

Love and Fear: Personal and Artistic Development for Musicians

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Kjell Fagéus plays the clarinet and has often appeared as a soloist and with chamber music ensembles. Aside from his performance career, he has a strong interest in teaching music and in personal and artistic development. He has recently written a book that covers clarinet playing and all aspects of musicianship including mental training. The title of the book, *Lek på fullt allvar*, incorporates two important aspects of performance: being a professional in one's field but at the same time, not losing the pleasure and sense of play.

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Abstract

Kjell Fagéus combines his experience as a musician and teacher to provide an interesting perspective on how mental training can help students and professionals to improve their performance and enjoy the process. Kjell believes that performance lies in a delicate balance between love and fear. Love for what we are doing frees us to do great things, fear can cripple us and our performance. This article discusses how mental training can increase love and diminish. The content is based on a presentation and workshop given at the International Conference on Mental Training and Peak Performance in Örebro, Sweden in 1997.

Love and Fear

I believe the most important energy in our lives is love...love for the instrument, love for the music, love for the audience. However, we often risk diminishing our true capacity. Love is blocked by fear, the other big energy source. Fear of what other people might say, fear of playing incorrectly, fear of letting yourself down. Can mental training increase love? Can mental training diminish fear? I am convinced it can do both!

Benefits of Mental Training for Musicians

Research has shown how mental training (including relaxation, stress control

training and mental preparation) can enhance our sense of wellbeing resulting in better performance. Sports people, managers, doctors and musicians actively use these techniques. I feel that mental training for musicians works in three fundamental ways. Mental training can help a musician feel and function well; it increases physical and psychological health. It develops the capacity to deal with relationships: intimate relationships, those within an orchestra, pupil-teacher relationships and so on. If you do not take care of your health and relationships, it does not matter how musical you are. Bad health and bad relationships will incapacitate the development of your full potential.

Second, mental training is excellent preparation for a concert or audition. You can more easily find the balance between calmness and vibrancy. You can be present to the complete situation while concentrating on the task at hand. Engagement in the playing increases. Mental training helps the musician get to the level in the performance where the technique is easy and faultless, the music flows freely and the musician is full of joy and completely without fear, the state known as "flow".

To get into the flow of the music a mantra can be used - one or a few words to describe the character of the music. You repeat these words and feel in tune. The focus is placed on the music and not on distractions. Just before a concert, the repetition of the mantra and the reassurance of long term training enables you to walk on to the stage and just "do it".

Finally, long-term training helps in personal and artistic development. We change identity during our lives, for example, from a student to a professional musician. Mental training makes this transition easier. The mind becomes more open and receptive for new and creative ideas. The practice of relaxation increases energy and vitality. Self-confidence increases and we become more aware of our unique resources.

The Developmental Training Process

Much has been written and spoken about development. What is development? Let me use an image to illustrate how I view it: a flower needs certain things for full development in spite of the fact that the potential is there from the beginning. A good environment, sunlight and so on will bring it to full bloom. Perhaps a gardener is needed to remove some weeds, to tend it

during its growing period to enable it to grow fully.

Like the flower, our potential for development is with us from the start. However, as musicians, we need a good place to live and work. We need the knowledge and experience of teachers and others. We need to increase consciousness about what drives us forward and what responds to our deepest inner urging. We need to increase our awareness about what prevents us from moving ahead. We need to be inspired and supported. We need to see that we are responsible for our lives and that we cannot blame anyone else for failure.

In the developmental training process, the musician learns mental training one step at a time. Once all of the skills are learned, they can be integrated in a continuous flow. First, it is important to see the situation as it is today: how much of the artistry needs to be improved? What are the strengths of which you can be proud? In traditional education, problems are often stressed. Positive aspects are neglected because they are in some way taken for granted. The positive side needs to be affirmed. The fundamental principal in mental training is to see the whole picture, positive and negative and thereafter focus on the goal(s) you set for yourself.

Physical relaxation is next. It may help to physically workout in the way you like best before practicing relaxation. It is helpful to listen to cassettes or CDs that include music and instructions for relaxing. The instructions should help a person experience the difference between tense and relaxed muscles. For these recordings, it is important to use music that a trained musician finds acceptable and calming. The session should last 15-20 minutes.

The third step is practicing inner calmness. As the body and mind are interconnected, training this skill has already begun in the first step. Here you find your own "inner mental room" where you can feel relaxed and calm. This mental room can be a place you have been to or just a place you imagine. In this room you get new vital energy and there you also can integrate your own positive affirmations such as, "I know what I want and I know how to get it".

In the following step you work on self-confidence. One way of doing this is to identify when your playing was of the highest quality remembering the feeling, the sound and the state of mind and body. Then, in a relaxed state of mind, you return to these moments. Thereafter, you can transpose these moments into the preparations for an upcoming concert.

Another aspect of training is awareness of the messages you give yourself. Negative elements can be camouflaged in seemingly insignificant messages; we discover that some messages from teachers or parents are retained as inner messages that sometimes choke and diminish our will and capacity for expression. By becoming more aware and responsible, you can choose to listen to what supports your aim in life and can sift out what blocks your way.

