

notes on
EMBODIED PLAYING®

and FULL BODY SCALES® for instrumentalists
across all musical genres

by Maxine Heppner

first developed at Sharpley Sonic Designs

Singapore, October 2016

Contact: info@acrossoceans.org for private and group sessions

EMBODIED PLAYING

and Full-Body Scales© • for instrumentalists

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Full-Body Scales ©

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Hello Moving Musicians:

Here are a FEW Notes on the CONCEPTS from our October 2016 sessions.

This is not comprehensive but I thought having some of the concepts and exercises written down might assist you in integrating the work we did together into your own work.

All the best,

Maxine

(at Dr. J. Sharpley's Sonic Design, Singapore Oct 2016)

CONCEPTS for Embodied Playing

Three regions of my musical world:

The literal Playing of music - when I cause the sound of the music to come out of my instrument - is the middle region of my world of music. To one side is my **Physical Self**, to the other side is the **Sound (Music)** created through my playing of the **Musical instrument** (e.g. piano).

Just as with the middle instrument (e.g. piano), I practice my first instrument, my physical self, to achieve maximum mobility within the musical world I have put myself in.



THE MOST BASIC SCALE in this practice is ROLLING activating *all aspects of my physical self*.
By circling hips, knees, torso, etc. I *identify and mobilize* muscles and bones.
By swinging limbs I identify *roots of action*. And before this is...

THE MOST BASIC AWARENESS - Conscious breath opens my interior and tunes me to the inner intangible parts of my physical self.

Awareness of the soles of my feet in relation to the palms of my hands while I am doing my conscious breathing establishes a sense of *soft power*, and useful especially when doing complex actions (playing).

For our purposes we are considering **OUR PHYSICAL SELF** in regards to **Skin** (and all things related to skin)

Bones

Muscles

Breath

Senses

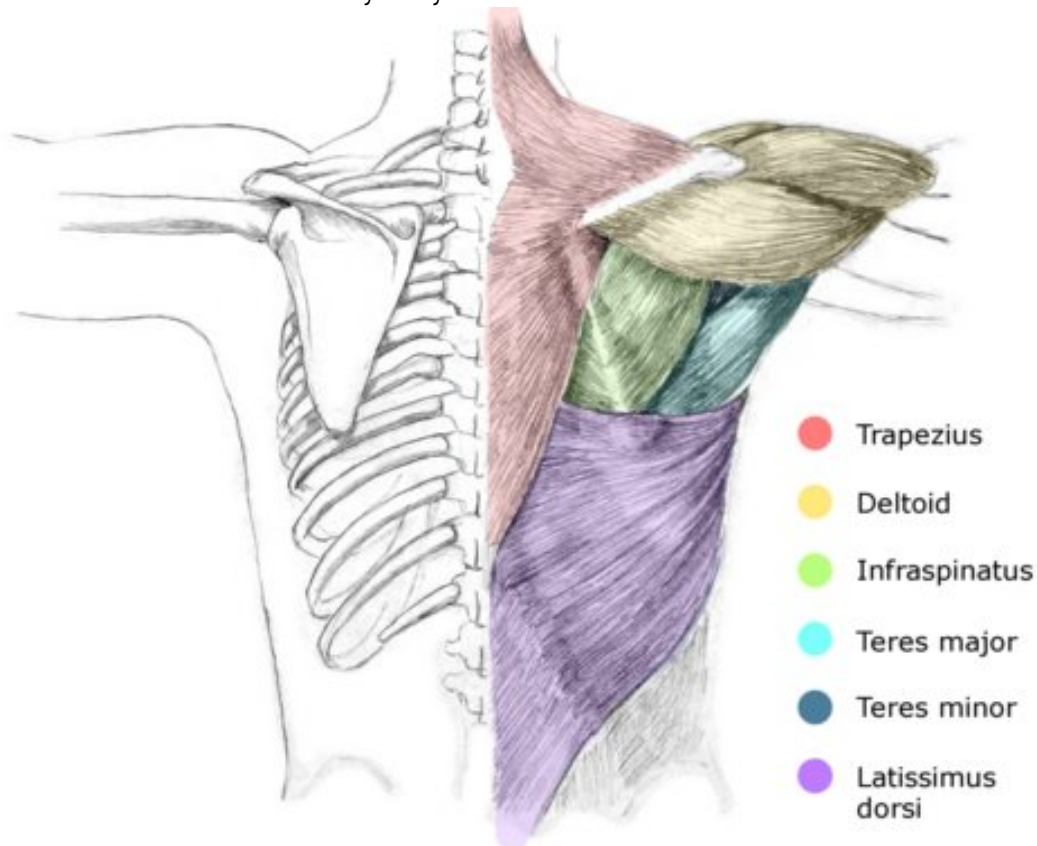
Energetic sources (connects with concepts of Flow)

