

Taking care of the flautist

Anna Pope and David Katz on the sound of collaboration

What do cadavers have to do with flute playing? How did I, with an educational background entirely in the arts, find myself attending Imperial College for an anatomy course? Do you know where your tongue is attached? Do you know precisely where your diaphragm is located and how it affects other muscles?

I always knew roughly what good flute posture should look like, and was fussy about it in my teaching. I had some experience of Alexander Technique, and would refer pupils with postural problems for lessons. But I could not have described what constitutes anatomically ideal posture. I had not realised the extent to which playing involves the whole body, how, for instance, tight hamstrings can affect breathing.

Then in 2003 I met David Katz. I dropped in to a Pilates class, just to see what it was all about, and he was teaching. I felt immediately that there was something here very relevant to me as a musician. This was the beginning of my collaboration with David (whose bodywork skills range far beyond Pilates) and of our research into the effects of flute playing on the body. On this basis, a whole range of techniques and exercises has evolved, which we use with my students. Initially I was interested in correcting posture to avoid pain and injury. The big surprise has been the extent of the improvement in playing quality. This has opened a whole new dimension for me, a dimension generally lacking (with some notable exceptions) in the education of the musician.

Through this work I am gradually learning about anatomy and becoming ever more fascinated. I now know where the tongue is attached — the root of the tongue is attached to the chin, in case you were wondering!

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Soon after Anna joined my Pilates class she approached me to help her resolve a neck injury. Having worked with elite sports people and performers, I quickly became fascinated with the precision required by flautists in particular and musicians in general to perform at a high level. I was easily persuaded by Anna to help some of her young students. This was the start of a journey I have become passionate about.

Via my exposure through Anna to some of the music schools and colleges, I was shocked and, at the same time, saddened

to see the lack of physical support and education provided to young, growing children, who are subject to the same pressures and expectations as adult musicians. This has led to us working together with the aim of educating young musicians and proving to them the importance of looking after their bodies.



Stanley the Skeleton, complete with lung (one!) and diaphragm. He is able to breathe, with a little help.

We believe in 'prehab' versus 'rehab', and that therapies like physiotherapy, massage and osteopathy can be used as a preventative tool and not just to 'fix'. Part of what I do is to identify problematic areas that the young flautist may have and maybe do some soft-tissue treatment and prescribe tailor-made exercises for that individual. My approach is always holistic. I believe that the physical stress put on elite musicians is similar to that which athletes and dancers experience, so I recommend physical warm-ups, stretching, relaxation strategies and warm-downs. It is also fundamental that the musician find a movement discipline to keep fit, healthy and strong outside of their playing in order to maintain optimal performance.

What we do

The way most people live, even without doing something as strange as playing a musical instrument, is often not conducive to good posture. There is a shockingly high incidence of muscle and joint pain among musicians. Playing an instrument puts huge physical demands on the body, something often not