoughts, fear of judgment)?

3. **Release:** Let go of the mistake. Dwelling on it will only make it harder to move forward. Use a physical or mental cue to remind yourself to release unhelpful thoughts and focus on the present.

What unhelpful thoughts or feelings do you need to let go of after making a mistake (e.g., self-criticism, fear of looking unprofessional)? What specific release techniques can you practice (e.g., silently saying, "Let it go," relaxing your grip, or taking a deep breath)?

4. **Regroup:** After releasing the mistake, take a moment to regroup and reconnect with the performance. This is your opportunity to ground yourself and reestablish control over your focus.

What specific actions help you regain composure and get back into the music (e.g., repeating a grounding affirmation or visually tracking the conductor or score)? How can you use physical or mental cues to bring yourself back to the present moment?

5. **Refocus:** Now, shift your attention fully to the present. Mistakes are in the past; focus on the process of music-making and what's in front of you.

What cues can you use to focus on the music in the moment (e.g., listening to the ensemble, focusing on dynamics or phrasing)? How can you practice redirecting your mind if it starts to wander toward self-doubt or frustration?

6. **Ready:** Before reengaging fully, ensure you are mentally and physically ready to continue with the performance. Align your thoughts and posture with a readiness to perform at your best.

What signs show you that you're grounded and ready to move forward with confidence (e.g., relaxed breathing, feeling balanced on stage)? What readiness routines can you practice to align your body and mind after a mistake?

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PART II: Playing In the Zone

"Everything goes on autopilot. There's synergy with everything you're trying to do.

- Stephen Curry

Purpose: This chapter will help you understand what performance anxiety is, how it can influence the way you play, and offers techniques to manage it.

Playing out of your mind refers to what most call being **in the zone**. In performance psychology literature, being in the zone is also known as *flow*: "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990. p.4). Musicians have described being *in the zone* or *flow* as effortless, in complete control, and a deep focus. Alternative to a performance in flow is one filled with performance anxiety. Being able to understand your personal relationship with performance anxiety and learning to utilize the physical and cognitive changes in your body to your advantage will get you one step closer to playing out of your mind.

Before you begin, take a few moments to take stock of your strengths and weaknesses using questions adapted from performance psychologist Don Greene's "Artist's Performance Survey." The full assessment and scoring instructions are at the end of the manual.

For this chapter, reflect on the following questions from Dr. Greene's survey and rate how they relate to you on a scale of 1 (untrue for you) to 5 (very true for you):

- I perform well when I'm feeling energized and "up." _____
- I know how to perform under pressure. _____
- I tend to try too hard under pressure. _____
- It takes me a while to get it back after making mistakes. _____
- I don't do very well when I'm at a high energy level. _____
- My performance skills suffer significantly under pressure. _____
- I need to stop trying to force things to happen. _____
- It takes me some time to recover after making a mistake. _____
- I perform much better when I'm feeling relatively calm. _____
- I have the ability to bounce back after unfortunate circumstances. _____
- I usually do better when I'm feeling relaxed. _____
- I am able to trust my talent and abilities and "let it go." _____

Section One: Stress and Performance

"I shook pretty badly. Lots of extra vibrato. I experienced the whole demoralization of folks not knowing what I am capable of, and it got into my head."

- Army Vocalist Kate Bolcar

The terms stress and performance anxiety are often used interchangeably throughout performance psychology literature. Whether it be an Olympic athlete before a big game, a lawyer getting ready to take the stand, or a dancer prior to taking the stage, the reported experiences of those in the spotlight tend to be eerily similar.

Perception and interpretation are key processes involved in what contributes to **stress**, which is defined as the perception that the demands of a situation outweigh the ability to cope (Fry & Hogue, 2021). In other words, it is a belief that an individual is lacking the skills required to satisfy the demands of the task in front of them in a given moment (i.e., self-doubt in abilities). The amount of, and the manner by which, stress is experienced varies depending on one's interpretation of the situation and can change from one context to another. For example, the nature of the circumstance may be playing in a rehearsal versus a concert, performing solo versus in the ensemble, playing on an international stage versus a local event, or playing in front of the President of the United States versus in front of peers. We often perceive performance situations differently depending on the context, which can play a large role in how our bodies physically and cognitively interpret our perceptions and, in turn, influence our performance. Some people can feel paralyzed when performing a solo but excited when playing on an international stage (Nideffer & Hessler, 1978). It is important to note: the same biological systems that are operating in a "fight or flight" mode associated with danger are also engaged prior to a musical performance (Greene, 2002).

Nideffer's Stress Model (Figure 2.1) details how a situational stressor, such as a high-profile performance, can lead to physical (e.g., increased heart rate, changes in respiration, muscle tension, feeling unsteady, increased perspiration) and psychological (e.g., feeling confused, loss of focus, mental rigidity, inner-directed attention, tunnel vision) responses in the body that ultimately influence performance in various ways. Some of these impacts may include becoming highly distractible, or manifest in impairments to fine motor skills, timing, and decision-making ability (Greene, 2002). Sound familiar?

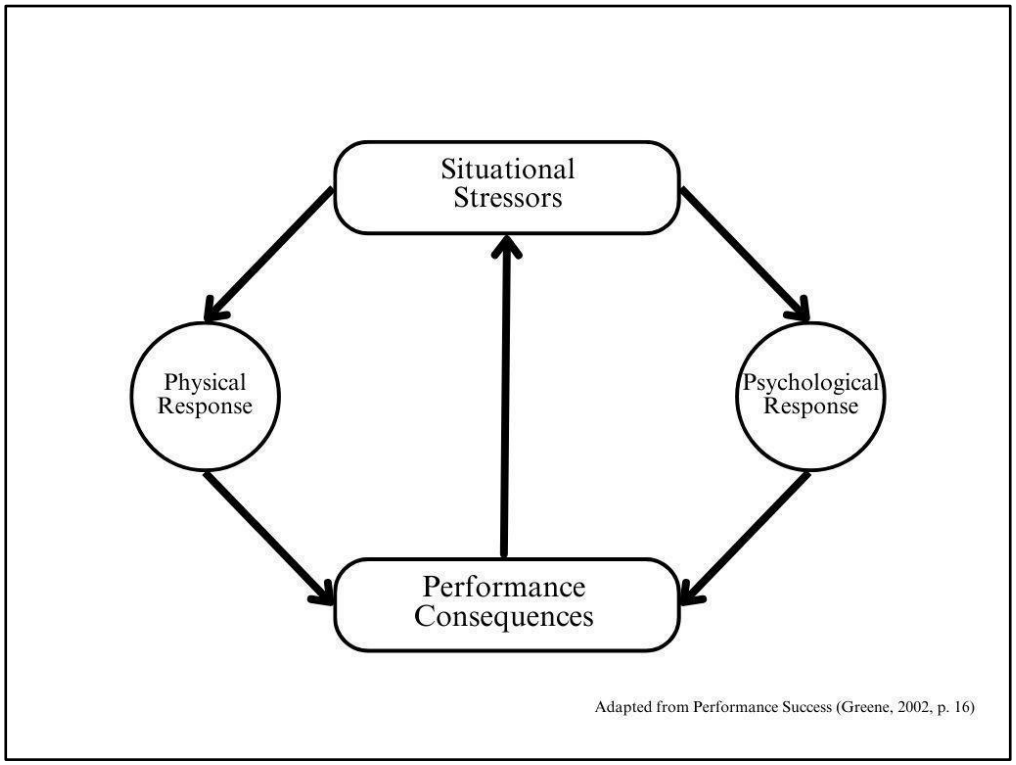

Figure 2.1

Stress is part of **performance anxiety**, which has been defined as "a learned negative emotional reaction to a perceived demand or threat that has not actually occurred" (Frame & Reichin, 2019). In other words, performance anxiety arises when an individual perceives a situation as threatening to their performance. It involves concerns about making mistakes, fear of failure, and/or apprehension about the consequences of performance. In this definition, and throughout this text, the emphasis will be on how we perceive and interpret emotions in the various performance domains involved in the military music profession (Papageorgi et al., 2013). To be more specific, there are four aspects of performance anxiety.

1. As highlighted in the definition above, performance anxiety is a learned emotional reaction (Frame & Reichin, 2019). In other words, your responses are the product of your previous lived or observed experiences. For example, you might have previously forgotten a note or witnessed your peer choke during a solo performance. As a result, you may experience cognitive or somatic symptoms when you perform under similar circumstances in the future.

2. Performance anxiety is labeled a negative emotion because we tend to view anxiety as unpleasant. However, the presence of anxiety does not mean that you will automatically have a poor performance. Anxiety can also be a facilitative emotion, meaning that its presence can help elevate performance. It is important to notice whether you are perceiving your anxiety as either facilitative (e.g., "I feel my heart rate increasing and that means my body is energized and getting ready to perform at its best!") or debilitative (e.g., "I am anxious, and I won't be able to perform optimally."). The way you interpret your anxiety will influence the way you will react to it. For example, musicians who interpreted anxiety symptoms prior to

performing as positive tended to have increased performance success (Clark et al., 2014).

3. If you perceive that the task at hand requires abilities greater than you possess, you are more likely to experience anxiety. Anxiety can be broken down into trait and state anxiety (Spielberger, 1966; 1972). We will focus on **state anxiety**, which is a short-term response elicited by a moment that an individual perceives as threatening (Eysenck, Derakshan, Santos, & Calvo, 2007). The two key elements in this definition are the temporary nature of symptoms and individual perception of both symptoms and the situation– they don't last forever and are dependent on how you are interpreting the moment.
4. Performance anxiety typically happens when you are thinking about a future event or reliving a mistake from the past. This emphasizes the importance of using mental skills to bring yourself to the present moment– a place where you have full access to your abilities and potential, and a greater chance of increasing performance quality and decreasing performance anxiety (Hoffman & Hanrahan, 2012).

Performance anxiety can manifest itself physically (e.g., shaking, stomach pain, etc.) and cognitively (e.g., doubts, negative thoughts, etc.) and can vary over time. Let's say you have an important audition coming up in two months. You might start having some doubts (e.g., why did I register for this audition?) or negative thoughts (e.g., I do not even have time to practice, I do not think I will be ready on time!) a few weeks before the audition. During this time, you may not be experiencing any physical or **somatic** symptoms, like shaking or butterflies. However, as the audition draws nearer, these somatic symptoms are more likely to emerge. After the audition, both the doubts and physical symptoms tend to dissipate. This variance in symptom and timing displays how performance anxiety may look and feel different depending on the timing, context, and perception of the challenge. In other words, performance anxiety can manifest itself differently and over a long period of time, particularly if we perceive it as being debilitative for our performance.

However, as we mentioned earlier, anxiety can be a facilitative emotion. Research has found that the level of anxiety needed to perform optimally will vary between performers and that each musician will have his own optimal zone of performance (Hanin, 2000). This theory is illustrated by the Individual Zone of Optimal Functioning (IZOF) model (See figure 2.2).

As displayed below, certain performers will experience their optimal performance under conditions of relatively low anxiety, while others may excel under moderate or relatively high anxiety levels (Fry & Hogue, 2021). This optimal zone is personalized for each performer (Fry & Hogue, 2021), and it will take individual exploration to determine where it is best for you! Yao (2016) illustrated the specific application of this theory in music, noting that pianists who performed within their Individual Zone of Optimal Functioning (IZOF) reported superior performances compared to those whose anxiety intensities fell outside their IZOF. The exercises at the end of this chapter will help you identify your own individual zone of optimal functioning. Additional resources surrounding how to apply the IZOF model to your practice are provided in chapter 4.

