

## Testimonial from Rosie Savage

freelance musician & horn teacher

Working on the skills of applying ACT to music performance has helped me tremendously as a horn player but it has also helped me in all areas of my life. I have had one on one sessions with Deb where we explored values and what is important to me - in life and in playing the horn. What is important to me for a particular phrase. What is important to me for the sound of a particular note. It has been general and also very detailed. By bringing focus back to what is important and learning how to take steps towards, rather than away, has made practice much easier. It has also helped me very directly during performance.' I have been playing the horn just over 25 years. It has always been important to me and I love the feeling it gives me when I play. To play a soaring horn-line is a wave of intense excitement and joy. It provides me a physical feeling that gets mixed up with the emotion of music and I have a deep desire to experience again and again.

During my high school and tertiary years I knew a little about, had some experiences of performance anxiety. I observed physical symptoms that would affect my ability to play the horn as well during performance as I could in the practice room. That said, I felt at that stage that I could manage some of these symptoms and 'knew' that I just had to be in form for each performance to go as well as it could. I also searched for practical ways to 'fix' these physical symptoms. I had moderate success and felt it was a topic need not take much of my attention.

Perhaps at that point I felt I had nothing to lose. I was a student and many of the 'important performances' were treated as 'performance opportunities', as chance to learn how to perform. Perhaps that took some pressure off? I was excited to prepare for recital and treated them as a way to share my music with family and friends. I was performing to learn or to connect and share my music and was enthusiastic about performance.



## Testimonial from Rosie Savage cont.

After a while I started getting my first paid gigs. At this time, I felt things got a little harder. Why could I play 'well' among my peers at uni, but when sitting among these great 'professional players' playing the horn feels like hard work. I was feeling anxious during performances as well as in the lead up to, and even after gigs. That said, I'm not sure I always identified these feelings as anxiety. I didn't understand the psychology behind it and I felt my worries were legitimate - that I 'had something to worry about' because perhaps I wasn't 'good enough'.

Nonetheless, I continued on. I had bouts of self belief where I fixated on goals, sometimes succeeding, sometimes falling and discovering that feeling of self disappointment. I had bouts of self doubt where I would practice obsessively because I knew that I 'wasn't good enough'. If I just did a few more hours in each day or week maybe I would be good enough. I also had bouts of crippling doubt where I couldn't bring myself to practice at all. It was too uncomfortable knowing that I wasn't good enough, too uncomfortable to have those psychical feelings of anxiety and play the horn at the same time, too uncomfortable to experience a constant stream of thoughts that wouldn't allow me to enter the practice room or even get the horn out of its case.

In some ways I came to ACT unexpectedly. I didn't realise part of what I was suffering in my horn playing could be solved outside of the practice room. Simultaneously I was also experiencing anxiety in other areas of my life. I had done CBT before and had been having counselling for some other issues. When I started conversations with Deb Hart about ACT and Music, I was also finding social interactions an effort, I was unable to go for walks outside - I was stuck on the couch feeling sad and paralysed. I had some significant life events that had contributed to this, but also my anxiety about where I was as a horn player, or that I was not, a professional horn player was on my mind throughout most days. One of the strongest messages in my mind was that I was a fraud.



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Aside from working as a professional horn player, I teach the horn in several schools. The work I have done in ACT has shone a light on the language I use as a teacher and it has helped me better understand my students and better able to help them from beginners through to very advanced students. I can help them with their own performance anxiety as it comes up, but I also feel a responsibility to help them learn to understand this topic before it's head rears unexpectedly.

Other areas I now directly apply the skills learnt through ACT (particular 'noticing' my thoughts or feelings and turning my attention on the 'toward') relate to getting out of bed; having conversations with people; filling in a form; getting a job done like clothes washing or doing the dishes; getting out of the car when arriving to my destination. These are all things where I have experienced anxiety in the past to the point of paralysis.

Something particular I have learned through sessions and workshops with Deb about 'ACT for Music' is about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. This has helped me change the way I teach. For myself, while going through a list of 'why I want a job' or 'why do I want to play the horn' the first answers had become extrinsic. I had come to a point in my horn playing where I thought it was about other people and what they thought, or rather, what I thought they thought. I have now been reconnected with the other reasons to practice for and turn up to work and take the risk of playing each and every time and the significance of this has been life changing.