Our Thinking self > intellect: manager: analyser: general

mind: sensor: perceiver: interpreter: grassroots organizer

SEEING and FEELING are parts of skin/eyes and thinking self.

EVERY **ACTION** is **rooted** within my body. All Actions are INTERCONNECTED and CO-DEPENDENT.



ENERGETIC SOURCES may reside at the point of the *root of the action* (actual biological spot) or may spark elsewhere in my body. **The impulse** (spark) always begins within my actual physical self. My thoughts are part of my physical self.

It is the energetic spark that causes action, the resulting FLOW of ENERGY causes action/movement and it always emanates beyond my skin/edges.

This emanating energy if directed through fingers causes the piano keys to move. Energy also emanates out through the porous skin of my whole body. I believe that this is what we sometimes call “strong stage presence”.

The FLOW of energy is ever present however it is not constant.

Flow is constantly shifting in consistency, dynamic, speed, direction, power, volume, etc. etc.

It can override all other aspects of action; it can be blocked, harnessed, channeled...like the water of a river...



ALL ACTION HAS MULTIPLE FACETS that simultaneously make the action what it is. Some are tangible some intangible.

MATERIAL PHYSICAL SELF/ INTANGIBLE PHYSICAL SELF

Skins, bones, muscles, breath are tangible facets of my physicality.

My breath makes it possible to sense the more intangible inner physical self.

My sensations come from intangible processes that I suggest we don't have to concern ourselves with. But my/your SENSES are CRITICAL to being in this world, and to creating, playing, interpreting, receiving/hearing music.

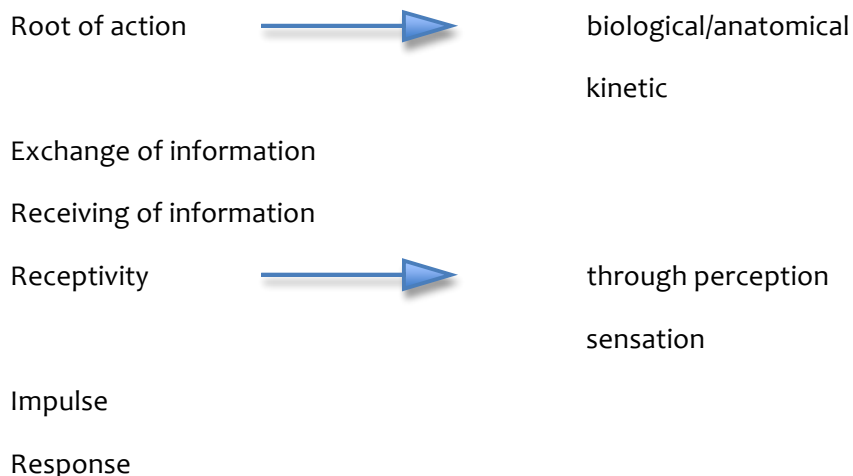
ALL ACTION is SEQUENTIAL

Example: To walk I do not move my foot in isolation from the rest of my body. There is a sequence of actions that results in the movement to step and then stand on my foot in order to move forward. The action may start in my hip, or my middle back or even my neck. Then there are sequential actions from that beginning place that make it possible me to lift my foot.