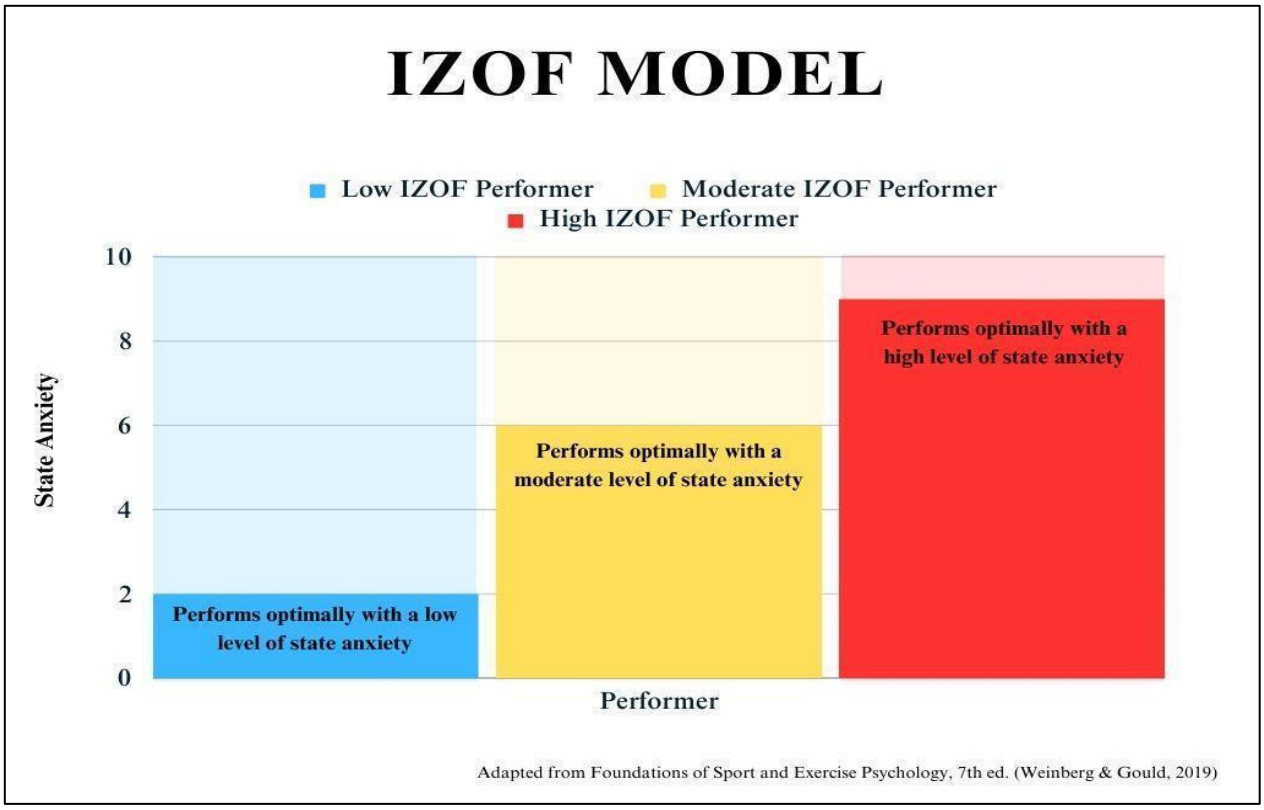

Figure 2.2

Now that you have an understanding of the origins of performance anxiety and how it can debilitate or facilitate performance, ask yourself:

- How many times in your career have you felt like you did not perform up to your potential?
- What were some things that made you anxious or stressed?
- How did they influence your ability to perform?
- What was going on in your mind and body when you have previously played at your best?

To access the ability to play out of your mind, it is helpful to start by distinguishing differences between how you think and feel during both your best and worst performances. Utilize the prompts below to reflect on how you operate when playing in the zone and out of your mind versus in your head and far from peak performance.

Reflecting on your best and worst performances as a military musician, pay attention to what was happening in your head (e.g., presence or lack of thoughts, judgements, doubts, fears, etc.). Each thought, feeling or attitude is correlated to a physical response such as muscle tension or relaxation, changes in respiratory rate and control, changes in attentional style, or other responses that impact the ability of a performer to reach their fullest potential (Green & Gallwey,

1986; Green, 2002). Oftentimes the responses to the body and mind are automatic because our body is getting ready to meet the demands of the task in front of us. As such, developing a level of self-awareness of our own facilitative or inhibiting tendencies can be the first step toward understanding and intentionally creating ideal cognitive and physical states during performance. As you increase your understanding of the situations, thought processes, and reactions that influence performance, you can train yourself to improve automatic control of these processes. Developing this skill will allow us to leverage the inverse of the same processes that may have held us back but will instead let us use them to our advantage to perform better. To develop this awareness and improve this skill, complete the following exercise (Figure 2.3) adapted from the Performance Psychology Department at the West Point Center for Enhanced Performance:

Best and Worst Reflection

Best Performance: Write about your best performance ever as a military musician. Be descriptive: *When/where was it, why was it significant, how did you feel, what were you thinking? List adjectives that describe your mindset/emotions/physical sensations during the performance.*

Worst Performance: Write about your worst performance ever as a military musician. Be descriptive: *When/where was it, why was it significant, how did you feel, what were you thinking? List adjectives that describe your mindset/emotions/physical sensations during the performance.*

Figure 2.3

Section Two: Understanding and Utilizing Arousal

"Fall in love with the butterflies."

- Dr. Nate Zinsser

An important concept when discussing performance anxiety in musicians is **arousal**. Arousal is a combination of physiological (pertaining to the body) and psychological (pertaining to the mind) activation that may vary significantly across short periods of time (Baldock et al., 2021). According to peak performance psychologist, Don Greene, the term **activation** is used synonymously with arousal and refers to the "sum of your mental and physical energies in different performance circumstances" (Greene 2002, p.31). Although arousal is interconnected with performance anxiety, it is important to distinguish the concepts from one another. Arousal is nondirective (i.e., neither good nor bad), whereas performance anxiety is directly associated with a negative emotional reaction. Arousal is a broad concept that does not specifically include competitive stressors, whereas performance anxiety does, and arousal can be temporary and adaptive, whereas anxiety can persist over a long period of time and might not always be adaptive (Baldock et al., 2021).

Arousal can be perceived as a continuum ranging from low arousal (e.g., relaxed and calm) to high arousal (e.g., intense and excited) depending on the performance context. Experiencing under- or over-arousal creates differing cognitive and physical influences on performance (Wilson & Roland, 2002). For example, a military musician described how she "shakes like a leaf" during solos, but she does not experience that same symptom when playing in the ensemble. We can describe her experience by saying she exhibits a sharp increase in arousal in the situation she perceives as more threatening and therefore displays symptoms of overarousal; however, these same symptoms are not present for her in more "safe" performance situations. Contrarily, musicians may experience symptoms of under-arousal in situations of low perceived threat. For instance: mundane, repetitive rehearsals or performances may create difficulty for the performer to achieve peak performance due to suboptimal levels of arousal. Despite the differing psychological and physiological processes of under-arousal and over-arousal, the impact on performance when experiencing one or the other can be eerily similar.

It is important to highlight that arousal is a natural process involving the **Autonomic Nervous System** (ANS). The shaking that the military musician described above is an example of a very normal, and in many cases, adaptive response of the ANS. Dr. Nate Zinsser (2023) outlines the process of the ANS activation below in Figure 2.4, discussed in his book and in his work at West Point's Center for Enhanced Performance.

This process is experienced by performers across various domains, whether it be an athlete before a game, a public speaker before an event, a surgeon before an operation, or a musician before a concert. Each performer has a unique, ideal level of performance activation associated with each individual performance situation and activity. Increasing arousal up to an individual's desired point can positively impact performance, however increasing arousal past that optimal point may have a negative impact on performance.

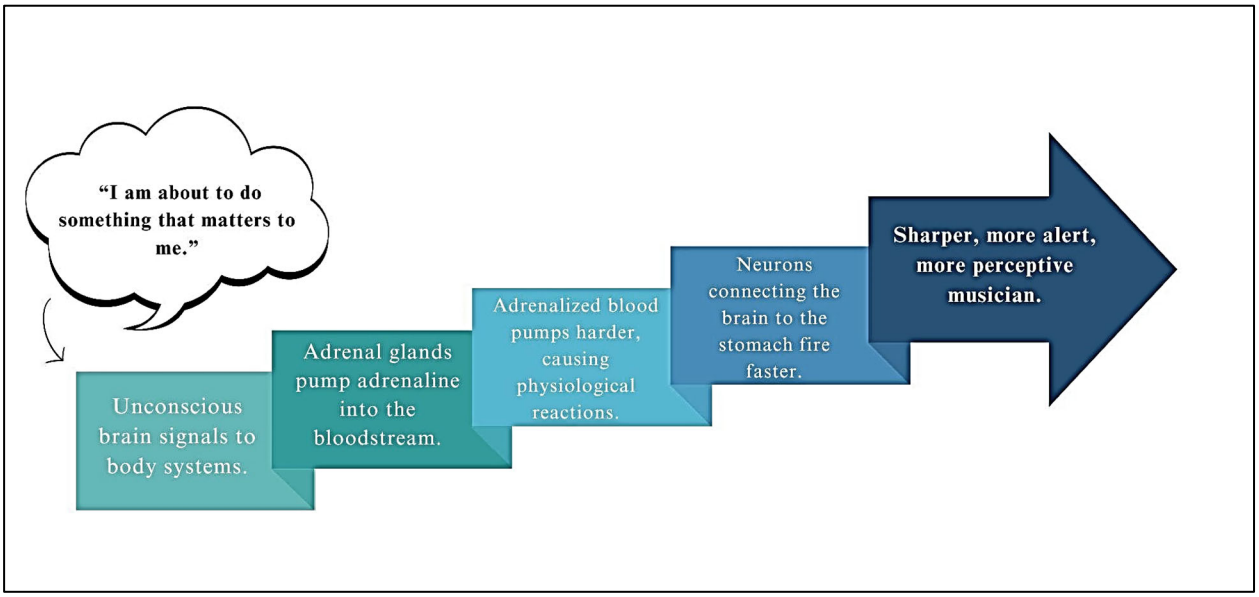

Figure 2.4

Take, for example, this story shared by a current military musician describing his experience of ANS arousal decreasing his performance.

