

POWER AND SENSITIVITY: BODY AND MOVEMENT AWARENESS TRAINING FOR MUSICIANS¹

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I have worked extensively with musicians who wished to develop greater body and movement awareness. They came to me because they felt they were not performing up to their potential, and generally they were they were experiencing anxiety or physical strain in their performing. Almost always their specific performance difficulties were expressions of more fundamental problems in their styles of movement and their ways of being. By cultivating freer and more skillful use of their bodies and minds, they were able to access their inner artistic potential.

I have found that the body and movement awareness tools I have developed can help musicians make dramatic improvements in their ability to play music. Reading through some of the basic exercises I use will give you a philosophical understanding and a vicarious experience of them and will allow you to begin using them in your performance and teaching. However, rather than starting with simple, basic exercises, I would like to begin with an example of how fundamental, complex and far-reaching awareness work can be.

A PIANIST

A pianist came to me because of pain in her right wrist. In any intense practice, her wrist hurt when she played at the right end of the keyboard, and she couldn't figure out why. I watched her play at the left end of the keyboard with her left hand, and when I compared what she did as she played with her right hand, I saw something very interesting. To help her notice what I noticed, I had her do a number of exercises to sensitize her to the body sensations of lateral movement.

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Then I asked her what she did with her pelvis when she reached her left hand out to the left, and she realized she tipped her pelvis to the right and bent her vertebral column in an arc to the left. This action moved her weight onto her right sitbone thereby allowing the weight of her pelvis and torso to act as a counterbalance to the weight/leverage of her left arm as it moved away from the centerline of her body. (The “sitbones” are the ischial tuberosities, the pointy bones in the buttocks that contact the chair when we sit.) The action also had the effect of moving her left shoulder to the left so that she could position her left arm and hand.

When I asked her to observe her movements as she played with her right hand, she realized that her body use was entirely different. She held her vertebral column in a straight line, stiffened her whole body and tipped to the right like a flag pole falling, putting all the weight on her right sitbone. Since she wasn't counterbalancing the weight of the arm as it moved away from her, she stiffened her torso to resist the arm's weight and prevent herself from falling over.

Then I asked her to notice the effects of these two body use patterns on her arms. She felt that the movement to the left was soft and sinuous and allowed her to keep her arm relaxed. However, the movement to the right caused great tension from her effort to resist falling to the right. She realized that she clenched not only the muscles in her torso but also all the muscles throughout her shoulder, elbow, wrist and hand. She understood that when she played at the right end of the keyboard, she simultaneously stiffened her hand, and that when she executed precise, rapid movements the result was discomfort and pain.

In our second lesson, I had her focus on what the different movements she had chosen for her right and left hands felt like. My experience is that it is not enough to know *what* you are doing. It is also important to know *what it feels like* to do it and *why it feels right* to do it that way. So rather than having her put all her attention on practicing the right way to use her right hand, in an effort to simply train her to move that way, I had her focus on playing the wrong way. I had her repeat the rigid movement, noticing small details of breathing, muscle tone and body feeling. She realized that she made her breath shallow, drew her body focus up into her neck and shoulders, and pulled her body in on itself. I asked her to exaggerate that movement pattern in order to become familiar enough with the feeling to describe it. In a surprised voice she said, “It feels like fear.”

I had her go deeply into the body sensations she was experiencing and request her body to let her access the memory of her earliest experience of that particular combination of movement and emotion. All of a sudden she remembered and re-experienced being a little girl having a piano lesson. Her mother was her first piano teacher and sat on her right as she played. Her mother yelled at her when she made mistakes, and she was afraid of her mother. In the end, she formed a conditioned response to the right end of the piano. She associated that end with fear and moved toward it in a fearful way. And that was why she “chose” that rigid way of moving to the right, even though she knew enough to adopt a much more comfortable manner of body use in moving to the left.

This example illustrates how fundamental mind-body work is. What the pianist had felt and experienced as a little girl was literally stored in her body, out of her conscious awareness, and was affecting her current playing. By having her pay detailed attention to her body experience as she played, she came to understand more fully what she was doing.

