

Music Teachers' Association of California  
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## **INTEGRATING THE WHOLE BODY IN THE PERFORMANCE AND PEDAGOGY OF PIANO**

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- I. General Principles
  - a. "With what part of your body do you play the piano?"
  - b. "Where does the sound of the piano come from?"
- II. Observing great movers (musicians) and choosing to adopt some of their gestures.
  - a. **"There is a well-kept secret among musicians: we have to move in order to make a sound on our instrument. Thus, we move to make a living, like a dancer or an actor."** (Barbara Conable)
- III. The '3 Muskateers' of pianism. All for one, and one for all.
  - a. Balance – what is the easiest way to balance objects?
  - b. Breathing – any physical activity is made more difficult when holding one's breath
    - i. *Stopping breathing limits your movement. When you exhale or inhale after holding your breath, you feel movement. You gain awareness of what was not moving while you weren't breathing.* (Schwiebert)
  - c. Awareness
    - i. Teaching these principles to 6-year-old or 9-year-old students;
      1. Employing balance, first away from keyboard, and then at the piano
        - a. "trees in a gentle wind"
        - b. "planet in their orbits"
        - c. Teacher demonstrations: can the student differentiate
          - i. By hearing?
      2. Breathing, first away from keyboard, and then at the piano
        - a. Marching while holding breath; and then without holding breath
        - b. Playing a scale while holding breath, and then without holding breath
        - c. Teacher demonstrations: can the student differentiate
          - i. By seeing?
          - ii. By hearing?
- IV. Knowing and growing in the knowledge of fundamentals of structure and balance – what's largely been missing?

- V. Principles of Structure and Balance
  - a. "Body Mapping"
    - i. *"The body map is one's self-representation in our brain. If the Body Map is accurate, movement is good."* (Barbara Conable)
    - ii. *"An improved academic knowledge is not enough. We have to have an accurate sensory awareness of where our head, arms, legs, pelvis, ribs, etc., are, and how they move in relation to each other."* (Kleinman and Buckoke, *The Alexander Technique for Musicians*, 2013.)
    - iii. *"Body Mapping is . . .the conscious correction and refining of one's Body Map to produce efficient, graceful movement. Over time with application, Body Mapping allows any musician to play like a natural."* (Barbara Conable)
  - b. Foot structure – point of focus, the ankle. Three principles
    - i. "Soft feet"
    - ii. Allow entire foot to be in contact with the terrain
    - iii. Take advantage of "opposing movement"
  - c. Lower leg structure, aligning the foot between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> toes
  - d. Upper leg and whole leg structure
    - i. The "Shane Anderson" stance
- VI. Principles of Balance and Structure – the torso
  - a. Balance and the "natural neutral"
  - b. *Balance is not a position. Balance is a means of organizing movement. Balance is a place of reference – from which movement in any direction is easiest.* (Thomas Mark)
  - c. The structure of balance – the "ischia" (*ischial tuberosity*) serve as little feet when we are seated.
    - i. The "psoas" muscle that attaches the upper leg to the lumbar spine
  - d. Balancing "around the spine" – weight centered over the hip joints and sit bones – produces movement that is more expressive, resulting in more expressive playing.
  - e. Balance of the head at the "AO" joint
  - f. Balance and the arm's 4 parts
    - i. Hand / lower arm / upper arm / collar bone & shoulder blade ("shoulder girdler")
    - ii. Extrinsic arm muscles include pectoral muscles, and muscles on the back, some connecting all the way down to the tailbone
    - iii. NOTE: the arms are connected to the torso by one joint at the junction of the chest bone and the collar bone ("sterno clavicular" joint)
    - iv. *It is important to know that if anything tightens when you move your arm, that tightening is unnecessary. The flow of your arm and your capacity for physical expression will be reduced.* (Schwiebert, p. 143)
- VII. Conclusions – Balance, breathing, awareness

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