> *"The main symptoms I felt were increased heart rate, sweaty hands/all over the body (it felt like the temperature in the room went up about 25 degrees), shaking (tremors) in hands, quivering embouchure, and unstable air support. All of the symptoms caused my playing to plummet in public performance and also caused the nasty snowballing effect where one mistake turned into many mistakes because I was coming down on myself very hard for making the first 'silly' mistake."*

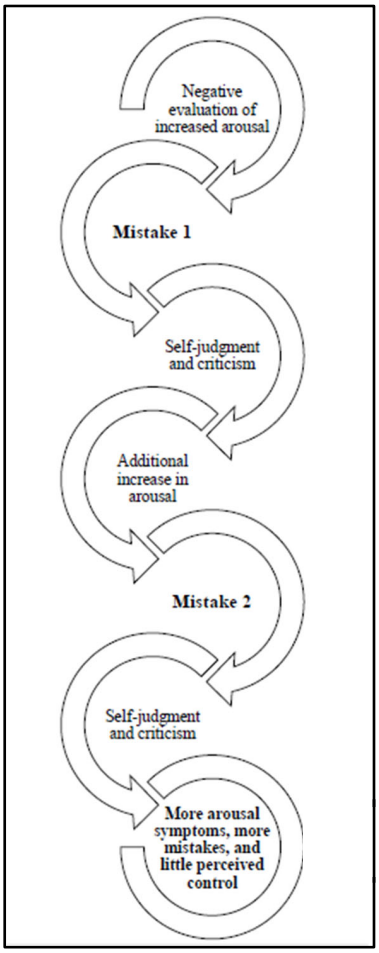

Figure 2.5

During his performance, this musician became over aroused and fell victim to a classic negative feedback loop displayed in Figure 2.5. He described experiencing overarousal and an inability to control his physiological reactions. As a result, he made a mistake and then judged himself for his mistake, taking him out of the moment and away from the task in front of him. This perpetuated the cycle of over-arousal and self-criticism, which inevitably led to more mistakes. This musician could have made two adjustments to improve his performance. Engaging in relaxation techniques (discussed later in chapter 3) could have lowered his arousal to help him return to a more performance-facilitative level. Additionally, he could have reframed the way he thought about the situation prior to engaging in it. Active, balanced, and correct reframing (discussed in Section 3) could have allowed him to change the narrative in his mind and avoid the feedback loop if started early enough.

It is important to remember that the Autonomic Nervous System response is thought to be an evolutionary adaptation that kept us alive. The ANS provides us with a foundational response to triggers to which we should pay attention and to times of safety and calm.

Psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson posited a hypothesis in 1908, commonly known today as the **Inverted-U Theory,** which linked the levels of arousal to performance of tasks. As illustrated in Figure 2.6. (adapted by David Diamond et al., 2007), this hypothesis states that increasing arousal increases performance to a point, at which performance begins to decrease. *While the actual process is more complex than this theory may suggest, this tool does a great job illustrating the concepts being discussed within the scope of this manual.*

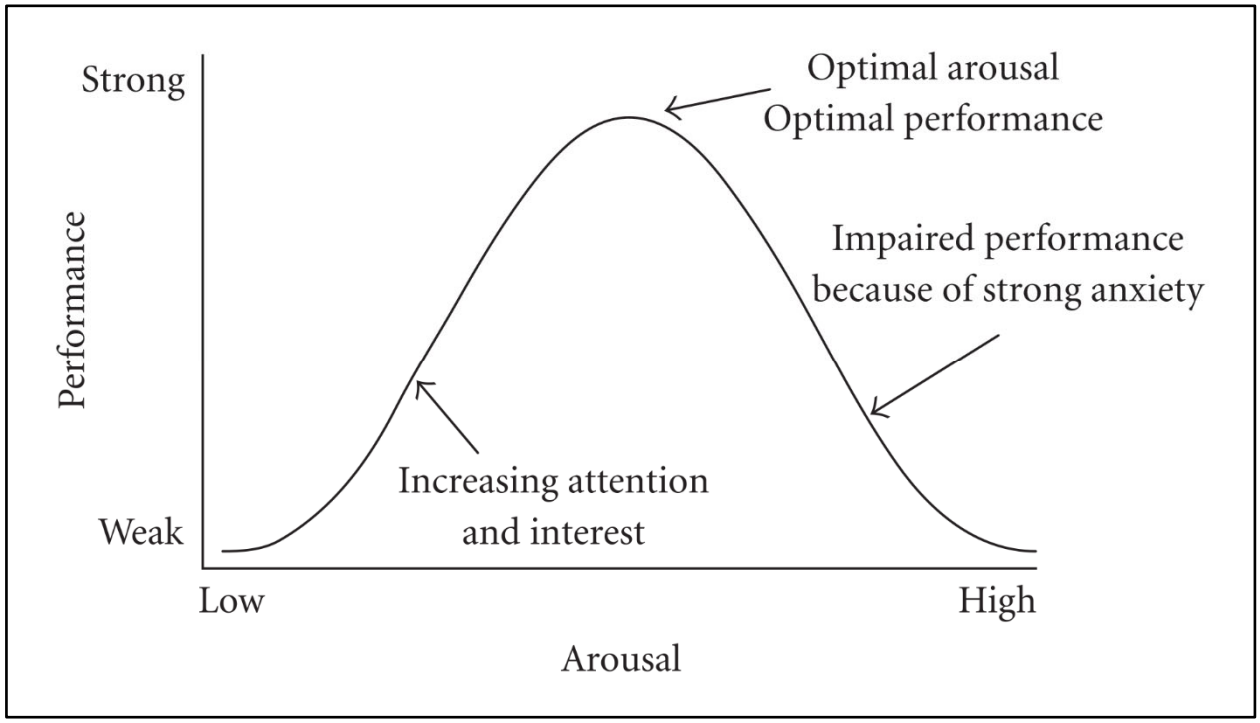

Figure 2.6

You have already identified in the previous section what your inhibiting tendencies are. Now, it is important that you further this awareness of your psychological and physiological states to regulate arousal before and during performance. Thinking back to that best performance you described in the previous section (and others like it)– Use the activity below (Figure 2.7), adapted from the West Point Center for Enhanced Performance, to indicate what your unique ideal, helpful and unhelpful activation levels were like for a typical performance.

Consider the quality of your best performance on a scale of 1-10 and the activation level during the performance on a scale of 1-10 and place a dot on that intersection. Use a different color and repeat the same procedure for your worst performance. Use a third color and repeat again when reflecting on your typical, consistent performance. Draw a line beginning in the lower left corner linking those dots. What does the curve tell you about your individual zone of optimal performance?

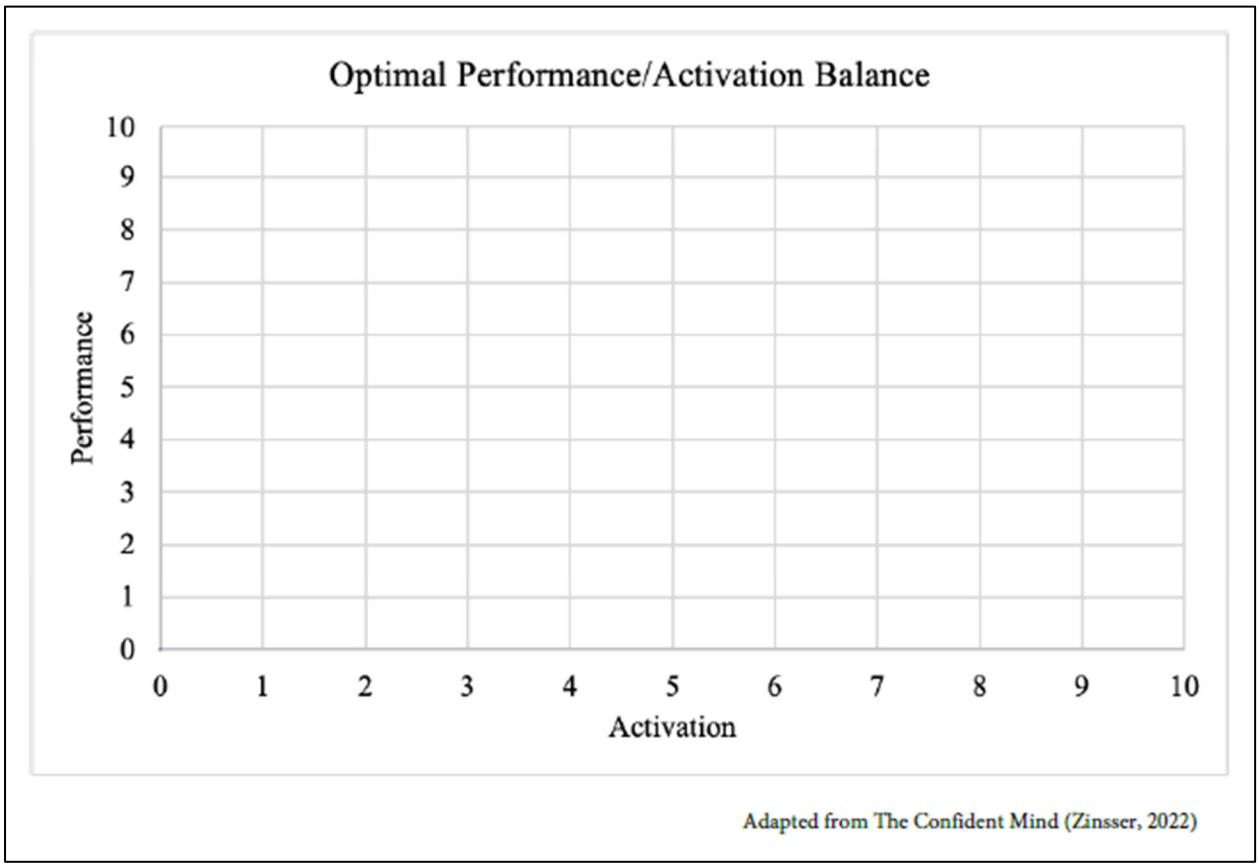

Figure 2.7

Once you become aware of your optimal arousal level, arousal regulation strategies can be implemented into your practice and performance routine. The goal for the following section is to develop a series of techniques to regulate those initial ANS arousal symptoms and our perceptions of them to have more control over them.

Section Three: In The Zone – The Playbook

"Whether you think you can or think you can't: you're right."

- Henry Ford

This section will detail a series of energy management techniques targeting the physiological, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of performance stress (Salmon, 1990) experienced by military musicians.

Applied Intervention #1: Categorize Your Stress

"The extra duties become so paramount in keeping the unit functioning once you reach the senior ranks that it becomes incredibly difficult to keep your performance chops at their best."

– Member of the United States Army Band, "Pershing's Own"

Identifying the stressors in your life and recognizing which are relevant vs. irrelevant to your musical performance is an important skill to enhance focus and concentration in both rehearsal and concerts. You can use the worksheet below, adapted from West Point's Center for Enhanced Performance, to identify stressors in the various aspects of your life and reflect on the controllability, importance, and method of coping for them.

1. Name some stressors that are impacting your life right now:

2. Place an "I" beside the stressors that are truly important to you (i.e., stressors that could cost you your livelihood, your family, your home, etc.)

3. Place a "U" beside the stressors that are unimportant in the large scheme of things (i.e., the weather)

4. Now determine which stressors are within your control and which are not.

5. Place each stressor in the appropriate box below.

Within My Control	Not Within My Control

Take some time to think of deliberate recovery strategies you could employ to manage your stressors. (Make sure to pick a tool that matches the stressor).

Stressor	**Recovery Strategy**

Applied Intervention #2: Centering

"I had to relearn what "breathing" meant to calm myself down and how to channel the adrenaline kick I get when performing."

