

M^{TNA}e-journal

September 2012



From the Editorial Committee

As teachers, we want our students to develop a love of music and achieve their musical goals. The field of "musician wellness" has evolved over the past few years, becoming a vital component of students' lessons, providing them essential tools to maximize their musical potential. Today's teachers are integrating information from the fields of physiology, psychology and neuroscience into the more characteristic topics of technique, interpretation, music history and theory. They are recognizing how crucial this information is in fostering effortless and innately music performances from their students.

In the past, when the word "wellness" was mentioned, the ideas of injury prevention, curing injured musicians and handling perfor-

mance anxiety most often came to mind. While educating ourselves on those topics is extremely important, the focus has expanded. While keeping our students healthy is still fundamental, we also want to utilize what we know about wellness to provide them the skills to be the best musician possible, performing effortlessly, whether for their own enjoyment or for audiences around the world.

This past summer, MTNA and CFMTA (Canadian Federation of Music Teachers' Association) once again partnered to host a three-day summer Wellness Symposium in New York City. "Empowering the Whole Musician—Mind and Body" was a huge success thanks to our four outstanding guest clinicians, Vanessa Cornett-Murtada, Kathleen Riley, Julie Jaffee Nagel and Linda Cockey.



Gail Berenson, NCTM

Those in attendance were provided a wealth of knowledge and inspiration to take home to their students. We wanted to share this information with you, so this issue of the *MTNA e-Journal* features summaries of the presentations given at this outstanding event.

In fact, MTNA wants to serve as your personal resource on the topic of wellness. MTNA offers a number of resources including an extensive *Annotated Wellness Bibliography* (books, journals, websites), annotated by Linda Cockey, Salisbury University, with a searchable online database. *Ten Essential Skills for Promoting a Lifelong Love of Music and Music Making*, a result of a 2003 MTNA Board directive, resulted in four in-depth, wellness-related articles that are available online. Finally, in 2008 the MTNA Board of Directors initiated a Wellness Forum. The purposes of this forum are:

- ▶ To provide a medium for open discussion and expression of ideas.
- ▶ To provide a vehicle for maintaining an ongoing focus on this vital subject.
- ▶ To recommend initiatives, projects and services to the MTNA Board of Directors for their consideration.

I encourage you to communicate with the Wellness Forum by attending the open sessions held at each MTNA national conference and/or by sending your questions or ideas for MTNA national conference sessions or articles in the *American Music Teacher* or the *MTNA e-Journal* to the chair of the Wellness Forum:

Gerardo C. Ascheri, NCTM
ascheri@msu.edu.

Wishing you and your students a lifetime of healthy and joyful music making!

—Gail Berenson, NCTM, MTNA past president

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Address all editorial correspondence to
ejournal@mtna.org

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You are talented, well-prepared, smart and love music. You walk on stage, bow to the audience, and begin to play. Suddenly your mind freezes up and your technique falters. A surge of panic rises. You feel embarrassed, angry, and confused about why this is happening because it went perfectly in the practice room. In this article, Julie Jaffee Nagel addresses the mysteries and issues of how to understand and cope with stage fright.

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By Linda Cockey, NCTM

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Performance Anxiety And Human Development Through The Life Cycle

As a psychotherapist and former performing pianist, I see a number of musicians in my private practice who complain of chronic and debilitating performance anxiety. I also see a number of people who come in for help a few weeks, sometimes days, before an important performance. Since I am a therapist and not a magician, I wanted to emphasize that performance anxiety is complex and has historical determinants in each person's life history. There is not a quick magic "cure." Regarding treatment, "one size does not fit all."

I decided to use my morning to explore how performance anxiety is embedded in life cycle development and comes "alive" when one is faced with a performance. One takes one's entire history on stage—not just the pieces learned for a recital. My presentation was designed to inform, raise awareness, understand and promote dialogue about what happens between practice room (where "it goes perfectly") and the stage (where the performer and the music can fall apart). And more importantly, I raise the questions "Why does all of this matter, and how does a psychological knowledge of human development converge with understanding and treating performance anxiety?" A second objective was to have participants take something useful with them from my presenta-

tion—how could teachers and students use this information in practical ways?

I will be basing my remarks primarily on the developmental model created by psychoanalyst and educator, Erik Erikson (1902–1994). His chart, "The Eight Ages of Man," has become a classic model for understanding development through a biological, psychological and social lens. Originating in his historic book, *Childhood and Society* (1950), Erikson's model encompasses the life cycle from birth to death and illustrates the crises or conflicts inherent in each stage of life and the resolution of these conflicts. It also shows how individuals are shaped by their internal, external and social environments, and with proper supports, can move successfully from one stage to another. However the eight stages are cumulative, and each is present in some way in the succeeding stage. Under pressure, one is susceptible to regression to a previous stage or stages. If musicians think contrapuntally, the theory here is clear—many lines of development occur simultaneously and individually, and they accumulate as one passes through the life cycle. Each stage shapes personality development. The themes or motives of each developmental stage then take on a life of their own. There are multiple functions occurring that overlap, as in a fugue.

I emphasize that in thinking about human development and how it relates to performance and performance anxiety, young children are not fully developed emotionally or physically. They have difficulty distinguishing inner and outer reality. Thus adult guidance and nurturance is critical for growth, indeed for survival. By considering the entire life cycle

there are many implications important for parents and teachers in nourishing healthy individuals who become performers.

The website www.usefulcharts.com can be consulted for a chart of Erik Erikson's Stages of Development. I will also include my own version of the chart below so you can refer to it as you continue to read.

8 STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT (E. Erikson)

Stage	Age (years)	Crisis/Conflict	Favorable Result	Tasks
1	Birth–1	Trust vs. Mistrust	Hope	Feeding, nurture
2	2–3	Autonomy vs. shame/doubt	Will	Potty, walk/indep.
3	4–6	Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose	Exploration
4	7–12	Industry vs. Inferiority	Competent	School, Skills
5	13–19	Iden.vs. Role Confusion	Sense of self	Social, Peers
6	20–34	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love	Intimate relationship
7	35–65	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Work, Parenthood	Accomplish, nurturance
8	65.....	Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom	Reflection, Fulfillment

Figure 1: 8 Stages of Development

Stage One deals with how the newborn experiences the world. This is primarily through his or her body. The mouth, eyes, ears and sensory organs (skin) literally "take in" the world. The parents supply nutrients by their care and attention to the baby's needs. However, paradise is lost for the first time (hopefully in a healthy way) when the baby is appropriately weaned and learns that every cry does not elicit an immediate response. He or she has to wait. How this is handled leads to later feelings about "starvation" and reaching out for love of audience approval for sustenance. In the ideal sense, there is a mutual regulation between parent and child and creates a healthy balance between Trust and Mistrust.

Stage Two—Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt—finds the baby becoming a toddler. To stand on one's feet is to experience the world from an entirely new upright perspective. In this stage the child walks and can let go of infantile dependency. This is the time of the "terrible twos" when the child realizes he or she is separate from the parents not an extension of them, thus asserting him/herself with "no." Also potty training involves letting go of something from inside one's body and control over doing so. To accomplish this healthy developmental task can bring great sense of accomplishment for the toddler, or it could lead to power struggles with the parent. Both Stage One and Two set the stage for healthy attitudes toward performing, dependent on ones' healthy view of being loved and accepted and also being able to be independent and letting go from the backstage

and fears of abandonment. Early derivatives of performance anxiety, including loss of control of memory and technique, can be traced back to the first few years of life and how they were navigated both by parents and children. A healthy sense of self is a positive result of this stage of life, which will accompany a performer on stage and lend mental security.

Stages Three and Four, Initiative vs. Guilt and Industry vs. Inferiority, involve the psychosocial tasks of playing with others versus being self-absorbed, pleasure in learning, and the development of conscience about right and wrong. Here, parents and teachers are models for future attitudes and behaviors as many children begin private lessons at this age. With this stage comes the natural inclination for competition—with peers and parents—which extends to performing in public, including juries, competitions and auditions. For the preadolescent, significant physical changes are noted in addition to emotional ones. Budding sexuality and preoccupation with appearance is paramount, including sensitivity to what others think. Of course, performers are very concerned with what the audience thinks of them. With good guidance from teachers and parents, the preadolescent (and parents) survive this period with greater self-confidence. This bodes well for performing before others.

Stage Five centers around Identity vs. Identity Confusion. Here the full-fledged teenager has to cope with important issues that include "who am I," "what do I think," acceptance by peers and entrance into more meaningful relationships, often romantic. It is

during this stage that adolescents become more or less serious about music, and by the end of the teen years, many have decided on careers in music or otherwise. It is a time of life that calls for immense growth personally, interpersonally and musically.

