

DULWICH CENTRE

The Power of Music

Using the Power of Music to Reduce Stage Fright in Musicians

Phoebe M. Anagnostou

24/6/2017

Phoebe is a psychologist with English and Greek roots who works independently in Greece. She is also a qualified musician who plays the Violoncello and enjoys singing in choirs.

Address for correspondence:

Phoebe M. Anagnostou
31 Socrates Street
Volos
38221
GREECE

ph.anagno@gmail.com

Graduate Certificate in Narrative Therapy,
Dulwich Centre, Australia
E-learning Program 2016-2017

Abstract

This paper illustrates the process of creating a document, which includes musicians' special ways of reducing stage fright. In this process, musicians' skills and knowledge that sustain them during anxiety on stage were documented and then shared with other musicians who may have had similar experiences. Engaging narrative practice with this project, this paper suggests that musicians always find a way to enjoy music.

Key words: music, anxiety, stage fright, double listening, collective document, enabling contribution

Word count: 5,875

Introduction

Stage fright

Apart from the music that we listen to, that can be an enjoyable experience for us, sometimes when a musician is performing this music it is not always combined with these feelings but also with strong anxiety. Many musicians performing live on stage have strong feelings of anxiety and this experience creates stage fright. According to Wilson (2004), stage fright is a situation in which people experience severe anxiety, fear or persistent phobia due to the requirement to perform in front of an audience. Musicians, actors, comedians, politicians or even individuals having to appear in front of an audience for a job interview or for presenting a project, will experience a degree of stage fright. It has been said that to some extent nearly half of performers have experienced performance anxiety and in some cases it is so persistent that it threatens their career (Marchant-Haycox & Wilson, 1992; in Wilson, 2004). The key elements of this experience includes a feeling of being subject to scrutiny and likely to fail accompanied by an awareness of the adrenaline effects with fear, including palpitation, rapid respiration, sweating, dry mouth, stammering and an inability to think clearly (Wilson, 2004). In some cases, effects on general health have been observed such as difficulty in sleeping or eating, headaches, eczema and minor illnesses (Steptoe et al., 1995; in Wilson, 2004). It is well known that even celebrities have suffered stage fright. Barbra Streisand was unable to sing live in concerts for 27 years after forgetting her words during a concert in New York's Central Park and John Lennon and Cher were among those performers who were likely to vomit before a performance (Wilson, 2004).

My experience & position as a therapist

Given my own experience as a musician, I was drawn by the idea of meeting with musicians to talk about stage fright. It is quite likely that a musician will experience it and many of us try to find ways to reduce this anxiety. Michael White's idea is that people who are facing difficult times, even trauma, always try to make steps and develop ways of responding for survival and protect what they value (White 1995, 2004). Having faced stage fright in the past, it was important for me to have conversations with musicians and to enable them to acknowledge that their responses to stage fright could be their skills that sustain them during this difficult time. This also allowed me to have a position not as an expert but as a companion, as a musician who has been through similar experiences. It was important to me to be de-centred in the conversation with my fellow musicians since it is the main principle of narrative therapy and I find it is more suitable for me. In narrative therapy we collaborate with the person we are having the conversation with, through their stories we find solutions and explore their values and beliefs (White, 1995). We respect the person in front of us, we are curious about their stories and experiences, on how they dealt with them and why (White, 1997). In this

project, I was concerned to maintain this relationship with my participants and I was curious about their story and what skills they developed to reduce this anxiety. I also invited them to share this knowledge and to be part of creating a collective document containing these ideas. In this way a connection should be created between musicians' experiences in ways that have a powerful effect on them (Denborough, 2008). The position I had as a musician and a therapist provided me with the opportunity to come closer to the other musicians and many times I empathised with their experiences. I was able to speak their language and frequently I knew what they meant and I could ask more accurate questions to continue the conversation.

Why collective document

When I was first introduced to the idea of collective documents in narrative therapy I was extremely fascinated. While reading some examples of collective documents, I felt so close to those people describing them and moved by others. Some ideas that were told were new to me and interesting and others were familiar. A collective document in narrative therapy includes a double story of a person who experiences a difficult time but also the skills and knowledge that this person has developed in order to sustain himself during difficult times (Denborough, 2008). My first thought in this project was to discover this 'double-story' of stage fright, to create the collective document and to enable musicians to experience the same feelings that I felt while reading these collective documents.

