



Body, Instrument and Swing, one Unit

By Josefina Paulson

**When the music is moving
When movement is music
Where the beat becomes an impulse to dance
Where every note is a word in a story**

In this article I want to draw attention to the connection between what we hear, what we see and what we emotionally experience when we listen to or play music. Is the music a result of the movement in the body or is the movement a reflection of the music that is played? Is a tapping foot an engine or a bi-product of the music? And how can we use this in learning methods and adult education?

I have chosen to look at the importance of bringing the movement into the musician's body as a musical expression, from both a musical and an ergonomic perspective.

Music and Dancing

In many cultures there is no difference between dancing and making music. The two words go under the same definition because they are considered to be that closely connected. No music, no dancing and why music if there is no dancing to it. That might seem like an extreme way of simplifying the subject, when there are many ways to experience and enjoy music, but it also shows us how obviously connected these two matters are, music and movement, to some people.

In Swedish traditional (folk) music, most of the repertoire for the nyckelharpa is used for dancing. In the Swedish history of





playing this music, there is no percussionist in tradition, the nyckelharpa player needed to have a strong feeling for groove and speed to create a party mood for the dancers asking for the music at weddings, birthdays and different occasions. With this as a background, it is important for me as a musician to have the groove in focus. In my opinion, the groove, the speed and the character of the music is so much easier to understand if you first put it into your body and let your actual body become a part of your instrument.

One Unit

Just like singers carry their instrument in the body, I think all instrumentalists would gain from looking at their body as a part of the actual instrument. The body and the instrument as one unit, where the musician's body is just an extension of the instrument. In the case of the nyckelharpa this could mean to keep a posture that gives the instrument the best way to resonate and to optimise the possibilities for vibrations in the body of the instrument. It might also mean a good way of using the bow hand and the right arm, by placing the elbow as a light and flexible weight over the string holder. Using the right arm in this way, leaves the left hand totally free to run over the keys with ease. A relaxed neck and back, where only the needed muscles in the torso are activated, gives a breathing pattern that puts the body in a calm state. This helps with everything from handling nerves in the moment of action, to an effective and relaxed way of learning, where many students often forget to breathe during a state of high concentration. A well tuned body is as important as a well tuned instrument for creating good music. The better tuned, the more possible it is to express yourself freely in your musical story.

There are different ways of receiving information, some prefer the visual way, others are more kinesthetic-orientated and



some auditory. This means that in the meeting with the audience, from a scenic perspective, the visual way of playing might be of high importance to some of the listeners' way of experiencing the music, that might "hear" the music with their eyes. By using this understanding in your performance you are adding another dimension to your music. That might mean a dancer moving to the music, but it might also be the musician moving, the line of the bow arm, the tapping of feet, or just the pulse reflected in the movement of the body. A movement that is directly connected to the musical experience. A tapping foot, a grooving body, the precision of the muscles in the bowing hand all give detailed information on the same story that the music is telling, when communicated with a responsive audience.

As well as adding another dimension to the music, placing the music in the body by using the movement also creates a sustainable musicianship from an ergonomic point of view. There are lots of keys to achieving this, one is by using the tools from mental training. To try to describe this we use the terms, "the body's fundamental tension", (only the muscular tension that is needed for the actual situation) adding the "tension of the situation" (the additional tension that takes place for example in a nervous situation) gives the "current tension for this specific situation" When movement is allowed in the musician's body, locked joints, static muscular tension are automatically avoided. By doing this scanning of your body, you gain the knowledge of this actual situation and that makes it possible to know what to work with.

In my work as a musician, with my background in mental training and as a yoga instructor, I see how many aspects and tools from these subjects would be of great importance to add in learning methods for adults, such as the importance of physical and mental strength and also the awareness of breathing patterns.



Mental Training

One of the tools that is used in mental training is how different aspects are directly connected to each other, and therefore you can influence one area in your life, by working through another. "THOUGHT" "IMAGE" "ACTION" and "FEELING" are all connected and influenced by each other.

Thought

It is said that 90% of what we think of everyday is routine, a habit, just to facilitate our everyday life. When we understand this, we can choose, and make sure that this pattern of thoughts, that goes through our mind every day, is positive and works in the direction we wish. Awareness gives control that gives freedom. We can create a positive circle as well as a negative.

Image

Our mind works with pictures. That is shown in the way we create thoughts in the mind, more or less consciously. A good example of this aspect is how ineffective the use of negations is in teaching and learning. Because the word "no" cannot translate into a picture, it will instead give us the opposite picture, by excluding the word "not" and create a picture out of the definite. If I ask you NOT to think of taking a big bite of a juicy lemon, I am sure that is exactly what you are going to think of. Just the thought might even start a physical reaction, start producing saliva and result in a chill. This reaction is triggered, even though you know that in real life you did not bite into a lemon. That is how strongly the thought and the images impact on our physical reactions. This is possible to use even in a situation of learning.

To connect an image, or a feeling to every tune or a musical story you want to tell, makes it easier to put the body into the right emotional state/mood, to express yourself in music.



Action and Breathing

Breathing and posture have a great impact on our health and are directly connected to the chemical processes in the body. A stressed breathing pattern, that is located high up in the chest, will stimulate the body producing and releasing adrenaline and prepares the body for a "flight or fight" mood, which is not ideal for example in a learning situation.

A deeper breathing pattern, that activates the diaphragm, uses the whole chest for breathing, and therefore calms it down and gives a signal to the body to produce endogenous calming endorphins, that set the body into a relaxed and receiving state. The breathing controls our mental and physical reactions. You can put the body into different states of mind and emotions just by learning how to control the breathing patterns.

Feeling

We can affect our feeling by consciously choosing patterns of behaviour. As well as it is hard to say yes and shake your head as a no, it is hard to say you are in deep sorrow and smile. The thought, the feeling and the body are closely connected in behaviour patterns. The same comes to expressing music. It is easier to musically express a rhythmical experience if you first express it with your body, in a movement. You could say that the body speaks for itself or leads us into different ways of making music.

When it comes to learning methods for adults, I think mental training and its way of working with self-confidence is of great importance. Many students carry a feeling of inadequacy in a new learning situation that works against effective learning. More often than kids, adults struggle with the inner critic, that is possible to change with tools from mental training.

The link between what we can hear, what we can see and what we emotionally experience when we listen to or make music ourselves, might in many ways be movement. The movement



of the musician's body and instrument, the movement we experience when we groove to the music, or even the emotional element in the music, that moves us.

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Josefina Paulson (Sweden)

Nyckelharpist, Lic Mental trainer and yoga instructor.

A modern musician with tradition, where the keyed fiddle sounds like nyckelharpa and brings an earthy taste into genres other than the traditional music. Josefina Paulson embraces the instrument's many possibilities, from the roots of the Uppland tradition, to its large crown of new influences from other cultures. A musician standing grounded in her own tradition, exploring new territory .

In Delsbo in 2008, Josefina was awarded the title "riksspelman" (national folk musician) by the Zorn Jury with the motivation "for playing the nyckelharpa lively and skillful, in the tradition of Uppland" In Västmanland, in 2009 she received the Cultural Award from VLT on the ground "Josefina IS music" At the moment Josefina is studying at the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm, bachelor in music, with the keyed fiddle as main instrument.

www.josefinapaulson.se



Photo: Mia Marin