

Stress: The Musical

by

Lloyd Fell

(1988 and 2010)

Originally performed by Lloyd Fell as the PROFESSOR and Graham Sharpe
as the CLOWN at the University of Western Sydney, May, 1988.
Substantially revised in 2010.



Stress: the Musical

The venue needs to seat about 20 people in such a way that a clear space can also be provided for dancing and movement (in Act III) either by moving the people or moving their chairs out of the way. A dozen or so inflated balloons must also be accommodated, preferably out of sight of the participants. The stage area need not be large, but a small backstage area is needed (not necessarily hidden from view) where the PROFESSOR can change clothing between Acts and to which some props from Act I can be returned.

Act I

There is a chair and a small desk on which are a few office accessories, papers and books, and a keyboard. PROFESSOR is wearing a dark suit and tie with a white shirt while CLOWN is dressed colourfully enough to represent a clown, but without the full clown make up, red nose etc.

CLOWN is beaming and gesturing welcome and gaiety for the assembling throng and having all sorts of funny mishaps in conjunction with them as they arrive, while PROFESSOR is sitting, reading several books at once.

Throughout the play it is PROFESSOR who leads the talking and singing, while CLOWN's principal role is to mime what is going on with his facial expression, body and his movements.

Rather incongruously, PROFESSOR is equipped at all times with a guitar, which he plays to accompany the songs. It is vital to the mood of the play, and the plot, to be able to get the participants singing along from early in Act II because this leads into communal dancing as well as singing in Act III.

CLOWN: Welcome to Stress (PAUSE) the Musical. (BEHIND HIS HAND) I'm an expert on stress – as you can see.

PROFESSOR: (SERIOUSLY) I'm an expert on stress.

CLOWN: I just said that. (LAUGHING) I'm an expert on . . .

PROFESSOR: (INTERRUPTING) I do research on stress every day.

CLOWN: So do I. (LAUGHING) Can't help it.

PROFESSOR: Now stress is no laughing matter. (HAS A SMIRK HIMSELF)

CLOWN: (CALMS DOWN) Of course, Professor. Of course. And especially not on a day like today, because today is the day the Professor will announce – wait for it – wait for it – he will announce (PAUSE) the cure for stress. I can't wait to find out what it is.

PROFESSOR: (BASHFULLY) Well, it's taken me a lifetime to find it out.

CLOWN: Well, could you tell us what it is?

PROFESSOR: (AFTER A PAUSE) It's clapping three times. (CLOWN LOOKS BEMUSED). Clever isn't it?

CLOWN: (STARTS TO CLAP, DOUBTFULLY) Yes, I think so. Did you have any trouble getting it published?

PROFESSOR: I did at first. So I had to call it acclamatory triplets . . . synchronized acclamatory triplets.

CLOWN: Oh, You mean we all clap three times at once.

PROFESSOR: That's it.

CLOWN: Let's go.

PROFESSOR: All you have to do is to listen very carefully and, every time you hear the word 'stress', you clap three times like this (CLAPS).

SONG: I've Got Stress (CLOWN LEADS CLAPS AFTER EACH WORD: stress)

I've got stress, I've got stress
Now this workshop's begun I've got stress
'Cause I do hope you'll like me, I want to impress
I've studied all morning, but nevertheless
My thoughts seem to be in a hell of a mess
What a mess, I confess, I've got stress

I've got stress, I've got stress
Since I got here today I've got stress
I found toilets for ladies, but nothing for men
I've mislaid my book and I can't find my pen
And the notes that I brought are the wrong ones again
What a mess, I confess, I've got stress

I've got stress, I've got stress
Every time we do this I've got stress
And I wonder if you've got it, everyone does
If you haven't you'll find it will give you a buzz
Or perhaps you're the bastard who gives it to uzz
What a mess, I confess, I've got stress

I've got stress, I've got stress
Wherever I go I've got stress
I came to this workshop thing mainly to play
But since meeting you people I've had it all day
Don't know what it is, but it won't go away
What a mess, I confess, I've got stress

I've got stress, I've got stress
At all times of day I've got stress
I've got it in the morning and it in the night
And when I don't feel good and wake up in fright
They say: "you've got stress" – which makes it alright?
What a mess, I confess, I've got stress
What a mess, I confess, I've got stress
What a mess, I confess, I've got stress

CLOWN: Are you sure you're alright?

