

# The Performer's Rapid Reset: FBI



## A Brief Micro-Ritual for the Moment Panic Hits Backstage

By Dr Maja Jankowska  
Clinical & Counselling Psychologist, PhD  
Specialist in Stage Performers' Mental Health

# THE PROBLEM



You've prepared.

You've got your pre-performance routine – maybe a 10-minute meditation, a 20-minute warm-up, visualisation exercises.

But then anxiety hits you backstage, five seconds before your entrance.

That long routine? It's now a mountain you can't climb.

In that critical moment, you don't need a lengthy protocol.

**YOU NEED A MICRO-RITUAL  
THAT WORKS RAPIDLY**

# WHY "CALM DOWN" DOESN'T WORK



When anxiety strikes, your nervous system is in threat response.

Your brain's primary goal is survival, not artistry.

Telling yourself to "calm down" is like shouting at a fire alarm to be quiet.

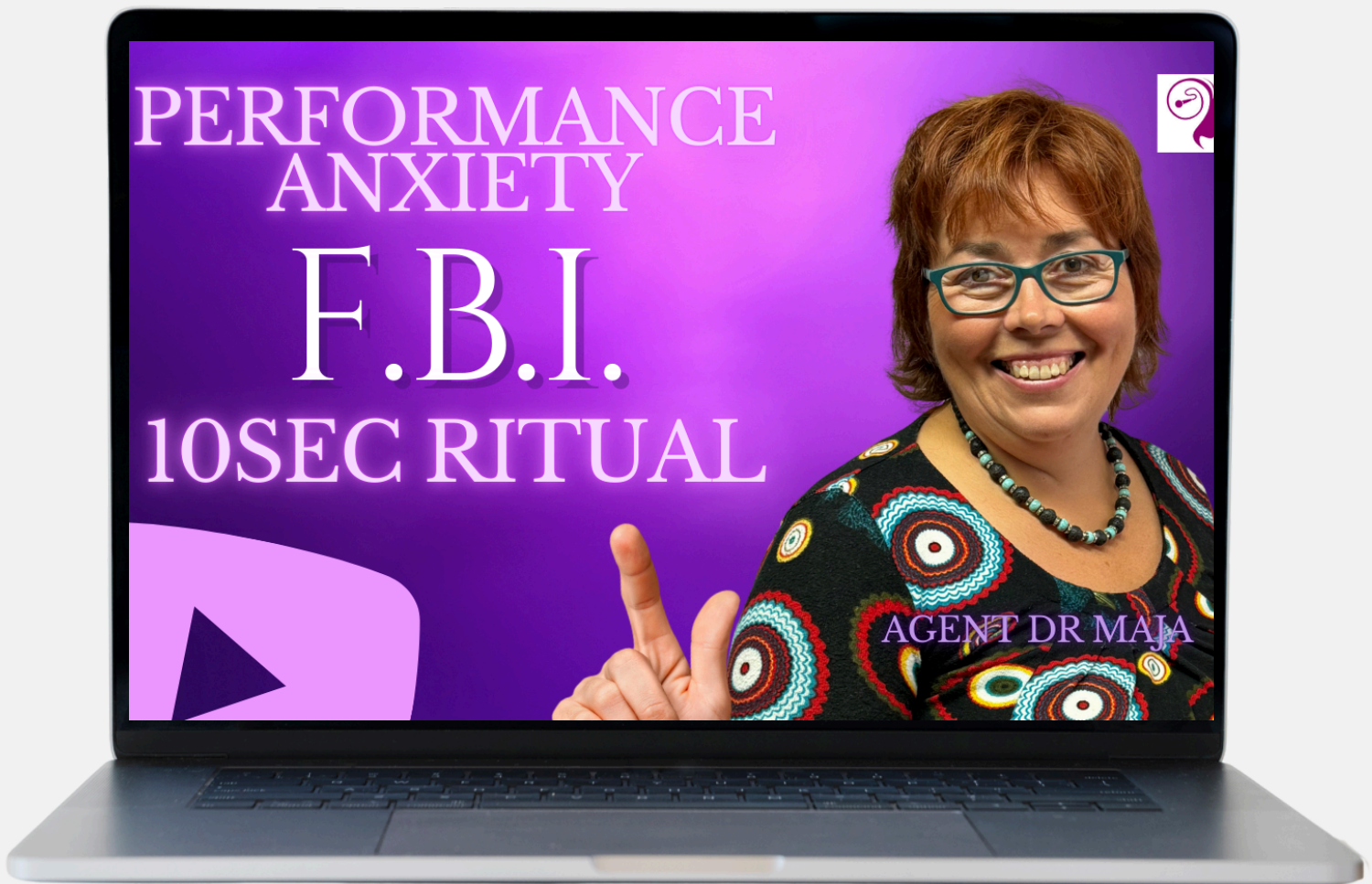
It won't work. The alarm's job is to scream.