My aim was to bring musicians closer by the experience of the collective document, to get new ideas from each other and their special skills and knowledge to be documented. Moreover, many musicians consider the problem of anxiety during a concert a taboo. Others may not even talk about it or have given up trying and anxiety could be a reason to leave their musical career (Marchant-Haycox & Wilson, 1992; in Wilson, 2004). Some even find comfort in anxiety by taking drugs (Wilson, 2004). Having those reasons in mind on how anxiety can influence musicians' lives I thought that this project could be helpful for those facing this kind of difficulties.

In the process of creating the document I also believed that the musicians would benefit personally from the conversation itself, that the "double-story" conversation would give value to them (White, 2007). They could also benefit collectively in a way that they will know that their personal skills and knowledge could be a helpful resource for others (Denborough, 2008). It could be helpful not only to musicians but to others too. It could be presented to music teachers and the ideas provided could be helpful for their students. In some cases, other performers also experience stage fright, such as theatre actors, comedians, speakers in conferences etc. and some of the ideas that musicians have documented could also be helpful for them.

Procedure

Interview invitation

To begin this project and in order to create the document I decided to interview individually musicians who perform music frequently in front of an audience. I thought it would be appropriate to write an invitation letter for participating in the interview. In the letter I introduced myself and I explained what was the purpose of this project (see; appendix III). I also introduced to them what narrative therapy is, in order for them to have an idea of how the interview will progress.

Six musicians participated in the individual interviews and they were all graduates from the Music Department at the University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki. At that time they were either engaged in postgraduate studies, performing frequently in concerts or working as music teachers. Before we started the interview I reminded them again of the purpose of this project, what is narrative therapy, and that their personal skills and knowledge will be documented and shared with other musicians.

Interviews

- *Externalising conversations*

When we started I was firstly interested to get a general idea about stage fright from my participants, that is, stories of their personal history of the problem and its effects. This was mainly done with externalising conversations and at this stage my questions were influenced by the Statement of Position Map I (White, 2005):

1. Naming/ Experience-near definition of the problem
2. Effects of the problem
3. Evaluation of the effects
4. Justification of these evaluations

For example, my questions at this stage were mostly like; *'Would you like to tell me what is your story/ experience about stage fright? How is it for you? How do you experience it? How long have you noticed it being present in your life? How could you characterise this experience? Do you think you can give it a name? What are the effects of this 'problem' in your life/ in your performance while you are on stage?'* etc.

For an externalising conversation see: Appendix I; Conversation with Jill

- *Openings to alternative storylines*

Apart from the history of the problem and its effects, I was also interested in developing the conversation and talk about what invites anxiety. This was mainly formulated by questions like; *'Would you like to tell me what is your personal experience about stage fright? What do you think invites this anxiety while performing on stage?'* At this point participants' responses to these questions were described with many different opinions and experiences. This provided me with an opportunity to ask questions like; *'It seems that anxiety at that point was really strong for you, would you like to share with me how you have been managing this?'* These questions were formed this way in order to start a 'double-story' conversation, that is, to not only listen to the challenges that this experience has brought but also to ask about the skills and knowledge that respond to this experience (White, 2007). In order to develop a 'double-memory', to maintain and document those skills and knowledge I had in mind the questions that David Denborough (2008) suggested in creating a collective document:

- What is the *name* of a special skill, knowledge or value that sustains you through difficult times?
- What is a *story* about this skill, knowledge or value: a story about a time when this made a difference to you or to others?
- What is the *history* of this skill, knowledge or value? How did you learn this? Who did you learn it from?
- Is this skill or value linked in some way to collective traditions, familial/community and/or cultural traditions? Are there proverbs, sayings, stories, songs, images from your family, community and/or culture with which these skills and knowledge are linked? (p. 29).