PROFESSOR: No! I've got . . . (CLOWN GOES TO CLAP) It's a mess, I confess, I've got something. (CLOWN CLAPS ACCIDENTALLY).

CLOWN: Oops! I thought you were going to say stress (THEY CLAP).

PROFESSOR: It's a cognitive, affective, re-gestational dissonance.

CLOWN: I think I'd prefer stress (THEY CLAP). How long have you had it?

PROFESSOR: Oh, well, I had great trauma in childhood, you know – bullying, boot camp and torture and toothache – but I think my stress (CLOWN CLAPS) first began when I joined the public service.

CLOWN: Ah, yes. That happened to me, too. (THE DESK BECOMES THE FOCUS)

Song: Office Neuroses

I work in an office and it isn't easy
It gives me neuroses and pimples and piles
The telephone's ringing and someone keeps bringing me
Mountains of paper, memos and files
The boss is abusing me, look how they're using me
I've run out of paper clips. Who's got my pen?
Everyone baits me, the tea lady hates me
I don't think I'll ever be human again

Everyone else has got fancy new keyboards
Mine is all crappy, they bought it last year
I want my own printer and wireless connections
I can't walk from this desk to way over here
(*Now the photocopier's jammed again*)
The emails are too much. The boss doesn't do much
I don't think I'll last till my long service break
It's not payday this week, the outlook sure is bleak
These office neuroses are too much to take

CLOWN: No wonder you have stress (THEY CLAP).

PROFESSOR: It's all the little things you know.

CLOWN: I know – there are far too many little things. I wonder why it's the little things?

PROFESSOR: I've been wondering that too.

CLOWN: It could be we need more information?

PROFESSOR: (BECOMES UPSET) Please don't mention information. It drives me crazy when you mention information. We were told that would be the answer to everything - more information – everybody got excited about more information . . .

SONG: Information

Information, information
It's the ultimate sensation
And a cause for celebration too
If you don't have information
How you're gonna tell the nation
All about how, what, when, where, why, who
Who?
What?
All about how, what, when, where, why, who
You!

That's the cause of this and that's the other
Cause of that and this is how it is right now,
Tomorrow? That's another matter, but you got to have
The chatter of the all-important data
Cause information makes the world go round (Oh Yeah!)
Information makes the world go round

Information, information
It's the ultimate sensation
And a cause for celebration too
If you don't have information
How you're gonna tell the nation
All about how, what, when, where, why, who
Who?
What?
I don't know
All about how, what, when, where, why, who
Where?
Don't keep complicating things
Me?
What?
Who?
Where?
All about how, what, when, where, why, who
All about how, what, when, where, why, who

PROFESSOR: You know what? It isn't true. Information never was the answer. We've got so much of it now we're buried beneath it, but life isn't getting any better.

CLOWN: You're right. That's not the answer. What is the answer?

PROFESSOR: Well, there are lots of things we can do, but most of them don't seem to help.

CLOWN: No, they don't. We could have a cup of tea. I used to drink six cups a day. But I got the jitters and I couldn't sleep.

PROFESSOR: There's alcohol, of course.

CLOWN: I tried drinking six beers a day and then I couldn't stay awake. And I took up smoking.

PROFESSOR: That only clouds the issue.

CLOWN: Yes, I couldn't see through the smoke.

PROFESSOR: Almost anything money can buy, we have tried to cope with our stress (CLAPS).

CLOWN: Travel, shopping – now there's a good one. Who's tried retail therapy.

PROFESSOR: And, of course, relationships.

CLOWN: Oh! Yes. That's a tricky one. A wife and family is nice – or a lover. I've never . . .
Have you been successful in relationships?

PROFESSOR: No. I . . . No.

CLOWN: Nor me. And it makes me very sad to think about it.