Almost always the physical, emotional and spiritual elements of performing music are intertwined and must all be dealt with together in the quest for perfection of talent and skill. Very often, what looks like simple physical strain in performing music is inextricably bound up with deep emotional and spiritual issues and cannot be addressed without dealing with the whole person. This intertwining is even more true with difficulties such as performance anxiety. Everything musicians ever experience in their training and their lives stays with them and may affect their performance, and it is therefore crucial that musicians attend to the whole person as they practice, perform and teach.

As a general rule, physical and emotional performance difficulties always involve some form of tension, constriction, collapse, twisting or imbalance in breathing, muscle tone and posture. Examining the specific places and patterns of such body blockages is a way of discovering and understanding inappropriate movement patterns and hidden feelings, thoughts, beliefs, intentions and choices. Freeing up the blockages is a way of working out the difficulties.

There is a fundamental state of wholeness which is the opposite of every particular negative state of mental and physical constriction and imbalance. In this Centered state, mind, body and spirit are integrated. The Self is symmetrical and expansive. It is calm and alert, powerful and sensitive, fluid and mobile.

The pianist and I worked with breathing and centering exercises (some of which will be described later in this article) to help her find this internal place of physical and emotional calm and power. Once we had identified *what* she was doing and *why* she was doing it, we used the centering exercises to help her replace old habits of movement and feeling with new, more comfortable and productive body patterns. By finding out how to move in a physically centered way, she also discovered how to overcome her emotional and spiritual blocks. By learning to feel and understand relaxation, breathing, body alignment, energy flow, physical concentration, use of space, and movement flow, she was learning to play in a way that was more powerful, sensitive, comfortable and joyful. She was learning to find her inner musical potential.

I have started the paper with an example of how deep and far-reaching mind-body work can be, but great care and skill is needed in order to help people delve into hidden mind-body material in a way that will ensure a comfortable and productive learning process. However, it is not necessary to dig into buried material to benefit from body and movement awareness training. The rest of the paper will deal with much simpler, more basic awareness and centering exercises that you can work with profitably on your own if you wish.

THE LOGIC OF TEACHING & LEARNING

THE PROBLEMS

The difficulties that musicians encounter fall into three broad overlapping and interrelated categories -- physical strain, anxiety, and non-specific performance inability. Physical strain can include a number of elements. One would be general postural problems such as having one's back hurt from sitting for hours while playing. A second element would be instrument-specific problems such as having pain in the bowing arm or pedal foot. Another element would be the physical tension caused by anxiety.

Anxiety can stem from such things as being intimidated by audiences, feeling intimidated by the instrument, or feeling unable to communicate freely with fellow performers. Fear of exposing one's weaknesses and fear of failing certainly are part of the anxieties performers face. In addition, experiencing physical strain can cause a musician to feel anxious about performing.

A vague problem that often presents itself is a general falling short of performance goals. The performer may be playing very well, and without being able to identify any specific difficulty simply cannot achieve the control and refinement they desire.

All of these areas of difficulty stem from present situations and/or past learning. There are plenty of elements in the present moment performance situation which can cause physical strains and anxieties. These challenges can be such things as the postural difficulties involved in playing an instrument which is awkward to manipulate, the interpersonal difficulties of getting along with an overbearing conductor or the emotional effects of failing an audition.

However, musicians also have to deal with the learning effects of past situations. To begin with, these include various cultural values concerning posture and attitude which can interfere with their ability to perform. Examples could be our culture's ideas that good posture is attained by throwing back the shoulders and sucking in the gut or that effort and rigidity are necessary for self-control.

More personal past learning situations can include anything from being taught an incorrect posture for supporting an instrument to the severe emotional and physical effects of child abuse or growing up with alcoholic parents. Many difficulties that musicians face are just the surface manifestations of deeper issues which have been pushed out of conscious awareness.

The various forms of difficulties that musicians face are interconnected. There really is no separation between mind, body and spirit. Choices about what to be and how to act in the world are intimately connected with a person's overall habits of posture and movement. Thoughts, feelings, beliefs and intentions *shape* and are *shaped by* muscle tone, breathing, body alignment, energy flow and movement.

In the deepest sense, the problems musicians face stem from some form of separation from the self. For example, that could be failing to feel or notice that a particular posture was causing physical strain and damage to a specific joint. Or it could be failing to realize that making the breath shallow is not a productive way to get rid of feelings of nervousness. In any case, not feeling things that are going on in the mind and body is the root cause of performance difficulties, and finding union with the self is the basis for finding union with the instrument, with the music, and with fellow musicians and the audience.