- Member of the West Point Band, Anonymous

Centering is a strategy utilized by Dr. Don Greene, as well as at West Point's Center for Enhanced Performance and many other performance psychology specialists, to help performers use 'nervous energy' to their advantage.

1. Form a Clear Intention

   While standing with your arms free at your sides, get a clear idea of what you'd like to do/accomplish once you've finished centering. As you're just beginning to learn how to "Center" your intention could be as simple as to *learn how to center*.

2. Pick a Focal Point

   Choose an object within eye sight on which to focus your attention. That focal point could be a piece of paper in front of you or a picture hanging on the wall. The focal point is where you'll be projecting all the intense energy that usually accompanies the stress of an audition or an examination.

3. Breathe Mindfully

   When we become nervous or stressed out, we tend to breathe higher in the chest, raising our shoulders creating tension. Mindful breathing helps to interrupt this stressful pattern and help reset our brain and body. To breathe mindfully close your eyes and breathe abdominally. As you inhale, feel your belly naturally expand before your rib cage and upper lungs. Pay close attention to your breathing as you inhale through your nose and exhale gently through your mouth. This kind of mindful abdominal breathing may seem unusual to you at first, but it comes easily with a bit of practice.

4. Release Tension

Muscle tension is one of the most challenging results of stress. Don Greene writes that it's unfortunately part of the "bad feedback syndrome" in that the more tense one becomes the more poorly one performs—and the more tense one becomes. As you continue your mindful breathing with eyes closed (inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth), scan your body for points of muscle tension. Pay special attention to the shoulders, neck, jaw, and face, as these are common hot spots for muscle tension. As you continue to breathe mindfully, consciously release tension in these and any other areas.

5. Find Your Center

Anyone who's ever been involved in dancing, gymnastics, skiing, and other activities requiring balance, knows how important it is to find your center of gravity. It's said to be about two inches below your navel and two inches inward. Take a moment to find it, feel it, and be aware of it. It may even help to put your hand there. The whole point of finding your center is to feel grounded, rooted, and stable.

**Sometimes we speak of left-hemisphere brain activity vs. right-hemisphere brain activity. All our internal brain chatter and logical thinking is the domain of the left hemisphere vs. feeling-intuition which is the purview of the right hemisphere. In mindful breathing and finding your center you're consciously switching brain activity from the left to the right hemispheres and in doing so quieting your mind.*

6. Use a Process Cue

Now that you've managed to quiet your mind down it's time to call your right hemisphere into action. We do so by creating and using a trigger called a process cue. Process cues can be words or phrases that call to mind images or movies that represent you performing at your very best. These process cues can be remarkably effective simply because they don't require left brain activity. The process cue I often use is, "*I've got this*." Some also find snippets of music to be especially effective as process cues. They're straight wire image/movie—feeling associations. Regardless, the right process cue can be like flipping a switch in terms of turning off distracting left brain chatter and turning on the body memory of the right brain which can be strategic to success. So, with eyes closed, bring up your process cue.

7. Direct Your Energy

    Now we'll use your focus point to the best advantage. It's time to open your eyes and when you do so, hurl all your excess nervous energy at the focus point like throwing a baseball. It's as if you're gathering your energy up from your center, bringing it up through your torso, up through your head, and out your eyes like X-Ray vision. As you hurl the energy out, you're letting it go, and in doing so, trust in your ability and previous experience.

Practice!

Centering may seem like a complicated sequence initially but with practice and repetition it quickly becomes second nature. When you first start to learn centering, it may take you anywhere between 12-25 breaths and a few minutes. With practice, you will be able to shorten the sequences to several breaths taken within a few seconds. Keep at it. Practice at least a half-dozen times a day initially and then once you get it remember to use it multiple times throughout the day to release stress, clear your mind, and if anything else *to stop time*!

Variation…

Once you feel confident in your ability to center down, use the below variation to take the technique a step further! During Step 2, "Pick a Focal Point" by doing the following:

1. Bring Up a Confident Memory

    For step two, instead of choosing a random object or place on which to focus your attention do the following: stop for a moment, go inside, and bring up one of your most confident memories as in a time where you were unstoppable—where you kicked the world's ass, so to speak. Really get into that memory and see what you saw at the time, hear what you heard, and feel what you felt, stand and breathe the same way.

2. Find the Exact Eye Position for the Memory

    Now for the important bit: as you are intensely focusing on/enjoying your confident memory, notice exactly where your eyes are directed. Pinpoint the exact place you are looking at to bring up the memory. Mark it precisely—this is important—by pointing to it as if you had to show it to someone.

3. Repetition

   Practice looking around and then zooming quickly to that location. Do it a dozen times very quickly and don't be surprised to find the confident feelings coming every time your eyes lock into the location.

4. Insert Eye Position

   Now practice the entire "Centering Down" sequence. This time for step two, *Pick a Focal Point*, go to the confidence eye position/location. And once you close your eyes, breathe mindfully, center, release tension, and bring up your process cue—open your eyes and zoom in to precise eye position and lock into that confident feeling. The result should be instantaneous–and powerfully effective.

Applied Intervention #3: Reframing Performance Anxiety

"I use perspective as my greatest weapon against workflow and heavy optempos. No matter how hard or tough my job is or the work that we are doing, it could always be harder and worse off."

- Member of West Point's Benny Havens Band, Anonymous

Reframing practice is central to the work at the West Point Center for Enhanced Performance. If you understand the physiological and psychological responses to a stressor and treat them as only what they are, their impact can be more easily controlled to work to your advantage.

Normalizing the Nerves: The physiological responses to an upcoming performance are completely normal. They are the result of your autonomic nervous system getting your body ready to perform.

1. Identify the physical reactions to your nervous system's arousal. *(i.e., When I feel nervous or anxious before a performance, I feel…)*

2. Identify the subsequent cognitive reactions to these physical changes. *(i.e., When I feel nervous or anxious before a performance, I am thinking…)*

The way we verbalize and think about our feelings helps to construct the way we actually feel. For example, a brief, simple statement **("I am excited")** or simple words of advice **("Get excited")** were found to be sufficient in increasing the experience of excitement, overshadowing the experience of anxiety (Brooks, 2013). This deliberate "misrepresentation" of anxious arousal as "excitement" led to increased feelings of excitement and improved performance. Thus, before anxiety-inducing tasks (e.g., a solo or audition), how we talk about our feelings influences whether we feel anxious or excited, dramatically influencing subsequent performance.

3. List self-talk statements or affirmations to reframe performance anxiety *(Examples: "I'm ready to go;" "Feeling confident;" "I am in control").*

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PART III: It's More Than Music

"None but ourselves can free our minds."
- Bob Marley

Purpose: This chapter aims to communicate coping skills for the unique demands that military musicians undertake in addition to their role as professional musicians. Understanding and utilizing concentration can be instrumental in performance success. Everything communicated in this chapter, as well as the rest of the manual, is both relevant and transferable to the various performance domains in your musical, military, and personal roles (i.e., physical fitness, public speaking, teaching, etc.).

Military musicians often cope with uncontrollable variables outside the scope of traditional performance settings. Some of these variables include weather conditions, performance time, travel issues, VIP attendance, etc. The ability to play at one's full potential despite the quality of these variables is a skill that can be developed and enhanced through consistent practice, honing, and refinement. Unlike many civilian counterparts, military musicians also have required extra duties and responsibilities in addition to their primary musical missions. Each servicemember typically fulfills multiple secondary non-musical roles in areas such as ensemble performance planning, training oversight and delivery, supply management, community and stakeholder outreach, marketing and communications, facilities management, etc. Oftentimes, the distractions of these other jobs can impact performance. For example, if a Supply Sergeant is on an important job, but her mind wanders to fulfilling her extra duty tasks, she can miss cues in rehearsal. As such, having the ability to be fully present with the music at each moment can be the difference between performing well and performing optimally.

Before you begin, take stock of your strengths and growth areas by reflecting on the following questions on a scale of 1 (untrue for you) to 5 (very true for you):

- I don't worry about what other people think of my performance. _____
- I'm not distracted by people moving around me or making noise. _____
- I have an intense focus. _____
- I direct my full attention to what I'm doing in the moment. _____
- I am able to keep focused for as long as necessary. _____
- The main source of distraction is my own mind. _____
- I get distracted when other performers make mistakes. _____
- I can focus even in distracting surroundings. _____
- I am able to still the chatter in my mind before I begin. _____
- I keep focused until I am done. _____
- I need to focus better. _____
- I get distracted when a number of things happen at once. _____

Section One: Focus and Concentration

"ONLY focus on/hear THE MUSIC. Nothing else in the room or world matters."

– Army Musician Andrew Hahn

A military musician in the Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCoE) Band, summarized aspects of the current performance psychology literature on focus and concentration as he reflected on a previous experience of performance anxiety.

> *I was performing a gig at a bar in Seoul, Korea. I was playing drum set and I was just having a really sloppy, poor performance that night. This of course made me feel extra anxious that I was going to screw up even more throughout the gig. I finally realized that throughout this gig, I had been mostly focused on the audience (i.e., trying to interact, looking for their reactions, having stage presence). At this moment, I actually adjusted my focus literally and psychologically on my drum set. When I did this, everything got better. What I noticed is for certain parts of the music, I can't have my focus split between playing and the audience. There certainly is a time and place to visually interact and connect with the audience, BUT for me, I noticed I have to put all my focus on my instrument first instead of focusing on the crowd. In addition to shifting my visual focus, I also found it helpful to literally hear the piece of music in my head when performing. This mental focus on hearing the tune or rhythm in my head keeps me from thinking of the pressure or the audience. This re-shifting of visual and mental focus was a HUGE help to reducing my anxious thoughts while on stage.*

According to Williams and colleagues (2021), "effective concentration entails attending to the right things at the right time and in the right way" (p. 314). The above musician was able to identify what was relevant at that moment and deliberately shift his attention to the task at hand. In doing so, he tuned out distracting external (i.e., the audience) and internal (i.e., anxious thoughts) stimuli while on stage. As the musician pointed out, allowing his attention to be split between playing and the audience created suboptimal performance in both domains. This assertion is consistent with the literature, as optimal conscious focus will be fully devoted to one relevant cue at a time, although that cue may shift depending on the changing demands of the performance or task (Williams et al., 2021).

When utilized effectively, **concentration and focus** are skills that can be major contributors to success in the career of military musicians. Not only do you have to perform at an incredibly high level as a musician, but this must be balanced with extra responsibilities as a soldier. Managing multiple roles tends to be a daunting task. Limited time, split attention, and competing personal, musical, and professional/military priorities can increase the pressure we put on ourselves and demand time commitments we are often unable to keep. However, understanding when and how to direct your attention may ease the stress of the various roles and improve your individual performance in each. Before you move on, take a moment and list all the different "hats"

you wear on a day-to-day basis in both your personal and professional life (e.g., musician, soldier, mother, sibling) in Figure 3.1.

