

“Mindfulness and Wellness for Musicians”

Note from Dr. Murph: Every Monday at 6pm this past Fall 2022 semester, a group of students and myself gathered for “Mindfulness and Wellness for Musicians” (MUS_GEN 4550/7550).

Our class explored different somatic (mind/body) practices with the goal to holistically improve musicianship. A great deal of attention was paid to connecting the body, mind, and breath for stress reduction and grounding. While I am certified in yoga (RYT-200hr) and reiki, I encouraged the students to explore multiple somatic practices (from tai chi to qi gong, running, and myriad self-care/contemplative practices). These practices not only conditioned them for the practice room and concert stage but for the classroom and everyday life. The one requirement for the course was to have an open mind and willingness to engage with self and others respectfully.

Below are practices and tips created by Meghan Brown to help in the rehearsal space and prep for concerts. Try them out and see how it feels. As always, make sure you are speaking with your primary instructor about ways to somatically prepare your repertoire and set goals for your instrument. Enjoy!

Tips for Musicians by *Meghan Brown* (SOM senior, clarinet major)

As a performance major, I experience a lot of stress. I battle with perfectionism in the practice room and on the concert stage. Therefore, the pressure can often be overwhelming. As I advance in my education and career, the pressure will increase since there will be higher standards and more expectations. These somatic practices will help me to be intentional and aware of how my body is feeling during high stress situations. These practices will give me a way to address stress and tension in a healthy way.

Many musicians walk into the practice room with practice anxiety and stress...

Before practicing or rehearsing, it is important to set intentions. Imagine what it will feel like to perform the piece you're working on. Imagine walking to the venue, walking on stage, your first breath before playing, and what that stress and pressure may feel like. Mentally walk yourself through everything.

While physically practicing for a concert is important, so is preparing mentally. By rehearsing how we may feel, it will help to eliminate the surprise of the nerves before and during the performance. Taking deep breaths allows the musician to focus their mind and relax for a few minutes. Stretching helps to physically relieve the tension in the body. Once the person is relaxed, they can think more clearly and strategically when it comes to efficient practice. Planning their practice will help them retain the same focus and concentration they experienced during the somatic practice.

In the Practice Room

1. Sit on the edge of the seat of a chair with both feet on the ground. Notice your posture and spine in alignment.
2. Close your eyes (or allow your gaze to soften) and take three deep breaths in and out. Make sure each breath in and out becomes slower than the one before it.
3. Remain seated in the chair with your eyes closed. Set the intention to put aside all the worries and distractions of the day.
4. Once you feel relaxed, slowly start to fold at the hips, bending forward to reach your toes (as far as you'd like to stretch) while remaining seated in the chair. As you stretch, make sure that your breaths remain full and intentional. Feel free to lift back up into the seat and repeat the process about 5x.



Then, on a sticky note or piece of paper, plan what you will be practicing and your goals for this specific practice session. It can be very detailed or a rough sketch of your practice, whatever will help you to focus your mind best on your tasks ahead.



Pre-Concert

Many musicians walk onto the stage nervous...

Before a concert, it is important to set intentions. The pre-concert tips are like those for the practice room because, as performers, it is important that we practice the same way we expect to perform. The stress of a performance generates a large amount of adrenaline and anxiety.

By allowing yourself time to slow down and calm down, you can refocus on the performance. Stretching can help with this as well by giving the body a relaxed and controlled way of releasing the growing energy. Also, by imagining the beginning of the performance, you are preparing your body for the experience it is about to encounter. When we know what to expect, we take the “unknown” out of the situation.

1. Stand or sit with both feet placed on the ground. Notice your posture and spine in alignment.
2. Close your eyes (or allow your gaze to soften) and take three deep breaths in and out. Make sure each breath in and out becomes slower than the one before it.
3. Remain standing with your eyes closed. Set the intention to put aside all the worries and distractions of the day.
4. Once you feel relaxed, slowly start to fold at the hips, bending forward to reach your toes (as far as you'd like to stretch). As you stretch, make sure that your breaths remain full and intentional. Feel free to lift back up and repeat the process about 5x.

Imagine yourself walking on stage. Imagine what the nerves will feel like, the first breath, and what the first note will sound like. *Take a minute to imagine your performance going well, how excited you feel to play and how proud you will feel afterwards.* Whenever you make your way to the stage, remember to smile, breathe, and have fun.



Post-Concert

The adrenaline after a concert can be intense...

By using the somatic method of walking slowly, the musician can take control of their body and mind. The slow walking and breathing helps the performer to slow down their heart rate. It also helps them to release nervous energy. Finally, taking time to reflect on growth and gratitude allows your mind to focus on the positive aspects of your

performance. When a situation is met with positivity, an experience can be centered around learning and grace.

1. Find a place backstage where you can be alone and away from people for a few minutes to recoup.
2. Begin to draw a circle on the floor with your eyes.
3. Walk around the perimeter of this circle as slowly as possible.
4. See if you can make each lift of the foot match the inhale and the stepping down of the foot on the exhale. Work so that your footsteps match your breath.
5. If you're sitting, you could also do this with your hands (lifting your hand on an inhale and pressing the hand down towards a thigh or table on the exhale).
6. Try to can make these movements slower and slower until you feel your heartbeat slow down and your body relax.
7. Once you feel centered, stop, and go greet your fans with a clear mind and grateful attitude. Remind yourself that you are loved. The people who took time out of their lives to come watch you perform are evidence of that.

After your concert, think (or journal) about the first time you played the repertoire you just performed. Reflect on everything you have learned leading up to your performance and how much you have improved on the repertoire. Then, no matter how you feel about your performance, remind yourself that music is a lifelong journey. That is why we never reach a point where we feel as though we no longer need to practice or perform. Music is something that we never fully master.