Intimacy vs. Isolation marks the Sixth Stage of Development according to Erikson. The intensity of friendships evolves into intimate romantic relationships and work choices become all important. Mutual love is a marker of such life events. Now musicians have a serious relationship with music and their chosen instrument. They want to connect with the audience and share themselves through performance and creativity. Performance anxiety results when there are impediments—psychological or social—that interfere with these developmental tasks, and if there is a regression, it may be to an earlier stage where development was thwarted due to life events or personal circumstances. Performers hopefully become better able to deal with the challenges of performance demands, including ability to deal with anxiety, competition and often rejection. However, music and its performance gives immense satisfaction.

By Stage Seven, Generativity vs. Stagnation, the mature musician is ready to contribute to the next generation through teaching and creative efforts, including performance, which can include becoming a parent. Building a legacy for future generations, with teaching and performing being important links, becomes paramount.

By Stage Eight, Integrity vs. Despair, one comes to a time of reflection upon one's life lived. Fulfillment vs. bitterness, satisfaction vs. regrets are tasks that confront every person who lives into older adulthood. Often there is a pursuit of new and creative activities, and decisions about retirement—or not to retire. An openness to all kinds of creative expression awaits the performer who has reached this stage of artistic and chronological maturity.

As you have read and probably surmised, there is no simple answer for performance anxiety. Its tentacles reach way back to the earliest years of life. Parents, teachers and individual temperaments, as well as social forces, all shape the musical performer who, after much work and development, goes on stage well-tuned to withstand the rigors and rewards of performing with enjoyment. After all, isn't pleasure in performance the goal and ultimately the best reward?



Julie Jaffee Nagel, PhD, holds degrees in piano performance from the Juilliard School and degrees in psychology and social work from the University of Michigan. She is also a nationally certified adult psychoanalyst. The recipient of many awards, Nagel has published and presented widely and has a private practice in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Her book, *Melodies of the Mind* will be published by Routledge Press in December 2012.



Looking Inside The Art Of Piano Performance

Where Do We Begin?

We've all learned different techniques through our lives—no one technique is perfect. When we look inside the performer through physiologic monitoring and biofeedback we have a tool to look deeper into issues and see what works best for each individual. Let's go into this together as an exploration. Exploring what we cannot see with the naked eye, tension has three sources: physical, mental and emotional. Regardless of the starting point, all three manifest physiologically in the body, and we see this through the monitoring of muscle activity. We can literally see and analyze how our muscles are involved in playing and learn efficiency of muscle use.

Through simultaneous recording and playback on a MIDI instrument we become aware of what we often don't hear while we are playing: harsh tone and notes that "stick out" as a result of too much tension. Seeing the piano roll notation on the screen allows us to analyze how our fingers interact with each other—are they playing independently or do certain fingers overlap? Looking at this along with the video windows and graphs of muscle activity, are there correlations between hand position and muscle activity and finger interaction?

How Things Work

Let's back up a bit and have a closer look at some basics of physiology. Our muscles respond to produce the intended movements. Muscles have a tendency to "brace" in response to certain movements and misperceptions of movements. No muscle is completely relaxed, even during sleep. The amount of tension present in the muscle is simply muscle tone. Too much relaxation results in movements that are too loose and not controlled affecting the sounds produced.

What can we learn from tennis? The follow-through! This movement allows the arm, wrist and hand to move freely, preparing for the next shot, causing the muscles involved to relax. However, there is still an amount of tension present—the racket doesn't fall out of the player's hand!

There is a delicate balance. Too much relaxation is not a good thing! The completely relaxed muscle needs time to take up the slack. The slightly contracted muscle can transmit its pull to the bone immediately. But, how much is enough?

The key word is optimal. Muscle tone is not a constant force. It is usually greatest following a period of activity, least following inactivity, and changing with varying degrees of emotional excitement or everyday stress.

There are optimal levels of muscle tone or tension for each movement. Muscle fatigue can occur without you being aware of the onset. Periods of rest are important as they allow waste products to be removed from the muscles and for the muscles to be refueled.

Monitoring muscle activity can give us a tremendous amount of information. This process, coupled with real-time video, windows of how our hands and bodies are moving provide a rich source of biofeedback that speaks to our bodies.

A Simple Anatomy Lesson

This is a wonderful illustration from *Gray's Anatomy* depicting some of the most important muscles in the back:

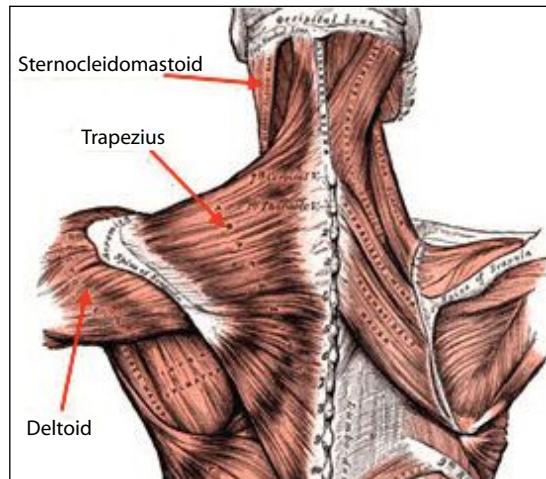


Figure 1: Some important muscles in the back

Understanding The Muscles Of The Hand

We have several sets of powerful muscles that operate our fingers. The extrinsic muscles,

exterior to the hand, start at the elbow or forearm. They run down the forearm and cross the wrist and hand. The smallest muscles that originate in the wrist and hand are called the intrinsic muscles. The intrinsic muscles guide the fine motions of the fingers by getting the fingers positioned and holding them steady during hand activities. Some control only the bending or straightening of the wrist. Others influence the movement of the fingers or thumb. Many of these muscles help position and hold the wrist and hand, while the thumb and fingers perform fine motor skills.

Finger movements are largely controlled by two muscle systems. The *Flexor digitorum* system consists of: the *Flexors digitorum profundus*, which run from the elbow along the lower arm, through the carpal tunnel under the wrist, to the first finger joint (nearest the finger tip) of each finger; the *Lumbricals* branch off from the *Flexors digitorum profundus* at a point within the hand palm and run to each knuckle joint. The *Flexors digitorum superficialis*, also run from the elbow, along the forearm, under the wrist, to the second finger joint of each finger. This group of muscles closes and curves the fingers. Another set of muscles, the *Flexor carpi* and *Extensor carpi*, hold the wrist firm, counterbalancing the *Flexor digitorum* muscles.

Now we come to the "powerhouse muscles"—the muscles *inside* the hand. The *Interossei* lie on either side of the hand between the knuckles. Their primary function is in opening and closing of the fingers and to contribute to fine motor control. We rely on

the *Lumbricals* to do most of the knuckle movements throughout our daily activities, including our finger actions on the keyboard. In piano playing we must strengthen the *Interossei* muscles to flex the fingers from the knuckle joints. This leaves the wrists relaxed and flexible. Both the *Lumbricals* and *Interossei* assist in maintaining the natural arch of the hand by supporting the main metacarpals as the fingers play.

The thumb has its own sets of "powerhouse muscles" both intrinsically and extrinsically. The muscles for the fifth finger are all intrinsic—the *Digit minimi* group. These are most often neglected and underdeveloped in pianists.

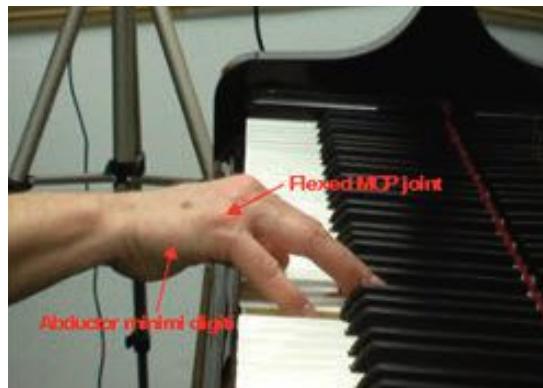


Figure 2: Intrinsic muscles of fifth finger

What Is Biofeedback?

Biofeedback is a physiological control technique. It incorporates the use of monitoring devices that display information about the operation of a bodily function that is not normally consciously controlled, heart rate or blood pressure for example. Biofeedback helps a person to learn to control the function or movement consciously.

What Is sEMG?

sEMG stands for Surface Electromyography. It is a device that measures the amount of electrical activity your muscles release when they are contracting, more commonly known

as muscle tension. It is similar in function to an EKG (electrocardiogram), which measures heart muscle activity.

How Does This Relate To Piano Playing?