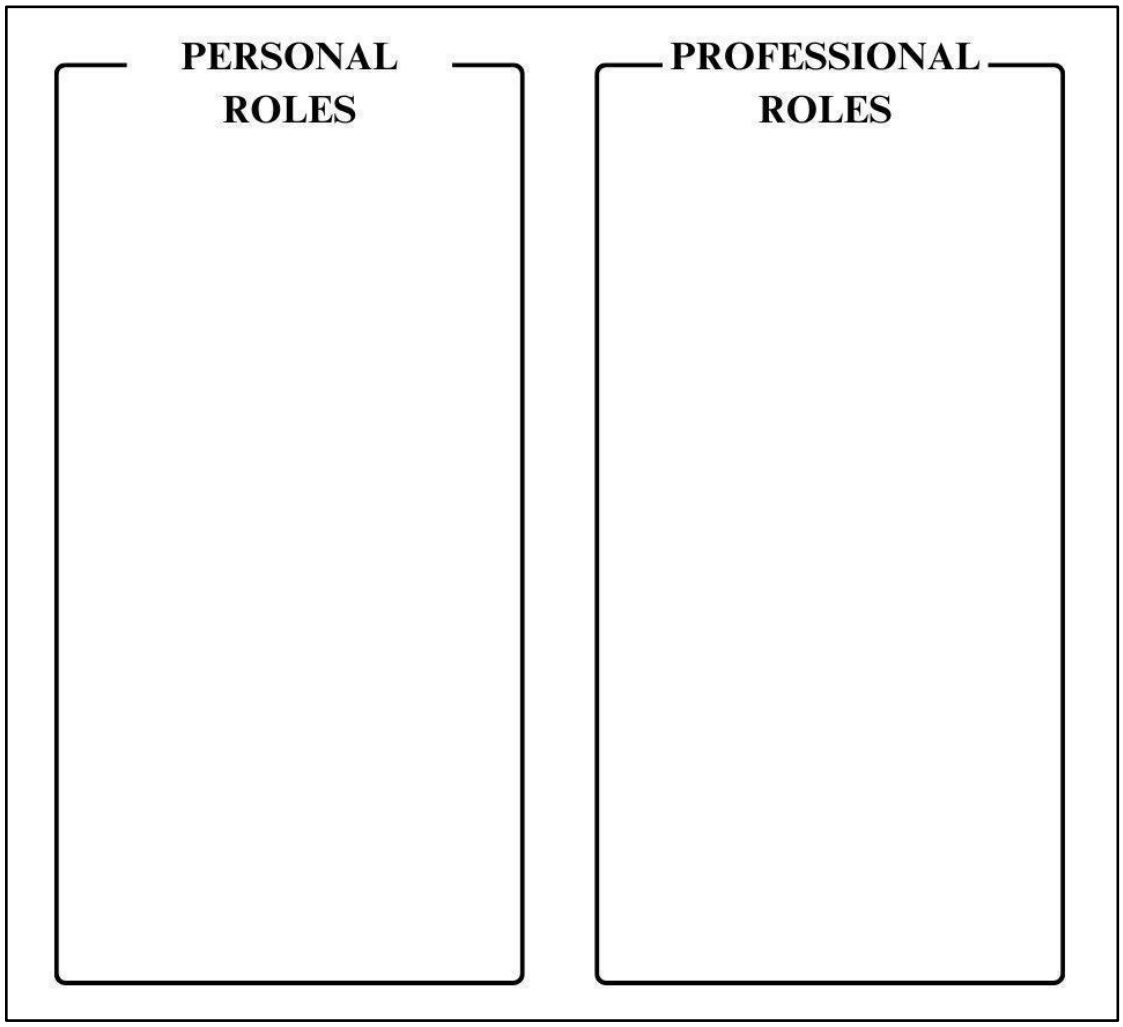

Figure 3.1

Focus is the directing of attention to the task at hand; **concentration** is the maintenance of focus on the necessary things at the right time in the correct way (Williams et al., 2021). Controlling focus to decrease stress and improve performance is much easier said than done. How can someone just switch their attention from one demand to another? Focus, like a muscle, can be strengthened through repetition and deliberate practice. Gaining a better understanding of how focus and concentration work can provide valuable insights into this process. Nideffer's (1976) model (Figure 3.2) offers a useful framework for comprehending the dynamics of focus and concentration, making it a valuable tool for navigating the various roles you are responsible for and helping you determine the type and degree of focus required to succeed in the tasks at hand. It is presented below as it is discussed in multiple trainings offered at the West Point Center for Enhanced Performance:

	External	**Internal**
Broad	*Assessing* Focus is **directed outward towards the broader musical environment**, to ensure an individual is in sync with the entire orchestra.	*Analyzing* Focus is **directed inward at reflecting on thoughts and emotions** relating to an ongoing performance or rehearsal.
Narrow	*Acting* Focus is **directed outward to execute a specific skill**, helping the musician coordinate their actions with a particular external element within the ensemble.	*Preparing* Focus is **directed inward towards preparing to execute a technique**, enabling a performer to home in on executing a solo or difficult passage.

Figure 3.2

Nideffer's model asserts that there are four types of focus: broad-external, broad-internal, narrow-external, and narrow-internal. The width (i.e., narrow or broad) refers to the need to focus on big or small things depending on the context. Sometimes, you need to focus on the bigger picture (e.g., the sound of the whole ensemble; broad focus) and sometimes you need to fixate on something more specific (e.g., one entrance note; narrow focus). The direction refers to focusing on the internal self or the external environment depending on the context.

Being able to shift attention based on the demand at hand and your role in the ensemble is an important skill, as different situations require different attentional demands. For example, during a rehearsal or performance, a trumpet player may need to utilize *broad-external focus* to catch the conductor's cues, track the tempo of the entire ensemble, and the fit within the overall dynamics of the ensemble. Employing a broad-external focus will help this musician attend to his environment so he is ready to react automatically to what is going on around him (Nideffer, 2002). During the same rehearsal or performance, that trumpeter may need to switch to a *narrow-external focus* to attend closely to the timing of the piece leading up to a specific entrance. Using a narrow-external focus will help this musician maintain an acute awareness of the tempo and perform the action of the entrance on time (Nideffer, 2002). Alternatively, a *broad-internal focus* will aid in gathering information from the environment and comparing it to information the trumpeter already has stored in his long-term memory to analyze the environment and create a plan for desired performance (Nideffer, 2002). When preparing for a solo performance, the trumpeter may shift to a broad-internal focus, attending to his internal dialogue, acknowledging negative thoughts and reframing them. Finally, a *narrow-internal focus* is utilized when the trumpeter needs to focus on practicing techniques such as fingering or embouchure pressure to execute a difficult section. The trumpeter will use a narrow-internal focus to systematically approach technique

and/or change his own internal state by focusing on breathing rate or muscle tension (Nideffer, 2002).

The critical takeaway here, as discussed in CEP, is that there is no quadrant of focus that is inherently 'correct or incorrect' during performance. The key to elite attentional control is to be able to enter and exit each of the four quadrants at will, according to what is most relevant to your performance at the moment. Common errors in attentional control, in contrast, arise when a performer is stuck in the wrong quadrant, i.e. they need to be attending to the conductor to follow cues about timing and intonation in a critical part of the piece (narrow external), but are being drawn to focus on unhelpful self-talk criticizing a mistake a few moments earlier (narrow internal).

Consider Figure 3.2 and the above information to model specific scenarios from your role in the band during which each type of attentional focus on the chart below would be beneficial.

	External	**Internal**
Broad	*Assessing*	*Analyzing*
Narrow	*Acting*	*Preparing*

Figure 3.3

Now that you have a basic understanding of focus, let's learn how to shift between the various roles you perform as a military musician to concentrate that focus where it's needed.

Section Two: Mental Preparation

"An effective mental preparation routine is a way to transform from the normal, everyday self into a mentally focused and prepared warrior."

-COL Travis S. Tilman, Dr. Ken Ravizza, and Dr. Traci Statler

As you learned in the previous section, focus and concentration can significantly impact success. Performances can be negatively impacted by thoughts about the past, the future, or things outside of your control (Williams et al., 2021). Hermansson and Hodge (2012) assert that immersion in the present moment yields the best concentration. The numerous duties and demands required by military musicians can make total engagement in the here-and-now a difficult task. The remainder of this chapter will provide a foundation for attention control, or concentration, training.

An important principle for developing **concentration** is that concentration is deliberate: we need to decide when and on what to concentrate (Moran, 2009). The military musician in the previous section described a situation in which he had to choose to direct his attention towards his instrument to better perform his music. Developing an imaginary switch (Moran, Toner & Campbell, 2019) that turns concentration on and off based on the environmental cues and demands of the task can help musicians better tune-in to the performance. This mental switch can be flipped using performance routines and protocols and is a focus of mental training at West Point's CEP.

Performance routines are intentional series of behaviors and/or cognitive strategies that help performers prepare both the mind (e.g., being in the present moment) and body (e.g., feeling appropriately energized) for performance (Munroe-Chandler & Hall, 2021). These pseudo-rituals vary from performer to performer and include mental skills, such as attentional cues and imagery, which help the individual achieve their unique ideal performance state. **Attentional cues** are words and actions that help performers focus on the task at hand. These cues can be verbal (e.g., "I've got this", "smooth", "control"), visual (e.g., fixing one's gaze on the sheet music or conductor), physical (e.g., taking a deep breath, tapping the instrument, emptying the spit valve) or any combination of the three (Munroe-Chandler & Hall, 2021). **Imagery**, or mental rehearsal, can be used by musicians to mentally recreate the stressful environment of performing and visualize themselves executing properly under those conditions (Williams et al., 2021). Imagery can also be used as a way of recovering from mistakes, regulating emotions, learning difficult sections, visualizing future successes, and improving mental skills. It is recommended that imagery practitioners use all five senses to create an experience in their mind that mimics real experience (White & Hardy, 1998), which can enhance performance over time if trained correctly (Munroe-Chandler & Hall, 2021). An example imagery script can be found at the end of this chapter and additional resources surrounding imagery can be found in Part 4.

Figure 3.4, utilized often at West Point's Center for Enhanced Performance, details an example of a mental preparation routine of a soldier that is conducive to minimizing distractions and facilitating more consistent focus (Tilman et al., 2011).

Everything in the funnel above the vehicle is what is important and relevant to the soldier at that moment. In this funnel, the soldier's mental preparation consists of the behavioral and cognitive strategies mentioned above: the soldier physically prepares herself and her equipment; engages in a few rounds of deliberate breathing to help relax and tune into the present moment; reviews the maps of the route and alternate routes; visualizes herself traveling the roads and completing the mission while maintaining composure, confidence, and ease despite what is going on around her. She does not worry about anything in red that is outside the funnel that is unhelpful in facilitating her success. When these thoughts and concerns creep into her mind, she tunes them out.

Listed on the vehicle are the soldier's refocus commands (See Activity #2 in Section 3 of this chapter). Everything inside the funnel below the vehicle is what is relevant to the soldier directly after the mission. The red elements outside the funnel are irrelevant to the task in the present moment and her attention should be redirected away from them and back to task-relevant cues until her mission is completed.