Performance difficulties are marvelous opportunities. Music comes from *within*, not only from the instrument, and performance problems point to those aspects of the self that are interfering with musical growth. Therefore musical growth involves not only honing technical skills but working on the inner self to achieve power, sensitivity, balance and harmony. By focusing on performance problems, discovering what weaknesses they reveal and learning to be strong in the places of weakness, musicians can learn to reach their highest potentials in music making.

BODY AWARENESS AND PHYSICAL THINKING

Body awareness is an effective and convenient tool for addressing and learning about the *whole self*. Music is just as much an emotional and spiritual as a physical endeavor, but it is helpful to focus on the body aspect of music because what people do with their bodies is solid and easily observable. The body is the concrete aspect of the self and offers a tangible way of examining and overcoming the patterns that are restricting one.

In teaching individuals how to perform better, I try to identify the performance situations that they find threatening, confusing, irritating or awkward. Once I have done so, I structure a simplified performance experiment which incorporates the important elements of the real situation and triggers their performance difficulties. This offers the student an opportunity to monitor their habitual body and movement responses to the situation and experiment with more effective responses.

In order to help people monitor what they are doing and feeling, I teach them how to report their experiences in language that refers to specific bodily sensations and events. This concrete way of thinking and speaking means pinning down both mental and physical elements by defining them in terms of observable, physical response patterns and tangible physical sensations. I have students specify what they are feeling and doing by giving detailed and complete statements of precisely *what* they are feeling in their bodies and *where* in their bodies they feel it.

I ask people to go through their bodies part by part and notice whether anything is occurring there. Physical thinking helps people notice the actual sensory contents of their experience by forcing them to keep up a running pattern of self-monitoring, focusing on the current details of breathing, muscle tone, posture and movement. Physical thinking helps people achieve more precise communication by allowing them to pin down the

specific experiences they attach to the broad, vague words that we usually use to talk about ourselves.

Physical thinking also forces people to notice that their responses are *actions* that they choose and do, therefore enabling them to assume responsibility for themselves. It also allows people to begin taking a new relation to their own experience. Rather than being overwhelmed by negative feelings or negative performance results, people begin to stay focused on simply observing what they are doing inside of themselves. Most important, physical thinking allows people to evaluate and change their responses.

RESPONSES.

Once musicians can monitor their responses, the next steps are to help them understand and evaluate the effects of those actions and then construct new, more comfortable and effective responses to the difficult performance situations. Evaluating responses means discovering whether or not the responses are the most effective and comfortable ways of creating music. It is important that they learn how to judge for themselves the differences between the old and new patterns rather than taking anyone's word for what works. The two criteria against which they must test the new actions are whether they are *effective* in producing a better sound and whether they are *comfortable* to perform.

The key to comfortable, effective performance is the state of Center. Center is equally an emotional, spiritual and physical state. The same principles describe emotional or spiritual center and centered use of the skeleton and muscles. Center is balanced and open, a fusion of power and sensitivity. This state can be approached through physical training processes, and the next section of the paper will describe this training.

DEVELOPING POWER AND SENSITIVITY

Sensitivity is about softness, awareness, adaptability, mobility and fluidity. Power is about solidity, weight, decision-making, determination, and stability. Power and sensitivity are intimately connected. Power that is not balanced by sensitivity will be harsh, tense and uncontrolled, and sensitivity that is not balanced by power will be weak and ineffective. Balancing and integrating power and sensitivity allows comfortable, effective, graceful action.

This section will focus on descriptions of a few of the exercises I employ to help musicians understand and develop power and sensitivity.² Reading through these exercises will convey a vicarious experience of them, and if you wish to, you can try out

² For detailed instructions on how to do the basic breathing, body awareness, and centering exercises I teach, see the file *A Downloadable Script for the Eight Core BIM Exercises* on my website, www.being-in-movement.com.

some of the exercises and experience for yourself the techniques and ideas being presented.