Example: We circled our shoulders and arms. Then I coached each one of you to move your arm from a mobile shoulder blade, eventually you were able to perceive the area on your spine where your shoulder blades attach to the spine. Then you practiced unfolding your arms to be outstretched sideways Beginning from the attachment point at your spine, then bit by bit moving your shoulder blade sideways, then your shoulder bone, forearm, elbow, lower arm, wrist, hand, fingers, finger tips....

Example: In the long series of rolling exercises, you were practicing sequential action: pushing on part into the floor, moving another and another to be able to push another into the floor...etc etc...

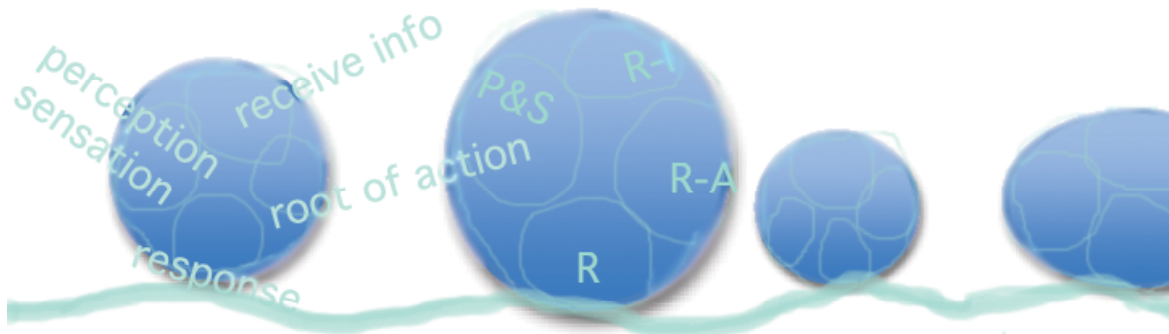
ACTION-INTERACTION-EXCHANGES (when it goes well we call it communication)
within ourselves, between each other, between me and the medium for my expression



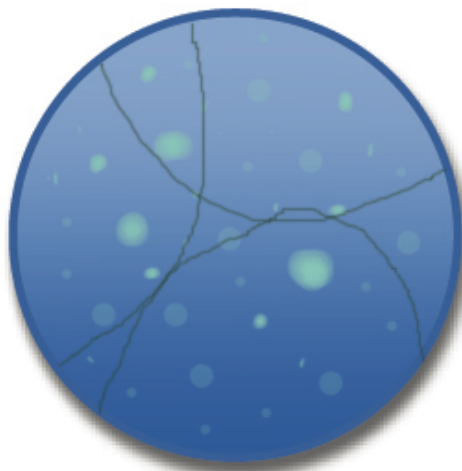
EXCHANGE: CIRCULARITY and INFINITE INTERSECTING PATTERNS

This can also be viewed as circular exchanges with “Response” being the fulcrum for the exchanges. The green line is the energetic continuity between moments of action.

In our full-day session we put our conscious breathing on that pathway and I asked you to practice the open breathing as something you are doing simultaneous to the exchanges and yet not in direct coordination.... just as one hand often is independent of the other when playing the piano.

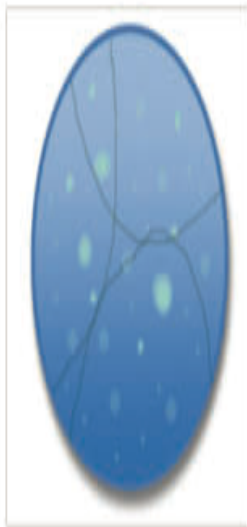
**AWARENESS : Focus**

I accept that at any one moment the range of my awareness will encompass only part of my world. Through practice I widen my range of awareness and my ability to hold many things in my primary and secondary attentions. I accept that everything in my world is mobile. So my awareness must be at ease with constantly scanning and shifting and attending.