Eventually in the opening of the alternative story my questions were mainly formulated like; *'How is it for you to experience (given name/experience-near) e.g. anxiety? What sort of effects does it have on you? Were there times when anxiety didn't appear on stage? Was there something that you did that prevented anxiety from appearing? Would you call this as an act of resistance to anxiety? What were you thinking and how did you choose this course of action? What sort of skills and knowledge were you calling upon at that moment? Have you ever used them before? What is the history of how you learned to do this? How are these connected to your intention/purposes in your work/life? What does this say about you, your hopes/dreams? What does this action/skill/knowledge mean to you? Do you have any allies that support this action? If so, what would they say? (opening to re-membering conversation) How could this act/skill be useful in your future?'* etc.

For a full description of skills and knowledge see; Appendix II : Conversation with Emily

After all the conversations with the musicians I collected many different ideas of musicians' skills and knowledge to reduce anxiety on stage. Then, I created the document, sent it back to my interviewees for confirmation and when some slight changes/corrections were made, the collective document was ready to be shared.

Collective document

Attending in seminars

In order to overcome my anxiety, I tried to receive advice from the people surrounding me. I saw some improvement with the help of my teacher but I had to take more steps to improve myself, so I started attending seminars. In one seminar I attended they kept telling me; "Don't panic!" And that was really what I needed. For instance, when they gave me something new to play and I saw a difficult point, my eyes blurred. I could not play it. What really helped me was when they told me to sing each note to myself and allow space within the note, that is, to think that a semi quaver is just four notes in a beat. "It's easy!" In that way I became better at sight-reading and my heart rate returned to normal levels. I used to panic when I read new scores. Then I realised that the only thing I had to do was to organise the way I see a score before I play it.

Productive anxiety

I believe that the thing that changed in me was my way of thinking, that is, anxiety cannot be switched off and in the future there will be anxious moments. Through my experiences I have observed that there is always anxiety and that is logical. It would go away only if you stopped caring about what you are doing and it would no longer produce excitement and uneasiness. The purpose is not to play without anxiety but to play well. Therefore, anxiety can be productive. It is a matter of enthusiasm, to feel enthusiastic about what you are doing, to feel that what you are doing will happen once, now! It will never happen again in the same way and you make that moment important.

Reveal my personality

What I try to achieve is to exhibit the piece through myself; make everyone remember how that specific musician performed the piece. I want my personality to be unveiled clearly. I want my audience to hear the way I perceive the piece. I really want to transmit that special thing I see from the composer's work. It is as if I have served this piece, exhibited the work of the composer and simultaneously the work has served me as a performer and that for me is a great recognition and joy. I really like it when something makes a difference and that is how I see things in my life. I want to have personality; I do not want to be just a soloist or just play the music. This externalisation of myself exhibits the lack of anxiety.

Sense of humour

Sometimes in order to expel the anxiety, a few minutes before the concert, I made fun of myself and the people around me. I said silly things, black humour, such as "OK! Today we will all play terribly and then we will die!". That only helped at that moment though.

Singing to myself

Once in a concert, when we were playing something difficult I panicked and I remember that in order to calm down, I thought; “Stop and just sing the music!” I started to sing to myself and removed every logical thought from my head and just sung. My teacher told me that singing to oneself embraces all the musicality, the rhythm, the notes, the phrases, the movement of it. So if you only think of the song and nothing else, then you are in the music. This is the most useful and important thing to me, to sing the notes. By singing what you are about to play you are expressing what you want to say and the way you sing is your sound, your interpretation. By singing the notes you say what you want to express with your instrument.

I relax and control my breathing

I understand that anxiety is building up when I have rapid heartbeat. This affects my breathing and because I play a wind instrument it is very important to control my breathing. My teachers helped me to control my breathing and I have done a lot of relaxation exercises. I try to take deeper breaths and say to myself “Relax! There is no reason to be anxious, give what you can”. And that actually works.