SENSITIVITY

Sensitivity is about softening, being ready to receive and feel. If you are physically or emotionally tense and armored, you will find it hard to feel yourself, hard to move freely to play your instrument, hard to communicate effectively with your fellow performers and the audience, and hard to feel the music itself. Sensitivity is therefore the foundation for effective and appropriate action. Looking at sensitivity from a body awareness perspective, the development of sensitivity involves softening the pelvic area, the belly, the breath and the chest.

Pelvic opening: How do you use the muscles in your pelvis and belly? Many people tighten their breath and hold their belly and pelvic musculature tense and sucked in, which produces a feeling of physical and emotional constraint and weakness (though it may be so familiar that they never notice it).

In order to increase your awareness of how you hold these body elements, consciously tighten your belly, anal sphincter muscles and genitals and then walk around. Notice how stiff and strained this makes your legs, hips and lower back and your movement as a whole. Holding tension in these body areas while singing or playing an instrument makes it impossible to move freely and perform well.

Now stand and alternately tighten your belly and relax it. Let it plop out when you relax it. Next, stand as you normally would and try releasing your belly without doing a preliminary tightening. People generally experience a noticeable release even though they had not first tightened their bellies consciously, and they realize from this that they had been unconsciously holding themselves tight and that they probably hold themselves tight all the time. For greater relaxation, along with softening your belly, allow your genital and anal muscles to relax.

As a further step, touch your belly and experiment with your breathing until you discover how to soften your belly and let your breathing drop down into the pit of your belly, expanding both your belly and lower back as you inhale. This is frequently a novel sensation since many people suck in their guts as they inhale, thereby constraining the free operation of the diaphragm and rigidifying the chest and back.

When people try walking or doing other movements in this overall state of pelvic release, they generally feel that their movement is easier, better balanced, more graceful, more coordinated and much more solidly connected to the ground. This new physical state allows physically freer and more relaxed singing or playing of any instrument.

In addition to the physical benefits, this internal physical softness creates a psychological state of relaxed alertness as well. If you examine what happens when you feel nervous or anxious about some element of your performance, you will feel the physical components of that anxiety. What do you feel, and where in your body do you

feel it? Feelings of fear, anger, anxiety, confusion etc. always involve some form of constriction and twisting in muscles, breathing, posture and movement. These responses are generally both the physical core of the experience of anxiety and part of people's ways of coping with the anxiety-producing situation. When people feel vulnerable and threatened, they twist away from the situation, restrict their breathing, and stiffen themselves to reduce the feelings of anxiety. However, constriction and twisting render the person unable to act freely and effectively to deal with the situation, and feeling incapable of effective action increases and perpetuates the anxiety.

If you use the physical techniques for pelvic softening when you feel anxious about some performance situation, you will find that you are able to create and maintain a relaxed and alert mental and physical state. You will find that whatever difficulty you face will feel much less threatening and uncomfortable, and this will enable you to deal with the situation more effectively, thereby further reducing the anxiety you feel. Playing an instrument or singing from this state of pelvic release is much freer, more spontaneous and more outgoing.

Chest softening: What is the relationship between your belly and your chest? Try elevating (puffing up) your chest and relaxing your belly at the same time. Notice that elevating your chest results in tension in your chest, back and belly. Relaxing your belly and your breathing necessarily involves softening your chest and letting it fall into its natural alignment. Many people try to “stand tall” by elongating and elevating the front of their bodies, but that prevents soft breathing and is contrary to what is needed for comfortable and effective body use.

Another important aspect of sensitivity has to do with a particular feeling in the chest. This can be experienced through working with imagery and body responses. Everyone has something or someone -- perhaps a friend, a lover, a child, a flower, a work of art -- something that when they imagine it makes their heart smile. Stand with your eyes closed, imagine whatever it is that makes your heart smile and notice the changes in your body. Most people experience a softening and warmth in their chests, and a freeing up over their whole bodies. These sensations of being “warm hearted” or “tender hearted” are the bodily manifestations of love or compassion.

Try imagining instead someone or something that is a constant source of irritation and obstruction. Notice what happens in your body now. Negative feelings such as fear, anger, and surprise produce constriction, hardness and imbalance in breathing and the chest. Creating the sensation of love in the chest is a way of replacing such feelings with love. In this physical state, people will indeed feel loving and act in genuinely loving ways.

