

A Mindfulness Approach to Warm-up for Musicians

Gayanne Grossman PT EdM, BFA (gngrossman@aol.com)

Bonnie Robson MD FRCPC (bonnie.robson@xplornet.com)

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way on purpose, in the present moment and being non-judgmental. Mindfulness includes being aware, curious, observant, being open to the experience and accepting. Thus mindfulness has to do with memory retention which is vitally important to those who worry about forgetting. It is based on Buddhist tradition starting in India 2,500 years ago. We are incorporating the work of Paul and Gail Dennison in educational kinesiology, based on the work of Piaget and Montessori and the movement programs of Alexander and Feldenkrais. Neuroimaging studies find that by using mindfulness technique, specific areas of the brain can be aroused with heightened brain function. And areas that draw attention away from the task can be quieted to bring focus to the work. Each exercise we do helps prepare for performance. Most musicians practice with performance mentality and so may wish to use these techniques in daily practice.

- 1) **Focused Breathing** and the use of imagery is involved in the Executive Function of the [Prefrontal Cortex](#). From neuroimaging it has been shown that the Prefrontal Cortex is related to organization, judgement, focus and attention. This leads to significantly greater self-control. For musicians it helps with planning action. As well breathing deeply and slowly relaxing the facial muscles clears the head of anxious thoughts and allows the musician to focus on the present. This is one of the characteristics of the mindfulness approach to stay in the present. Begin by breathing into your abdomen pushing your stomach away to draw air in and pulling your abdomen in to breathe out. Breathe at your own rate if you are breathing too rapidly you may experience tingling in your fingers or dizziness. Slow your breathing cycle down.
- 2) **Body Scan** with imaging leads to anxiety reduction via the [Prefrontal Cortex](#) and [Basal Ganglia](#) and integration with the [Somatosensory Cortex](#) which has a major role in visual and auditory integration. Sensory information is used in planning movement. Focus on your toes and feet and gradually explore up your legs to each area of your body; making micro-adjustments to ease tension and feel more relaxed.
- 3) **Body Awareness** and focus on movement lead to smooth easy movement modulated by the [Parietal Lobe](#) which integrates sensory information of heat, cold, pressure, and proprioception and communicates with the [Primary Motor Area](#). Proprioception is the sense of relative position of neighbouring parts of the body. There are proprioceptors in skeletal muscle and joints.
- 4) **Posture Alignment** activates the [Cerebellum](#) for balance and posture and makes adjustments to maintain balance. The cerebellum co-ordinates the timing and force of different muscle groups to produce fluid body movements. Neuroimaging research shows that the Cerebellum is also involved in language, executive functioning and verbal fluency and

language. It also activates the [Amygdala](#) for reduction of anxiety and mood improvement. Standing behind your chair, use the chair for balance and shift from one foot to the other slowly and mindfully.

- 5) **Movement for both hemispheres:** We are more likely to favour one hemisphere. Using Cross-over exercises awakens the [Motor Cortex](#) in both hemispheres via the Corpus Callosum. The Corpus Callosum is a huge bundle of myelinated fibres or nerve tissue that connects the two sides of the brain. Tapping across the body and crossing arms over to massage the other earlobe is effective in stimulating the other hemisphere and is basic to the practice of Brain Gym ®. Crossing hand exercises and finger massage also crosses between both hemispheres. Specific attention to finger exercises is helpful prior to practice. These hand exercises are based on Self Shiatsu practice. Wrap fingers of right hand around thumb of left hand and gently squeeze thumb, then pull it along it, making stroking motions. Repeat with each finger and then repeat with right hand. Warm-up palm of both hands with thumb pressure at three points.
- 6) **Motor Function:** The exercises are primarily in [Motor Cortex](#) and [Premotor Area](#). They include exercises design for myofascial release. Begin sitting upright in a chair, feet on the floor hip width apart, toes facing forward, hands placed on your thighs with the palms downward. Find a neutral pelvis. Close your eyes and begin to audibly breathe. Inhale on three counts and exhale on three counts. Feel you belly move out on the inhalation and in on the exhalation. Belly out and belly in with each breath. Purse your lips to force the air out to increase the muscular contribution. After three breaths you begin to involve your spine.
- 7) **Spinal flexion and extension:** Curve forward and drop your head with the exhalation. Curve backward while lifting your head to look at the ceiling with the inhalation. Move successively more with each breath. Repeat three times.
- 8) **Spinal rotation (small to large):** Return to a seated position and place your hands on your waist. This will widen your shoulders, scapula and ribs. Rotate only your spine to the right and then to the left. Your pelvis remains in place. Include your pelvis, legs and arms on the second set of three.
- 9) **Spinal side-bending:** Return to a neutral position. Exhale and slide your right arm down the side of the chair reaching to the floor. Inhale to return to neutral. Repeat on the left side. Repeat both sides again. On the third set include both of your arms. One arm continues to reach toward the floor and the other reaches for the ceiling with the palm. This is a myofascial stretch and neural tension releasing technique.
- 10) **Scapular mobility –protraction and retraction with elevation and depression:** Return to an upright seated position. Breathe audibly. Roll your shoulders three times forward and three times backward. Liberate your scapula! Allow them to move freely with each shoulder roll.