Expressing music

I see the audience and I think that they come to enjoy me and not to see me anxious. So what you do as a musician is to stress the music to show what the composer wanted to say, to create colour, a beautiful atmosphere. I would call this ‘Romanticism’. Generally, my personal ideas are romantic and I think it is good for someone to think this way about the arts. Self esteem helps me to maintain the romanticism, and then afterwards that becomes your life, your way of expressing yourself and for that reason you do it because you want to and you like it. Hence in a concert, I will enjoy it, the audience will enjoy it and I go onto the stage and I give everything.

Attending other performances

I had a personal experience where various singers were performing and their performance was so real and strong that it overwhelmed me; to see a person living the music until his fingertips. At that time, I did not think “Is he anxious?” So I understood that when you do not think logically and let yourself into the music you become yourself. This had a positive effect on me.

Exercising

Exercising has helped me a lot because of my heavy instrument and its relationship to my body. Therefore, if you have complete control of your body it helps your performance.

One step at a time

My teacher believed in me and encouraged me a lot. He showed me many study methods, he taught me to define small goals in every lesson in order to achieve the final one at the end of the year and that released my anxiety. I felt I could cope with small goals and therefore at the end of the year I could reach where I wanted to be. I said to myself I do not have any disability so I can make it. I realised that the beauty of the piece and the degree to which the audience will appreciate it depend on the performer's personality, his musicality and the relationship he develops with the audience in each performance. This is the point where good musicians differ from the best.

Participating in other music groups

When I play with a group of people, I feel more comfortable. The more I played with this group the more relaxed I felt on stage. In this way I could experiment and see things differently. It also helped me that it was a different type of music that we played.

Change my body posture

A teacher gave me some advice to change my body posture since I was obstructing my movements. He advised me to stand up straight with my shoulders back in order to open my chest. This gave me stability and I felt that I could breathe better and my sound improved.

Remind myself of my goal

Personally, when somebody comes to listen to me I want to be able to relax him, to create feelings in him. This is what I believe about music, that it has an unbreakable relationship with emotions. I do not wish to convey my personal feelings at that moment, but to put across the feeling that result from the piece that I play, as if it is a role as an actor performs it. At least I want to be able to make the other person feel something, not what I am thinking but to transmit to him something, to bring him to a position to wonder; "Why did she do that?" or the elation to say; "Wow! That was it, I am calmer now". I think this is the job of a musician, to evoke such words. I am not interested to hear for example, "You are the best soloist" etc. but to transmit something with that sound.

Experimentation and practicing

It is important for me to play as if I am in a concert or to find an opportunity to play as often as possible in different places with different audiences or even to a friend. I have seen that the more I challenge myself, the easier it becomes. It is like a trial or a rehearsal to become familiar with a situation or a place. Additionally, preparation plays a role, that is to say to have practiced and studied the right way and not mechanically or with agitation; to practice slowly and not quickly.

Sharing something beautiful

Through my experience I now teach my students that we produce music because we like to do so. From the moment we make music and it is a means of pleasing the others we must be familiar with the idea that we should share it. It is beautiful that what we possess we share; not to show off or be judged but to share it.

Preparation and believing in yourself

There must be a proper preparation with analysis and strict criticism. If all of this has preceded the next step is to believe in yourself. That is, to believe in all the good elements that you have and that can be recognised by you and the others; you know what your weapons are. It is important to know what you want to do, what it means to you and why you are doing the concert. When you are on stage you are selling your interpretation, how you are and how you perceive the piece you have practiced. In music you share this idea and the clearer you share it the better you speak the language of music. You share a text at that moment, therefore you must know very well what you want to say with that text. For example, when a teacher imposes an interpretation or an opinion, the pupil will be very anxious when the time comes to play because he will not have worked in that way and he will not believe in what he is doing.

Transmit what music means to my students

It is very important for me to transmit to my students that music is not just playing notes, but creative. This expels my anxiety and it is very pleasant for me to be in such an environment and I try to transmit the creative aspect of music to the students in any way, either by improvising, or with specific pieces that I ask them to play; to use their imagination, because that was what was missing for me. It is important to create something from a young age.

Have fun

When you have fun while playing and do it for your self, you see that that is what the audience enjoys. That gives you everything and it keeps getting bigger. If I do that I will not have anxiety. If you do something for the others you will become anxious, if you do it for yourself, you will not. I have said that since I was young; "Play for yourself", do not worry about the others.