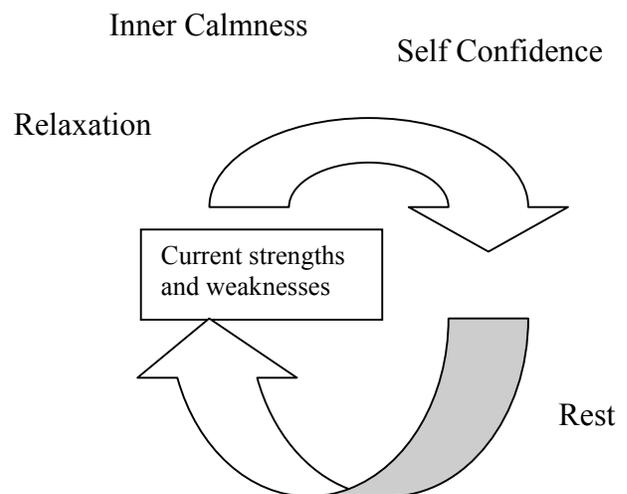
The last part of mental training is to set goals. The concrete goals need to be high and challenging while still attainable. One way of achieving this is first to formulate a dream goal. The dream goal is your true vision, how you want to be both as a person and as musician. This vision leads you in the direction you choose. You then formulate what you want to achieve, for example, for the next concert or for the next three months. By having both a concrete goal and a strong overall vision you can ac-

quire energy and motivation for working. You will also better use your creativity to develop your playing. The vision should not be something superficial but needs to come from deep within.

Integration of the goal is achieved by picturing the goal during deep relaxation. In this state of mind you are more like you were as a child: open and receptive. The goals and the messages you choose for yourself will live in you and influence your behaviour and your capacity to achieve.

The last aspect of the training process is no training at all. Rest from the sometimes demanding work of striving for development; trust the process, assured of what is happening. Observe the process while retaining your power, spontaneity and initiative.

The developmental training process looks like this:



The Process of Development

When you work on your formulated and integrated goals, you then return to the starting point that now lies on a higher level. The development process works like a verti-

cally ascending spiral. There is always a "Now" to start from. It is very pleasing and satisfying that over and over you can see things with new eyes. During rest you can see your work bear fruit and receive strong feedback and motivation to continue training.

The chief of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, said at an interview during his visit to Sweden in August 1997 concerning criticism of the slow change within the UN, "Development is a process, not an event". I think it is important to see mental training in this way. A lecture in mental training can give a kickstart but long-term training results in development.

Teaching Mental Training in Conjunction with Musical Training

I have combined mental training and traditional music teaching in two different ways. One is through a one week mental training course I teach to pupils who come to me from music academies. The maximum number of pupils I like to work with is five because that is the number I as a teacher can best engage.

We begin on Monday morning and finish with a concert on Saturday night. The days are planned in the following way. Each morning, for approximately 45 minutes, we spend time examining our current abilities and what we want to achieve by the end of the week. Every day starts with this exercise and the content follows as described in the previous section. The pupils are asked to put their reflections down on paper but they do not need to show them to me unless they want feedback.

After the first 45 minutes we move, either in dance, stretch or yoga, in order to get in shape for the instrumental lessons that follow. In the music lessons, each individ-

ual aims for the highest level of concentration. The pupils listen to each others' lessons if the individual student agrees to this. However, after some days everyone is so busy practicing or taking a walk to digest impressions that participation in other students' lessons diminishes.

In the evening as a group, we watch the videos we made during the day. We listen to the music played during the lessons and also discuss the art of stage-performance. The videotapes are a fantastic compliment to the other teaching. At the end of the day we use one hour for relaxation and mental preparation for the concert on Saturday.

After two days in the course the energy always drops somewhat. Very often the lessons on Wednesday involve discussions about life and the problems that the pupils experience. The energy lifts on Thursday and climaxes on Saturday. The pupils have time at the end of the week to go through their concert mentally two or three times, completely relaxed, lying on the floor or on mattresses. Most of the fears that arise before a concert are illusions and should be regarded as such; in that way, it becomes possible to let go of fear. All pupils understand my goal for the course which is that everyone plays in the concert one level higher artistically and technically than that already achieved. The result is superb!

Since I began this program, I have been careful to follow up by letter and telephone. Even if the pupils do not choose to come back, they have benefited by the program. Some have returned up to five times. Many realize that they no longer need me as a teacher but rather as a mentor. This development has made me very happy! The possibilities of working in a group can not

be overestimated as the pupils give each other great support.

Another way I have been using mental training with musicians is to spread sessions out over a longer period of time. Five to ten musicians meet eight times over the period of four months. These meetings are two to three hours long every second week. Between the meetings, the participants work on stress control, relaxation, self-confidence etc. During the meetings, all have the opportunity to share experiences and thoughts.

Mental training is a very important complement to traditional teaching methods used in musical academies and offers a developmental process for orchestras and ensembles. The training can and ought to be

seen as a health-promoting agent. Most illnesses today are related to stress and the most difficult stress is experienced when you have the feeling that you cannot influence your living and working situation.

Where love abounds, there is no fear - there the music flows and a mistake is only a single mistake, not a failure of the whole person. If we take responsibility for what we want and prepare ourselves well, we open ourselves up to that which is bigger than our ego. We can then let go of ordinary control and let the performance happen. In this state of mind it seems that another system of accounting operates where $1 + 1 = 4$ not 2. In mental training, this is called an alternative state of mind. This is a grace filled time, joyous, inviting greater musical accomplishment.