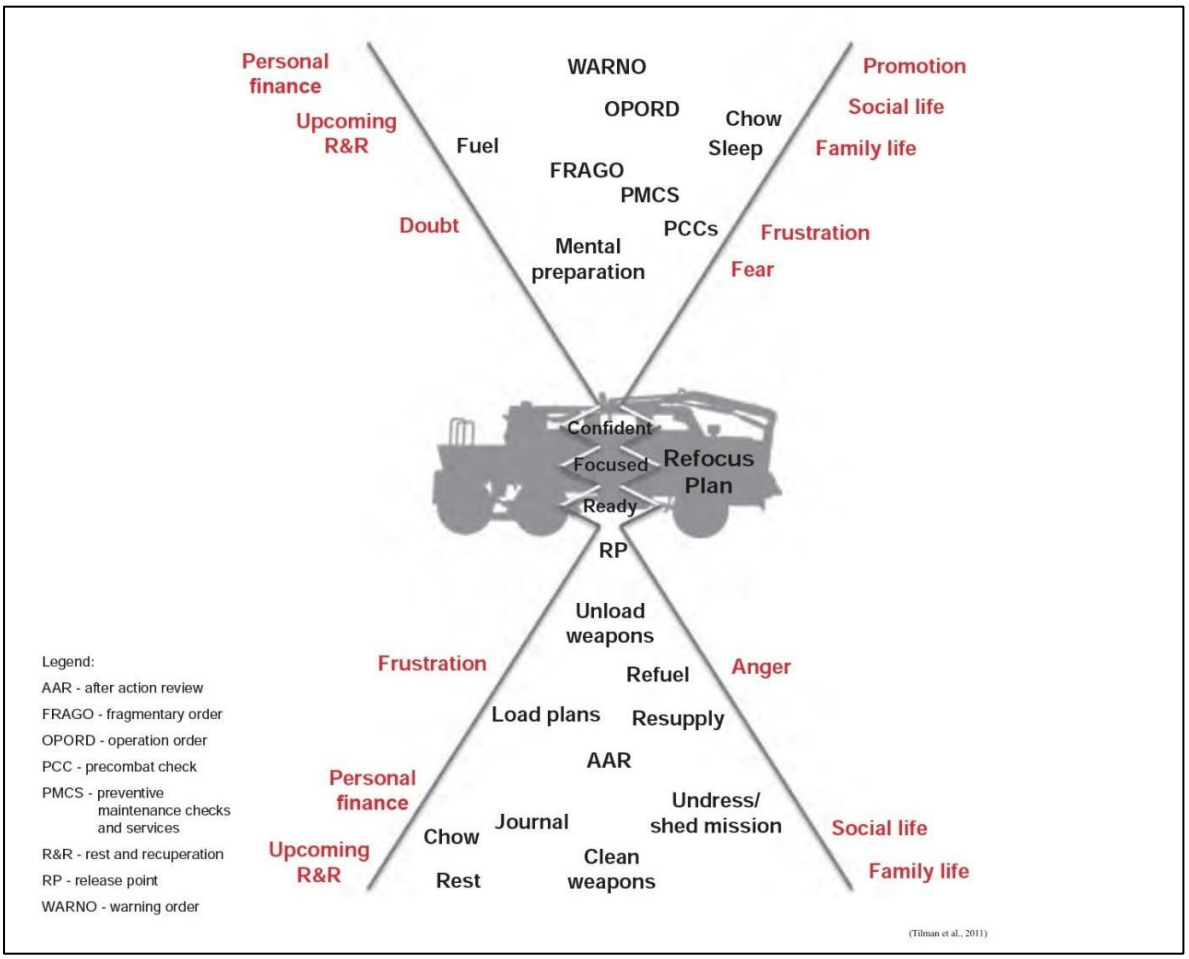

Figure 3.4

In Figure 3.5 below, identify what you need to focus on to be successful before and after a rehearsal or performance and your own potential external and internal distractors that could inhibit peak performance. Consider how this routine may need to adjust for your different daily duties.

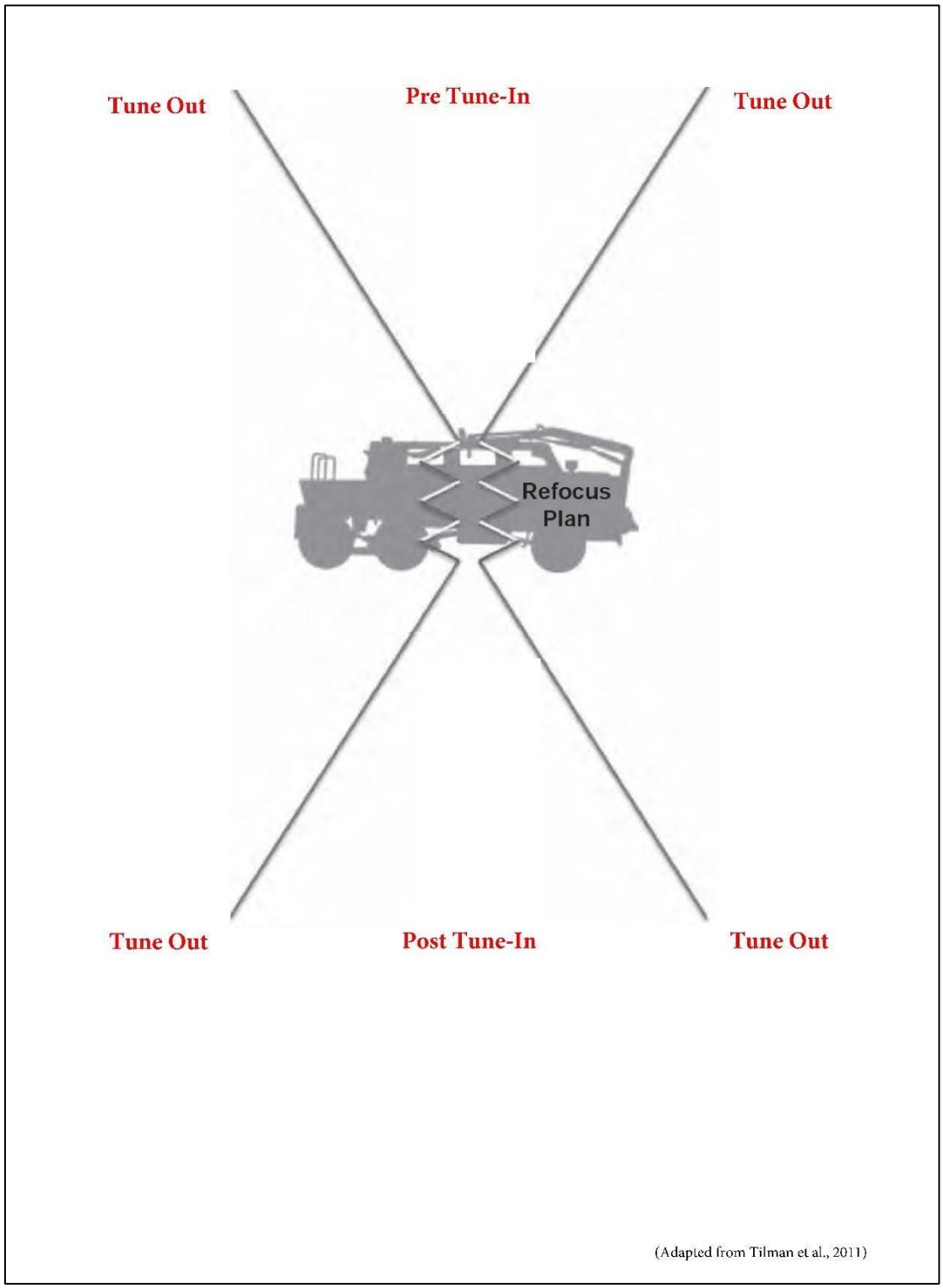

Figure 3.5

Taking the time to develop your own performance routine will help enhance your focus and put you in the zone to perform well (Munroe-Chandler & Hall, 2021). The effectiveness of performance routines will be maximized with regular repetition of the routine. The objective is to ensure that you have done everything in your control (i.e., training habits, nutrition, sleep, effort) to flip that mental switch and put yourself in the best space to perform when you step into the performance environment. Trusting in your preparation process and directing attention away from elements that are outside of your control or irrelevant to the task in front of you are skills that take deliberate practice and refinement over time.

Section Three: Be Where the Music Is – The Playbook

"Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally."

-Jon Kabat-Zinn

Utilize the exercises in this section to continue to develop your attention and concentration skill set.

Activity #1 CBA Routine

"I rewired my brain to get excited about performing instead of dreading it."

- Member of the West Point Band Member, Anonymous

The following exercise, borrowed with permission from West Point's Center for Enhanced Performance, is an excellent tool to quickly and actively shift your mind away from unhelpful thoughts and onto more adaptive cues:

During performances, our minds will wander. For you individually, it may wander more in periods of higher pressure, it may wander more in periods of lower pressure, but one thing is for certain; it will wander. It is what our mind has been trained to do! Constantly scanning for threats kept our ancestors alive, and we even train our brains to constantly shift our attention by multitasking, task switching (going back and forth between the TV and your phone, for example) and scrolling on social media (seeing a friend from high school, a colleague on vacation and a forgotten family member all in the span of 10-20 seconds!)

Noticing when our minds wander is half the battle, but it can be an enormous struggle to return it to a task relevant **cue** AND hold it there for long enough to fully refocus! Creating and rehearsing an in-performance routine enough times for it to become habit can simplify this process; at West Point we often utilize the CBA method below. To start, think about an upcoming important performance when you would like to implement your routine and write it below.

Performance _____

During that performance, you will need to notice when your mind leaves your desired attention point. When this happens, we will have the opportunity to deploy our CBA! 'C' stands for "Cue," 'B' stands for "Breath," and 'A' stands for "Attach."

C **Cue your Confidence**

B **Breath & Body**

A **Attach Awareness/Attention - Focal Point**

Activity #2: Refocusing Commands

"I once heard someone say, 'The best musicians have the shortest memories.' Essentially, if a mistake is made or if the time prior to the performance is not good, the best musicians will be able to play as if nothing has happened. If a mistake is made, I try to ensure the following notes or passages are excellent. Once a part of the performance has gone poorly, it's best to move on and focus energy on the upcoming portion."

- Member of the United States Army Band, "Pershing's Own"

Mistakes and a loss of concentration are inevitable parts of the performing arts. However, being able to bounce back quickly and effectively is an important skill that can be developed. A "Refocusing Command" is a short, positive, and instructive word or statement used immediately after a bad play, bad break, or distraction that stops negative self-talk before it can begin. They keep you in the zone and focused on the next note.

Refocusing Commands Have Three Criteria:

1. *Immediate* **–** They are used as soon as the distracting or upsetting event occurs.
2. *Intense* – They need to be strong and loud (in your head) to snap your focus back to the present.
3. *Instructive* – They need to provide clear direction for what you should do next.

Example: *After a mistake during a performance, a musician may say, "Stay focused!" directing their attention back to the music and ensuring concentration despite errors. Likewise, during a high-stress performance moment, a musician might say, "Breathe." to remind themselves to control their nerves and maintain composure.*

Application:

What are the negative events common to your performance domain? What happens that can throw you off your game? Create Refocusing Commands for these situations, ensuring they meet all three criteria. Use them in rehearsals and concerts. Before you know it, they will become automatic responses that keep you in the zone when something bad happens.

My Refocusing Commands:
Example: *Stay Focused!*
Example: *Breathe.*

Activity #3: Post Performance E-S-P

"Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences and failing to achieve anything useful."