Many pianists are unaware of their hand and finger position. Even those with a good technique often play with high levels of tension that they are unaware of, and therefore, do not always release properly. In piano playing, the large muscles of our arms assist the fine muscles in our hands and fingers. Using only tiny finger muscles can cause unnecessary strain that can result in tendonitis and other problems. Common complaints among pianists are pain or discomfort and excess tension in the neck and shoulders, back, elbow, forearm, wrist or hand, and tiredness.

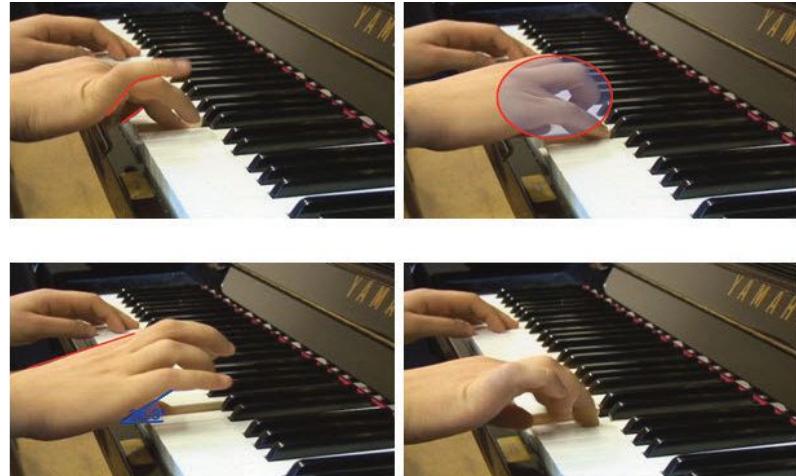
Let's break down the components of the physiomonitoring methodology and see what we can learn.

Video Analysis



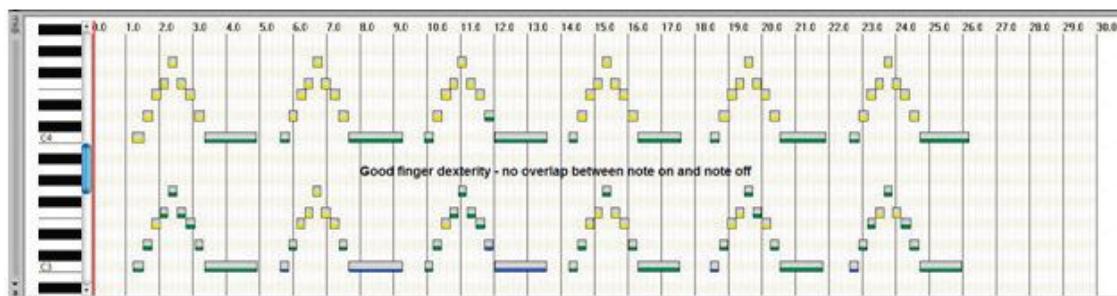
Figure 3

Video capture allows us an up-close view of hand position that we never see for ourselves when we are playing or for us as teachers when we are teaching because we are monitoring so many things at once. Let's take a look at the next couple slides of the same person as they play a scale:

**Figure 4**

The Power Of MIDI

MIDI is a data interface that is designed to communicate musical messages. MIDI instruments describe the variables of a performance by reading and emitting a constant stream of messages. Used as a feedback tool the performance score generated by a sequencer as a piano roll graph can be understood as a translation of the timing and dynamics of the performance. The precise measurements of timing are seen on the piano roll and the dynamics are heard in playback and presented in bands of color on the graph.

**Figure 5: Ideal piano roll graph**

The bars (boxes) on the graph depict specific notes played in relation to vertical keyboard display on left. Colors reflect velocity levels.

Establishing Correlations

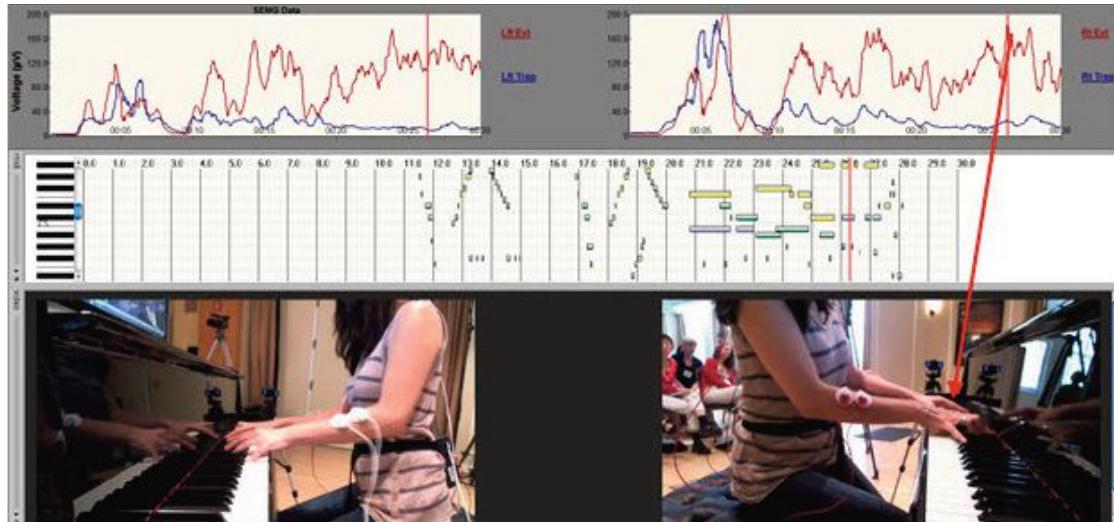
Over the last 10 years, I have worked with hundreds of pianists, as well as other musicians, some to correct problems, but in many workshops and master classes, some come simply for assessment. There are several factors that can clearly be seen as possible roads to injury, or in many cases, just the cause of faulty technical approaches to passages. I have said for years that a picture is worth a thousand words. And now that we can clearly see hand position along with readings of muscle tension I can establish validity for my arguments. Remember the picture of the correct hand position? The fingers fall naturally from the large knuckles. Here are some pictures taken from the participants at our symposium. The spikes in muscle activity clearly correlate with raised wrist, raised fingers and collapsed knuckles.



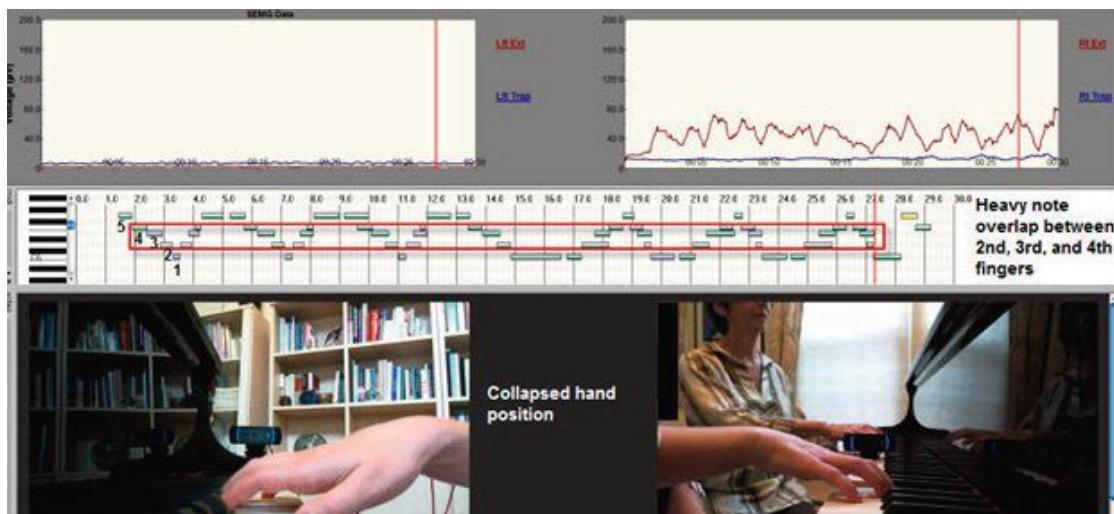
Figure 6



Figure 7

**Figure 8**

Used as a student assessment tool, we can help bring awareness to students even at the beginning level. The next picture is of a beginning student who had had about eight months of lessons. Luckily she was not playing much and so, in a relatively short period of time, the bad habits learned could be corrected.

**Figure 9: Student assessment**

The power of the piano roll notation allowed me to also see weaknesses in finger independence. The note bars should not overlap as seen in Figure 9.

Over the last eight years of research and teaching with video and sEMG monitoring, what has struck me most is the compensatory patterns musicians develop because of an improper hand position. We use our hands in many different ways—for functionality of daily living, work, high-level skills such as piano playing, and while we don't often realize it, for emotional expression. One of my colleagues expresses everything through gestures with her hands as she

speaks. But hands and fingers often tell a deeper story—at the piano when a student is unsure of the notes of a piece or the technical difficulty is beyond his or her grasp, the hand position is filled with trepidation that simply manifests as muscle tension.

