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In the mood

An investigation into how my moods influence my piano playing

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Abstract

In the mood

An investigation into how the authors moods influences her piano playing.

The methods has been used on this thesis were diary keeping, authors concert experiences and recordings as well as an interview, all in combination with literature on moods and concentration.

As an result could say that the the author believes that her moods influences her piano playing if she is not capable of to switch her mood to be highly concentrated before performance.

Conclusions are that some of her methods to be highly concentrated musician are different than normally have been recommended. To be able to play better, the author thinks she must bring in the survival mode, which she does through primitive, simple but efficient techniques. This is tiring if the author must do several concerts in a row, but is mainly something inside of the author and it does not affect the experience of the listener.

Keywords: piano, music, performance, playing, learning, risk-taking, "survival mode".

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Introduction

Solo recitals in the Western classical music tradition place extraordinary demands on the performer. Performances must be practiced to the point that they can be delivered automatically in order to ensure reliability under the pressures of the concert stage. (Chaffin & Logan, 2006)

In my field, as a classical pianist, I have struggled a lot to find out what emotional mood is best for a good performance. I would like to study this more in depth, because my personal experience of mood related to performance is quite intriguing.

When I am happy, I have noticed that I have do stupid mistakes while playing. And I have had my best concert reviews when I have been really mad on the stage. I would like to understand how my brain works and how to be the best version of myself as a pianist on the stage. What are the criteria of a good performance as a pianist? In my case, how do these criteria usually relate to my actual mood?

Then there is the factor of risk taking. Is it worth taking a risk to play better and is there such a thing as playing better when taking a risk?

In this investigation I will use my diary, my concert experiences and recordings as well as an interview, all in combination with literature on moods and concentration. I will try to understand how I work by testing to play with different moods.

What is a good performance?

When I am listening as a listener, the best performances give me some feeling. Maybe I feel sad while I am listening or maybe I feel happy. It does not matter, I just want to feel something. Other criteria of a good performance are mistakes. Is the performance flawless? Am I impressed by the techniques? What about improvisation? How is the performer's stage charisma?

After trying to analyse my criteria of good performance, it is time to use them on me. How do I evaluate my playing? I think the best way is to use these categories:

- How many mistakes do I make?
- How is the musical experience to me?
- How do I experience the flow of the whole program or piece?
- How much am I using of my energy in the performance?

Mistakes include musical mistakes, technical mistakes and memory mistakes. Musical experience includes all the musical ideas I have and what I am normally able to get out. Flow is for control of the whole context. Am I directing the music in a natural way that gives a sense and am I giving everything to the performance including my own personality and temperament?

How can I evaluate the risk-taking factor? David Clowney & Robert Rawlins (2014) give a good definition of a successful performance, from the perspective of the listener:

A performer's accomplishment is naturally expected to include skillful use of the instrument, sensitive phrasing, a match between content and manner of presentation and, in the case of a soloist, a clear personal interpretation of the piece he or she is presenting. In this way the personal presence of the artist becomes part of each individual performance of the music.

From the perspective of the player, I mean that you must add risk-taking. Having an individual performance every time on the stage means in my opinion that the music has to be alive.

Then I have to be alive too, being spontaneous and changing things if something is not working on that day. For example, the hall could be cold and my fingers freezing. Maybe I must adjust and change the tempo I start with. Maybe some key in the piano doesn't work. Maybe the piano is so loud that I must play with a softer touch. In my opinion, adjusting for the reality is the same as taking risks. Whether I like it or not, risk-taking then is not a choice, it's a exploring and experimenting music while performing.

My survival mode

During the academic year 2018-2019 I have been very busy with different projects that has required me to send links to video clips with my playing. Listening to the recordings has been very revealing to me, and I was not satisfied with the results. Those days and times when I felt fine with my playing, the result of it wasn't on a high level. The recordings when I was very disappointed with myself as a pianist, I played much better - according to my own standards at least.

I have a routine I do before going to the stage. I put myself very much down, for example by remembering all the times I haven't made it so well, and then I try to assemble all the panic, crying it out. After that, reassembling myself from the pieces, I try to be in the present, thinking that I am good enough and willing to "fight" to be able to be a pianist. I would say it is a kind of "survival mode". I have noticed that I have the best results from this routine when I don't have to use it too often.