PROFESSOR: Do you know? I think that was the lowest point of my entire life – when my wife
and I separated – and I couldn't see the kids.

CLOWN: And then you desperately try to find love, here and there.

(CLOWN CUTS A TRAGIC FIGURE SITTING ON THE EDGE OF THE DESK AS
PROFESSOR SING THIS SONG)

Song: Take My Hand

Take my hand while I tell you my story
Hold me close as I try to tell you why
There are times when I so miss my children
That I'm sad even though there's you and I

Take my hand while I talk to my children
Hold me close when I hear no reply
Be with me as I cry in the night-time
For it's this love we share, you and I

So alone, I'm so alone
I want you to be here next to me
When you're here there's a better kind of feeling
Oh, I'm so alone

Take my hand while I think of the future
Hold me close while I worry about the past
Be with me as I live for the moment
For it's all here and now and you and I

So alone, I'm so alone

I want you to be here next to me
When you're here there's a better kind of feeling
Oh, I'm so alone

Take my hand while I think of the future
Hold me close while I worry about the past
Be with me as I live for the moment
For it's all here and now and you and I

AS PROFESSOR turns to leave the stage CLOWN addresses the participants with an invitation to stretch and breathe.

Act II

CLOWN: How about some stretching and breathing exercises? Very good for stress (CLAPS). And for joining in the singing. Everybody stand up for a minute. Sit down. Try this one etc. etc.

(ZANY EXERCISE ROUTINE FOR A SHORT PERIOD)

PROFESSOR: (RETURNS AS A DOCTOR IN A WHITE COAT OVER WHITE SHIRT WITHOUT TIE). Ladies and Gentlemen. There is nothing for it but to face the facts.

CLOWN: Face the facts!

PROFESSOR: The catalogue of diseases and maladies caused by stress (THEY CLAP) makes a long and gruesome list.

CLOWN: Aargh! (BEGINS TO ACT OUT THE SONG)

Song: Indica Medicus Grim

First there are facial problems – the twitches
And the squints – neuralgia and neuritis
Caused by stress (CLAPS)
Then there are the skin problems – acne and eczema,
Psoriasis too (with a p)
With a p!
Caused by stress (CLAPS)
Then there are the respiratory problems
Like coughing and wheezing and croup
Caused by stress (CLAPS)
And then there are the big ones
The big ones! The big!

(SUNG AS CHORUS) All caused by stress (CLAPS)
All caused by stress (CLAPS)
Oh, what a worry
It's all caused by stress (CLAPS)

Where was I?

The big ones! The bigs!

Oh! Yes. Baldness and varicose veins
And cardiovascular 'omas – and . . .

Everybody now. All caused by . . .

All caused by stress (CLAPS)
All caused by stress (CLAPS)
Oh, what a worry
It's all caused by stress (CLAPS)

Haemorrhoids and hernia and Orhh! itchy groins
Dandruff and pimples and pains in the loins
Breathlessness, backache and things in your nose
Ingrowing toenails and warts (I suppose)
Plaque-forming tooth decay, aches in the heart
Hiatus hiccups and pain when you . . . (fart)
Cerebral cavities, coughing and cramp
Even hot flushes and cold rising damp
All of these terrible things you can guess
Are definitely, certainly, incontrovertibly,

All caused by stress (CLAPS)
All caused by stress (CLAPS)
Oh, what a worry
It's all caused by stress (CLAPS)

Nervous neuroses and neck rash and lumps
Goiterious gout and malignant mumps
Biliousness, blubbering and untidy bowel
Something unusual stuck to your towel
Homesickness, herpes, forgetting your Mum
Wrinkles and thrush and a pain in the . . . (tum)
Gastric and tinea and lying in bed
When people say, what's that thing on your head?
All of these terrible things you can guess
Are definitely, certainly, incontrovertibly,

All caused by stress (CLAPS)
All caused by stress (CLAPS)
Oh, what a worry
It's all caused by stress (CLAPS)

CLOWN: Isn't there any hope?