I am also amazed at how many musicians play the piano with the collapsed position shown in the last figure—a completely non-functional shaping of the hand where the fingers cannot operate without strain on the forearm. I would like to discuss hand position further as it is so very important to what we do.

Defining Proper Hand Position

As pedagogues, we know there is a natural shape to the hand. The large knuckles of the hand form a very powerful arch—they are the “powerhouse” of the hand AND of piano technique. There are three sets of muscles inside the hand that are situated around the large knuckles or main metacarpals as they are called. These muscles are responsible for the fine motor movements our fingers make. The natural arch of the hand looks like this:

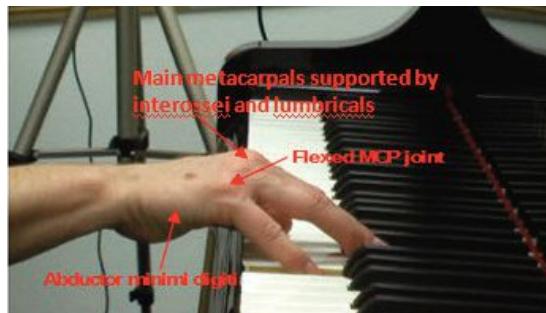


Figure 10

The hand position on the keyboard should resemble the hand in a relaxed position: the thumb hanging at the side of the hand and the other fingers extending downward in a gentle curve from the main knuckle (metacarpal joints). These four knuckles are the bridge, which forms an arch on the top of the hand. The bridge of the hand is the powerhouse behind the fingers.

1. The finger that plays should be in a straight line with its flexor and extensor muscles.



Figure 11

2. The hand, wrist and arm adjust slightly both vertically and horizontally to place each finger in the position where its muscles can contract effectively and where the hand and arm are balanced over the finger that plays.
 3. This slight change of position eliminates any tension in the joints and muscles and guarantees their readiness to play again.
 4. Any change of position enables the hand and arm to transmit a throw to the fingers, resulting in an increase in speed and power.
- The knuckles and wrist should be level and the joints should not collapse or buckle under when a finger depresses a key, forming a “box” on the top of the hand. It is also important to not collapse the last joint of the finger while depressing the key. This position is often difficult for beginning students, especially children. Many of the muscles needed

to maintain this position are not yet strong enough.



Figure 12

It is best to emphasize the position of the hand away from the keyboard. By beginning to shape the hand correctly, students are using many of the small muscles within the hand. It is important to begin to do this without strain. Emphasize the same position of the hand resting on the keys: fingers falling gently from the knuckles. See the arch across knuckles, forming the "box" of the hand. There is a straight line from the wrist to the knuckles.



Figure 13

The Fingers

As György Sándor observed, true finger independence can be achieved only with the assistance of the forearm and upper arm muscles and not by maintaining a fixed hand (or wrist) position that causes the fingers to move in a forced, unnatural position. In the long run, these fixed positions will cause tension, fatigue, pain and acute or chronic ailments.

There are two very important movements of the arm and wrist that enable them to collaborate with each of the fingers and make adjustments: vertical and horizontal. Since we want to place the fingers in line with their respective forearm muscles (the flexors and extensors), there will be a slight horizontal change in the position of the wrist and forearm for each finger.



Figure 14

The fingers are spread apart, assisting the stability of the hand; the curvature of the finger is very important. The open, relaxed position of the thumb is important for the

stability of all arches in hand. The correct position of the arch forms a "C" between the thumb and forefinger.

Velocity is an important factor to consider here. Since we refer to velocity in piano playing as the speed of a succession of notes, the speed of the release of each key back to its original position effects a succeeding key strike. I refer to this as an active release. The instinct of the untrained student is to "muscle" the passages demanding velocity, incorporating powerful contractions. However, this type of contraction brings a reactionary movement of a larger arm unit. For example, a powerful movement of the finger at the knuckle joint is not possible without incorporating part of the arm.

Concluding Thoughts

Physiologic monitoring and biofeedback enable us, as teachers, to look inside ourselves and our students. The power of biofeedback helps students make changes that are lasting. When there is irrefutable proof from the lines on the screen that a correct hand and finger position and body alignment significantly decrease the amount of muscle activity, AND it is easier to play a passage, there are no arguments from students—only willingness and an understanding of what needs to be corrected and why.

Proper posture and body alignment are essential. Careful repertoire selection is a must—the piece must fit the student, technically, emotionally and ergonomically. If a stu-

dent has small hands, some pieces will simply be off the list of choices unless you are willing to take out notes. Have students spend more time in the intermediate repertoire. This repertoire is rich with building blocks for style and technical development. Once students have a solid foundation here it is more easily transferred to the advanced repertoire.

Proper development of the muscles in the hand is important. In children these are not developed. Maintaining a proper hand and finger position automatically engages these muscles and they begin to strengthen. When the hand is in a collapsed position, these muscles do not engage.

Musicians must begin to think of themselves as athletes of finger dexterity. We need to take the same amount of careful training of the body as athletes do to ensure healthy development and prevent technical problems and injuries.



Kathleen Riley, PhD, is known nationally as a lecturer and clinician on musicians' technique and injury prevention. She has more than 30 years of piano teaching experience, training in biofeedback techniques, and research in biofeedback and music performance with musicians. Riley has worked with specialists in different retraining therapies and has developed her own method. She is the music performance and rehabilitation specialist for the Yamaha Artist in Education program and clinical director of ProformaVision. She has been invited to join the first comprehensive, interdisciplinary, medically based, world-wide performance enhancement and treatment network for musicians. She is a widely published author.



Nurturing The Whole Musician

Mindfulness, Wellness, And The Mind-Body Connection

In his two-part drama *Faust*, Goethe provides a beautiful description of an inner conflict:

*Alas, two souls are living in my breast,
And one wants to separate itself from the other.
One holds fast to the world with earthly passion
And clings with twining tendrils:
The other lifts itself with forceful craving
To the very roof of heaven.¹*

This sense of unrest is familiar to many performing artists. The desire to perform music with passion and abandon is, for many musicians, often tempered by fears and self-doubts. The intent of this paper is to advocate for holistic teaching methods, which include education and practice in psychological wellness.

The Whole Musician

What if we regularly taught only a fraction of each piece of repertoire (say, every third measure) to our students? Or, what if we only considered half of the student (for example, only the left side) on a regular basis? These examples are silly, but very often we neglect to approach each student as a complex system of various physiological, psychological and spiritual needs.

Holism is the concept that the universe, particularly each living system, is correctly viewed in terms of interacting wholes rather than as a collection of parts. Furthermore, these systems cannot be fully understood in terms of the sum of their component parts. Holistic ecology, for example, considers the environment and human beings as a single system. Holistic medicine aims to treat the mind and body as one system.

Our understanding of the self as an integrated whole has evolved since the 17th century. The father of modern philosophy, René Descartes, believed in a distinct separation between the body (a machine that perceives the environment through its senses) and the mind (that by thinking creates awareness, the seat of the soul). Just as mind and matter are separate, Descartes asserted, the mind and body

"I have a body and I am more than my body. I have emotions and I am more than my emotions. I have a mind and I am more than my mind..."

—Kabbalah saying

are two separate mechanisms that interact with each other. This influence is seen almost 400 years later in the number of resources that contain phrases such as "mind-body" or "body-mind-spirit." The fact that we compound these terms indicates a traditional belief in their existence as separate entities. Yet, we would never say, "Yesterday I taught Susie's mind and body to play a B major triad," would we?

A number of philosophers, from Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre to other minds of the later 20th century, have challenged this idea of Cartesian dualism. Our nervous system influences our cognition, some believe, and our mind influences our bodily actions. Modern philosophies of embodied cognition assert that thinking involves perception and action by the body, or more simply, we think with our bodies as well as our brains. Some fascinating research studies have offered support for this idea. In one study, participants who held a pencil in their teeth, thus engaging the same muscles as if they were smiling, comprehended humorous or pleasant sentences more quickly than unpleasant ones.² In another study, actors who moved and ges-

tured while reciting their lines were able to memorize them faster than actors who studied their scripts while seated.³ Educational philosophies related to embodied cognition can be observed from Montessori schools to Dalcroze Eurhythmics classes. In recent years, Descartes's famous declaration *Cogito ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am") has been reinterpreted by the University of Wisconsin's

Laboratory of Embodied Cognition: *Ago ergo cogito* ("I act, therefore I think").