SIMULTANEOUS AND SHIFTING AWARENESS OF

How I am sitting. Depth of breath. Many details of the playing - from physical techniques of fingers to timings, rhythms, cadence, structures, to the notes themselves, to the subtleties of attention. Fatigue. A thought. The feel of the keys. My foot, which part exactly? pressing the pedal. The vibrations of the instrument. Elbows. Lower back. Fast breath. Always activating the keys, the strings. The vibrations. The sound of the music. BREATH continuously opening my inner self to be receptive to the whole. The sound of the music. Respond to the whole. A detail pulls at me. Respond. response to what I am hearing, perceiving, doing, responding. The music.

ATTENTION and FOCUS includes

The way I look.
The way I perceive.
How I perceive.

focus
see

Range of awareness
shifts un & consciously.

Within each range there will be
primary / secondary attentions

FULL-BODY SCALES © SIMPLE PRACTICE TO DO AT HOME

The only wrong is to not do it at all.
The only right is that you are doing it in an ongoing way.
Everything else is in the details.

Maxine Heppner



General Approach:

Try to do this physical practice on a regular basis.

Set reasonable goals so that you can easily be successful. We all know too well how easy it is to become frustrated and then discard activities when we have set goals that are not reasonable within the capabilities of our life!

Suggestion 1: Add a mere 3 minutes to your regular music practice. Every time you go to practice your music, choose just one set, or a part of one of the sets and do it for 3 minutes before starting your music practice. 3 minutes is enough to establish the neuro-physical connections needed to develop and maintain what I call “integrated awarenesses”. Next time choose another of the exercises. This circulation of exercises also helps to establish mobility of neuro-physical connections.

Suggestion 2: If you prefer, set a 20 minute time once a week to do the physical practice. This is another proven way to establish the awareness connections. If you are not so good at keeping to your schedule goals, then make “once-a-week” one the same day every week OR just make sure you put the practice in sometime every week but not necessarily on the same day or at the same time. This may give a sense of liberty to your scheduled life!

Suggestion 3: If you already do some kind of physical training (yoga, pilates, football, tennis, tai chi, kick boxing, dancing, etc etc.) consider doing the exercises as a warm-up or cool-down (it could be at home before or after) OR do this practice on days when you are Not doing the other. Other physical activity compliments but does not replace this one, as this is directed to your musical practice.

Although these instructions may seem contradictory in fact the most important thing is to find your own way to build this practice into your musical and personal life. Also your goals can change as your life changes. (E.G. at a heavy school or work time, or holidays you might change your schedule.)

You will notice that each set targets specific kinesthetic and neuro-physical connections. You will notice that each set has its own sense of Time (pacing, pulse, evolving rhythms), use of Force (stretch and strength), use of Attention.

You will notice that at different times you likely prefer to do one set over the others. Please don't fight with yourself. You benefit by doing what you prefer. You also benefit if you say to yourself “hu, today I'll do the one that I don't want to do”. Sometimes it is good to follow your desire. Sometimes it is good to face what you do not like and just do it. Both are good. Both should be practiced.

External circumstances may limit your ability to do the practice. Use your abundant creativity to keep the essence of the practice and adjust what/where you do, to adapt to your environment.

Eventually this is like playing musical scales (or brushing teeth) sometimes enjoyable, sometimes just what it is.

What is under your skin? Take a look at human skeleton to remind you of your boney structures BUT you do not have to be feeling any anatomical “correctness” as you do this practice!



ROLLING

Where:

Do it on a carpet, on a bare floor; can do on a bed but you won't get the same resistance so the exercise may feel comfy but not so clear.

What:

• Rolling: Lie on floor, sense a soft part of your body, press it into the floor, sense another soft part, press it into the floor, adjust your body to positions that make other parts of your body rounded, press into the floor. Large adjustments for changing directions and levels are usually by adjusting from your hips (pelvis), legs (together or separately), and head and shoulders. Remember that the palms of your hands have soft pads, also your feet. Hands and feet are useful for changing positions and also levels (e.g. sitting up, turning).

Once you are feeling the sequential flow from one position to a next add the Pause practice.

• Pause: consciously breathe and notice how in that position your breath goes to a particular part of your torso. Now turn your attention to notice what parts of you are touching the floor. Choose 2 or 3 parts. Press them into the floor. Notice if other parts of your body are doing action that is not necessary for this pressing and stop doing the unnecessary action. Keep pressing. Notice your breath. Keep pressing until the pressing adjusts your body position and causes you to move into action. Continue with the Rolling.

