

Why Students are in a Fog over Scales By Ruth Bonetti

Often students flinch at the uncommon accidentals like A#, B#, E#, Gb, Cb. Not to mention double sharps or double flats! Many young players simplify enharmonic changes by converting them to the familiar version.

The pitch: “Notes, like people, have two names. You wouldn’t like to be called by your middle name, would you? Winifred, is it? It makes more harmonic sense to give notes their correct names according to the key, mode or tonal centre, even if it means facing exotic names.” Give the notes their correct names – Herbert!

Aural fog

Many students avoid the naming issue altogether; they manage instead to play the scales quite reasonably by ear at home, when relaxed. In the exam room they grope through the fog which encircles their mind, eyes and ears. At times like this, turning E# into F falls down. Under pressure, the brain argues with itself: “Hey, how can there be F as well as F# in the same scale?” By which time they have faltered, stumbled, lost the track – and their confidence.

The pitch: “Do you remember that confusion, how you beat up on yourself every time you botched it up? Every time you play that F# minor incorrectly, you spread another misty layer of negative memory over it. This is what the brain remembers when under pressure in an exam. If you started learning the scale in a rushed, unthinking way, riddled with mistakes, you need to re-program your brain. It’s far easier to play it correctly and slowly from the beginning, enough times to make a habit. Each time you play a scale correctly you are reinforcing it with positive memories of success.”

Ruth Bonetti writes a complimentary weekly E-Zine, *Performance Power*, the monthly E-Zine for teachers: *Music Educators’ Energiser* and the weekly *MusoMotivator* (nominal charge). Those interested to receive this can sign up at <http://ruthbonetti.com> or by emailing ruth@ruthbonetti.com

Her books *Confident Music Performance; Fix the fear of facing an audience* and *Practice is a Dirty Word; How to clean up your act* (Words and Music) are available at www.RuthBonetti.com

She compiled the method *Enjoy Playing the Clarinet* (Oxford University Press) (<http://www.oup.co.uk/isbn/0-19-322108-X>) and was Editorial Consultant for the AMEB Clarinet Grade Books.

Ruth’s music and speaking career, helping musicians and speakers to perform with confidence, has taken her around Australia, Europe (speaking German, French and Swedish) and the United States, where her seminars were repeated by popular demand.

Reproduction available with permission

You are free to reproduce this for other publications, provided you:

- 1: Reproduce the article in full.
- 2: Acknowledge as the source of the article:

Ruth Bonetti- Music Performance Confidence

- 3: Include the above By-line
4. Include the ESN URL <http://www.ruthbonetti.com> as the reference.
5. Please contact Ruth at ruth@ruthbonetti.com or (61) 7 3300 2286 to clear this before use.