The concept of a "mind-body connection" is paradoxical, then, since the two cannot be separated. The act of music performance involves an intimate dance between the mind and the physical body, and problems in one area will create challenges in another. Musicians who perform with excessive muscle tension tend to report more feelings of stress, while those who experience intense self-doubt or worry on stage often perform with a great deal of physical tension. In other words, tension in the body directly translates into tension in the mind, and vice-versa. It is therefore essential that any discussion of musicians' health include psychological wellness.

Mental Wellness And Musicians

If we as humans are more than just a physical body, and if we agree that holistic instruction involves teaching more than the mechanics of music production, we must also agree that the concept of "wellness" necessarily extends beyond the physical body. Most large music teaching organizations advocate for musician health, and many emphasize the idea that mental health is an imperative component of wellness. One worthwhile resource for music educators is the Performing Arts Medicine Association (PAMA), which unites medical professionals, performers, educators and administrators in an effort to improve the

health care of performing artists. As part of its mission, PAMA is committed to:

Promoting the highest quality of care to all performing artists and bringing to that care an appreciation of the special needs of performing artists; Developing educational programs designed to enhance the understanding and prevention of medical problems related to the performing arts; Promoting communication among all those involved in the health care and well being of performing artists; Fostering research into the etiology, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of medical problems of performing artists.⁴

MTNA, which provides an *Annotated Bibliography on Musician Wellness* on its website, issued a "Statement on Health in Music Teaching" in 2007. The statement serves as a strong affirmation that music teachers should strive to be health conscious and to engage in prevention education with their students. The three primary health concerns, as outlined by MTNA, are hearing health, physical health and psychological health. Regarding mental health, the organization states, "The performance of music, especially the public performance of music, involves a host of social and emotional factors that are key to the importance we place on music—and a potential source of stress in the student."⁵

The National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy supports a number of committees, including the active Committee on Wellness for the Pianist. This group created a detailed Wellness Curriculum Outline in 2003 (updated in 2007), which is accessible online.⁶ This curriculum addresses the psychological aspects of wellness, including issues of peak performance, stage fright, generalized anxiety and/or depression and stress management. The accrediting organization National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) has recently addressed the importance of wellness in a robust music cur-

riculum. NASM and PAMA have agreed to work together to develop studies and projects focused on the health of musicians. According to the current NASM Handbook, "Institutions should assist students to acquire knowledge

"I've experienced many terrible things in my life, a few of which actually happened."

—Mark Twain

from qualified professionals and authoritative medical sources regarding the maintenance of professional health and the prevention of performance injuries."⁷ The concept of prevention is essential, because although we often think of wellness as the quality or state of being in good health, musicians often neglect to consider their physical or mental health until a problem or injury arises.

Performing musicians, and creative artists in general, are susceptible to a variety of mental and emotional health challenges. Performance anxiety is a common issue for musicians and does not discriminate based on age, experience or level of ability. The legendary cellist Pablo Casals wrote in his autobiography,

I gave my first real concert in Barcelona when I was fourteen. My father, who had come to Barcelona for the occasion, took me on the tramway. I was terribly nervous. When we got to the concert hall, I said, "Father, I've forgotten the beginning of the piece! I can't remember a note of it! What shall I do?" He calmed me down. That was eighty years ago but I've never conquered that dreadful feeling of nervousness before a performance. It is always an ordeal. Before I go onstage, I have a pain in my chest. I'm tormented.⁸

We can no longer brush away the topic of performance stress by assuring our students it will only get better with experience.

Mental health professionals will sometimes diagnose musical performance anxiety as a type of social anxiety disorder or social phobia, although some believe the type of stress a musician feels on stage deserves its own classification. To make matters more complex, performers will often experience a number of other psychological challenges concurrently with their anxiety. The most common of these conditions are depression, which will not come as a surprise to most music educators, and other forms of anxiety such as panic disorder. In addition, a few performers may experience any degree of obsessive-compulsive tendencies, introversion, inhibition, perfectionism or shame.⁹ Even performers who do not suffer from the debilitating effects of anxiety or depression are still likely to experience the roller coaster of emotions and stresses that accompany the life of a musician. In fact, the physical and psychological effects of stress on students and professionals have been well-documented. Undergraduate music majors, graduate students seeking advanced performance degrees and musicians who perform for a living often experience an ongoing and excessive level of occupational stress.

Cardiologist Herbert Benson noted, "We live in very difficult times, when man is constantly faced with anxieties caused by rapid change. Man simply does not have the biological resources to maintain physiologic equanimity, certainly not without experiencing the effects of so-called stress that may have led to the recent prevalence of the disease hypertension."¹⁰ Benson published that statement more than 50 years ago, and the stress level in many Western societies has only intensified over the years. Clearly, understanding the causes and effects of stress on the body and mind is essential to training the whole musician toward healthy life habits.

When a person feels stressed or anxious, very specific neurological changes occur in the body. The autonomic nervous system reacts to perceived stress by initiating a series

of chemical reactions, which results in an excess of epinephrine (adrenaline) in the blood stream. Since this automatic fear response bypasses the rational part of the brain, it is often difficult or impossible for a performer to rationalize the fear away. The physical effects of adrenaline can include quickened or shallow breathing, racing heart-beat or elevated blood pressure, cold or shaky hands, fluttering or upset stomach, dry mouth, perspiration or gastrointestinal distress. The psychological effects of quickened brain activity, however, may be even more debilitating for some performers. These effects may include overactivity of the critical conscious mind, feelings of detachment or dissociation, sudden self-doubt, agitation or indecisiveness. Furthermore, performers may find they exhibit some of the subtle hidden symptoms of anxiety such as self-sabotage, excuse making, negative judgment of others, procrastination or self-medication. The good news is most performers can learn valuable coping techniques to lessen the effects of stress and to cultivate an optimal performance experience on stage.

Optimal Performance Experiences

A well-prepared musician may perceive any type of experience on stage as being a sub-optimal (less than desirable), optimal (favorable, desirable and realistic) or peak performance (the absolute highest achievement possible). A suboptimal, or unsatisfactory, experience might include physical symptoms of anxiety, feelings of doubt or self-criticism, or even a sense of detachment or dissociation from the music or the audience. An optimal experience would be a realistically achieved high level of performance that leaves the musician feeling satisfied. While some authors use the phrase "peak performance" to denote this type of experience, I prefer to reserve the use of this phrase to describe the very highest level of performance, one that happens on rare occasion,

often while under pressure, such as in a high-stakes competition. Because near-flawless peak performances are so rare, students and professional performing musicians are advised not to aim for this degree of perfection with every performance, or they may find themselves frequently disappointed. An optimal experience in which the performer feels secure, comfortable and in control is a desirable and realistic goal, assuming the per-

"You are in an ecstatic state to such a point that you feel as though you almost don't exist. I have experienced this time and again. My hand seems devoid of myself, and I have nothing to do with what is happening. I just sit there watching it in a state of awe and wonderment. And [the music] just flows out of itself."

Some performers may experience a shift in brainwave activity during a flow experience. When one is awake and the mind is active, the beta brainwave (where post-synaptic currents measure approximately 14–30 Hz) is the most active pattern of electrical activity in the brain. While faster beta brainwaves are often associated with feelings of anxiety or separation, the slower beta levels can indicate normal waking, alert concentration. When the

conscious mind is actively engaged in learning a skill or paying attention, such as in focused musical practice, the beta brainwave is active. As the mind and body begin to relax, the brain begins to emit the slower alpha brainwave (8–14 Hz). In this state, a person may experience relaxed

former is well-prepared and the venue offers adequate support. In these situations, a musician may interpret the adrenaline in the body as enthusiasm or excitement rather than fear. Musicians, actors and dancers have described these experiences as being "on," "in the zone" "or an open channel." This mental state in which the performer is completely immersed with a sense of energy, focus, full involvement and feelings of success is referred to as "flow" by eminent psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. He says,

Contrary to what we usually believe...the best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times—although such experiences can also be enjoyable, if we have worked hard to attain them. The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something that we *make happen.*¹²

focus, a light trance state or mild drowsiness. During an optimal performance experience, where one may feel alert but relaxed, musicians sometimes describe the type of mild trance created by alpha brainwaves. When we close our eyes to block out light and visual stimuli, we immediately induce slower alpha brainwaves and a sense of mild relaxation, and it is interesting to observe how often a performer will involuntarily close her eyes during a performance. In fact, we slip into this altered state of consciousness several times a day, when we are daydreaming, absorbed in a good book or movie, enthralled by a computer game, or driving on a dull or unchanging highway. Anyone can purposefully induce an altered state by practicing meditation, yoga, creative visualization or progressive relaxation exercises. When the alpha brainwave is active, the critical conscious mind is often subdued, and we are able to access the subconscious mind more readily. If a performer regularly engages in a practice that encourages alpha

brainwaves, it makes sense that he may learn skills that will help him access a flow state of consciousness while on stage. Mindfulness meditation and creative visualization are two of the most beneficial mental skills a performer can cultivate offstage.