Why:

- Expand range of physical mobility.
- Practice *sequential* moving.
- Continue to develop and maintain stretch and strength in mobile body/mind.
- Practice identifying *impulse sources* and *roots of movement*. (sometimes the same place, not always- the place you choose to press into the floor might be a impulse point, might be a root, or may just be a *catalyst action* to energize the impulse and/or root.)
- Move with even *flow of energy*. Movement may change in rhythm and/or pulse/time but flow is even and constant.
- Practice *noticing* and letting-go of unnecessary action. i.e. doing things that are not directly involved in doing the action (e.g. tension in neck. e.g. on hand stuck up in the air).
- Practice *flexible mind*, a mind that is always in a moment of discovery.
- Rolling like this is a soft and very effective way to do stretching and strengthening of especially internal muscles (the ones you will use when playing music)
- Practice connection of *analytic mind* with *sensing mind*. Finding practical ways to adjust your body (bones, muscles, joints) in order to find ways for your body to be soft to roll-press-massage using the solidity of the floor uses both analysis and sensing.
- Practice using peripheral sensing to navigate safely in the space.
- Practice being *aware and engaging simultaneously*: 1. your full physical self (bones, muscles, skin, breath, etc), I'll call it your "*actual self*", with 2. your *internal self* (your breath helps you to perceive non-actual such as the spaces inside you, your temperatures, tastes in your mouth, the vibrations of energy in you, with 3. the *external environment* (such as the hardness of the floor, textures of carpet/clothes, sounds, other people, furniture, smells, etc etc.

TORSO-ARM CIRCLES

Where: standing in a space where you can stretch out both arms

What:

(With moderate speed, sometimes slowly for clarity)

Shoulders: 1. Lift up towards your ears, pull down towards your hip-bone (one side, together, alternating). 2. Circle front to back, (one side, together, alternating) back to front. 3. Right hand touching sternum bone, circle left shoulder starting from sternum. 4. Same on other side. 5. Right hand touching spine between shoulder blades, circle left shoulder starting from that area. 6. Same on other side. 7. Right hand touching right side of middle back beside spine, circle left shoulder starting from that area. Do small circles then exaggerate until whole torso curves forward. 8. Same on other side.

Swimming Arms: Stand with feet about 1.5 metres apart, knees relaxed, arms extended sideways with energy to fingertips and beyond. 1. Practice extending arms from your sternum as root of the movement, from your shoulder blade connection as root of movement, from your middle back as root of movement. 2. Place left hand on your sternum bone. (keep right arm extended). Touching your chest gently draw your left hand to touch your right shoulder continue reaching past your right shoulder and feel the movement moving from your left shoulder blade. With the energized fingers of your left hand reach beyond your left shoulder to draw a half-circle beyond, in front and to your left side. Bend your left arm at your elbow to place your left hand on your sternum. Repeat several times. Do on other side, then alternating sides. 3. Study the spatial patterns of the exercise and invert the directions to be swimming the “other” way.

Energetic Lines: Place the back of both hands on your tailbone. Trace the energetic line from that place through your torso to activate the circles of your shoulder. Start with shoulder action that is extremely tiny and mostly internal, continuing to expand the action until it involves your whole torso curving forward. Sense how the energetic line starts at your tailbone and expands upwards through your spine, and when your torso curves, that energetic line continues to curve forward outside of your torso completing the circular line that connects back at your tailbone. Stand normally between each curve.

Simple Simultaneous Circles: Stand with your feet and knees together. Gently bend your knees. Place each of your hands above corresponding kneecap (you will curve your spine to do this). Move your knees in a circular clockwise direction purposefully having your feet roll with the circling as your body weight shifts in order to do the task. Continue with 10 or 11 circles. Then do the circles in the counter-clockwise direction. Notice how many circles occur in your body simultaneous to the knee circles.

