



SENSEABILITY

A newsletter of applications
of the *Feldenkrais Method*
of somatic education
written by *Guild Certified*
Feldenkrais
Teachers®

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The *Feldenkrais Method*® for Musicians

The Magic Piccolo *by John Tarr, GCFT*

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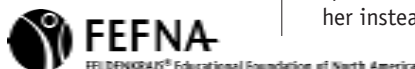
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Linda, a piccolo player came to see me because her fingers were stiffening up when she came to a difficult passage in a piece she was working on. As a trained musician and *Feldenkrais*® Practitioner, I see instrumentalists and vocalists who come to me to work on their breathing and posture, or have excess tension and pain. I wasn't really sure I could help Linda with her finger speed, and mentioned this to her, but she wanted to continue.

I always ask the instrumentalist to bring their instrument along, when possible, so I can observe them while they play. This is also useful in comparing the differences before and after the *Feldenkrais* lesson. As Linda brought her instrument up to play, I noticed she tended to tilt her head forward to the instrument. This was causing her to crane her head and neck as she played. When she came to the troublesome passage, she craned her head and neck forward even more. I asked myself if this craning might be related to the stiffening of her fingers? I wasn't sure, but I thought it would be a good place to start.

I had Linda place her piccolo in a safe place and asked her to lie down on the low table. I began to work with her shoulders, arms and neck, and her breathing began to deepen and slow down. I gently worked with the muscles in her neck so she could begin to feel some of the excess tension there. After a while, she noticed that her shoulders and arms were lying more fully on the table. When I was finished, I had her roll to her side and come up to sit on the edge of the table. She reported that sitting and breathing felt freer and easier.

At this point, Linda wanted to play again, but I asked her if it would be all right if I brought the piccolo to her. She said this would be fine. I told her that while we were working on the table, the piccolo had become enchanted with a magic spell, which enabled the instrument to come to her instead of her having to pick it up. I slowly

brought the instrument closer to her embouchure and asked her to take the piccolo and bring it up to play. I had her repeat this motion of bringing the piccolo to her lips and asked her to notice if the position of her head changed as the piccolo came closer. She began to notice that she was not only bringing the piccolo to her lips, but also her head to the instrument. I reminded her that the piccolo was magic and would come to her, and that she didn't have to go to it. She laughed and began to experiment with bringing the instrument to her lips and felt the difference in her neck and shoulders. When she played a few notes and scales, her sound was clearer and more resonant.

I asked her to experiment with this idea at home for a few days before playing the difficult passage. She did and later reported that her fingers remained lighter and quicker when she wasn't craning her head forward. About a year later I saw her again and she told me that she still hears me saying (in my German with American accent), “Remember, the piccolo comes to you, not you to it.” Additionally, she reported that her colleagues say she looks very professional when she plays.

It may seem that finger dexterity and head/neck position are unrelated. However, the way you sit/stand, position your feet and carry your head on top of your spine will affect the freedom and mobility of your fingers and arms. Having a neutral, comfortable posture while sitting/standing (what I call “dynamic stability”) will also increase your expressive capabilities while playing and performing. This lesson demonstrates one of the unique aspects of the *Feldenkrais Method*: that increasing and refining the awareness in one area of yourself will also have an effect elsewhere in your body.

John Tarr studied Trombone Performance at the Univ. of Northern Colorado and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music (Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Music Performance respectively).

Using the *Feldenkrais Method* to Heighten Musical Awareness and Skill

—by Elisabeth Reed, GCFT

Like many musicians, I came to the *Feldenkrais Method* in the course of dealing with a repetitive stress injury. The Method is invaluable for addressing such injuries, since it not only looks at the presenting symptoms but also investigates the underlying context of behaviors that produced them. Yet, while the *Feldenkrais Method* alleviated what was a potentially career-threatening injury for me, its power as a tool for understanding those holistic contexts of movement and thought has been the Method's greatest contribution to my musical life. In the years of incorporating the Method into my playing and teaching since first using it to heal my arm, I have come to believe that the benefits of *Feldenkrais* study for the non-injured musician, in the form of heightened musical awareness and skill, even outweigh its more well-known role as an approach to free oneself from pain.

