

Memo for Lecture Envelope:

Reason Why One is Afraid Before a Performance

For many years in my career I had that terrible pain before playing—that anguish which is not to be described. It takes not only all your courage but all your strength. It is agonizing, frightful. My theory was that that

terrible inside nervousness, fear of everything—of the public, of the piano, of the conditions and of the memory, too—that was nothing else but a bad conscience. For years and years I had it. I was analyzing myself, and it took me a very long time before I discovered that it was, I repeat, a bad conscience, which meant that there was something in my program which I had not yet completely mastered—a difficulty which was above me, I was not above the difficulty. There was still some weak point in my program. And this is always the case. Fright is only the sense of insecurity, and it may be insecurity of only one passage or phrase. You may play ten pieces on a program perfectly, without a blunder—they are absolutely under your control—but if the eleventh is not in perfect condition, let us say, and even one phrase or a few bars of a great composition remain unconquered and elude the fingers, it is quite enough to upset your whole inner being. That one passage can torture you as long as it remains unconquered.

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There is sound sense in this exclamation. From my own little experience before an audience I am convinced that the reason I suffered, was so paralyzed and so stiff, was that I was not dead sure of the form of my material, or my method of presentation, as well as of my speech and manner. At every

point I had an uncertainty and that uncertainty upset my nervous system but in no such degree as it did Paderewski in his superior form of art and his immense emotional outpouring.