Edges: Standing. Rub your hands together 10-20 times. Stamp your right foot flat on the floor 5 times. Stamp your left foot flat on the floor 5 times. As if you are drying your skin with a towel with swift up-down motion, starting at your feet rub all your body with your hands. Stand still and sense the tingling on your skin and in your body.

Why:

- Practice *connections* of the muscles of your torso to your arms, hands, fingers, beyond.
- Practice knowing the root of an action.
- Practice choosing to *respond* (move/play) from the *root of an action*.
- Practice *mobile strength* in your arms, full torso, spine, hips, legs, feet.
- Practice constant rediscovery of *energetic sources* of action.
- Get energy moving within your body in order to have access to it when playing your music.

BREATH opening (elementary practice)**Where:** Sitting or standing anywhere/everywhere**What:**

Drink a little sip of water. Control the swallowing so that the water is a little stream down your throat. Attend to keeping your throat open so that the water feels as if it is slipping down the inside. Try to relax/keep open the action of swallowing that instinctively occurs at the base of your throat near your voice box.

Breath as water: Breath in through your mouth sending the air as a little stream that slips through your mouth and down your throat, perhaps you will be able to continue this imaging as you breath down upper torso, mid-torso, lower torso, pelvis. (some days yes, some days no)

Breath migrations: Put yourself in an unusual shape. Hold the shape with full strength. Breath consciously. Notice where the air goes inside you. Change your position/shape. Hold the shape with full strength. Notice where the air goes inside you. Repeat 8 or 9 times.

Now put yourself in a shape, breath, feel then stand “normally” and try to send your breath into the place that you felt it when you were in the shape. Repeat this 5 or 6 times.

Now standing or sitting “normally” decide where you want to put your breath (inside you) and try to do it. (Using the experience from the shaping as your guide to unusual places where you normally do not send your breath.)

Breath behind mask: Consider that your face is a mask. Through your nose, Breath in quickly, feeling your nostrils and the coming together of the insides of your nose.

Relax. Through your nose, gently breath, sensing it entering the passageways behind your mask. It may go behind your eyes, behind your cheekbones, towards your ears, towards your jaw, your back teeth. Imagine the air as smoke, a stream of incense, clouds. You may know that you are also sending air into other parts of you while you breath but keep your primary attention on the air as it enters and fills and expands the inside of your mask and skull.

Breath patterns: cycling through interior pathways: You may do this with several inhalation-exhalations. You may be able to do this with one inhalation-exhalation. This is an exercise of accumulation. Try to keep sensations accumulating as you cycle your breath through your body.

Breathe into and behind your mask. Sense the “smoke” inside your skull caressing or pressing your skull bones from the inside. Swirl the smoke over to and around the topmost vertebrae of your spine (axis of head and neck); continue your breath smoking down and around the vertebrae of your neck to the place where your shoulder blades are connected,

Why:

- Breath is literally a *link* between the outer world that is not me, to *inner spaces* in me that I seldom *perceive* nor pay attention to (unless I am eating or sick).
- By *attending* to the ways that breath enters and exits my body I am *practicing linking the external, inner and material* (body) aspects that all make up where I live. This is an *actual experience* (not philosophical).
- Making different body shapes and holding them while *paying attention* to breath, strengthens muscle, coordination and balancing skills.
- Practicing *extended breathing* by intending it towards different internal spaces frees other aspects of physicality to respond in coordinated and/or *complementary action*.
- Practicing extended breath patterns literally *opens*, stretches and increases *positive mobility* of internal body parts.
- Practicing breath free and independent of other simultaneous actions builds abilities to use it to support and compliment tasks E.G. When I do a difficult task free breath helps. E.G. Sometimes it is useful to coordinate my breath with a task e.g. breath in when I lift my hands, breath out when I push or vice versa; etc. etc.

“Leonardo da Vinci” Energetic lines and connections

Where: In a place with space enough to stretch both arms, stand with legs about 1 metre apart.