The language of music is very physical; we speak constantly in terms of things like breathing, gesture and weight. Musical gesture, like physical gesture, can be initiated from anywhere we can imagine: from our breath, from our spine, from our feet, sitz bones, pelvis, or belly. While it is of course legitimate to generate musical ideas intellectually, the valuable thing about the *Feldenkrais Method* is that it helps us discover many more options for initiating or refining a gesture, a direction for the phrase, or an emphasis. By using the *Feldenkrais Method* to explore how we go about making music, we can begin to notice what our habits are—perhaps we tend to make a certain quality of sound which we don't vary much, or we have a limited range of emotional affects we are comfortable with. Once we are aware of what we are doing, we can begin to sense a whole new range of possibilities for creating and shaping sound through movement.

Here is a short *Awareness Through Movement*® lesson to play with—one specifically for cellists or gambists, but easily adaptable to other instruments:

Sit comfortably on a chair, at first without your instrument. Feel your two sitz bones on the chair and begin to sense the central "line" of your spine, as well as the lines of your arms and legs. Sense yourself almost as a stick figure composed of the line of your spine ascending from the chair, and the four lines of your legs and arms extending out.

Now pick up your cello and feel the relationship of the instrument to this image you have of the five connected lines of your spine, arms, and legs.

Begin with long, slow bows, down and up. As you play the down bow, arch your back, roll forward on your sitz bones, and look up toward the ceiling, breathing in. As you play the up bow, curl your back in, roll back on your sitz bones, and look down toward the floor or your belly button, breathing out.

Do this several times, keeping a sense of the five lines of your spine, legs, and arms, and shifting your attention from your feet to your knees, your sitz bones, your spine, shoulder blades, neck, head, eyes, and breath.

Now start to play with initiating the movement from each of the different places mentioned above. Begin the movement in your feet, for example, or start it with your breath. Let the impulse for beginning to move the bow shift from one place within you to another, and listen to the changes in the quality and character of the sound.

Then, reverse the direction, so that you are curling everything in on the down bow and breathing out—then arching everything on the up bow and breathing in. Notice the differences in your experience of the down and up bow.

Which way feels more habitual to you?

Experiment with moving the bow almost entirely with your breath: as you breathe in, your rib cage expands and your arm may move almost without any muscular effort in the arm itself. Play with it.

If you can, try doing this with another musician. Have them play and initiate the sound from different places and see what you notice about changes in the quality of the sound. Don't be afraid to sound "bad" sometimes. Cultivate an interest in the variety of sounds you can make.

Elisabeth Reed is a professional musician and teacher in Oakland, Calif., where she specializes in early music. She plays the cello, the baroque cello, and a Renaissance instrument called the viola da gamba.

Due to the number of excellent articles we received for this issue, and the limited space we have to print them, we've decided to put the additional articles online. Go to: www.feldenkrais.com/senseability, and click the link for issue #34.

Feldenkrais Method Can Expand Musical Freedom, Experimentation and Imagination

—by Uri Vardi, GCFT

The *Feldenkrais Method* has been used to improve body awareness and enhance the functioning of a wide variety of populations. I use the *Feldenkrais Method* in my work with musicians because the principles of the Method correspond to my teaching philosophy. I believe that my principal role as a teacher is to help my students become aware of who they are and to help them grow. It is not to define their faults nor cure them. When teaching a musical composition, instead of setting concrete, simple goals and teaching prescribed tools to attain them, I engage the student in a process of experimentation with different ideas that provides him/her with the freedom to choose among a whole array of options for expressing a musical intention.

The same principle of encouraging the search for a variety of options applies to the technical mastery of the musical instrument. In order for my students to gain the ability to meet any composition's demands, they must have a vast repertoire of movements that will give them the freedom to use their bodies with maximum efficiency. Most of us accept the ways we move as if they are a part of our genetic makeup, whereas in reality, we learned to move by trial and error, and our nervous system is wired according to our experiences. Unless we are challenged to question this wiring, and to explore new possibilities of movement, we limit our range of expression. I constantly challenge my students to explore new ways of moving while playing, and to correlate them with subtle differences in the quality of sound. Through my experience, I have found that when students discover the power of becoming aware of minute differences in their movement, it is not only their sound that changes, but also their coordination, and overall technical proficiency.

The most fascinating aspect for me in approaching teaching in this manner is that my students come to not only discover their personal involvement in the communication of a musical composition, and their

ability to efficiently express it on their instrument, but they also very often gain self-confidence and imagination. The benefits of body awareness also help them in the prevention of injury, and in the healing after a disabling injury.