PROFESSOR: Yes, there is! In my research I've actually found out what it is – stress (CLAPS).
I just haven't quite worked out what to do about it yet. Apart from clapping.

CLOWN: Well, tell me what it is and I might be able to work it out.

PROFESSOR: (AFTER LOOKING DOUBTEDFULLY AT CLOWN) Well, you know that we, like all living systems, have an inside and an outside.

CLOWN: Yes. An inside and an outside.

PROFESSOR: And they are both always changing, moving, flowing. Our outside goes every which way . . .

CLOWN: Every which way.

PROFESSOR: . . . while our inside is autopoietic.

CLOWN: I beg your pardon?

PROFESSOR: Autopoietic. It means self-producing. Autopoiesis. It's the crucial internal control mechanism that keeps us being who we are.

CLOWN: Who we are.

PROFESSOR: Yes. Sometimes, the flow of our insides is not properly matched up with the flow of our outsides. There is a mismatch - a disagreement.

CLOWN: A disagreement.

PROFESSOR: That's what stress is.

CLOWN: It's a disagreement - between your insides and your outsides.

PROFESSOR: That's right. Now, to fix it up, what we need is something that exists in both our insides and our outsides at the same time; something that could bring the two into line. Do you see what I mean?

CLOWN: (AFTER THINKING) Is that all we need. That's easy!

PROFESSOR: It is?

CLOWN: Of course! It's music! Music exists in the outside as sound waves in the air. (TO PARTICIPANTS AS PROFESSOR PICKS OUT A MELODY) Did you hear that? And it exists on the inside in our mind and our feelings. It vibrates within me. And it vibrates out there.

PROFESSOR: I think you could be right! (BEGINS PLAYING A MELODY)

CLOWN: I know.

PROFESSOR: I wonder. Wouldn't it be good if something could overcome that separation, that disconnection, that one feels in relation to my world, sometimes . . .

Song: The Search

In the deep of my heart and the high in the sky
I think something should be the same
But the way that I feel is cut off from the world
And so I look for something to blame
Is it friends who don't like me or the smoke and the fumes?
Or my bed or my sex or the food I consumes?
Or the pressures of work, or the heat or the cold?
Or perhaps it's that I'm growing old?

Could it be that for me there can never be peace?
What I know, no one knows, what I see, no one sees
I'm alone, on my own, there's a gulf that divides
What's out there from in here, the world from my inside
I don't know where to go, will I change, will I grow?
So my search must go on, maybe yes, maybe no
Will the reach of my mind match the big world outside?
Will the deep of my heart ever be like the high in the sky?

CLOWN: (REFLECTIVELY) The search must go on. And what we are searching for is a better agreement between our insides and our outsides. What do you mean exactly – connected – or disconnected?

PROFESSOR: It's basic biology. We maintain ourselves, autopoietically, by connecting meaningfully with everything around us.

CLOWN: But how am I . . . connecting?

PROFESSOR: By your senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell . . . (CLOWN sniffs suspiciously).

CLOWN: I thought they were just gathering information.

PROFESSOR: That's a common way of thinking about it. But it's misleading. We don't passively collect information about the world. What we see there is what our brain has prepared us to see there. Our perception is proactive. What we notice is only what we know according to the organising idea in our brain. All the time we are really just making a connection. In fact, without that we could not know who we are or what to do.

CLOWN: Make the connection to be who you are. (TO PARTICIPANTS) I think the answer is not only clapping, but singing as well.

PROFESSOR: When we sing along with one another, we sing along with our own living process as well.

Song: Make the Connection

Make the connection to be who you are
Reach out your hand and follow your star
As we are joined we draw strength from afar
If we will make the connection

Sing it with us

Make the connection to be who you are
Reach out your hand and follow your star
As we are joined we draw strength from afar
If we will make the connection

I make the connection to know I am here
My predilection is mistrust and fear
But the correction is being sincere
Trying to make the connection

Make the connection to be who you are
Reach out your hand and follow your star
As we are joined we draw strength from afar
If we will make the connection

In introspection my worries abound
And circumspection that goes round and round
For my protection this motto I've found
It works to make the connection

Make the connection to be who you are
Reach out your hand and follow your star
As we are joined we draw strength from afar
If we will make the connection

CLOWN: How can we tell if we're properly connected – or not?