- Margaret J. Wheatley

Reflecting after a rehearsal or performance is just as important as getting yourself ready to play because it will help you learn from your performance, make adjustments, and develop self-regulation (Kirschenbaum, 1997; Ravizza & Fifer, 2014). The process of reflection and adjustments that you choose to make between rehearsals and performances are entirely within your control. The development of confidence and the reflection on performance play off of one another, as reflecting on performance makes an individual feel more competent and in control of performance and development. The E-S-P exercise, developed by Zinsser (2022) and utilized heavily in his work at the West Point Center for Enhanced Performance, emphasizes constructive memories that contribute to confidence development. It requires you to reflect on the positive despite a good or bad performance. You are essentially making a highlight reel of a performance. In doing so, you are also exercising complete control over your thoughts. Reflect on the areas of effort, success, and progress made during your rehearsal or concert.

E-Effort

Where did I put in valuable effort today?

Where could I have put in more effort today?

S-Success

When did I create success today?

Are there times where I fell short of success today?

P-Progress

Where did I progress from my effort today?

What can I do to continue progress tomorrow?

Activity #4: Imagery Scripts

Below are two examples of imagery scripts developed by a military musician in the West Point Band. Utilize the examples below and your own experiences to create your own imagery script. See the additional resources sections in Part 4 for more information surrounding imagery.

Inside View:

I see everything through my own eyes. I fast forward to being at the venue and hit "play" ***feeling relaxed and ready***. I put my phone on "do not disturb" because I have something awesome to do. My clothes and shoes feel comfortable, an outfit I have performed in before. I hear people backstage talking, warming up, laughing, watching videos on their phones. I talk with some friends. My warm-up goes well, my lips are pliable, and my breath is cool as I inhale and warm on the exhale. Everything feels easy. I touch on a few spots to have them in the tank for the performance. I smell familiar fragrances of the warm-up area and the stage, the soap in the bathrooms, which put me at ease. My body and mind are ***calm and relaxed***. I use the bathroom and eat the same pre-performance snack.

I fast forward and slow down milestone times leading up to downbeat. An hour before, thirty minutes before, ten minutes before. I feel the hit of adrenaline, which I welcome, because performing is something I am excited to do. I go through a minute of mindful diaphragmatic breathing, which I practice regularly and do well. ***I feel relaxed, ready, and steady***. I feel the smoothness of my instrument, my fingertips on the valves. I hear the side chatter as I walk on the stage, see the brightness of the lights, feel the energy of an audience that wants to hear a great performance. I hear the tuning note, which is my cue. I see our conductor, her baton, and feel like a swimmer jumping in the pool as she gives the downbeat of the concert.

I hear myself playing well in the ensemble, blending with others. I speed up and slow down to the moments where I have some challenging passages. I feel relaxed and use a cue word ("easy") in my mind before I play it. I feel my lips, breath, and fingers all align as I hear the timbre, rhythm, intonation, and style resonate well. I rewind and replay the passage going this way a few times. Sometimes I even play it in slow motion in my mind. I do this with some of the other challenging sections, then fast forward to the end enjoying the sights and sounds of an appreciative audience.

Outside View:

I see myself from different camera angles. I see myself getting ready for the day. Since I have seen this many times, I scrub forward to when I leave for the performance venue. ***I look confident, calm, relaxed, and ready.***

Like a well-produced Netflix documentary, I see myself from multiple vantage points: from the audience, from backstage, from within the ensemble. Most importantly, I hear myself singing well from different parts of the concert hall. I am meant to be in that uniform, a great visual and auditory representation of our military as a featured soloist.

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Part IV: Be All You Can Be

"I think you should work on yourself until the day you die."

- Serena Williams

Purpose: This chapter will summarize key takeaways from the previous sections, offer words of advice from others in your shoes, and provide a bank of further learning and resources.

Part one focused on the importance of self-awareness and goal setting for military musicians in their careers. Self-awareness is crucial for musicians, extending beyond technical mastery to include understanding one's thoughts, physical sensations, emotions, and behaviors. Enhanced self-awareness can lead to greater confidence during performances (Clark & Williamon, 2012) and helps identify behavioral patterns, inhibiting tendencies, and effective mindsets (Cowden, 2017). As such, engaging in self-reflective activities is an important starting point on your performance enhancement journey. Likewise, goal setting is an important skill that guides individuals toward personal and professional pursuits. Goal setting provides direction, increases motivation, confidence, and performance, and is supported by research in both military (Adler et al., 2015) and musical (Hatfield, 2016) contexts. There are three types of goals: outcome goals (i.e., desired end result of performance), performance goals (i.e., what needs to be executed to make end result more likely), and process goals (i.e., focus on technique). It is important to make goals specific, measurable, challenging yet attainable, and aligned with personal standards of excellence (Locke & Latham, 1985; Weinberg, 2013). Additionally, short-term, process-oriented goals can improve the likelihood of achieving long-term goals (Weinberg, 2010; Weinberg, Butt, & Knight, 2001). Developing self-awareness and utilizing goal setting can help enhance success in both personal and professional aspects of a military musician's journey.

Part two provided the knowledge and tools for military musicians to understand and manage performance anxiety. The chapter made distinctions between key terms including performance anxiety, stress, and arousal. Performance anxiety is a learned, negative emotional response to perceived performance demands or threats (Frame & Reichin, 2019). In this context, the term 'negative' refers to a typical emotional perception of being unpleasant; it is important to remember that anxiety is not always detrimental, as many musicians thrive under varying levels. Stress is the perception that demands exceed one's ability to cope (Fry & Hogue, 2021). Arousal is a combination of physiological and psychological activation that can vary throughout and influence performance (Williams et al., 2021; Wilson & Roland, 2002). Each musician will have his own unique, desired range of arousal for peak performance, also known as the Individual Zone of Optimal Functioning (IZOF). It is important to recognize one's optimal arousal zone for peak performance. We encouraged you to reflect on your personal experiences with performance anxiety, including your best and worst performances; identify your optimal and suboptimal arousal levels and tendencies; and practice and implement arousal regulation strategies to manage nervous energy during performance.

Part three highlighted the unique challenges military musicians face beyond their musical roles and provided tools for managing focus to achieve peak performance in all aspects of their lives. Focus is crucial for optimal performance both musically and across various military duties. Mental preparation routines are individualized sequences of behaviors and strategies to enhance concentration and prepare your mind and body for performance. Some key components of performance routines include attentional cues, imagery, and refocus commands. We encouraged you to identify the different "hats" you wear and the focus demands of each role; to practice switching focus types based on Nideffer's model, which identified four types of focus: broad-external, broad-internal, narrow-external, and narrow-internal (Nideffer, 1976; 2002); and to design your own mental preparation routines for optimal performance in your different roles. Remember to be flexible and adapt your routines to different contexts and evolving needs. Continue to practice the strategies detailed in part three to navigate the demands of military life, optimize focus, and consistently achieve peak performance in all domains.

This manual only scratches the surface of the wealth of knowledge and information in the field of performance psychology that can help take you to the next level. Please see the below list for additional reading and resources:

Books:

1. The Confident Mind by Nate Zinsser (2022)
2. Performance Success: Performing Your best Under Pressure by Don Greene (2002)
3. Performance Psychology in Action by Kate F. Hays (2009)
4. Applied Sport Psychology: Personal Growth to Peak Performance from Jean M. Williams & Vikki Krane (2020)
5. It Takes What It Takes: How to Think Neutrally and Gain Control of Your Life by Trevor Moawad and Andy Staples
6. Achieving Peak Performance in Music: Psychological Strategies for Optimal Flow by Sarah Sinnamon (2020)

Academic Articles:

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Websites:

Music Specific:

https://bulletproofmusician.com/

https://www.winningonstage.com/products/#assessments

https://www.musiciansway.com/performance/

Mental Health and Performance in the Performing Arts:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ah2MY9I5Po

Athletics Related Resources that are Transferable to Military Musicians:

https://mindhealth.nba.com/

https://olympics.com/athlete365/mentally-fit/

https://greenepsych.com/resources/

Dr. Greene's "Artist Performance Survey"

(Used with permission of the author.)

Scenario 1: Imagine yourself on the way to rehearse or perform. [Reflect on the following questions and answer on a scale of 1 (untrue for you) to 5 (very true for you).]

0 1. I have a strong inner drive to be my best.

0 2. The level at which I perform is very important to me.

0 3. I have a strong will to succeed.

0 4. I am driven from within.

0 5. I know how to perform under pressure.

0 6. I am committed to be the best I can be.

_____ 7. I have no fear of success.

_____ 8. Going into most performance situations, I expect to do well.

_____ 9. I have what it takes to make it.

0 10. I perform well when I'm feeling energized and "up."

_____ 11. I'm not afraid of failing.

_____ 12. I believe in my talent and abilities.

_____ 13. I have fought my way out of many difficult circumstances.

0 14. I have an intense focus.

0 15. I direct my full attention to what I'm doing in the moment.

0 16. I am able to keep focused for as long as necessary.

0 17. I'm not distracted by people moving around me or making noise.

0 18. I don't worry about what other people think of my performing.

_____ 19. I get anxious before some practice sessions.

_____ 20. Final rehearsals can make me feel very uptight.

_____ 21. I can get nervous just thinking about an upcoming dress rehearsal.

_____ 22. Before important performances, I feel extremely nervous.

_____ 23. I have no trouble getting my energy up for performances.

_____ 24. Auditions can place overwhelming stress on me.

_____ 25. I usually go into auditions with way too much anxiety.

_____ 26. I worry about performing below my capabilities.

_____ 27. I want to gain others' recognition of my talent.

_____ 28. I tend to doubt my ability before I even begin.

_____ 29. My approach to most performances is one of caution.

Scenario 2: Now see yourself warming up and getting ready to begin. [Reflect on the following questions and answer on a scale of 1 (very true for you) to 5 (untrue for you). ***Note the scale is reversed for these questions.*** *Answers from earlier have been adjusted accordingly.*]

_____ 30. Things never seem to work out the way I want them to.

_____ 31. No matter how well I prepare, something seems to go wrong.

0_____ 32. I don't do very well when I'm at a high energy level.

0_____ 33. I perform much better when I'm feeling relatively calm.

_____ 34. It's often difficult for me to get relaxed enough.

_____ 35. I don't know how to control my nervousness.

_____ 36. Even the thought of doing my absolute best can make me anxious.

_____ 37. I get too caught up in what others think of me and my performance.

_____ 38. I have a strong fear of failure.

0_____ 39. My performance skills suffer significantly under pressure.

_____ 40. I'd probably start off better if I believed more in myself.

_____ 41. I would not describe my focus as being powerful.

0_____ 42. I get distracted when other performers make mistakes.

0_____ 43. The main source of distraction is my own mind.

_____ 44. I have trouble staying focused.

_____ 45. My mind races with instructions, criticism, or totally unrelated thoughts.

_____ 46. I say things to myself while performing that I'd never say to a friend.

_____ 47. I'd probably do better if I didn't try so hard.

0_____ 48. It takes me a while to get it back after making mistakes.

_____ 49. I get really negative and self-critical.

0_____ 50. I need to stop trying to force things to happen.

Scenario 3: Now you are performing and experiencing some problems. [Reflect on the following questions and answer on a scale of 1 (very true for you) to 5 (untrue for you). ***Note the scale is reversed for these questions.*** *Answers from earlier have been adjusted accordingly.*]

_____ 51. Things do not usually go how I'd like them to go.

_____ 52. I seem to get more than my share of bad breaks.

_____ 53. I don't do very well when I'm feeling a lot of pressure.

0 54. I usually do better when I'm feeling relaxed.