Mindfulness For Musicians

When translated directly from Sanskrit, the word *mindfulness* means simply "awareness." In our culture, the term usually refers to the intentional direction of attention, without judgment, to the present moment. Despite the apparent simplicity of this concept, it is worth noting that it is extremely rare for people in Western culture to practice mindfulness during a regular workday. Much of what we do is performed by the body while the mind is elsewhere, perhaps multitasking, or perhaps dwelling on something in the past or in the future. The proliferation of personal computers, wireless devices and other gadgets has made functioning on "auto-pilot" the norm rather than the exception. Directing the attention to a focal point in the present is easy to experience but much more difficult to put into regular practice. As an example, you might experiment with a simple mindfulness practice as you read this paragraph. You could choose to become gen-

tly but wholly aware of the bottoms of your feet. We don't normally direct our attention to our feet, but as you read this you may simply observe how the feet are positioned and how they feel in general. Observe whether or not you shifted them at all during the last two sentences, if you can feel the contact points between your foot and your sock (or stocking or shoe or floor), if you can become aware of the edges of your big toe, your smallest toe,

the back of your heel, the sides of your ankle. Does your arch come into contact with any other surface, or do you feel a space between your arch and your shoe? Can you feel the tingling of circulation in places you normally might not notice? Are you able to observe and accept these sensations and your thoughts about them without judgment?

While noticing your feet may have been quite easy, even mildly entertaining, the greatest challenge for most people is learning to observe *without judgment*. High achievers, such as performing musicians, struggle especially with extraneous thoughts and inner judgments stemming from the critical conscious mind. Even in the simple exercise in foot awareness, a critical conscious mind may have offered any number of peripheral thoughts: "Gee, my feet are tense," "I need new socks," "This is sort of dumb," "I bet I'm not even doing it right," "Do I smell French fries?" The Buddhists refer to this phenomenon as "monkey mind," and the first lesson is that it is impossible to tame monkey mind... all we can do is observe and acknowledge it. The second lesson, I suppose, is that we actually experi-

"What a liberation to realize that the 'voice in my head' is not who I am. Who am I, then? The one who sees that."

—Eckhart Tolle

ence two concurrent points of observation: the subject itself (a foot) and one's own thoughts about that subject. If you choose to try the exercise again, focusing this time on another part of the body (the scalp is a good subject), take a full minute to pay attention not only to the subtle and detailed physical sensations, but also to the stream of thoughts that accompanies you. The purpose of mindfulness practice is not to control the thoughts,

but simply to notice them without getting caught up in them. In putting a subtle distance between our experience and our thoughts about the experience, we can become a detached observer of mental activity. In the words of Bhante Gunaratana, "There is a difference between being aware of a thought and thinking a thought."¹³

Musicians will find it quite easy to make a connection between the mindfulness activity described above and a typical performance experience. As we perform, we strive to direct our thoughts to each musical moment as we create it. Yet the continuous stream of thoughts in the back of our mind may offer salient or unwanted opinions and critiques of recent mistakes or slips, or offer apprehension about difficult passages to come. What if we were able to stay focused in the present moment, and accept without judgment every note, regardless of its beauty or even its accuracy? What if we were able to acknowledge mistakes, even big ones, with noncritical awareness, always redirecting our attention back to the music itself? The beautiful irony is that, although mindfulness practice during performance can be challenging, music exists only in the present moment. If we fret over a past mistake or worry about an upcoming passage, we are not fully experiencing the sound of music that exists only *now*. Some might acknowledge it is the same with life itself. As long as we are preoccupied with the past or focused on the future, we are not experiencing life as we know it in this moment.

Most mindfulness practices have their roots in Eastern contemplative traditions, some of which were introduced to Americans during the counterculture of the 1960s. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a pioneer of the therapeutic practice of mindfulness in the United States, founded the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in 1979. The positive effects of Zinn's mindfulness programs have been documented for many years and include a decrease in blood pressure, diminished respiratory rate, lower pulse rate, diminished oxygen consumption, improved immune function, reduced suffering for patients with chronic pain, improvements in symptoms of anxiety and panic disorders, and an overall improved sense of wellbeing. In the last few decades, the popularity of various Buddhist authors such as Thich Nhat Hanh, Jack Kornfield, Pema Chödrön, and the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet has stimulated Western interest in the practice of mindfulness. Perhaps not surprisingly, recent branches of psychotherapy (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy) have incorporated contemplative traditions into clinical therapy practices. The Mind and Life Institute, founded by the Dalai Lama, strives to promote wellbeing by fostering discourse to find common ground between contemplative traditions and scientific inquiry.

Qualities of Mindfulness	
► Non-judging	
► Acceptance	
► Patience	
► Beginner's mind	
► Trust	
► Non-striving	
► Letting go	

When used for stress reduction and anxiety management in Western culture, most mindfulness practices are based on Buddhist *vipassanā* ("insight") meditation. This type of practice emphasizes moment-to-moment awareness, paying attention to events and thoughts that would normally go unnoticed, becoming a detached observer of one's own

thought processes and having no goal except to observe. It seems apparent that these goals would be particularly helpful to students of the 21st century who are chronically over-stimulated, engaged in multitasking through a variety of media, distracted, exhausted and exhibiting stress-related illnesses at younger and younger ages. I sometimes make it a point to watch the students at my university walk to their classes; more often than not they are talking on the phone, texting or listening to music as they walk unaware through a beautiful tree-lined campus on the Mississippi River. The act of turning off electronic media and music and simply observing the sights and sounds of one's surroundings is an excellent mindfulness exercise. In the words of William James, the father of American psychology, "The education of attention would be an education par excellence."¹⁴

Furthermore, most students do not have the opportunity to experience silence of any kind during their waking hours. The irony is many who would benefit greatly from silent contemplation are performing musicians.

Meditation Practice

We can make a subtle distinction between mindfulness (awareness) and the practice of meditation.

While many would rightfully argue the two are often one in the

same, the term meditation is often used to describe the practice of using contemplation to train the mind for a specific focus, for example to cultivate mindfulness. It is worth noting that mindfulness meditation is not the only form of meditation, and that meditation does not need to occur while sitting cross-legged on a cushion amidst a cloud of

incense smoke. Almost any activity can be done meditatively, and in fact, walking meditations have inspired people from a number of cultures to create vast labyrinths. For performers suffering from stress or anxiety, the most effective and therapeutic way to practice mindfulness is through short sitting meditations. I believe, for beginning meditators, 10 minutes is a good time limit for meditation practice. In fact, 10 minutes of focused, mindful awareness can be extremely difficult to do!¹⁵ The goal of practice should not necessarily be to increase the sitting time, but to practice every day if possible.

Find a relatively quiet spot where you will not be disturbed. (For dorm-dwelling college students, this can be a challenge. I sometimes suggest the campus chapel, arboretum or library study room.) It is my opinion that the best seated position should be the most comfortable position, because if the body is uncomfortable, the discomfort will be the primary focus of attention.¹⁶ Try sitting in a comfortable chair, or on a cushion or blanket. I don't advise meditating in a supine position, because the sudden urge to fall asleep can easily overcome any tired musician. The eyes should ideally be closed or directed downward, and the body should be as relaxed as

possible while still remaining upright. The mantra "relaxed body, alert mind" may seem familiar

"When there is silence, one finds the anchor of the universe within oneself."

—Tao Te Ching

to a performer. Breathe normally, without trying to control or regulate the breath. Anything can be the point of focus in mindfulness meditation (remember that we began with our feet), and in this sort of meditation, the breath is the easiest and most effective point of focus. You may choose to focus on a physical location in your body where you feel

each inhale or exhale (the tip of the nose, the back of the throat), you may count each inhale and/or each exhale (start over with one once you reach five), you may focus on the subtle moment in which an inhale becomes an exhale and vice-versa, you may listen to the quiet stillness in between breath cycles...the possibilities are endless. At the same time, see if you can observe every thought as it arises, without judgment. Simply acknowledge the presence of each thought, then gently put it aside. You can give yourself permission to think about it later. If your mind wanders, and it will, observe that without judgment, and return your attention to the breath.

Variations on a Theme of Breathing

- » Breathe naturally from the diaphragm, observing but not controlling the breath.
- » See if you can watch the breath become slightly deeper, slower and quieter.
- » Count each exhale from 1–5 then start over again.
- » Imagine the breath cycle beginning on the *exhale* instead of the inhale.
- » Observe the moment the exhale becomes an inhale, and the inhale becomes an exhale.
- » Identify the moments of stillness ("the gap") at the end of each inhale and/or exhale.