In *Artist och Musikerhälsan* (2019) I read about fight-or-fly responses. How humans react to situations where they feel like they are in danger. They say that sometimes it's not about life threatening situations but more about being in situations that create fear or feeling of discomfort based on how we view ourselves and sometimes even the environments view of me and my abilities. (<https://www.artist-musikerhalsan.se/musikerergonomi/6-nervositet-och-rampfeber> 17.03.2019) It is a reaction when the adrenaline flows and raises heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension and affects the stomach and intestine. Initially, this incentive makes us alert and concentrated, but if the reaction is too strong, it is difficult to handle the body's reactions and a feeling of tunnel vision develops.

Like I said, I have noticed my "survival mode" will not work if I use it too often, for example two times a day because it makes me so tired. I was playing as a soloist with the Malmö Academy of Music orchestra where I had a concert on Saturday the 2nd of February at Malmö Live and on the 3rd of February in Växjö. At Malmö Live I did my routines right and I performed in my own level. Next day in Växjö I noticed bad problems with my mental state because I was so exhausted and tired. Even though my performance went well in Växjö, I think that the performance at Malmö Live was much better, because in Växjö I had nothing

left of me. That's why I have used my time after that to find other solutions, so I would be able to perform in my own level in tours, competitions and other events where I would have to be able to perform many days in a row.

One more example is my diploma audition I had on the 8th of March. I gathered all my energy so I didn't play to anyone before it. I listened to hip hop music before going onto the stage, and tried as much as I could to get into my survival mode. On that day I was able to play on my own level, but it also concerns me how much energy I needed to do that and that's why I think I have to find a better solution.

Managing the energy

After all of this I had to two very important consecutive concerts. On Tuesday the 2nd of April I was playing on a lunch concert at Palladium with my class where I was ending the concert. The next day on the 3rd of April I had my schools Gala concert with the same piece. What I did was that I used just a bit of my "survival mode" on the Tuesday: I cried a bit, tried to get my feelings out but not as much as usual. My playing was fine, very controlled, maybe a bit boring. The next day before the Gala I cried for everything I could think of, preparing for hours and when I went to the stage my music was very alive, I did couple of mistakes but nothing serious. I got a feedback that both concerts were a huge success for me, but I know that the Wednesday's Gala concert was more emotional to the audience. Therefore, I believe that I am able to play at my best a couple of days in a row, if I don't get too tired on the first day.

Evaluating in practice

Changing practicing methods?

How much do my practice methods influence the results on performed on my concerts?

How many hours should I practice in a day, where to put the focus, does it matter how I feel when I practice?

I have tried to use all the information I have collected before from books and my own results as a pianist. Because I have a tendency to do mistakes, I start my new piece by learning every rhythm, note and dynamic right. If I feel I can't take more information in, I switch to play something else or have a break before continuing.

I have noticed that I am very happy in the practice room. I love doing it and it feels like a hobby. That's why I don't understand why I don't play the best performances while I'm in a good mood? For example, Aaron Williamson's book says: *"Second, there are strategies that can be used in the final stages of preparing to give a performance from memory. One is state-dependence: learning to control your frame of mind so that you can conjure up the same sense of exhilaration, for instance, when you are practicing as when you are actually performing. The other is contextdependent learning: practicing in the room or on the stage where the performance is (p.138) to take place. These strategies, like so many others, can be useful whatever kind of music you are playing or singing, and whether you are a soloist or in an ensemble"* (chapter 7). This means that I should be on the same mindset on a practice room than I am in a concert hall, so maybe I should try to go to the different mindset when I am practicing.

During my bachelor studies in Finland where I wrote my thesis "Principles of piano playing" (2017) I noticed that I use more hours in the practise room and get better results compared to only practicing three to four hours a day. That is because I am good at switching my focus when I need to, so I don't get too tired.

