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# THE AUTHENTIC PERFORMER

Why masking your true self can affect your health

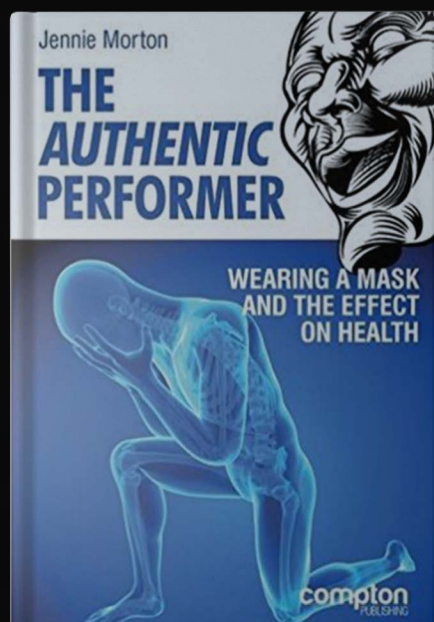
**JENNIE MORTON** explains why it's vital for performers to find their own voice – and use it.

**D**o you ever wonder what drives you to perform? Do you find yourself torn between striving for technical perfection and expressing emotion in your performance? Do you question how your career can be both exhilarating and anxiety-producing? If you have, then my book *The Authentic Performer: Wearing a Mask and the Effect on Health* may help you to unravel some of the psycho-physiological processes that underlie these questions.

As both a performing artist and an osteopath specialising in the treatment of performers, I have found myself digging into the deeper questions of the very nature of creativity and how it affects our health at a physiological level. To answer these questions, I have delved into the realms of neuroscience, pathophysiology, psychology and philosophy to uncover the reasons why we are drawn to a career in the arts in the first place, how we are programmed both technically and emotionally by our training, and how our psycho-emotional relationship to our craft shapes our physical health.

In a career where we often find ourselves playing a variety of roles or following different emotional narratives in the pursuit of our storytelling, artists can sometimes lose touch with their own true sense of self. Some artists may even be drawn to the profession for the very reason that it allows them to escape into different characters, affording them respite from their inner reality.

However, from what science tells us about the connections between our sense of self and our physiological development



and wellbeing, we know that there may be a biological cost to that escape from reality. My book explores the underlying biological processes that drive us to be creative and the challenges they pose to us as professional artists earning a living from our passion. The following is a short excerpt from the book that discusses the role of the voice in expressing our innermost thoughts and how voice quality can telegraph the state of one's physical health.

“The voice, in my opinion, is one of the most truly expressive parts of who we are. There is a commonly used proverb which says that the 'eyes are the window to the soul', but, for me, the voice tells me so much more about a person than I can glean from their eyes. The eyes can often be well defended - some people have quite a clear 'no entry' sign pinned across them. The voice however, like body language, never lies - even if the words it produces seek to deceive.

Many people, particularly in the performance world, contrive a sound for their voice which they feel projects the image of themselves that they wish to convey, but the contrivance in itself is descriptive of the person behind that image. When working with my patients, I find the voice to be most indicative of their current state of mind, and therefore health, even if it is cloaked in a mask: a subtle crack or waver when a particular subject is touched upon; the slightly clenched or choked sound of someone who feels they are not being heard or are lacking control in a situation; the high pattern of breathing and audible breath sounds of someone under

stress; the openness and clarity of tone which returns when an issue has been resolved - these are all valuable tools in understanding the subtext of the patient's state of health, regardless of the words being said.

The voice is the meeting point of both our emotional subtext and the contrivance of language, and is often the arena where the struggle between these sometimes opposing forces is played out. The physiological signs and symptoms produced here are well worth exploring: the next time you have an inexplicably sore throat, perhaps you may correlate this with finding yourself in a situation where you feel you are being subjugated by another and therefore have no 'voice'; or perhaps there is a conversation you need to have with someone which you have been avoiding. Finding or having one's own voice is both a metaphorical and physiological need for health: for those who find themselves removed from this, either by an emotional situation or, in the case of performers, are spending much time recreating the voice of another, it is essential to find the time to return to your own natural vocal expression... When you allow the voice to be the conduit for the expression of your true self, you may find that any conflicts of language, thought, and emotion will be resolved, and an inherent connection will be made with those around you.

In summary, the book highlights the need for artists to afford themselves the same level of character analysis that they more often reserve for an upcoming role, and to be vigilant to the subtle physical signs and emotional expressions that the body provides as a means to support them in their journey to a long and healthy career ■

## JENNIE MORTON



Jennie began her career as a classical ballet dancer before moving into musical theatre, performing in London's West End for many years. She was also the lead singer of a UK Big Band performing across jazz, swing, rock and pop genres. She is now an osteopath in Los Angeles specialising in the treatment of performing artists, as well as offering performance coaching for singers, actors, instrumentalists and dancers. She is an adjunct professor at Chapman University College of Performing Arts, and is the Wellness Professor at The Colburn School. She is on the Board of Directors for the Performing Arts Medicine Association (PAMA) and the Dance Resource Center (DRC). She is an Honorary Lecturer for the MSc in Performing Arts Medicine at University College London, is on the Health and Wellness Committee for the International Society for Music Education, and has published many articles in the field of Performing Arts Medicine.



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