



Playing Scared: A History and Memoir of Stage Fright

By Sara Solovitch

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Stage fright is one of the human psyche's deepest fears. Laurence Olivier learned to adapt to it, as have actors Salma Hayek and Hugh Grant. Musicians such as George Harrison and Adele have battled it and learned to cope. Others never do: In 1973, Pittsburgh Pirates All-Star pitcher Steve Blass suddenly could no longer find the strike zone; his career ended soon after. Surveys in the United States repeatedly rank public speaking as one of the top fears, affecting up to 74 percent of people.

Sara Solovitch studied piano as a young child and fell in love with music. At ten, she played Bach and Mozart in her hometown's annual music festival, but was overwhelmed by fear. As a teen, she attended Eastman School of Music, where stage fright led her to give up aspirations of becoming a professional pianist. In her late fifties, Sara gave herself a one-year deadline to tame performance anxiety and play before an audience. She resumed music lessons, while exploring meditation, exposure therapy, cognitive therapy, biofeedback, beta blockers, and other remedies. She performed in airports, hospitals, and retirement homes before renting a public hall and performing for fifty guests on her sixtieth birthday.

Using her own journey as inspiration, Solovitch has written a thoughtful and insightful examination of the myriad causes of stage fright and the equally diverse ways to overcome it, and a tribute to pursuing personal growth at any age.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Interspersed with her own story, Solovitch provides plenty of context on performance anxiety in general . . . For those who similarly suffer, and they are legion, the book suggests, the memoir offers comfort and hope.”
?Kirkus Reviews

“There is a wide range of behavioral and mental exercises that might help [the physical symptoms of anxiety], and these are the main subject of Sara Solovitch's *PLAYING SCARED*.” *?The New Yorker*

“Readers will find her story fascinating.” *?Publishers Weekly*

“Solovitch's book is not just a memoir, but a practical guide for the multitudes who share her . . . performing fears. One of the unexpected pleasures of the book is Solovitch's description of playing the piano . . . her dedication to her craft and the joy she experiences as she immerses herself in the music.” *?BookPage*

“One of the strengths of this book is the clarity and confidence of Solovitch's prose.” *?Weekly Standard*

“Not only has Sara Solovitch written a gripping and compelling tale of her own journey as a musical performer confronting stage fright, *Playing Scared* will hold significance for anyone who fears the spotlight, whether in the boardroom, on the playing field or on stage. Masterfully done!” *?Jennifer L. Eberhardt, associate professor of psychology at Stanford University and a 2014 MacArthur Fellow*

“Who knew that stage fright was so widespread--the sad secret of many musicians, athletes, actors, and people from all walks of life who dissolve when giving a talk to a dozen people? Brava to Solovitch for weaving the fascinating history of stage fright together with her own experience of playing the piano literally scared stiff, and for enriching all of us by sharing her triumphant story.” *?Katie Hafner, author of MOTHER DUGHTER ME and A ROMANCE ON THREE LEGS: GLENN GOULD'S OBSESSIVE QUEST FOR THE PERFECT PIANO*

“If your knees knock, your heart races and your sweat glands become hydrants at the terrifying prospect of taking the stage, you're in good company. I once had stage fright. So did Sara Solovitch. If you're in the club, fear not. This book will set you free.” *?Steve Lopez, author of THE SOLOIST: A LOST DREAM, AN UNLIKELY FRIENDSHIP AND THE REDEMPTIVE POWER OF MUSIC*

“This fascinating book is a memoir of the author's journey from uncontrollable stage fright as a young pianist to the joy of recovery in middle age . . . and there are quite a few useful tips along the way.” *?Stephen Hough, concert pianist and composer*

About the Author

Sara Solovitch is a former reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* whose articles have appeared in *Esquire*, *Wired*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*. She has been a health columnist for the *San Jose Mercury News* and worked as a medical writer at Stanford University. This is her first book. She lives in Santa Cruz, California.

Users Review

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