

## **Performance anxiety and my paranoid ego.**

By Lachlan Davidson 2018.

During my 35 years as a professional musician,  
(Including much of it as an improvising jazz player)  
I have felt something limiting my ability to perform at my maximum capability.  
Although I have had good success in many areas I still feel like  
I've got in my own way, but haven't been able to really  
Defeat the enemy for any length of time.

I go back to what drove me to "get good" when I was young.  
I had the phrase in my head, "I'll show them."  
I never knew who them was but I could imagine the faces of everyone I knew  
Looking disappointed with my playing. I was determined to show them that  
I was worthy, and better than everyone else. It seemed the only reason.  
I became aware of this affliction fairly quickly and it's inappropriateness, and put  
lots of thought into how to counter it. I found better reasons to play music;  
because you love it; because it is intrinsically good; because it's all I can do.

I embraced the more positive and "better" attitudes and felt that I was on the  
right track, but the barrier was still there.  
It stopped me from almost ever playing how I liked and what I liked.  
I bound myself in patterns of playing how I thought other people wanted me to  
play, despite espousing the virtues of playing for your own pleasure.  
The overwhelming feeling of always being judged and found wanting was  
Ever-present.  
It made me anxious beyond what I ever realised. It cramped my breathing  
Significantly. It disrupted my sense of time, forced my tone, stooped my posture  
Resulting in chronic headaches, and inhibited my self expression.  
I've spent my musical life battling this paranoia with varied success, but never  
Winning for long, or to any great degree.  
Some situations were positive and easier to relax in and I could almost d=feel  
like I'd exorcised my demons. But other times still continued to cripple me with  
fear and cause me to perform well below par.

My son's eighteen year old girlfriend was talking to me about her anxiety the  
other day and describing her victory over it. She was able to identify the anxious  
voice in her head and put it to rest by understanding that it was of no help or use  
to her. Smart girl.

I have also been reading "Big magic-creative living beyond fear" by Elizabeth  
Gilbert. This book encourages the artist in all of us and has reminded me that  
fear and anxiety are great hindrances to creativity.

So tonight I stepped into a situation where I would be comparing myself to other  
saxophone players who the other guys had played with or heard, where I would  
Be really struggling to breathe, play musically and in time, and where I would  
walk away seriously grumpy with myself for failing to win my internal battle.

I realised that my ego is paranoid. It is afraid of any threat to its thin skin and its tenuous grip on an emotional equilibrium and that, having given it a name, I could watch it exerting its influence, and control it. I could stare at it derisively and call it stupid. I was able to cast it aside and refuse to let it control my actions and thoughts. It gave me space to see that my fellow musos and friends weren't judging me as I felt, and even if they were, it's not my concern. I play my best when I'm not concerned about any perceived judgement.

Tonight I won and so did my music, artistry, breathing and friendships. I would hope that I have turned a corner in my career and life and that I may be able to continue to win this battle more often now and become the artist I crave to be.