Bernard Scully, a horn player who took my *Feldenkrais* for Musicians class, described his experience: "When I was asked to initially play for the class, I was a bit nervous and not totally centered on the music. The process of differentiation that I was asked to do next gave me the awareness I needed. By standing on one foot, playing in a more and more contorted fashion, and walking while playing, it took my mind off the class, my nerves, and everything outside of me at the time. It made me look inward and focus more on basic things like taking a big breath, blowing lots of air into the horn, etc. As these unnatural positions became more and more complex, I had to go further and further inside myself to draw out the music. Finally, when I went back into my normal playing position, I was aware of how much more I could give to my performance! I was also more focused, more limber, and more in tune with my music-making.

About the changes that he went through as a musician, Scully writes, "I began to just let myself do things, explore sensations, do a 'bizarre' interpretation of a piece, all the while just observing what was going on and relating it to everything else I had learned. I feel more freedom to simply go through a process to make things the way I want them, rather than adhering to the 'correct' methods or forcing things in place. It is a little like the idea of jumping off a cliff at first, but after I'm flying in the air, I feel much more at ease letting myself 'miss' notes, produce 'bad' sounds, do things differently, all for the sake of becoming more attune to what actually does work."

Uri Vardi is a cello professor at University of Wisconsin, Madison. He regularly conducts masterclasses in music schools throughout the country. This spring, he will conduct Feldenkrais for Cellists masterclasses at the Julliard School.

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Artist/Teacher Finds Relaxation, Grounding in the *Feldenkrais Method*

—by Nancy Galeota-Wozny, GCFT

The *Feldenkrais Method* was a natural progression for musician Janet Rarick. As an artist and teacher of woodwinds and professional development at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, she was already well acquainted with various practices in mind/body health. She first heard about the *Feldenkrais Method* through one of my students, Christina Jennings, a music student at Rice. Jennings had managed to play pain-free after several *Functional Integration*® and weekly *Awareness Through Movement* lessons. Jennings' story piqued Rarick's curiosity, and it wasn't long before she tried a class for herself.

"I enjoyed the gentle quality of the class," remembers Rarick.

The practice of moving with less effort and finding the path of least resistance is at odds with the music world.

"Musicians have compulsive and perfectionist tendencies. We need to be that way to examine the detail of the work we do. If you tell a musician to do it 5 times they will do it 20 times. They are wired to think more is more. Push it more and get it is the motto. We perform under stress and we have to be consistent. The *Feldenkrais Method* helps you to deal with that situation," states Rarick. "Because we are small muscle athletes this is important."

"What *Feldenkrais* does is help you to understand the direct path to a goal that is not always the best path. Sometimes indirect can be more powerful than direct. The *Feldenkrais* work shows that to you in a way that you can understand. You can't make a mistake in a *Feldenkrais* lesson. It's OK to not be perfect. When you finish a lesson you feel relaxed and calm and you notice you are much more grounded."

Rarick continued taking my ATM lessons at the Jung Center on a weekly basis. At the time she was playing in the Houston Ballet and Houston Grand Opera Orchestras, both of which have demanding schedules. She would get together with fellow *Feldenkrais* student and principal harpist Joan Eidman during the breaks and do lessons from memory. "We did lessons in sitting and standing, and found we were both re-energized and more relaxed after intermission."

She found the work of such value that when she received a major grant to develop a website at Rice called Navigating Musical Career, she knew she wanted a somatic component. The website helps students consider topics like performance anxiety, career options, and health. In a brief video clip, Rebecca Clearman, MD, a renowned physician specializing in performing arts medicine, extols the value of the somatic disciplines of The Alexander Technique and The *Feldenkrais Method*.

"My reason for including this material is to show students why it is important to include somatic work in their artistic growth process – especially work like the *Feldenkrais Method*, which works with the mind and body. I think that having a strong recommendation from someone like Dr. Clearman emphasizes this point."

Nancy Galeota-Wozny is a GCFT and a freelance writer. Her work has appeared in Dance Magazine, Contact Quarterly, Somatics, Arts Houston, Houston Woman and other publications. She is a 2004 recipient of the Gary Parks Memorial Award for Emerging Dance Critics.

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Starting with this issue, we now have additional articles online that do not appear in the print edition. Just click the link for Issue #34 for a full list of stories about the Feldenkrais Method for musicians.

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