Because I don't feel tired while I practice piano, I do a good foundational work without playing mistakes and because the results of my concerts are very different with the same

program, I don't think I have anything to observe in my basic practicing methods and from now on my thesis will concentrate on methods that influences my moods and nerves.

And the questions are still: do I practice right? Should I also have the awareness what I need in the performance situation? Should I be able to know exactly what fails when I am stressed in the performance?

This leads to my main problem: I don't know what goes wrong. When I started my master studies, I thought my problem was that I couldn't control my fingers one hundred percent with my brains and I have tried to practice it as the problem would be the lack of control. Then I eventually controlled my fingers, I was able to do and bring out whatever I wanted, but on the stage the problem was still there. It might not ever be "bad playing", but in my standards and level there was still a big gap between a day where I played well in my own standards and a day where I didn't play as I should have.

I still think that I have some small problems with my technique and also with my memory. While finishing my master studies, I am trying to change the order of the learning process to learn everything by heart instantly only a few weeks after starting on a new piece. It would possibly solve some minor issues if my memory would work better. I would have had more time to prepare the piece by heart before going to the stage.

I have noticed that my personal "secret" as a player is living in a moment on the stage. That means that am there with a single tone, single character, living the music as it comes. That makes my playing very intense. On the stage my attention is in the moment, I make a story, I live and feel the story and at the same time listen the story. I do it every time and because of that I think the problem is somewhere else. What is also true is that If I spend my time thinking about dealing with nerves, I will still be in their grip, because my mind is busy with them.

I have tried to solve this puzzle before with different teachers and different kinds of exercise. Beta blockers have helped me when I was younger. They made me steady on the stage so my mood wasn't important, because I have no mood when I am on medication. I did my first

auditions, exams and first competitions with the help of them. The problem is, that I am just a “normal” player with them: they take my mood away but at the same time they take my person away, so I have no “magic” while playing. Because I feel my “magic” is all I have, I decided not to take them anymore.

With different master classes I have learned to be a steady player as the way I sit, so the piano would always feel the same way. My belly button is where the middle C is, my hands are little bit higher than the keys of the piano and I have my feet resting on the right and left pedal. That has made me more a steady player in a way, that nothing is weird when I start to play, what also means my feelings will not change before I start playing, but it does not solve the whole problem.

I have tried all the methods my colleagues have told me about and teachers have asked me to try meditate, exercise, read a book, listen to music, breathing, sitting on a chair and concentrating, walking and even throwing up. But nothing has worked better than the other. Nothing gives me the result that I want other than my own survival mode and that has made me question, what if that is the answer to all my problems? In that kind of “survival mode” I play my A-game every time. Do I ask too much for trying to be the best version of myself without putting so much energy on that? I am not ready to give up.

Another point of view comes from a book called “Musical Excellence: Strategies and Techniques to Enhance Performance (2004)” written by Aaron Williamon. In this book he states that the number of hours put into practicing isn’t enough but rather that what is important is how you use the time put into your practicing. He refers to a couple of studies made by Sloboda (1996), Sosnik (1985) and Williamon (2000) and Valentine (2002) where he explains that these studies have been made with different groups of students, some going to what he calls “elite schools”. These students practiced a very different amount of hours, some practicing only a fifth of the amount of hours while others were practicing up to four times more than others using every second of their free time practicing. The data collected was based on groups with similar amount of time spent practicing and what was interesting was that when these groups were examined in the associated boards exams there were students in every group that passed this exam. Here is it worth mentioning that the results

were based on a pass or fail and not on a points system. He also touches onto the amount of hours students used on studying a new piece where some would use two or three times the amount of time when comparing them. Even if some used a much larger amount of time studying a new piece the results were the same. What was important was the way they were practicing with the ones who used their time in a more organized manner in an earlier stage of the learning process would reach a much higher level of quality in their performance and would get better at this. In the end he argues that he thinks the best result is when the performer uses his or her time on getting to know the piece on a deeper level understanding the composer and making an image of the final result.

