Optimal and Peak Performance Psychology for the Stage

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Aims:

- Present and summarise research in music psychology and performance science related to:
  - Peak performance
  - Optimal performance
  - Flow state

- Connect the research to learning, teaching, and performance contexts

- Provide overview of preparation, self-regulation, and performance evaluation for optimal performance

- Question and discussion time

Defining "the stage"

- Concerts

- Competitions

- Examinations

- Auditions

- Recordings

Defining terminology: Peak Performance

- Pushing beyond your usual level of performance

- Short-term, exceptional state

- E.g., athlete setting a new world record

Defining terminology: Optimal Performance

- Performing at a consistently high standard

- Long-term behavioral state achieved through training, dedication, and mental resilience

- *Consistent* performance but not necessarily *exceeding* your usual levels

Defining terminology: Flow State

- Altered mental state of total absorption in task

- Merges focus, enjoyment, and skill into seamless whole

- Often described as "*being in the zone*" – "*effortless mastery*"

Flow State: 9 Dimensions

1. The 'challenge–skill balance'
2. Total focus and absorption
3. A merging of action and awareness
4. Clear goals
5. Unambiguous feedback
6. Sense of control
7. Loss of self-consciousness
8. Time transformation
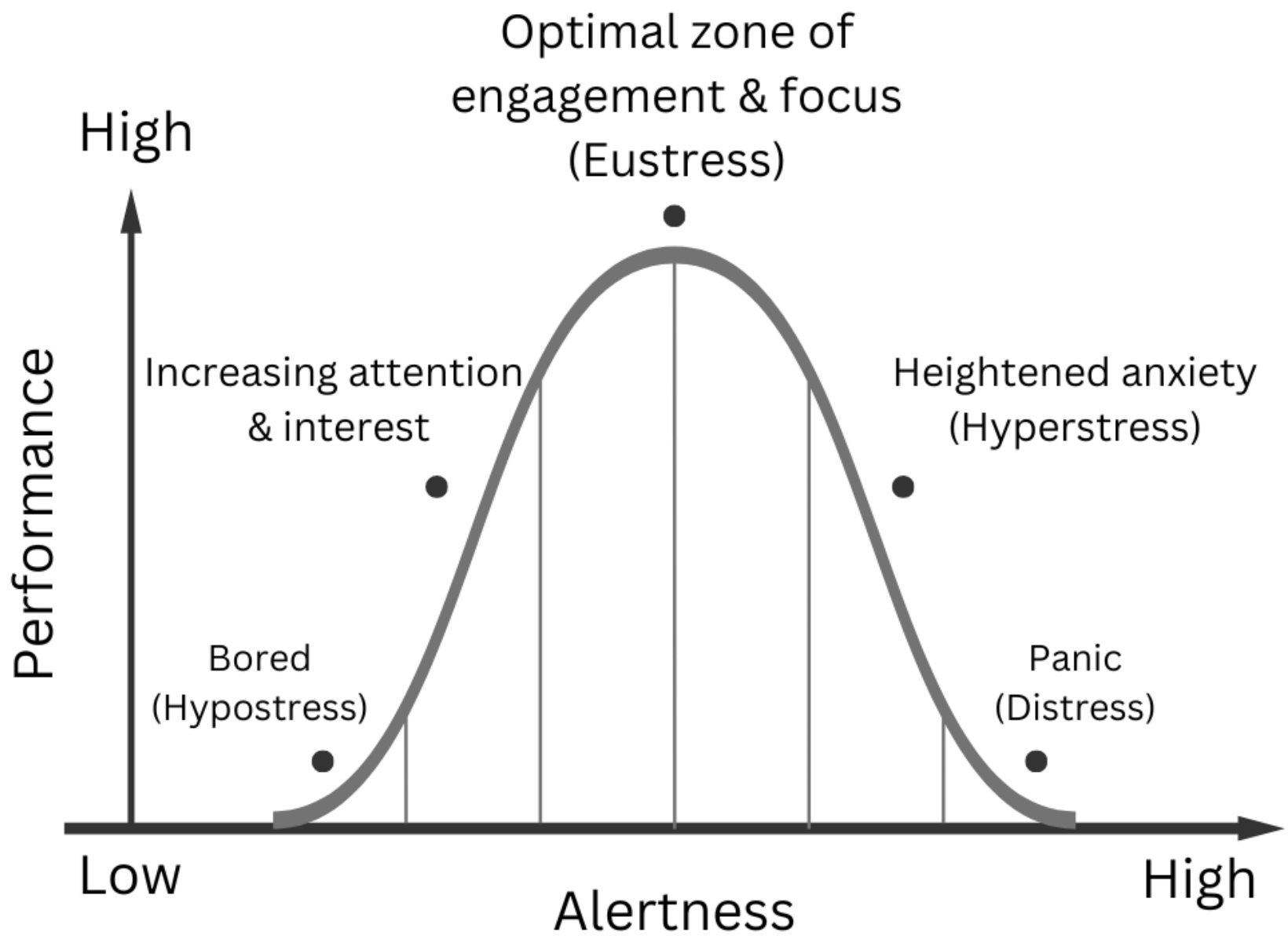9. Autotelic experience

Is Flow State necessary for an Optimal Performance?

No!