What:

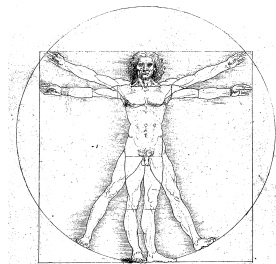
Hands, Feet Energy, Distance: **HANDS:** put the palms of your hands together rub them against each other briskly. When you feel the heat in your palms pull them slightly away from each other to create a space the size of a ping-pong ball. Roll the imaginary ping-pong ball with your palms, imagine it is growing so your palms give it more space by moving away from each other. Feel the ball as an energy ball that grows and shrinks, sometimes causing you to open your hands quite far away from each other, sometimes to bring them quite close. Experiment with how you can move your hands at great distances from one another still feeling their energetic connection.

FEET and HANDS: On a chair or on the floor. Lift one foot into the air or rest your ankle on the knee of your other leg. Similar to the first part of this exercise, try to feel an energy ball between the sole of your foot and the palms of one or both hands. Experiment with changing the distances between your hands/foot while maintaining the sense of an energy connection between them. Do the same with the other foot. You will notice that your abdominals and mid-to-lower-back will be working as they are the muscles groups that stabilize you, making it possible to have your arms and legs free to explore the sensations. (This may be a little difficult depending on your abdominal strength and hip flexibility. If so just do it for a moment.)

ALL: Stand like the Leonardo da Vinci Man with legs strongly apart and arms extended sideways, every limb reaching away from the centre. Try to sense energy lines between hands and feet and also the places in your torso that are stabilizing. Move your 4 points (2 hands 2 feet) in many ways while keeping the energetic distance between them. (Experiment with your elbows and knees straight and bent.) Sometimes points may pass by each other or look like they are close together but still feel far apart.

Tailbone Head Spinal Continuity: This is done laying on the floor or a bed. The floor is always best because it is more solid and therefore more stabilizing, giving you more feedback on what you are doing. But if you are boney or there is no floor to lie on (this could be for many many reasons) just use your bed. Lay down on your back. Relax your legs, hips, arms, shoulders, hands. Roll to one side. Use one hand to scratch the back of your head where your spine is attached (called the Axis). Take your hand away. Sense that place. If you don't feel it yet repeat the scratch-then-sense until you do feel it. Place one of your hand's fingers on your tailbone area. Tickle that area. Stop and sense. Repeat until you can sense clearly. Roll back to your back. Practice moving just your tailbone, (like the tail of a cat), from its tip, curving side-to-side. Feel that when you move from the tip different parts of your spine also move, adjusting to your tailbone's position. Practice moving from the first vertebrae that inserts into your skull (the axis). Feel the spinal movement that results (often the movement is very slight). Now practice a moving your tailbone then your axis in different rhythmic patterns, always noticing the responding movement in your spine. Tailbone moves, axis adjusts and other parts of spine adjust. Axis moves, tailbone adjusts and other parts of spine adjust. Try to do this while also conscious with your internal breath-opening. Then stand and try the spinal movement when standing.

Open Awareness: Four point distance (2 hands, 2 feet) and Spinal Continuity simultaneously: Practice doing simultaneous 5-points and spinal continuity. Practice allowing shifting open awareness.



Full Leonardo Awareness: Practice doing the full awareness with conscious “breath-opening”.

Why:

- To sense *energy within and outside* your physical self.
- To train full-body balancing while in motion.
- To practice continuity of energized action.
- To sense *positive interdependence* of movement/action of different parts of your body.
- To practice positive interdependence
- To *continuously re-discover* how your body, your thoughts, your breath, your feelings can go off on their own tracks yet maintain interdependence / connectivity.
- To *expand* your ability to have wider and/or more complex range of action while maintaining awareness of energetic lines.
- To practice complex actions with full awareness of *wonderful complexity* of what you are doing (This includes feeling/sensing/perceiving/thinking.)
- To practice accepting that at any moment you likely can only really be aware of a few things at a time.
- To expand range of awareness.