Methods I could try

Like I have been mentioning, I really want to change my methods because even though they work if I do everything right, I think it's a very unhealthy method and I am sure I could get better results out in some other way. On the page <https://www.artist-musikerhalsan.se> they have tips on the road for nervousness of musicians. On the below I have translated some of the most important ones (for me) in English:

Before practicing:

Relaxation. 4-point relaxation: (<https://www.artist-musikerhalsan.se/musikerergonomi/6-nervositet-och-rampfeber>)

In the practicing room:

This exercise comes from mindfulness. Exercise the task using all our senses - listen, and pay attention to how it feels in the body, when it's good? Look at the notes. Use "images" and "feelings" in the music to make it a complete experience with strong conviction. "Play" through the piece without instruments but with total concentration in all small movements, good training of the mind for our movements and where I am in the room with fingers / hands etc.

Feeling of control. Go through how it will go and convince you that you are safe in it and want to do it with your own strength. [mental training]

The next one comes from the idea of visualization. Prepare the actual performance mentally and start with the relaxation exercise. Then go through the whole situation and use reinforcing sentences like "I am lit on this" "I know I can do this well" "I want to take the risk" "I accept to fail" "I believe in myself"

In the performing-practicing room:

The last one talk on the subject of sensitization. Support from others and feedback. Perform it in several different contexts and make sure you get concrete feedback about what was positive and what can be better.

I tried these methods in the practice room many days in a row and tried to write down how it felt differently did does it affect to my next stage performance. I used smaller stage performances like group lessons and playing to other pianists to analyze my results.

Before practicing, relaxation didn't really help at all, I feel that the reason is that I am very relaxed already when I go to the practice room and I don't feel stressed when I am at the school practicing. Because I felt I am not able to write anything about the relaxation myself, I asked many of my colleagues about this and asked do they use it on a daily routine. Many of my colleagues said that they haven't done this, mainly because of they have learned to handle the anxiety rather than to work with exercises. The other big reason has been for some musicians is that they don't feel they have problems on the stage or on the practice room. However, I have reached some musicians who uses these exercises before going to performance. They feel it is big part of their pre concert-routine to be able to be concentrated especially before concerts. Even though it helps for some people I personally think it is matter of what routine are you using by yourself, because many musicians have had to solve problems concerning the concentration and many of them have solved problems in their minds on the earlier stage of their professional life.

However, practicing with a visualization is something I have been doing a lot lately. Thinking the whole piece and situation in my mind before the concert helps in my opinion for keeping it together on the stage. I feel that my "bad memory days" are not so bad anymore, because

playing not only the beginning of the piece but also hard passages and whole piece with all characters, breaths and dynamics in mind makes it much easier to do them on the stage no matter where your mind is at.

Changing concert preparation and attention?

How can I prepare myself for playing better in the concert situations or other kinds of hard situations for musicians such as auditions? This is the question I'm asking myself every day and still I don't have a perfect answer.

I have tried to organize small concerts for friends, made recordings of myself, visualizing different situations in my head and practicing difficult passages from memory, what I sometimes like to call "safe practicing". Still I don't feel like I am secure enough to go onto the stage and start playing without any worries.

I wrote on Gathering materials p6 that I have created this "survival mode" for myself. Survival mode is basically getting into the right mindset before going to the stage. I have noticed that I get into my survival mode if I cry first for about fifteen minutes and what I think about when crying in the situation doesn't matter. Afterwards I look at all the pictures that I have saved for moments like these so I remember where I came from and how much I have always wanted to be here. After remembering where I came from and how much this means to me, I start to listen to very energetic music to lift myself up and to get into a mindset where I am preparing to go onto the stage. I have noticed that the best music for me is Finnish hip hop as that kind of music is near to my heart in situations like these, because I remember all the times that I listened to this kind of music before going onto the stage and how good I felt on the stage during my concerts. Sometimes I stop listening to the music about fifteen minutes before going to the stage, walk around a bit and try to feel that I am ready and that I can do this. Sometimes I also listen until the very last moment before I go into concert hall. It depends on how I feel in the moment and what I feel is best for my concentration.

After the concert I normally feel very tired, and the next couple of days are harder to get up from the bed. That is one of the reasons why I think I should try other methods more often to get concentrated.