PROFESSOR: There are three kinds of connection – maybe four. We experience it cognitively, affectively and physically . . . and maybe also . . .

CLOWN: You mean we have a mental connection (NODDING AND TOUCHING HEAD), an emotional connection (LAYING HEAD ON HANDS), a physical connection (SHAKES HANDS WITH PROFESSOR AND SLAPS HIS BACK HARD), and maybe a spiritual connection.

BOTH: (TENTATIVELY) What would that be?

CLOWN: It's music.

PROFESSOR: Oh! Thank God!

CLOWN: That's the one. Do you think we have any spooky connections?

PROFESSOR: What do you mean?

CLOWN: Well, you know that feeling you get that someone is staring at you behind your back. Or when you suddenly think you must ring a friend because they need you right at this moment.

PROFESSOR: Yes, that's called the extended mind. There is so much we don't know about it. There may be energy fields around us and between us that play a large part in this connection.

CLOWN: You mean, there might be songlines.

PROFESSOR: Yes, there might be songlines.

Song: We are the song

Threads connect us every day in everything we do
Everything we notice and pay attention to
These threads are hardly broken; they just renew each day
They follow one another in an incremental way
Honouring these details, the truth will set us free
Where we are right now is where we're meant to be

We are the songlines of our lives
We are the laughter, we are the cries
We are the being right and wrong
We are the singing, we are the song

We often think of what we are as what we ought to be
Some imagined super being, absolutely free
Or perhaps a victim of events that were not kind
This denies us our free will; suffocates the mind
We can only be exactly what we have become
The product of our history; the race that we have run

We are the songlines of our lives
We are the laughter, we are the cries
We are the being right and wrong
We are the singing, we are the song

Everybody sing

We are the songlines of our lives
We are the laughter, we are the cries
We are the being right and wrong
We are the singing, we are the song

CLOWN: Do know what it is that spoils and hinders this connection?

PROFESSOR: Yes, we know some things.

CLOWN: What are they?

PROFESSOR: Well, any obsessive behaviour denies us the full range of connections.

CLOWN: (OBSESSIVEL TEXTING – THEN PUTS ON HEADPHONES). What?

PROFESSOR: (POINTEDLY) Such as staring at little screens and not listening. We have grown increasingly deaf. Whereas looking takes us into the world, it is listening that brings the world into us. We need both. But we isolate ourselves in many selfish ways.

CLOWN: (REMOVES HEADPHONES TO PAY ATTENTION AGAIN) What do you mean, selfish?

PROFESSOR: Being selfish means we take too much notice of what others are thinking of us and we do not get to know ourselves. When we know ourselves we can relate better to everything.

CLOWN: I have been trying to know myself.

PROFESSOR: And then we find it easier to love ourselves - exactly as we are.

CLOWN: . . . and love myself - exactly as I am.

PROFESSOR: And then we notice the little changes going on around us – and are more able to flow with them. We forget ourselves in the joy of our connecting.

CLOWN: I see. You want to know yourself, so you can accept yourself, and then forget yourself.

PROFESSOR: (STARTS PLAYING) It works. It's the greatest antidote to stress.

Song: Know Yourself

Know yourself
And you will know who you're being
And then accept yourself
So you will like what you're seeing
And then forget yourself
That's all you need to do
And it will help you to keep up with
Everything that happens in the
Big wide world

Know yourself
And you will know who you're being
And then accept yourself
So you will like what you're seeing
And then forget yourself
That's all you need to do
And it will help you to keep up with
Everything that happens in the
Big wide world

It helps if you will use all your senses
Even those we're not sure they exist
Otherwise you might put up defenses
And think of all the things you must resist

Big wide world
It will help you to keep up with
Everything that happens in the
Big wide world
It will help you to keep up with
Everything that (SUDDEN STOP WITH MOVEMENT FREEZE)

CLOWN: What happened?