Pleasing myself and those around me

I convert my anxiety in order to produce pleasure to myself and those around me. I see the music as something that does not include only material but as something that never finishes and has no boundaries. It is a means of communicating, not a way of impressing the others.

The advantage of anxiety

Many people believe that stage fright is something bad. Why do we consider it bad? There was one occasion when anxiety helped me and everything was perfect because I was anxious and pressurised. It is also common knowledge to musicians that there will be anxiety and that it is normal. That is how the term creative anxiety appeared. The anxiety pushed me to play and personally I work more efficiently under pressure in many aspects of my life. That is how I am.

Convey the music to the audience

When I am on stage it is important for me to want to give pleasure to the audience. To make them understand how the composer has perceived the piece, the ideas of the piece, which is a work of art and not only an object of entertainment but a complete poem. With this interpretation you have to convince him so much so that he says "this is something". You have to have said it in a way that he understands so that he leaves satisfied. This completion of my goal, that is the pleasure and the transmission of the piece, relieves the anxiety. When all this happens there is an immediate response from the audience and they congratulate you.

Enabling contribution

During each interview we discussed with each participant the possibility of sharing those skills and knowledge with other musicians. They were all happy to do so and they were all curious to see what effects this document may have on people. In order to do this, I presented the document to musicians who have experienced stage fright before and I invited them to respond as an outsider witness (reader/listener). The reason I decided to invite them to respond as an outsider witness was that in general it has been noticed that an outsider witness can change on account of listening to stories, and this demonstrates that the story has made a contribution to their life (Denborough, 2008). Consequently, the questions I formulated in these conversations were influenced by Michael White's (2005) outsider witness process:

- 1. Identifying the expression:** *Which expressions caught your attention/ captured your imagination/ struck a chord for you?*
- 2. Describing the image:** *What images of people's lives/ identities, did these expressions evoke? What did these expressions suggest to you about these people's purposes, values, beliefs, hopes, dreams and commitments?*
- 3. Embodying responses:** *What is it about your own life/ work that accounts for why these expressions caught your attention/ struck a chord for you?*
- 4. Acknowledging transport:** *How have you been moved on account of being present to witness these expressions of life? Where has it taken you to?*

There were three different musicians who were interested in reading and responding to the document. They were all professional musicians who play regularly in concerts and have experienced stage fright at some point in their life.

Charlotte

Charlotte was the first to respond to the collective document and in the first question of identifying the expression she replied:

1. *What caught my attention were some ideas that I had not thought of before and some others that surprised me, but I don't believe that they would ever help me personally. The one that struck a chord for me was the idea of 'Experimentation and Practicing'. It represents me and probably that's what helps me too.*

In describing the image of that person she replied:

2. *I imagine that this person is making efforts to play in a lot of concerts in order for this to become a habit and not a rare occasion. I imagine that this person values the end result rather than being anxious and this is his way of dealing with it.*

When I asked what part of her experiences resonated with this idea, she replied:

3. *I also had this advice from my teachers; that is to rehearse before the concert at the exact same place and to play the whole programme, as it will be in the concert. For example, I was rehearsing my programme in front of my friends two weeks before the concert, in order to become more familiar with it. As a result, it is important not to be anxious, because if you are, you don't give the best of yourself and anxiety becomes an obstacle.*

At the end of our conversation I asked her if and in what account she had been moved on reading the document and she replied:

4. *The more I played as if in a concert, the less anxious I felt, and this is what helped me. Consequently, the idea of that person was familiar to me, since it is something that I would do as well. It is rare for someone not to be anxious at all during a concert. For example, the rehearsal for a recent concert went very badly and therefore I was very anxious during the concert. Eventually the concert went very well and my anxiety was controlled. In the future, even if I have excess anxiety, I will deal with it.*

Peter

Peter was very impressed by this document and in the conversation we had, he responded:

1. *I am very impressed how differently anxiety can be faced since before I read the text I thought that musicians dealt with it more or less in the same way. Eventually I was surprised and I think that every person remains unique and faces anxiety in his own unique way therefore I obviously disagreed with some ideas and others I thought were exactly to the point. Maybe what caught my attention was the one with the title "Productive anxiety" and the one "Experimentation and practicing" because I have the same way of thinking. There are two realistic things for me, you need experimentation and practice to become better but on the other hand you must recognise that anxiety exists and it is good to transform it to productive anxiety and not let it get to you.*

In the question about the image he replied:

2. *I consider that the person who referred to productive anxiety is very down to earth. Obviously until he reinforced all this and the plain anxiety became productive, he went through various stages. I see a person who through his experience observed that it was logical to be anxious but he understood that many times it was not only about the interpretation, but about excitement, to play something that you love. Therefore, that helped him to understand that that feeling could sometimes also be from enthusiasm and it is not something negative. For this person the important thing is that he understands that every moment is unique and that it will never happen again in the same way and that is why you must make the moment important.*

Those ideas shared in the document reminded him of his experience:

3. *The person who talked about experimentation and practicing, reminded me that you need to be well prepared. Consequently, repetition and studying certainly prepares you to go on stage more comfortably.*

When I asked how has he been moved on account of reading this document he replied:

4. *I think that the ideas about productive anxiety, experimentation & practicing would be a part of what I would say to you too. Although, the thing that touched me, is the idea that we share something beautiful. Sometimes we forget the reason we are doing this and it is very nice to think that at that moment you will share something with the people around you, something you like. I had not thought about this. I was moved by the phrase 'It is beautiful that what we possess we share, not to show off or be judged but to share it'. I really liked this. Next time*

that I will play music I will bear in mind those words, I will share with the audience a beautiful moment combined with the ideas of the other person, that this will never happen again in the same way and that is why I will make that moment special.

Matthew

Matthew was particularly interested in the document and he responded:

1. *I was impressed with the idea of singing to myself. When you are dealing with a combination of anxiety and attempting to get through a difficult piece, it is preferable to concentrate on the music and how to sing the piece properly. Body position and control of breathing is also very important. As far as teaching is concerned, it is important to transmit what music is, the creative part of music. Of course, productive anxiety and preparation also plays a role. All of these are matters that I have thought about, I have experienced and have discussed with others and they connect with my experiences. As a performer though, I would emphasise singing.*

The image that was created in his mind about singing was:

2. *I imagine a musician who faces anxiety and the difficult points can create insecurity. So he tries through singing to find a solution to the problem and maybe with the advice of his teacher he found a way to deal with stage fright. He might be a person who does not perform on stage very often and obviously becomes anxious. He is not perfect, but he fights it. He puts goals and enjoys the music and does not allow anxiety to affect him and spoil the enjoyment.*

This was related to him because he responded as if he was talking about himself:

3. *I could more or less say the same things about myself with that which I imagine about the other person. I have had, and will have, anxiety and very often it does not allow me to enjoy the music, but as with him, I try to find ways to deal with it, either through singing or with something else such as movement with breathing or positive thinking. When I think that I sing the music, in practice I am making music. I don't just sing; I concentrate on the melody, the phrase and not on the rhythm, the notes and the technique. I focus on the expression of music, musical phrases and expressionism.*

Matthew was also moved on account of reading the document and he replied:

4. *It made me think about the next time that I will go on stage. Not to concentrate on technique or notes or rhythm, but maybe to set a goal to play more musically, with more expression. In order to relieve the anxiety, to me at least, it is more important to think to play with expression and use phrases rather than get anxious about managing the technical part.*

Conclusion

The aim of this project was to create a narrative collective document that would include musicians' skills and knowledge on ways to reduce stage fright. Once the document was created, it was shared with other musicians who also may have experienced stage fright in order to enable contribution. In this project, it was observed that the musicians who responded to the collective document were moved in certain ways on account of reading it. It reminded them all of their own personal experiences and made them think of their future performances in a more different and positive way. We could reasonably say that this document has had clearly made a contribution to them. In addition, the musicians who participated in the process of creating this document were also moved by the whole experience; from the conversation itself, from acknowledging those skills and from making contributions to others. From the feedback at the end of the interview, they stated that the topic was very interesting to them, that they enjoyed the conversation and most of them were happy to know about the results that the document can bring. However, not only the musicians but also myself were deeply touched by the words I heard in the implementation of this project. It was an interesting and unforgettable experience for me, to listen to the stories and to share them with other musicians. Having in mind these positive effects and since my hopes for this project were to create these acknowledgements and contributions, it is my wish that this document will continue to make contributions to many other performers.