Current research suggests that the psychological wellness of performers, particularly in the area of anxiety management, can be improved through practice of mindfulness meditation.¹⁷ One study in particular posits that a connection may exist between meditation practice and the overall quality of the performance.¹⁸ Psychologists at one university discovered that taking breaks in a natural environment improved attention capture,

memory and the ability to concentrate in students.¹⁹ In this study, college students were given a list of words to memorize, were asked to walk for one hour in either the campus arboretum or in downtown Ann Arbor, Michigan, then were tested on how many words they could recall from the list. Researchers discovered that the group of students who took a walk in the campus arboretum outperformed the other groups on the memory test. Surprisingly, students who simply viewed a *photograph* of a serene natural environment also outperformed their peers, suggesting an image of nature can have the same effect on attention. It is possible a quiet, natural environment (even one suggested by a photograph) encouraged a state of reflective mindfulness in these students.

Additionally, in a study of Chinese students, meditation training led to improvement in memory function as well as reduced anxiety, stress, depression, fatigue and levels of the stress hormone cortisol.²⁰ According to attention restoration theory, sustained mental effort produces fatigue and leads to a reduction in systemic glucose. Attention-state training techniques, such as mindfulness meditation, replenish glucose supply, which improves performance.²¹ Most would agree that the gentle process of focusing the mind would make it easier for a performer to quiet the critical conscious mind, paving the way to positive flow experiences.

Meditation in Western Practice

- » Engaging in moment-to-moment awareness
- » Paying attention to thoughts and events that would usually go unnoticed
- » Becoming a detached observer of one's own mental activity
- » Having no goal except to be oneself

Csikszentmihalyi's belief that flow states and the quality of life depend on a person's ability to control what happens in his or her consciousness is, to this author, similar to the practice of observing and directing the thoughts in mindfulness meditation. While the goal of mindfulness is not to control one's thoughts, a performer who practices meditation can learn to consciously direct her awareness at will, rather than being at the mercy of what happens to catch her attention while on stage. In Csikszentmihalyi's words, "Since what we experience *is* reality, as far as we are concerned, we can transform reality to the extent that we influence what happens in consciousness."²² Most well-prepared musicians do not need to struggle to remember their music or the technique required to perform well while on stage. Often they simply need to be able to focus their concentration and gently direct their awareness to the art of expressing themselves through their music. One final tool that can powerfully influence performance quality is the art of creative visualization.

Creative Visualization

Mental imagery, when used to enhance performance, requires a different set of skills than meditation. Both benefit from a quiet space, a relaxed body, the ability to concentrate and a

small but consistent time commitment from the performer. However, these skills

train different parts of the brain in different but equally beneficial ways. Because of this, I suggest musicians who are interested in

developing the two skills attempt to keep the practices separate. A short meditation practice can be 10 minutes of consciously observing the breath and thoughts, for example, while creative visualization will ideally require a longer period of time (15–30 minutes) and a specific plan of focus. If mindfulness is non-judgmental awareness in its simplest form, with no goal other than pure observation, creative visualization should be a very precisely controlled and goal-oriented activity.²³ One will observe the thoughts during meditation, but guide the thoughts during a visualization exercise.

Athletes have known for decades that visualization enhances performance, and the same is true for performing artists. The essence of creative visualization is to focus the imagination on a specific objective with the intention of achieving it. We have known for many years that the brain and nervous system cannot distinguish between an event that was intensely imagined and one that actually occurred.²⁴ When a person is clearly visualizing a series of movements, whether an athletic routine or a musical performance, the nerve cells involved in moving those muscles are stimulated. In other words, if a student closes his eyes and visualizes an exhilarating and successful performance each night before bed, his mind and body believe it actu-

ally happened. Since that which preoccupies our thoughts tends to become our reality, it would make sense that repeatedly worrying about possible mistakes (or even worse, fantasizing about specific worst-case scenarios on

stage) could program the mind and body with *that* reality. The important thing is to focus on a positive, realistic, desired outcome.

"Imagination is not an empirical or superadded power of consciousness, it is the whole of consciousness as it realizes its freedom."

—Jean-Paul Sartre

Like meditation, yoga and deep breathing exercises, creative visualization can bring about an altered state of consciousness and positive physical and psychological health benefits. I should mention it is important for teachers, especially, to be aware that a minority of people experience great difficulty in creating and holding a mental picture in their minds. These students can sometimes become frustrated, and will offer feedback such as "I can't 'see' it" or "I'm not a visual person." Almost always, though, these people can use other senses to mentally feel, hear or sense their imagined surroundings. In fact, utilizing more than just the visual sense can bring about a richer and more vivid experience for anyone. Children, who often live in a world of make-believe, can be very open to and successful with creative visualization.

To create a successful visualization experience, begin as you would a sitting meditation, with a quiet, private location, a comfortable seated position, closed eyes, and mindful attention to the breath. The mind will be more open to the exercise if the body is comfortable and relaxed, so it would help to gradually release the large muscles of the shoulders, arms, legs and abdomen. Take a few minutes to settle in and relax before you imagine yourself at your next performance venue. I suggest beginning the activity by visualizing an off-stage location where you will be waiting before the performance. This might be a dressing room, practice room, green room or standing backstage ready to perform. In your mind, look around at your surroundings, observing as much vivid detail as possible. You might draw your attention to the colors or textures of the walls or floor, the objects or people around you, or even your own shoes and performance attire. Once you have engaged these visual images, see if you can recreate the sounds of the venue (audience members talk-

ing, an orchestra tuning), the possible physical sensations (temperature of the venue, whether or not you are holding music or an instrument) and your own emotions. If you normally wrestle with performance anxiety, I believe it is important to create a *realistic* visualization experience that your subconscious mind will accept. For example, it may be unlikely that you will feel completely calm, confident and jitter-free at this moment, but this is the time to manipulate your imagined feelings so the adrenaline in your body feels more like enthusiasm, excitement or eagerness. You can imagine that you are surprised to find that you are actually eager to go out onstage to perform, or that you are in a great mood, laughing and joking with a colleague backstage. You could also imagine that underneath the energy and excitement, you feel a peaceful core of confidence and security within you.²⁵ Using first-person observations such as "I know I am well-prepared, and I am excited to perform this wonderful music for my friends," can be extremely effective.

When it is time for you to perform, imagine in great detail the sights and sensations involved in walking out onstage, hearing the applause, feeling the warm stage lights, bowing or whatever you may expect. As you begin to perform, visualize a best-possible optimal experience. You may choose to imagine that you find yourself performing with great ease or a sense of security and confidence, or that you feel connected to this audience and/or this music, or that you are able to let go enough to enjoy what you have to communicate to others. If you struggle with specific fears or physical symptoms ("I hope my hands don't start shaking!"), try to reframe those as an expected positive outcome ("I am pleased to notice that my hands are quiet and relaxed"). It has been my experience that, in most situations, it would be best

not to imagine yourself playing or singing each note of a piece (or the entire program) from beginning to end. First of all, unless you are performing for only five minutes or shorter, that degree of intense concentration can be mentally fatiguing. Also, if you happen to forget a note or part of a measure in your visualization, that event can engage the critical conscious mind and induce the very stress or anxiety you want to avoid. While I believe mental practice should be an essential part of performance preparation, I suggest that exercises in memory and security should be kept separate from exercises for flow experiences and performance anxiety management.

You may choose to end your visualization by imagining the sounds of enthusiastic applause from the audience, and perhaps greeting friends and colleagues after the performance. For many performers, this is a time when those inner critics are most active, weighing and evaluating the quality of the performance. For that reason, you might imagine the positive responses from those in attendance (and believe me, it is perfectly fine to exaggerate your imagined impact on these audience members)! Imagine the excitement and satisfaction you feel afterward, how pleased you were with your ability to remain focused and confident, and how grateful you are for the opportunity to perform music for others. In a creative visualization activity such as this, the specific points of focus will differ from person to person and from performance to performance. Nevertheless, here are a few suggestions I have found to be effective for both students and professional musicians:

- ▶ Transforming nervous energy into positive anticipation and enthusiasm.
- ▶ Cultivating feelings of safety and security, both onstage and off.
- ▶ Feeling in control yet free enough to let go.
- ▶ Releasing specific physical tensions.
- ▶ Releasing the need to "prove" oneself on stage.
- ▶ Separating self-value from performance quality.
- ▶ Embracing the unknown with positive expectation.
- ▶ Focusing on communicating something special or unique.

As with any practice technique, it is essential that teachers first become familiar with any mental or contemplative practice they wish to try with a student.