_____ 55. I feel relatively calm in most rehearsals.

_____ 56. I worry constantly about making mistakes in performances.

_____ 57. I wish I could do a better job of controlling my nerves.

_____ 58. I tend to start off tentatively.

_____ 59. It takes me too long to calm myself down.

0 60. I get distracted when a number of things happen at once.

0 61. I tend to try too hard under pressure.

_____ 62. I don't focus very well.

0 63. Sometimes success isn't worth the effort it requires.

0 64. I'd probably do better if I were more self-motivated.

0 65. I don't always have to do my absolute best.

0 66. It takes me some time to recover after making a mistake.

_____ 67. I really get down on myself.

_____ 68. It's difficult getting my energy up after something bad has happened.

_____ 69. Sometimes my energy is not up enough in certain performances.

_____ 70. My energy has been too low in some auditions.

_____ 71. I have trouble keeping my mind in the present.

_____ 72. I have a short attention span.

_____ 73. I go back to my mistakes or ahead to things that could go wrong.

_____ 74. I even worry about the possibility of performing too well.

0 75. I need to focus better.

_____ 76. I believe that things usually turn out for the best.

0 77. I have the ability to bounce back after unfortunate circumstances.

_____ 78. It does not take me very long to get back on track.

_____ 79. Tough conditions bring out the fighter in me.

_____ 80. I can summon up my energy and rally even if I'm tired.

_____ 81. I know how to get myself "pumped up" when I need to.

_____ 82. I like to go onstage feeling up.

Scenario 4: After resolving some of the problems, you are about to finish. [Reflect on the following questions and answer on a scale of 1 (untrue for you) to 5 (very true for you).]

_____ 83. I enjoy performing with a lot of positive energy.

_____ 84. I am willing to take certain risks to see how good I can be.

_____ 85. I am not afraid of the consequences of doing my very best.

_____ 86. I'm not that concerned with what others may think

_____ 87. Auditions don't make me that nervous.

0____ 88. I know that I will be successful.

0____ 89. I am very driven for my own reasons.

0____ 90. I am committed to doing my best.

0____ 91. I would do almost anything to succeed.

_____ 92. I know how to function under pressure.

0____ 93. I can focus even in distracting surroundings.

_____ 94. I talk to myself in a positive way.

_____ 95. I center myself in the "here and now."

0____ 96. I am able to still the chatter in my mind before I begin.

_____ 97. I quietly focus on the task at hand.

_____ 98. I summon up the courage and "go for it" not matter what.

0____ 99. I am able to trust my talent and abilities and "let it go."

0____ 100. I keep focused until I am done.

Scoring

All scores were imported and calculated from previous answers.

Factor 1: Determination

Intrinsic Motivation

1) 0
4) 0
64) 0
89) 0
Subtotal: 0 x5
Total: 0

Commitment

2) 0
6) 0
65) 0
90) 0
Subtotal: 0 x5
Total: 0

Will to Succeed

3) 0
63) 0
88) 0
91) 0
Subtotal: 0 x5
Total: 0

Factor 2: Poise

Optimal Activation

10) 0
32) 0
33) 0
54) 0
Total: 0

Performance Activation

22) 0
69) 0
82) 0
83) 0
Total: 0

Rehearsal Activation

19) 0
20) 0
21) 0
55) 0
Total: 0

Audition Activation

24) 0
25) 0
70) 0
87) 0
Total: 0

Performance Under Pressure	Ability to Activate	Ability to Deactivate
5) 0	23) 0	34) 0
39) 0	68) 0	35) 0
53) 0	80) 0	57) 0
92) 0	81) 0	59) 0
Total: 0	Total: 0	Total: 0

Factor 3: Mental Outlook

Self-Confidence	Self-Talk	Expectancy
9) 0	46) 0	8) 0
12) 0	49) 0	30) 0
28) 0	67) 0	51) 0
40) 0	94) 0	76) 0
Total: 0	Total: 0	Total: 0

Factor 4: Emotional Approach

Ability to Risk	Risking Defeat	Risking Success
29) 0	11) 0	7) 0
58) 0	26) 0	36) 0
84) 0	38) 0	74) 0
98) 0	56) 0	85) 0
Total: 0	Total: 0	Total: 0

Factor 5: Controlling Attention

Object of Focus	Focus Past Distractions	Mental Quiet
18) 0	17) 0	43) 0
27) 0	42) 0	45) 0
37) 0	60) 0	96) 0
86) 0	93) 0	97) 0
Total: 0	Total: 0	Total: 0

Factor 6: Concentration

Intensity of Focus	Presence of Focus	Duration of Focus
14) 0	15) 0	16) 0
41) 0	71) 0	44) 0
62) 0	73) 0	72) 0
75) 0	95) 0	100) 0
Total: 0	Total: 0	Total: 0

Factor 7: Resilience

Ability to Fight	Ease Under Pressure	Ability to Recover
13) 0	47) 0	48) 0
31) 0	50) 0	66) 0
52) 0	61) 0	77) 0
79) 0	99) 0	78) 0
Total: 0	Total: 0	Total: 0

Key Takeaways

Self-Awareness	***What are my strengths and growth areas?*** Develop a clear picture of the strong aspects of your music and areas in which you can grow. Use this knowledge to set goals and learn the mental skills to improve your growth areas and further advance your strengths.
Goals and Expectations	***What do I want to achieve right now?*** Name the objective. What are my expectations for this performance? How will I react if I succeed? If I don't succeed? Establish a plan of action for different outcomes.
Energy Management	***Am I too relaxed? Too excited?*** The level of arousal needed for optimal performance is different for every individual. Do you perform best when amped up or calm beforehand? If you are too excited, consider a centering breath to calm down. If your arousal is too low, think about things you can do to increase your excitement (e.g., music, cue words, routines).
Self- Talk	***How am I talking to myself?*** We want to be deliberate about what we say to ourselves. Reflect on your internal dialogue and ask yourself: Are my thoughts and self-talk helping me achieve the task in front of me? If not, how can I restructure them to make them helpful?
Attentional Focus	***Where is my attention?*** Consider cue words or phrases that remind you to direct and focus attention on the task. Use simple, positive, motivating language in the present tense. "Steady" or "Smooth" are examples of cue words that can redirect your attention to the present moment.
Imagery	***Am I seeing myself succeeding?*** Using all five senses, create images in your mind of yourself performing and succeeding. What do you see, smell, taste, feel, and hear? You can choose to visualize yourself from an internal (i.e., seeing the action through your own eyes) or external (i.e., watching yourself on TV) perspective. Practice and repetition are the keys to developing effective imagery.
Performance Routines	***How am I getting myself ready to perform?*** All of the above skills can be utilized in developing a performance routine. Keep your routine simple and flexible. The goal of a performance routine is to get you in the mental space to play out of your mind.

Epilogue/Conclusion

Here are a few reminders that can help you navigate what lies ahead:

1. Performance psychology is a journey of self-discovery, a pathway to understanding yourself on a deeper level, and making choices that empower you to positively influence your performance in music and in life. To truly excel, it is beneficial to know who you are, your core values, and what strategies work best for you. This self-awareness allows you to develop a skill set that is tailored to your unique needs. Take the time to get to know yourself.
2. Much like mastering your instrument, the concepts introduced in this manual are skills that require consistent practice. Dedicate that ten extra minutes a day to practice your breathing techniques or engage in an effective post-performance reflection (e.g., E-S-P) to train your brain to focus on strengths and growth areas.
3. You will encounter challenges along this journey, and they are likely to trigger stress, self-doubt, lack of motivation or other emotional symptoms. These emotions are not only normal but also valid. As such, the skills and resources provided throughout this manual are not only about making you a better musician but are also designed to positively impact your overall well-being (Osborne et al., 2014). Learning how to manage stress effectively, focus on constructive thoughts, visualize success, practice self-compassion, and stay present in the moment can enhance your quality of life and contribute to a more sustainable career as a military musician.
4. Evidence suggests that you can better your mental health and well-being (e.g., combination of psychological, social, and emotional health) with the use of mental skills such as those discussed in this book (Dithurbide et al., 2022; Durand-Bush et al., 2022). In athletics research, individuals who utilized mental skills (e.g., breathing exercises) were better able to cope with their stress and reported a higher level of well-being after the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (Dithurbide et al., 2022). As such, developing a solid set of mental skills that work for you can not only enhance performance, but may also positively affect your well-being which in turn, can lead to more consistent performances and feelings of enjoyment (Durand-Bush et al., 2022).

In the midst of performing at the highest level, balancing multiple roles and unpredictable military demands, strive in each moment to become the best version of yourself. By doing so, you'll not only benefit your colleagues, partners, friends, and children but, most importantly, you will become a better version of yourself.

Be all you can be!

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About the Authors

Lara Pomerleau-Fontaine is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Human Kinetics at the University of Sherbrooke. Her expertise primarily focuses on athletes' mental health and well-being and the coach-athlete relationship. She is also a Mental Performance Consultant®, where she has had the opportunity to work with individual athletes and teams both in Canada and in the United-States at various levels, including high school, CEGEP D1, NCAA D1, U Sport, semi-professional, and high-performance settings. Lara also completed an internship at the West Point Military Academy, where she gained insight and experience into the context of performance psychology in a military setting, working with athletes, members of the military, and professional musicians. Lara is currently working for the Sherbrooke Regional Multisport Training Center and the National Institute of Sport of Quebec in Canada, while pursuing her doctoral studies on a full-time basis.

Annie McConnon is a Ph.D. student in Clinical Psychology at Uniformed Services University in Bethesda, MD. She previously earned her master's degree in counseling with a sport psychology specialization from Boston University. She obtained her Bachelor of Science from Saint Joseph's University, where she played Division I soccer. Annie is also a Mental Performance Consultant® and has worked with individual athletes and teams at various levels, including NCAA Division I and Division III, high school, and elementary school. She has also received performance psychology training at the United States Military Academy and clinical training at the South Boston Collaborative Center. Annie is currently pursuing her doctoral studies on a full-time basis and is engaging in clinical training in the George Washington Medical Faculty Associates Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health.

Dr. Mitch DeSimone, CMPC currently serves as a Performance Psychology Instructor and Specialist within the Center for Enhanced Performance at the United States Military Academy. He currently works with cadets, active-duty personnel, athletes and performing artists at USMA to help them train mental skills critical to helping them perform their best when it matters most, and runs a private practice to support performing artists at all levels on their path to achieve their goals. He is the coordinator of the Performing Arts Special Interest Group within the Association of Applied Sport Psychology, runs a small dance school in New York State with his wife and close friend, and is a retired professional and competitive Irish dancer.

Nicholas Caluori is a Sergeant First Class in the U.S. Army and a Special Bandsman in the West Point Band at the United States Military Academy. He is a researcher with the West Point Music Research Center (WPMRC) and assists the Center for Enhanced Performance (CEP) with departmental teaching needs in academic support and performance psychology. He has performed with major arts organizations throughout the United States such as the Albany Symphony, Dallas

Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and artists such as Josh Groban, and The Who. He holds a Master Teacher Program certificate from the United States Military Academy, a Master of Music from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, and a Bachelor of Music from Florida State University.