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank every single musician who participated in this project, especially the ones who agreed and were happy to share their personal stories, either from the written interviews or with their responses to this collective document. I would also like to thank my family; parents and fiancée who have been very supportive in their own unique ways, especially my sister Zoe, who put me in touch with all these musicians. And finally, I would like to express my appreciation to Kassandra Pedersen and Poh Lin Lee who helped me and encouraged me during the making of this project, Adam Harvatis and all the tutors whose workshops have been creative and full of new and inspiring ideas in narrative therapy.

References

- Denborough, D. (2008). *Collective narrative practice: Responding to individuals, groups, and communities who have experienced trauma*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- White, M. (2007). *Maps of narrative practice*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- White, M. (1997). *Narratives of therapists' lives*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- White, M. (1995). *Re-Authoring Lives: Interviews and Essays*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- White, M. (2004). Working with people who are suffering the consequences of multiple trauma: A narrative perspective. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 1, 44-75
- White, M. (2005). *Workshop notes*. Retrieved from <http://dulwichcentre.com.au/michael-white-workshop-notes.pdf>
- Wilson, G.D. (2004). *Psychology for Performing Artists* (2nd Ed.). London: Whurr

Appendix

APPENDIX I

Externalising conversation – Statement of position map 1

Jill

Jill explained some occasions in which she felt extreme anxiety on stage and she was afraid of peoples' reaction. She was afraid that she would be judged in a negative way and then her teachers would respond in a way that would not be encouraging for her. She remembers her teachers telling her that her practicing was not enough and that made her think that whatever she does, she won't manage to get better. She lost her confidence. After the description of her experiences with anxiety we started having an externalising conversation.

(...)

- *I wonder if there is a name that you could give for what you have just described? Like the facts that have been obstructive to you such as, your thinking that whatever you do is not enough, or the criticism you receive from others or that "must", do you believe you can give a name to these?*

What comes to my mind is the approach that I was forced into, a non-musical approach or non-musical teaching. It was as if I was taught only the grammar and the syntax of a language but not how to speak it.

- *What kind of effects did this non-musical approach have in your life, or in the way you see yourself?*

I think it was like a burden to me that I carried and it prevented me from living the music. I was influenced by the opinion of others who were important to me like my teacher. I was listening to her and I was taking into account her opinion but this sometimes also trapped me. (...)

- *So what you are saying is that the opinion of people who were of particular importance to you such as your teacher, your fellow students or certain people from the audience, also made you feel trapped. How was this to you? What were you trapped by? Where did you want to go?*

Because all of my experiences had this burden (of the non-musical approach) and I was not taught to express myself, when I was going into a different environment where it was possible that this non-musical approach would not exist, I still had this anxiety. I had learned to be that way. (...)

At this point, a new conversation came up in which she explained ways in which she managed to unravel herself and there was a rich description of the development of her new skills to express and live the music.

- *What sort of turning point was this to you in relation to music? How did this change the way you see things or the way you see yourself?*

I began to express myself. There is a big difference between then and now. At the beginning I was like a child who simply played her instrument and hoped that the audience would enjoy her performance. Then I started to release a voice in many different ways. Music is not only about shouting or whispering, but it has variety and theatricality. I now feel that I possess this kind of theatricality.

- *Would you say that to express yourself and to live the music is something very important to you?*

Yes, very much so...

- *And when you say that you started to release a voice, what were the actual words of this voice?*

..that I was living the music. I now live the music and it has a meaning to me. I found the reason for starting all this. I feel that while I am playing music it will be an experience that I will remember for the rest of my life. For example, you know the feeling being with your friends and you live an adventure? This is exactly what I mean! That it will be an experience so special to you that you will never forget it and you say to yourself: 'I will remember forever that day.' When you recall it your everyday life is refreshed. I live this experience every time I play music and when I play with other musicians, we all enjoy it too.