But, entering into Flow State is highly likely to lead to an optimal performance, or it could be the byproduct.
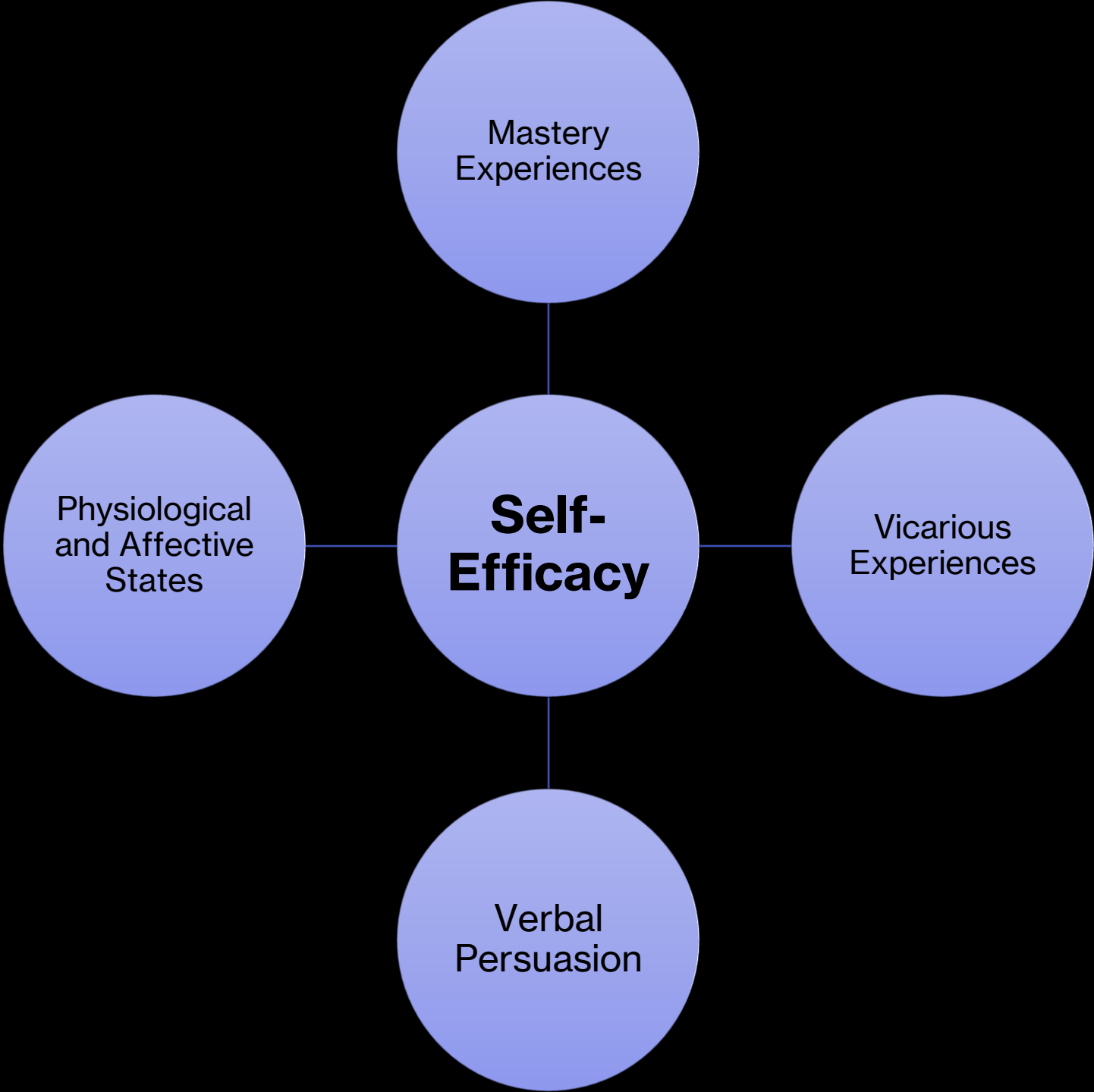
Bell Curve of Optimal Performance

Optimal Performance 'Lived Experience' Factors:

- Knowing the music well

- Liking the music one is performing

- Relating to it/seeking meaning

- Fully immersing oneself into a character or concept

- Relinquishing worry about 'getting it right' or being too technical

- Balance of focus / relaxation / positive nerves

- Receiving positive feedback from the audience

- Executing what is rehearsed

- Surrounding oneself with those who provide support and motivation.

Self-Determination Theory

Autonomy

The need for students to **feel in control** of their learning.

Motivation

Competence

The need for students to **feel capable and confident** in their skills and ability to learn.

Relatedness

The need for students to **feel supported and included** by a network.

Optimal Performance =
Actual ability + Perceived ability

"Personal perceptions about one's capacity to perform a musical work in public are more important predictors of musical performance success than the amount of practice."

Factors for Optimal Performance

🎵 Musical: Preparation, Practice – automation of musical skills.

🧠 Cognitive: Self-perception, Focus – imagery, visualization, mental practice.

💀 Somatic: Grounding, Physical wellbeing – mind-body practice.

♥ Emotional: Intrinsic motivation, Self-talk – balance negative and positive.

👥 Social: Support, Feedback – build a network of advisers.

🎬 Behavioral: Purposeful structure - pre-performance routine

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