It will help you to keep up with
Everything that happens in (SUDDEN STOP AGAIN)

PROFESSOR: There's a blockage – the flow is blocked.

CLOWN: I don't like it. It's stressful.

PROFESSOR: I know. We have to keep it moving at all times. We have to let it be.

It will help you to keep up with
Everything that happens in the
Big wide world
It will help you to keep up with
Everything that happens in the
Big wide world
(RELIEF FROM BIG FINISH)

CLOWN directs moving of chairs while PROFESSOR removes white coat and dark trousers to reveal white trousers underneath, so he is now dressed all in white.

Act III

CLOWN (TAKES STATUESQUE POSE WHICH GRADUALLY TRANSFORMS INTO A SLOW DANCE)

PROFESSOR: Friends, we are singing songs today to celebrate the great mystery of our connection with one another and with our world. We sit glued to little screens and have gone deaf. But there is always a song – the biosong – which can help us to flow – if we sing along.

To live is to move. The universe moves. And music is motion. It portrays the very movement of our bodies and our minds as we ebb and flow with the movement around us. Whether you sing loud or soft or silently, you can sing along with your life as it happens. And you can dance with anyone if you hear whatever music they are hearing.

We were designed to keep moving. Don't lose contact. Fear makes us stop flowing sometimes – then we lose touch. And we become stagnant little pools where the water does not flow - in our stereotyped work or play.

(CLOWN PROVIDES BALLOONS TO PARTICIPANTS IN A SINGLE FLOURISHING MOVEMENT)

We invite you to use these balloons as if they were parts of your world - not entirely under your control – and to dance with them and with one another in a dance of ebb and flow. Let the movement within you and the movement all around you flow together as one.

Song: Ebb and Flow

There's yin and yang
Life in motion
Sailing free upon an ocean
Sometimes windy, sometimes calm
And fish are swimming, birds are flying
Lovers living, soaring free
This is what they say to me

To and fro, lead and follow,
Yield and go and ebb and flow.
You and I, gently flowing,
To and fro, I love you so
Take me there to where you're going,
Come with me to where I'll go,
To and fro, lead and follow,
Yield and go and ebb and flow.

CLOWN: If you like, find a partner and put your hands together like this. Close your eyes. Sometimes lead, sometimes follow.

God help me, please, to really know
When to ebb and when to flow
To and fro, stop and go
When I feel the moving, flowing
Then I know that you are near
Did you whisper in my ear?

Sing it with us.

To and fro, lead and follow,
Yield and go and ebb and flow.
You and I, gently flowing,
To and fro, I love you so.
Take me there to where you're going,
Come with me to where I'll go,
To and fro, lead and follow,
Yield and go and ebb and flow

Song: Finale

One, two, one, two, three, four,
Everybody has a song to sing (Hey)
Tap your feet and let the dance begin
Everybody knows the way to go
To let the meaning flow

Know yourself
And you will know who you're being
And then accept yourself
So you will like what you're seeing
And then forget yourself
That's all you need to do
And it will help you to keep up with
Everything that happens in the
Big wide world
It will help you to keep up with
Everything that happens in the
Big wide world

CLOWN: And not have stress (CLAPS).

CLOWN may take hands and encourages participants to form chains or a circle during this song.

Oh, oh, oh,
Everyone here has a song to sing and a melody to play
Everyone here has a tune to share and a word or two to say
Isn't it great to communicate what your mind and body know?
From your inside out to your outside in -
To let the meaning flow

Everyone here has a song to sing and a melody to play
Everyone here has a tune to share and a word or two to say
Isn't it great to communicate what your mind and body know?
From your inside out to your outside in -
To let the meaning flow

And so

I love stress (CLAPS)
I love stress (CLAPS)
I love stress (CLAPS) (CONTINUE AS REQUIRED)

PROFESSOR: We'd like to thank you for taking part today - and we hope that you've experienced something you can use in managing stress in your lives.

CLOWN: And don't forget to sing along with your life.

BOTH - Goodbye everybody – from the biosong. (THEY CLAP AND GREET PARTICIPANTS IN FAREWELL).