Without my survival mode, that I don't always use, does it then matter at all what is my basic mood for today? Is that all based on luck? I don't think so. The best result of my playing is being very concentrated and getting there normally means I have to be a bit sad or very angry. So those days when I am having a concert and I decided not to crash myself before performance I don't think of how beautiful the weather is or how the coffee tastes great. I think that the shower was too hot, my coffee was too weak, and I hate my life. It still doesn't mean I can be anxious. With anxiety my level drops incredibly much so I am trying not to think of anything that makes me feel restless.

Aaron Williamons' book *Musical Excellence: Strategies and Techniques to Enhance Performance* (2004) offers an alternative thought to this. He says that what a musician focuses on during a performance seems to be one of the keys to seek inspiration. He states that a professional musician doesn't think about how to do something but simply does it. He explains that when we are too focused on the consequences, we will disappoint ourselves which gives us anxiety on the stage which furthermore breaks immersion for the audience. Suddenly we don't convey a story or a message. But when we simply do it, we can reach the highest possible outcome during a performance. He goes on to give us this list of characteristics that lead to the highest quality in our performance: Csikszentmihalyi, [1988](#); Csikszentmihalyi, [1990](#); Syer & Connolly, [1991](#), [1988](#)):

- energized, yet relaxed (a subtle balance of quiet intensity)
- confident (an expectation of success; lapses in performance do not undermine self-belief)
- (p.238) • focused (absorbed in the moment; focused solely on the task at hand)
- effortless and automatic (mind and body working in unison; little or no conscious thought involved; instincts and intuition "just let the performance happen")
- fun (incomparable enjoyment)
- in control (full control of the situation, no matter what)."

Therefore I might should shift my focus from being angry on purpose to being aware what I am doing on the stage. Like the Williamons' says, I should concentrate on doing on the stage and not how I am doing on the stage. I think that my solution to provoke anger inside of me

during my performances lead to this kind of focus when I am performing, but thinking of it in Williamons' manner could lead to a better resolution.

Is risk-taking a problem?

What is taking a risk? In the dictionary it is the act or fact of doing something, that involves danger or risk in order to achieve a goal. What does it mean in performance situations? I have found a lot of material of improvisation but not when the situation does not include improvisation.

What I think risk taking means, is adjusting the reality. Like I have said before in this thesis is, that music has to be alive and has to be spontaneous, changing things if something is not working on that day is very important and for me that is a fundamental thing. Ernest Sosa's book *Knowing full well: the normativity of beliefs as performances* (2008) is talking about the archer's shot as an example. The shot aims to hit the target, and its success can be judged by whether it hits the target or not. But there are other factories to evaluate how good the shot was: How skillful the actual shot was, where did it hit, how much skill the shot showed. *"Consider a shot diverted by a gust of wind initially, so that it would miss the target altogether but for a second gust that compensates and puts it back on track to hit the bull's-eye. This shot is both accurate and adroit, yet it is not accurate because adroit, so as to manifest the archer's skill and competence. It thus fails on a third dimension of evaluation, besides those of accuracy and adroitness: it fails to be apt."* (2008)

Performance has the same kind of idea: accuracy, skillfulness and ability. Safe playing would be shooting to the target somewhere that is easy to hit, with a good and stable bow and arrow. Performing safely would mean playing an easy program for the player, with steady fingers and with a program that has been played many times before in a safe environment. Risk in my opinion would mean in this case having a program that is not so safe, trying something on the stage that the performer maybe hasn't tried so many times, showing skills that the performer might not even know he or she had.

For me, taking risks like I have mentioned before is a daily routine, surprising myself on the stage how much I am ready to 'risk' to be that kind of player I want to be: flexible, unique and talented. That is one of the reasons why I ask myself constantly while analyzing: is my survive mode that bad thing? It makes me very unique player and gives me the confidence to

do miracles while performing. As a conclusion, my idea about risk-taking is not the one from Sosa. My idea is adjusting to reality, flexibility, coping with what really happens.

Evaluating through recordings

These are two days when I made tapes for Nordic Piano competition. They asked us one movement of classical sonata and one etyde. I was one of selected participants from my second recording tapes and because I haven't used my first recordings anywhere else than here, I don't know what resolution would have come with those. I believe that my first recordings wouldn't have been good enough in a tough competition.