**THE GOAL OF ANY IN-THE-MOMENT  
TOOL IS NOT TO SILENCE THE  
ALARM.**

Instead, you need to send a stronger counter-signal of safety – something so simple and physical that your activated brain has to listen.

# WATCH F.B.I ON YOUTUBE

Learn the F.B.I. method (Feet, Breath, Intention) - a 10-second sequence designed to ground your nervous system, activate your vagus nerve, and refocus your mind from fear to purpose.



WATCH “F B I PERFORMANCE ANXIETY 10 SECONDS RITUAL” ON YOUTUBE @DRMAJAJANKOWSKA

# STEP 1: GROUNDING



Plant your feet flat on the floor with attention. This isn't just posture (though it helps with that too). This is grounding – actively seeking sensory input from the earth.



You're answering your brain's disoriented questioning:

"Where am I?

What's happening?"

With a physical fact:

"I am here, on a stable surface."

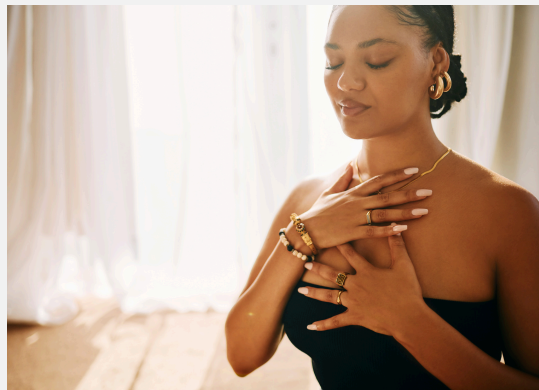
This is your first anchor.

If you can, stand barefoot for even stronger sensory input.

# STEP 2: BREATH (PHYSIOLOGICAL HACK)



Take a slow breath in through your nose.  
Then a long, deliberate exhale through your mouth.  
Not just any breath – a physiological exhale.  
Make the exhale longer than the inhale.  
This isn't about "breathing for relaxation."  
This is a biological hack



A prolonged exhale directly stimulates your vagus nerve – the oldest nerve connected to all others in your nervous system.  
It's responsible for shifting your body out of fight-or-flight and into rest-and-digest.  
You are manually shifting your nervous system.

# STEP 3: INTENTION (COGNITIVE REDIRECT)



Whisper 1-2 words.

NOT an affirmation like "I am calm."

Your panicked brain will argue with that.

Instead, whisper a performance intention – a tiny directive for your creative brain:

Connect

Listen

Tell the story

Begin

Joy

Precision

Release

This does something brilliant:

It forcibly redirects your cognitive focus from the internal threat ("I'm scared") to an external purpose ("My job is to connect").

# WHY FBI WORKS: CLAM & STRONG



Notice the sequence:

**Physical → Physiological → Psychological**

1. **FEET:** Most concrete, physical anchor
2. **BREATH:** Biological shift via vagus nerve
3. **INTENTION:** Cognitive redirect



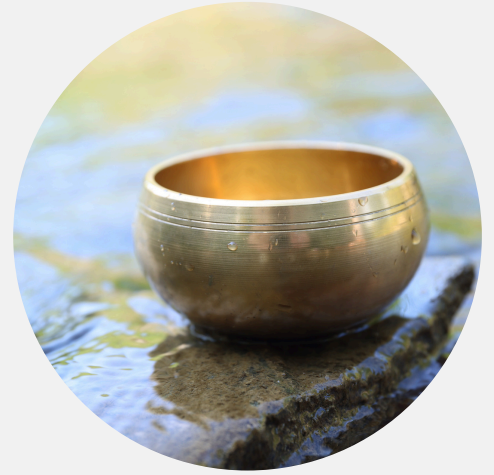
**You're systematically pulling levers of control, starting with the most tangible.**

**You're not begging your anxiety to leave.**

**You're building a platform of control right next to it.**

**You don't have to do anything about the anxiety.**

# THE MANTRA



**This isn't about calming down.  
It's about reclaiming control.**

**You're taking the steering wheel – just long  
enough to:**

**Make your entrance  
Begin your performance  
Hit that note  
Speak your line**



# CRITICAL: THIS WILL FAIL IN CRISIS... UNLESS YOU PRACTICE



This ritual will FAIL if you try it for the first time when you're panicking.

It must be over-learned.

Your brain needs to recognize this as a familiar path to safety.



# YOUR PRACTICE PROTOCOL

PRACTICE  
MAKES  
PERFECT!



## 1. PERSONALIZE IT

Find YOUR intention word.

What is the core of your job in this performance?

Joy?

Connection?

Precision?

Release?

Tell the story?

Choose words that resonate with YOUR artistic  
goal.



# YOUR PRACTICE PROTOCOL



## 2. INTEGRATE IT

Practice the FBI sequence at the start of EVERY rehearsal.