Conclusion

Awareness is the very root of human experience. Truthfully, one of the greatest abilities possessed by humans is that of meta-cognition. We are the only animals on earth who can observe our own thinking and who can deliberately change the direction of our awareness if we wish. In fact, each moment we choose to devote ourselves to something, and we do so with our awareness. Just as we

can cultivate the ability to perform a rapid arpeggio or read complex music notation at sight, we can train the mind to be a powerful tool for good psychological health. If the

mind and body work together to create optimal performance experiences for musicians, I believe the majority of performers neglect much of the training of the mind in favor of repetitive practice at their instruments.

***If you want the tree to grow, it won't help to water the leaves.
You have to water the roots.***

—Thich Nhat Hanh

Consider that we have about 100 billion brain cells at our disposal and more possible neural connections in one human brain than atoms in the entire universe. If these neural connections can be built up through repetition or broken down through neglect, we can train our mind as easily as we can train our fingers and voices.

Carl Jung believed that wholeness is achieved by integrating the opposites in oneself. If we are able to reconcile Cartesian dualism ("one mind + one body") with the holistic concept of embodied cognition ("one multi-dimensional self"), it might not be such a stretch to reconcile other opposites in the art of music performance. In using contemplative practices such as mindfulness meditation, we are joining the outer world of physical technique and the personality with the inner world of the silent observer. Or, perhaps we are uniting the Western world of competition and achievement ("doing") with traditional Eastern philosophies of awareness and acceptance ("being"). This sort of integrated teaching could be the very essence of music pedagogy in this new millennium.



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15. Obtaining a meditation timer with a pleasant or subtle alarm sound is much easier than it used to be. Some of the available online meditation timers and free or inexpensive smartphone apps are excellent.
16. It is worth mentioning that discomfort can be an invaluable tool for keeping the awareness centered on the physical body in the present moment. The same is true of a distracting noise, such as a barking dog or a neighbor's stereo. One can practice acknowledging the sensation or noise without attaching a quality or judgment to it, and one has ample opportunity to observe the plethora of thoughts accompanying the distraction.
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21. S. Kaplan (1995), The restorative benefits of nature: toward an integrative framework. *Journal of environmental psychology* 15(3), 169–182
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23. The degree of clear and pre-determined goals distinguishes visualization from daydreaming.
24. M. Maltz (1960), *Psycho-cybernetics*, Prentice-Hall, Inc.
25. If you are a very visual person who enjoys abstractions, you might wish to imagine what this confident and serene "core" looks like, and where it is located in your body. You could choose a symbol that is meaningful to you, and return to it each day as a visual anchor. One of my friends imagines a magical Pandora's box, full of miracles and possibilities. Another imagines that her core is the trunk of a young willow tree, strong and deeply rooted, yet flexible and yielding.



Vanessa Cornett-Murtada,
NCTM, is the director of keyboard studies at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she teaches piano and piano pedagogy. She has published papers in the Journal of Undergraduate Neuroscience Education and Cultural Politics and book chapters in the fourth edition of Creative Piano Teaching. A certified hypnotherapist, she specializes in the treatment of performance anxiety for musicians. Her current research focuses on mindfulness and the nature of human consciousness in the performing arts.

Online Resources

- www.meditationcenter.com
- www.mindfulness.org.au/InAction.htm
- marc.ucla.edu
- www.mindfullivingprograms.com
- contemplativemind.org
- www.mindandlife.org
- www.soundstrue.com

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Empowering The Whole Musician Mind And Body For A More Musical Tomorrow

Suggested Musician Wellness Resources

Books

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- Whitcomb, Benjamin."Overcoming Performance Anxiety," *American String Teacher* November 2008 p36–39. (cellist)

Websites

Annotated Bibliography on Musician Wellness—written and compiled by Linda Cockey with the assistance of librarian Kathryn Kalmanson. www.mtna.org

Performing Arts Medical Association—contains a member resource directory, information about the journal *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, resource on performing medicine organizations, clinics, arts organizations and other related materials. www.artsmed.org/

The Well Balanced Pianist—describes a holistic mind/body approach to teaching and playing based on the Taubman method, Don Greene's psychological techniques, Alexander Technique, and other strategies for musician health. www.wellbalancedpianist.com/

Pianomap—an excellent introduction to the concept of body mapping for enhancing performance and preventing injuries. Maintained by Thomas Mark (*What Every Pianist Needs to Know about the Body*). www.pianomap.com

Piano Wisdom—a holistic approach to improving performance and preventing injuries by engaging body and mind in piano performance. Click on “video” for films demonstrating each of the seven points in this system. <http://pianowisdom.wordpress.com/>

“Musicians and Their Health Care,” a special report, available as a PDF file at <http://www.musicalamerica.com/>

The Bullet Proof Musician—a website by performance psychologist and violinist Noa Kageyama who worked with Don Greene and currently teaches at Juilliard. The purpose of this website is to teach musicians how to overcome stage fright, performance anxiety, and other blocks to peak performance. <http://www.bulletproofmusician.com/>

Joshua Bell plays Beethoven’s Violin Concerto in D, Op. 51—watch how Bell’s whole body is engaged in the performance. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhSRneJ_INI&t=1s

Databases

ERIC education database; covers music pedagogy from childhood to adult.

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/>

PubMed from National Library of Medicine; finds articles in medical journals.
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/>

Annotated Bibliography on Musician Wellness sponsored by MTNA; covers books and websites.
<http://www.mtna.org/member-resources/annotated-bibliography-on-musician-wellness/>

Google Scholar finds articles in scholarly journals. <http://scholar.google.com/>

For more information

Linda E. Cockey, NCTM
 Dept. of Music
 Salisbury University
 Salisbury, MD 21801
 lecockey@salisbury.edu

Kathryn C. Kalmanson
 Blackwell Library
 Salisbury University
 Salisbury, MD 21801
 kckalmanson@salisbury.edu

Linda Cockey, NCTM, is professor of music at Salisbury University in Maryland, where she has taught with a psychologist and athletic trainer a wellness course for more than 15 years that focuses on teaching techniques for peak performance and injury prevention. She began working on the “Annotated Bibliography On Musician Wellness” for MTNA in 1997, annually updating this valuable online database into the pedagogical research tool it is today. She has presented her research as a member of the wellness committee for the National Keyboard Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy and has given presentations at the Hoff-Barthelson Music School, Scarsdale, New York, the 2003 Maryland State Music Teacher’s State Convention and MTNA’s 2003 National Conference in Salt Lake City.



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Cincinnati, OH 45202-3004
Phone: (513) 421-1420 or
(888) 512-5278 • Fax: (513) 421-2503
mtnanet@mtna.org • www.mtna.org

Gary L. Ingle, Executive
Director & CEO
ext. 226
gingle@mtna.org

Marge Bengel
Senior Deputy Executive Director
ext. 229
mbengel@mtna.org

Brian Shepard
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Deputy Executive Director
for Resource Development
ext. 241
bshepard@mtna.org

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Member Development Associate
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mcurtice@mtna.org

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Director of Membership Processing
ext. 230
edonaldson@mtna.org

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Member Services Associate
ext. 242
rkkramer@mtna.org

Marcie Gerriets Lindsey
Director of Publishing
ext. 234
mlindsey@mtna.org

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Communications Associate
ext. 231
toconnell@mtna.org

Brian Pieper
Graphic Designer
bpieper@mtna.org

Tonya Schauer
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ext. 245
tschauer@mtna.org

Chad Schwalbach
Marketing and Public Relations Associate
ext. 232
cschwalbach@mtna.org

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Bookkeeper
ext. 228
pstites@mtna.org

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MTNA National Headquarters
441 Vine St., Ste. 3100
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(888)512-5278
gingle@mtna.org

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2200 Groesbeck Ave.
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(517) 485-1363
ascheri@msu.edu
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Scott Beard, NCTM
414 Kidwiler Rd.
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(304) 876-5370
sbeard@shepherd.edu
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604 Lilac
Rexburg, ID 83440
(208) 390-0439
id_maestro@yahoo.com
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Cheryl Norman, NCTM
1090 N. 100 E.
American Fork, UT 84003
(801) 756-3112
cherylnorman.nctm@gmail.com
Southwest Division

Mary Katherine Sallee, NCTM
2721 Tropicana Ave.
Norman, OK 73071
(405) 447-1370
mksallee@cox.net
South Central Division

Timothy Shook, NCTM
457 N. Fountain
Wichita, KS 67208
(316) 651-0177
timothy.shook@sckans.edu
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Martha L. Thomas, NCTM
155 Knob Lick Dr.
Athens, GA 30605
(706) 546-0563
mlthomas@uga.edu
Southern Division

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Bozeman, MT 59715
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kjcincmt@aol.com

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801 Driftwood Dr.
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(402) 488-0718
jreist1@unl.edu

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80907-7820
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j.norden@sbcglobal.net

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