Think of some performance situation in which you might encounter irritation or antagonism from a fellow performer. If you can respond with an open heart to your antagonist, you have a chance of establishing a more positive connection between both of you. Along with pelvic softening, this physical state of love is helpful in overcoming feelings of conflict and threat. Knowing how to create this state and act from it can be very helpful in smoothing out difficult interpersonal situations that often arise in

performance situations. Beyond that, it also will allow you to really open yourself to yourself, to the people around you and to the music. You will be able to play with more heart.

POWER

Power has to do with such qualities of body organization as solidity, weight, rootedness, resoluteness and tenacity. Power is involved with the elements of force and control. Without power, you will not be able to act effectively to carry out your decisions. Physical and emotional power are rooted in a particular way of using the pelvis, spinal column, arms and legs.

Pelvic Alignment: Learning how to align the pelvis and spinal column for efficient support has to do with pelvic rotation, and sitting on a firm, flat chair (one with as little bucket or lean as possible) without leaning against the back support is the best position for working on this.

Try sitting and experimenting with the movement of slumping down and sitting up straight. What part of your body do you move to create the action of rising up out of the slump or of falling down into it? Most people believe that straightening up is done by throwing their shoulders back or by straightening their backs, and practically no one notices that straightening up is really a function of pelvic rotation. When the pelvis rotates backward, the stack of vertebrae has no foundation on which to rest and it curves and slumps down. (The pelvis can be thought of as a bowl which contains the guts, and “backward” is the direction in which the bowl would rotate to spill out the guts toward the back of the body).

Slump down, feeling how your chest caves in, your head falls forward and down, and your back rounds itself. Then try rotating your pelvis forward. You will feel how rotating the pelvis forward to the correct position provides a foundation for the spinal column and the torso as a whole and thereby creates upright posture.

There are two very different ways of rotating the pelvis forward. The most effective and comfortable form of forward rotation involves using muscles deep in the core of the body rather than muscles along the surface of the back. To understand this, consider that there are basically two ways to tip a bowl forward -- lifting the rear edge or lowering the front edge. Using the extensor muscles of the back to lift the rear edge of the pelvis arches the back and creates tension and discomfort, and this is why everyone will sit up “straight” for a minute when exhorted to and then give it up as uncomfortable. Using the deep, internal psoas muscle (which runs between the head of the thighbone and the front of the spinal column) to create a movement which in effect drops the front edge of the pelvis creates a very strong and comfortable physical organization of the pelvis and spinal column.



Photos taken during the flutist's third lesson. She realized that she habitually collapsed when she played, with her weight falling on the rear edge of her pelvis (as shown on the left). In the photo on the right, the torso is balanced on top of and supported by the pelvis.

Unfortunately, this new awareness of muscle functioning is easy to teach through direct physical contact but is extremely difficult to teach through written instructions. However, there is one movement experiment you can do which may help you find this new pelvic movement. Sit toward the front edge of a firm flat chair with your knees spread apart, your feet flat on the ground and your lower legs perpendicular to the ground (not tucked underneath you or stretched way out in front). Now, instead of moving your pelvis forward by shortening or pulling in your lower back, roll your pelvis forward by moving your genitals forward and down so that they point toward the floor. You will almost have the feeling that you are going to sit on top of your genitals. This movement takes place very low in the body, in the creases at the top of your thighs (which is where the hip sockets are). Your back and shoulders will not be actively engaged in muscular work but will move simply as a result of the pelvic rotation. If this hint isn't enough for you to find the new movement, try not to feel frustrated. It can be a difficult skill to learn on your own.

This new way of sitting places the bones of the pelvis and spinal column in architecturally optimal alignment. The weight of the body is on a vertical line through the head and torso and rests squarely on the sitbones.

Using the deep core of the body rather than the back to organize your sitting produces an experience of effortless physical strength and stability, and it indicates how strong, stable and comfortable movements can be when they are executed with correct relaxation and biomechanics. This form of body organization also produces a psychological feeling of personal stability and strength of will, and this sensation of power is crucial in developing an ability to handle the personal challenges of performing.

Speaking more specifically, many musicians experience back and neck strain from sitting for hours playing. This new form of body organization allows the bones to support the weight of the body in an architecturally optimal manner, and it vastly decreases the muscular effort and strain involved in sitting. Beyond simply making long periods of sitting more comfortable, it allows musicians to use more of their energy for the performance itself.

