

2026 CMDA Research Expo
Keynote Presenter Abstract and Bio

9:00-10:00 a.m. Keynote Presentation by Dr. Charlene Ryan
Anxiety in Performance: Beyond the Taboo

Session Abstract

Performance anxiety has long been considered a taboo topic in performance circles, unacknowledged and viewed as a handicap managed only by continued practice of already polished works or ceasing to perform altogether. While more than four decades of research on the topic shows it to be a prevalent concern, there continues to be a reluctance to normalize the feelings and challenges experienced in making the move from rehearsal to performance spaces. In this talk, Dr. Ryan will provide an overview of the literature on performance anxiety from the lens of a musician-researcher, and she will share some perspectives for students and educators about opening up and addressing this common mental health concern for performers.

Presenter Biography

Charlene Ryan, Ph.D., is a professor at Toronto Metropolitan University who specializes in elementary and early childhood music education. She has been in higher education for more than 20 years, with previous positions at the Berklee College of Music and McGill University. Dr. Ryan's research focuses on music performance anxiety, with a particular interest in the experiences of developing musicians. Her work can be found in a wide range of journals, including *Psychology of Music*, *Musicae Scientiae*, *Music and Science*, *International Journal of Music Education*, *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *International Journal of Stress Management*, and *Journal of Music Teacher Education*. Dr. Ryan has served on editorial boards for *International Journal of Music Education*, *Frontiers in Psychology*||*Performance Science*, and *Canadian Music Educator* (editor) and she is currently a board member for the *Journal of Research in Music Education* and *Journal of Piano Research*. Her works for young musicians, including picture book *Hannabelle's Butterflies* and chapter books *Katherine Lost* and *Katherine's Question*, share her research on performance anxiety through fictional stories that speak to children and adolescents.