APPENDIX II

Opening to alternative story – Emily’s Skills and Knowledge

Emily

Following the description and externalising conversation, Emily externalised her experience with anxiety on stage ‘Insecurity’. Below there is a part of the interview with Emily that she describes information about her skills

- *What kind of skills or knowledge do you have that seem to help you when you find yourself on stage with this insecurity?*

It is very important for me to control my body and to think that the audience should enjoy the music. Generally, all this (anxiety) is manageable (...)

- *How do you see yourself reacting to all of this when it comes to you? Do you have ways of managing it? What exactly do you do and you say manage it? Do you have a story to tell me?*

In the past, whenever I was on stage I thought to myself “Why did it come? I hope it goes away now. Do something to make it leave”, at the same time I was trying to understand what was wrong and what caused all of this and if the problem was the piece I was playing. But I have realised that all of this is manageable. Now it is manageable, I can foresee when it is going to happen and I think to myself, I am not here for this reason. Therefore, it is important for me to have control, to control my breathing. I take deep breaths and say to myself; ‘Relax; there is no reason to be anxious. Give what you can.’ and I see that this works for me. Also, I see the audience and know that they have come to enjoy me and not to see me being anxious. Generally, if there is a degree of anxiety, I am calmed if I think about all of the things that I’ve just said.

- *What is the history of these skills? Did somebody teach them to you or did you take the initiative by yourself to try certain things?*

Both my teachers advised me about controlling my breathing. I also did breathing exercises by myself in order to relax and have deeper breaths. Also, I have control because I have defined it previously. I have defined within the piece that ‘Until here you can manage’. I know that a certain part needs deeper breathing, but even with moderate anxiety, I can manage. If I can’t do that and I reach my limits, it means that something has not gone right, such as, in my preparation. Preparation is important, therefore the more I know the piece, the better I will perform.

- *And when you said before about the audience, what does it mean to you that people come to listen to you and enjoy you? What is it that you want them to listen to?*

I believe that people come to enjoy the music and that they understand when you are anxious, even if they do not have knowledge of music. They understand that something is going wrong on stage and that is transmitted to the audience. The challenge is to be able to exhibit the music; to show what the composer wants to say, to create colour and a beautiful atmosphere. If you don't do that, the magic of music is lost. Hence, this is my goal, to be able to calm the audience.

APPENDIX III

Interview invitation

Hello,

My name is Phoebe Anagnostou and I have completed my studies in Music and Psychology. At the moment I work as a psychologist and at the same time I participate in the e-learning program in Narrative Therapy. For my final project I chose the topic Stage Fright in Musicians.

In various discussions, it seems that there are particular factors that make the presence of anxiety so strong while on stage. Such factors could be ambition, competition, pressure etc.

Therefore, I invite you to a conversation that will cover those aspects and it will take place in a 'narrative therapy' way. Would you like to share your story? What are your experiences in this matter? What is your view on this? Do you believe those factors can make anxiety present?

Just a few words about Narrative Therapy:

Narrative therapy seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach in psychotherapy, which emphasises in centring people as the experts in their life. Its focus is on separating the problem of peoples' identity and assumes that people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of the problems in their lives.

This project will be a collective project that will include stories, personal experiences and ideas in reducing the problem from different musicians.

The purpose of this project is to bring people closer and with the collective character that it will have, based on narrative practices, it will offer empathy, ease and inspiration to all musicians as well as their teachers or family.

I would be privileged if you would like to participate in my project and it will take place in person or via skype. It is expected that the duration of the interview will be 45 minutes to one hour. If you wish, your anonymity will be maintained and if you are interested you can contact me at any time to find out about the progress of the project.

Contact information:

Email: ph.anagno@gmail.com

Phone number: 6976272570

For further information about Narrative Therapy please visit the Institute of Narrative Therapy (Thessaloniki) website www.narrativetherapy.gr or the Dulwich Centre website <http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/>.

Phoebe Anagnostou, Volos, 2017