Here are links for different moods:

Happy, in a good mood

- <https://youtu.be/DGwh7LD214U> (Claude Debussy: Etude pour les cinq doigts, d'après Monsieur Czerny)
- <https://youtu.be/IGhi7jzOpIA> (Joseph Haydn: Sonat Ess-dur Hob.XVI:49 Allegro)

Tired, I wanted to go home and didn't feel like playing piano at all

- <https://youtu.be/bLUxLVjHh7w> (Claude Debussy: Etude pour les cinq doigts, d'après Monsieur Czerny)
- https://youtu.be/M_atewI58bc (Joseph Haydn: Sonat Ess-dur Hob.XVI:49 Allegro)

As we can hear, my good day playing included some mistakes and music was not so flowing. In my bad day my music came out and I have used those recordings for competitions and auditions.

Analyzing the results

I will analyze the results using my four questions:

- How many mistakes I make?

In the first recordings where I was on a good mood, I did some small mistakes, I had to take it over and over again for five hours, because in the other recordings I made that day I had memory problems, wrong jumps and wrong tones. Also, my phrasing didn't work at all. At the results I can still hear all the struggles I had with previous tapes.

Second recordings on my bad mood day were the only ones I made on that day. I was very concentrated and all the things worked with my playing. I had minor mistakes but I felt the outcome was pretty high level.

- How is the musical experience?

Like I said before, phrasing on a good day didn't work as I hoped. I had problems building up the characters and felt that after five hours those tapes were the best ones I could make on that day.

The "bad day" tapes worked very well. Phrasing was there and everything sounded very good with characters and build ups.

- How is the flow of the whole program/piece?

The tapes from my day where I was in a good mood didn't have a good enough flow even though I tried to make the best of it while I was playing. They were not smooth enough and they didn't show my potential as a musician. I played mistakes, both musical and technical ones. The atmosphere is not right and it sounded like I was struggling. It also sounds like I am rushing and not paying attention to details.

The tapes from my day where I was in a bad mood worked like a dream. Musical and technique aspects were there, atmosphere was great and I didn't hear any struggles while listening my playing. I have been listened the tapes many times, also later as

time passed, to be sure that my own analyze is correct and I wouldn't be blinded of my own playing.

- How much I am giving in my own level to that performance?

Good day recordings I feel like I was giving anything at all. The bad day tapes I really gave everything.

I can summarize this by saying that on the first day when I was in a good mood, I recorded myself much more and I was prepared for that, recording multiple times. On the bad day I knew that I only wanted to try it once before giving up. But taking Williamon's thoughts into consideration, could this be the thing that was affecting the results? Maybe this was the outcome because on that first day I was planning on doing multiple tapes and on the second day where I was in a bad mood, I gave myself one chance which put me into a real life scenario where I would only have one chance of performing.

Evaluating through testimony

I thought it was crucial to get feedback about my behavior before going to the stage. It was difficult to find a person that could give me the right kind of feedback before I realized that it might a person closer to me than I thought. My roommate, friend and a colleague Elvira Börlin started her master of piano performance with me and has been on the backstage with me almost every time it has been "showtime". She has put on my make-up on, she has spent the evenings before the concert with me since we live together, she has almost walked me on the stage and listened to all of those concerts. Because I though she is the best person to ask these questions I gave her these written questions:

1. How would you describe my behavior day before my concert?
2. How would you describe my behavior three hours before my concert?
3. How would you describe my behavior before going to the stage?

4. How does my behavior before going to the stage shows in my performance in your opinion?

5. Do I act differently before different kinds of performances and do you think it shows on the stage?

6. Does it vary how tired I am after the concert?

Analyzing the results of the interview

After hearing the answers to the questions, I gave Elvira Börlin they confirmed the thoughts I had about myself. What Elvira Börlin noted is that one day before my concert she feels I am just as relaxed as I am in a normal day. Three hours before my concert I am nervous but still excited.