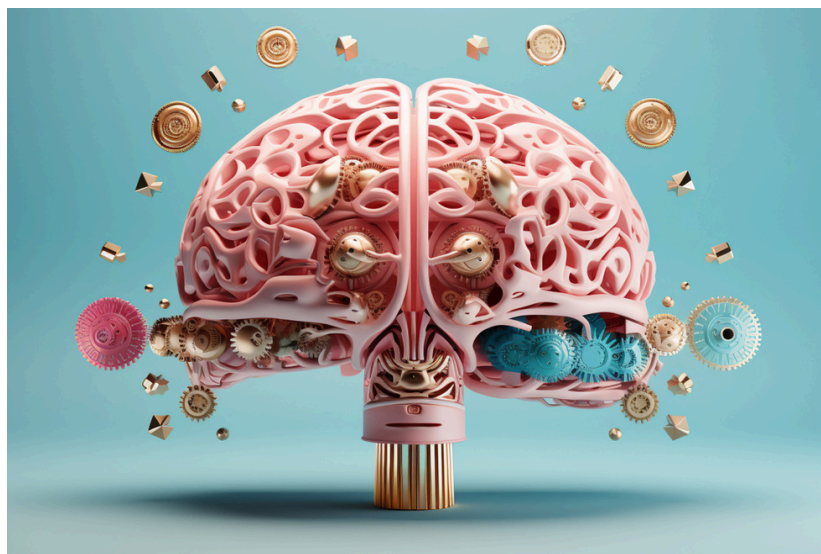
Before you run your scales.

Before you practice your monologue.

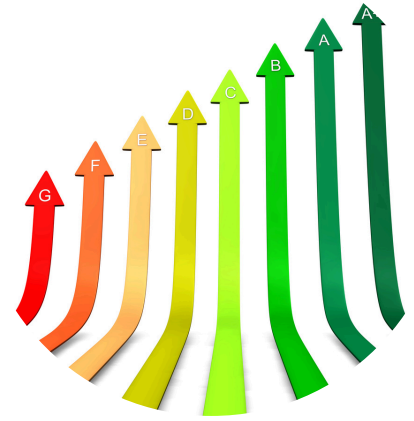
Before you warm up your voice.

You're not practicing the performance itself.

You're practicing the transition into performance state.



# YOUR PRACTICE PROTOCOL



## 3. SCALE IT

Once it's familiar, practice it under mild-to-moderate stress.

Do it right before:

A challenging piece of music

A difficult scene

A high note

A tongue-twister



The goal: Make this ritual as automatic as possible.

When it's automatic under pressure, it won't be difficult to remember in crisis.

# YOUR HOMEWORK



## Before your next practice:

1. Decide on your intention word
2. What's the core of your performance goal?
3. Practice the sequence 3-5 times
4. Feet → Breath → Intention word
5. Integrate it into your rehearsals
6. Use it at the start of every practice session
7. Test it under mild stress
8. Use it before challenging pieces



# EXAMPLE



Standing in the wings.

Heart racing.

Mind spinning.

Five seconds to entrance.

**FEET:** Press flat on the floor. I am here. Stable surface.

**BREATH:** Slow inhale through nose. Long exhale through mouth. Vagus nerve activated. Shifting to calm.

**INTENTION:** Whisper: "Connect."  
Walk on stage.



# REMEMBER!



FBI takes 10 seconds.

But it only works if you've practiced it when calm.  
Your brain needs to recognize this as a familiar,  
safe pathway.

Practice it.

Integrate it.

Scale it.

Then use it in the moment when anxiety hits.



# ABOUT DR MAJA JANKOWSKA



Dr Maja Jankowska is an HCPC-registered Clinical and Counselling Psychologist (PhD, BPS Chartered) who specialises in the mental health of stage performers.

She works with professional musicians, singers, actors, and performing artists, helping them move from anxiety to agency using evidence-based clinical psychology.

## 📱 CONNECT WITH ME:

Website: [www.beyondthespotlightpsychology.co.uk](http://www.beyondthespotlightpsychology.co.uk)

Instagram: @drmajajankowska

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/beyondthespotlight/>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@DrMajaJankowska>

Website for therapy clients: [www.expansionpsychology.com](http://www.expansionpsychology.com)

# WANT MORE SUPPORT?



If you're ready to go deeper and address the roots of your performance anxiety (not just manage the symptoms), explore:

**The Stage Fright Shift**  
(doors open soon for February cohort)  
A 2-hour live intensive workshop + 4-week  
integration programme

Learn more:  
[www.beyondthespotlightpsychology.co.uk](http://www.beyondthespotlightpsychology.co.uk)

This is the first tool to reclaim control.  
There are many more.

Now go practice.

© Dr Maja Jankowska | Beyond the Spotlight Psychology | 2026