Leg Use: Another problem that musicians frequently experience involves strain produced by failure to support the back by the legs. It may not be obvious that your legs do support the back when you are sitting, but certainly it is clear that they do when you stand. Examining the movement of walking is helpful in understanding how the legs support the back in all positions.

Why does your body move forward across the floor when you walk? Many people believe that it is because they pick up a leg, move it forward, and then drop their weight onto it. To develop your awareness of just what you do when you walk, try standing and pushing on a wall, with your feet far enough from the wall that your body inclines forward quite a bit. Usually people believe and feel that they are pushing on the wall with their arms and shoulders and are unaware of the contribution of the legs and hips.

Try bending your knees quite a bit and then straightening your legs rapidly -- as though you were trying to push the floor backwards away from the wall. Notice that when you do this the push on the wall from your hands increases. Actually, it is the traction of your feet on the floor and the shove back and down with your legs that create the forward shove on the wall.

Many people find that this experiment transforms their awareness so that they begin experiencing the lower half of their bodies as active and powerful. Our culture tends to value the top half of the body as the source of manipulation and control, and people very often are out of touch with their legs and pelvis. However, without being fully alive in the pelvis and legs, people won't have access to the full flow of their creative life energy, and they will feel in their lives that they cannot find solid ground to stand on.

To amplify your awareness of the function of the pelvis and legs, try maintaining a steady push on the wall and rotating your pelvis so that you move from tucking your tail to arching your back. As you do this, search for the particular orientation of your pelvis which maximizes the transmission of power from your feet to your hands. Feeling this will give you a clear experience of how the legs generate force and how the pelvis transmits it to the spinal column which in turn transmits it to the arms.

Walking with this awareness can transform the way people walk. As you walk, step forward by pressing down and back with the ball of your back foot in an exaggerated manner. Feel how the back/down energy of the foot reflects off the floor into a forward/up movement of the body. People generally experience that when they walk this way, they have a ground to stand on and a foundation for themselves. Their posture opens upward. Their walk becomes more erect, clearer and more energetic. When people conceive of walking as falling down onto their forward foot rather than pushing off their

back foot, they sag and fall down as they walked. They droop. This new way of moving is mechanically more efficient and powerful, and it is also much more confident and alert.

People experience in this new way of moving that the body feels more “knit together.” By feeling and working with the legs as the support for the torso, people can move in more effective and comfortable ways. If they are fully alive in their legs when they are sitting and singing or playing, their pelvis and lower back will not sag. Their whole torso will be energized and supported, and that will improve their overall posture and their playing. When they sing or play an instrument in a standing position, understanding how to effectively support their body on their legs will result in better performance.



These photos were also taken during the flutist’s third lesson. The photo on the left shows her habitual body use, with the weight on her heels and her back collapsed. The photo on the right shows more even weight distribution on her feet and legs and her back lengthened and aligned for more efficient support.

Arm Use: Arm strain is a significant problem for many musicians, but arm strain is always part of an overall body problem. There is a simple exercise to demonstrate how pelvic functioning affects arm use. Sit on a flat chair without touching the backrest, and then raise and lower your arms in front of you. Now slump and feel how your pelvis rolls back and the torso collapses. Notice how your collar bones and shoulders roll forward and down, and try raising your arms forward and up from this position. Most people notice that the range of motion of the arms is restricted. They feel that the top of the upper arm hits a “barrier” and that there is considerable tension in the neck.

Next adopt a straight “military” posture, throwing back your shoulders and straightening your back. Raising their arms from this position, most people feel that the bottom of the upper arm (near the armpit) is pulled down. Again the arms cannot move freely upward, and people experience considerable tension in the middle of the back and neck as well.

When people return to the anatomically proper pelvic alignment, they feel that their backs are relaxed and free and that they can raise their arms farther with less effort. This is important in playing any instrument. If the arms are freer, there will be less fatigue in playing. The arms will feel lighter and more powerful, and the musician's control and the sound he or she produces will be better.