Elvira Börlin stated that the situation changes when I am going to the stage depending on “How things have went and how many obstacles you have had to handle concerning that situation.” I understand why she said that. In Malmö Live on February 2019 where I was the soloist, I had my own dressing room with a upright piano and own big toilet. That already makes me more relaxed when I don't have to be worried about anything else than my upcoming performance. In Växjö I was given a small dressing room, with a upright piano middle of the room without a piano chair and nowhere to put my dress. The room was not soundproof so people were able to hear my warm up and practicing. Because it was close to the main hall stage, I was not able to play a single tone after the concert started. That made me very unsecure and I was very worried about how it would affect my performance on the stage because I was not able to warm up properly and the concert started and I had to wait sixty minutes before going to the stage.

On the interview Elvira Börlin said about my stage performance that even her who have heard my playing many times before, noticed “Nothing at all. I haven't noticed anything even through you would have been very nervous or not nervous at all. I wouldn't be able to hear or see any difference when you walk to the stage.” That is what I have been thinking: I

was very tired and in a stress but I was still able to be concentrated when I have to. For example, I had some troubles to keep myself calm, so I did my “survival mode ritual” and trusted that it will work. However, just like Elvira Börlin said in her interview, I got very tired after the concert from being a soloist. Having that kind of pressure two days in a row took everything from me and I felt I needed a whole month to be able to be “back on the game”.

I think the interview was a good idea to get confirmation about my behaviour. It is also interesting to hear that even through I would have been very nervous before going to the stage I am still able to play like that would be the best day of my life. I thought that at least my close ones would hear the difference, could it be that me being tired feels only in my ears, not ears from the listeners?

Conclusion: A price to pay

As a summary, I think I have solved my problem. I have gotten a lot for being myself as a player: very intense, living in the moment, making music on the stage and living every single tone and mood. I think that my goal as a piano player and performer is to be able to play at a very high level and to make my own version of the pieces I am playing.

Therefore, I think that I have asked too much from myself when I've wanted to be the best version of me without any sacrifices. If the price I pay as a pianist is that I am very tired and exhausted after my concerts, but I played like I wanted to play, I am ready to pay that price. That means that sometimes I have to go into my "survival mode" if I feel my mood is not right without it.

As a conclusion I think that my moods affect my playing if I am not able to swift my mind to be very focused when going to the stage or when I record. So what matters is, that I am on the right state of mind when I am walking to the stage and being very concentrated.

In general, I have learned about me that I need more on the stage when it is very important to me, fox example auditions or big concerts. That means I sometimes have to give more from me to be able to play while nervous. That might mean extraordinary ways to get so focused. For me, the risk taking factor does not exist, because it is not a risk if I do it every time I am on the stage. Risk taking for me could also be called experimenting. Experimenting implies a different state of mind than risk-taking but can give the same sounding results, although not the same "feeling" when I am in it. Could it be that the performance Williamon is describing is closer to this way of thinking, where flexibility and experimenting are softer, but equally efficient ways of taking risks? Are we just using a different mindset while analyzing this?

But what are the criteria of a good performance? In my opinion a good performance catches your attention, makes you feel something inside of you and makes an impression of handling the piece perfectly. That is where I want to be able to take the audience every time I'm on the stage.

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Supplement 1

Written interview with Elvira Börlin

1. How would you describe my behavior day before my concert?

There is not so much difference in your behaviour, you are pretty much same as usual and by that i mean that you seem to be relaxed.

2. How would you describe my behavior three hours before my concert?

Nervous but excited.

3. How would you describe my behavior before going to the stage?

It depends on how high are the stakes and how the situation is. How things have went and how many obstacles you have had to handle concerning that situation.

4. How does my behavior before going to the stage shows in my performance in your opinion? Nothing at all. I haven't noticed anything even through you would have been very nervous or not nervous at all. I wouldn't be able to hear or see any difference when you walk to the stage.

5. Do I act differently before different kinds of performances and do you think it shows on the stage?

I already answered in my previous answers.

6. Does it variates how tired I am after the concert?

I don't know. I think you were more tired when you were a soloist with the orchestra companing when you have a solo performance. I think it is because the pressure is higher for you as a soloist.