SIMPLIFIED Physical Preparations

(not to replace the Full-Body Scales but sometimes a fast prep is all one can manage)

Before sitting at the piano

1. HANDS

simultaneously

circle hands from wrists

fan fingers out, fan fingers in

shake hands : up and down, side to side, in and out

2. TORSO Lengthening

one side, other side, both simultaneously

reach hand overhead towards ceiling

add shoulders rising

add ribs rising

3. BACK and Torso Stretch and Spiral

one side, other side, both simultaneously

Stand a little more than arms length away from a wall.

reach with hand to touch wall

reach from shoulder to touch wall

reach from elbow to touch wall

reach from upper ribs to touch wall

reach from hips to touch wall

4. Upper BACK release and core strengthening

lying down on your back legs extended long

curl one hand from fingers until fist touches shoulder, rub hand across torso to other side until arm in long,

keep reaching so that you arm pulls you to be lying sideways

from middle back unfold sequentially until you are back to lying flat on your back

5. BREATH

Breathe in through nose, breathe out through nose or mouth.

1st breath fill chest-relax, 2nd breath fill ribs-relax, 3rd breath fill back of ribs-relax,

4th breath fill belly- relax, 5th breath fill lower back-relax

On out-breathe try to feel constant opening inside of body.

Sitting at Piano (before music practice)

6. WITH PHYSICAL AWARENESS

Play Short Sections (musical correctness is secondary importance)

paying attention to the feeling of moving your fingers, fingertips, hands, wrists, shoulders, back, upper arms, forearms, feet, both sides of bum, middle back, backs of legs, back of head.

7. DIRECTING BREATH as in #5

while playing scales, arpeggios, etc.

Keep your breath in it's own timing independent of the music.

Keep the playing in it's own timing independent of your breath.

MASTER CLASS ATTENTIONS

Rooted action: kinesthetic

- All actions made when playing are rooted in skeletal-muscular places in your body.
- Remember and notice and practice: sometimes the root of the action is obvious and has a tangible direct line from the root to the activity; sometimes the root is deeper inside or farther away from the activity.
- Playing in this way develops physical strength, flexibility and clarity of motion leading to increasing physical and mental stamina.

Shaping internal energy

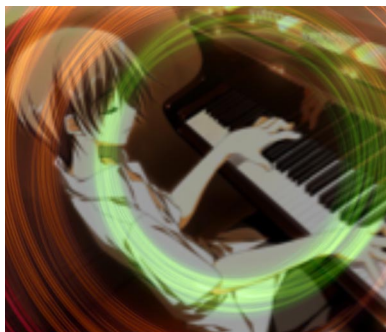
- Through the full-body scales you become adept at recognizing the energetic patterns within you and at channeling your energy to complement the task/action you are doing in ways that are similar to musical harmony.
- Breath is the first entry into this work.
- Extend your physical energetic practice to harmonizing your physical energetic patterns with the music's energetic patterns. Remember that harmony is sometimes but not usually unison. I prefer to consider the patterns as complementary.
- Playing in this way develops multi-dimensional sound and interpretation.

Simultaneous yet independent

- Many simultaneous activities go into the action of playing.
- Identify the grouping of activities. e.g. hands, feet, breath, spine (can be much more detailed).
- Re-discover the root of each grouping. Play from that root (groupings may share same root.)
- Open your awareness to include all simultaneous roots as you play.
- Playing in this way develops multi-dimensional sound and interpretation.

Complementary spheres of action

- Groupings of activities can be further grouped and sensed within spheres of activity.
- Multiple spheres co-exist complementarily and inter-dependent on each other.
- Intangible aspects are also contained in the spheres. e.g. green=energy, vibration, musical details, touch; orange= physical support in back, breath, full composition, perception of whole
- Playing with this awareness engages all aspects of your self towards positive playing.



Playing before lifting a finger

- You know the music, or at least you know the feel of the music.
- First: Hear the music without playing. Maybe it feels like imagining the music inside you. Maybe you hear it in your head. Maybe see the keyboard. Maybe feel the music motion in specific places in your body.
- Then: engage the musical instrument so we can hear the music that is inside you.

NOTES:

Contact:

info@acrossoceans.org to arrange for sessions with Maxine Heppner

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Images are from free open source image banks. Some have been altered to illustrate the notes.

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