- 11) **Scapular mobility –isolated and larger protraction and retraction:** Return to an upright seated position. Breathe audibly. Inhale and pull your scapula together in the back. Exhale and pull your scapula as far forward as they will move. Repeat three times. On the third set, increase the size of the entire movement by allowing your spine to participate in the movement.
- 12) **Scapular mobility –elevation and depression with upward and downward rotation:** While slowly standing up, inhale and lift your scapula to your ears include your entire arm. Make a fist with the thumb facing up. This will externally rotate your shoulder to allow the full arc of abduction. Exhale and lower your scapula as far down as possible that feels good to you. Rotate your thumb downward and have both thumbs touch behind your back as you are sitting back down the first time. The hand motion will allow greater range of motion. Repeat three times increasing the size of the movement with each repetition. Open your hands on repetitions two and three. Palms up on the inhalation and palms down on the exhalation. Remain standing at the conclusion of the third repetition.
- 13) **Neural tension release for hands and forearms:** Stretch arms out to the side with the forearms in pronation and the hand pulled back (wrist hyperextension) and again with the forearms in supination and the wrists in hyperflexion. Return to sitting after the third repetition while exhaling forcefully and pressing the air down around you.
- 14) **Balance:** Sit to stand three times. Exhale hard to stand feeling the belly, inner thighs and pelvic floor. Inhale to sit. On the third set lift your arms into a low abduction below 90 degrees and remain standing.
- 15) **Forearm and hand warm up:** Extend your elbows, fully supinate your forearms while and bringing your hands forward and extend your wrists until your palms are facing the wall in front of you. Flex your elbows and extend your arms behind you while pronating and hyper flexing your wrists. After the third set, abduct your arms, exhale forcibly and press the air down to sit, lowering the arms to the side.
- 16) **Elbow flexion and extension with pronation and supination:** Bring the hands to your shoulders, flexing your elbow as you exhale. The first time have the palms up. The second time have the thumbs up. Straighten your elbow (elbow extension) and you inhale. Extend the elbow with the hand in the same placement. Repeat three times. End the third set with the elbows flexed and the hands in front of you.
- 17) **Hand warm up:** Flex the fingers in pronation and extend the fingers in pronation. Repeat three times. Perform three sets. Repeat another set of three while you fan the fingers to open and close. This will individually stretch each finger.
- 18) **Large motion using the whole body:** Inhale and hyperextend your spine and shoulders while reaching to the back corners of the room and looking at the ceiling. Exhale and curve your entire spine, neck and arms inward. Repeat three times successively moving larger and breathing more audibly with each repetition. Stand on the third set and reach as wide and high as you can. You can

repeat one last time using one arm with the shoulder, elbow, and wrist hyperextended behind you while stretching your head and neck toward the other shoulder. Repeat with the other side.

- 19) **Tapping body all over while standing.** This exercise is based on Gyrokinesis ® practice.
- 20) **Face warm up:** While standing, open and close your facial muscles while breathing. Inhale to expand the face. Exhale to squeeze inward. Repeat three times. Remain standing and sense your entire body upon concluding this series of motions.
- 21) **Return to sitting** imagining all your energy gathering around your abdomen. Place your hands on your thighs and focus only on your breath.

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