Beyond just freedom of movement, pelvic use is also important in actively generating power in arm movements. When the pelvis is not used correctly, arm movements requiring power will be weak, strained and fatiguing. Two examples of arm movements requiring power are holding up weights and pressing down with force. These actions can be seen in holding up instruments such as a flute or violin and pressing down forcefully to produce loud sounds in striking piano keys or bowing cello strings.

When most people hold a weight out in front of their bodies, they counterbalance the forward and down force of the weight by leaning their head and shoulders back. You can observe this pattern by asking someone to pick up a weight such as a light chair and hold it out at arm's length. However, that way of supporting the weight creates a swayback curve and compresses the lower back, which results in strain and fatigue both in the arms and the back. Instead, aligning the pelvis correctly and sticking the tailbone slightly back and out allows the pelvis and lower torso rather than the shoulders and upper torso to act as the counterbalance to the forward weight. This opens and lengthens the back and frees up the hips and legs. It also allows the weight to be supported by the leg muscles rather than by the weaker back and arm muscles. All this results in much easier and stronger weight support as well as better balance and freedom of movement.

The legs and pelvis are also important in creating the force to press on strings, keys and so on. Just as clear contact by the feet with the ground during walking produces an energized, knit together style of walking, so the legs and pelvis energize the arms in power delivery. It is easy to physically demonstrate how this works, but it is difficult to convey in a written form.

However, to get a hint of this process, try imagining the similarity between a vertical chop down with an ax onto a log and the vertical strike down by a finger onto a piano key. When the whole body is involved and the pelvis is grounded, there is a powerful and penetrating yet relaxed and smooth quality to the power delivery. The power does not bounce off the surface of the log or key but goes deep within. If the strong muscles of the legs and pelvis do not contribute their power to the arm movements, then the arm muscles will have to act alone. The arms will become strained and tense, and the sound thus produced will reflect the fatigue and strain the musician experiences. The insecurity or hesitancy of a power stroke produced by just the arms can be clearly heard in the lack of richness and depth of sound produced. However, playing from the full self results in a full-bodied power stroke and a rich and full sound.

CONCLUSIONS

The body and movement awareness exercises described so far are the basics of the process of developing a fully centered way of creating music, but they are just the beginning. There are many other topics that can be pursued through body awareness training, for example, feeling the sound vibrations of the music equally in every part of the body, feeling the non-verbal spatial pressures that connect members of a chamber group as they play together, or projecting the body sense into the physical material of the instrument. These and other topics are elaborations of the process of developing self-awareness.

Whatever habits of body image, self image and movement performers have, it is on the basis of those habits that they will sing or play their instruments. Tense, unbalanced patterns of action get in the way of the ability to play freely, with power and sensitivity and feeling. The self-awareness and self-control procedures described in this article allow people to monitor themselves and create a state in which they can concentrate well, move freely, perceive sensitively, and exert efficient power. Rather than closing down to themselves, the music or the audience, performers come to the performance experience open and stay open through it.

Staying open, the experience becomes much more manageable. People find that physical and emotional discomforts they had previously experienced are vastly lessened, and they realize that most of the discomfort they had experienced they actually created themselves by their tension and resistance. They realize that shrinking or hardening themselves made them respond weakly and ineffectively to the challenges of the performance.

Performing in a spirit of sensitivity and power, people find that they can maintain a strong and compassionate connection to themselves, their fellow performers, the audience and the music. They find that the movements they do are softer, more graceful, stronger, more economical and more effective. They can actually create more music with less effort.

Even more important, pursuing this physical and emotional power and sensitivity is a path to opening up a fluid spontaneity in which the music plays itself. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that as the performer goes beyond the bounds of the familiar self, a deeper aspect of the self takes over and plays beyond the ability of the ordinary self.

The key to applying this learning in real life is the skill of self-examination. Remembering to observe, interpret and control their physical responses gives people a powerful tool for choosing effective ways of acting. This approach to action is a way of finding a powerful, loving and centered state of being and allowing the music to issue from that state. It points toward the possibility for extraordinary performance and challenges the performer to constantly aim at understanding and creating better ways of using the self to make music.

The body is the fundamental instrument whether the music is being made with the voice or a violin. When the muscles and breath are used in a state of power and compassion, the sound produced has a depth and richness, and an intimacy, that provides a new dimension to the music. Playing from the whole self makes the music whole.

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