

# Musical Athletes: Bodywork for Bassists

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## A Body Work Approach to Performance

- Our small muscle feats match Olympic athletes:
  - Track & Field, Marathon Running, Synchronized Swimming, Ice Skating, Curling, Gymnastics
- Self-Acceptance, Self-Care: Do not harm your body
  - You are your instrument, so take care of yourself
- 10% Rule for incremental progress without injury
  - change 1 variable at a time by at most 10% daily
- A little bit each day goes a long way towards a goal
- Physical fitness = musical freedom + longevity
- 3:1 or 5:2 ratio of work days to rest days (48 hours)
- 2:1 ratio of work time to recovery time in practice

## Bodywork Targets Anatomical Systems

1. **Skeletal:** solid and fixed weight bearing structures
  - Bones, ligaments, joints with passages for nerves & tendons
2. **Respiratory:** we drink H<sub>2</sub>O, inhale O<sub>2</sub> & exhale CO<sub>2</sub>
  - Nose, mouth, trachea, lungs, alveoli, diaphragm
3. **Circulatory:** delivers oxygen & nutrients for energy
  - Heart, blood vessels, blood flow, red blood cells, plasma
4. **Muscular:** tensile & mobile fibers that contract to work
  - Antagonistic pairs of muscles, tendons, fascia, vocal cords
5. **Nervous:** electrical & chemical signals in & out of brain
  - Neurons, spinal cord, nerves, adrenaline, epinephrine
  - The Musical 5 Senses: skin, ears, eyes, inner ear, inner voice
6. **Lymphatic:** drains toxic waste, byproducts of muscles
  - Lymph nodes & vessels, white blood cells, immune system

## Order of Operations

1. **Begin:** Mind Clearing, Meditation, & Mental Practice
2. **Warm-up: Exercises, Movement, “Tune your body”**
  - First body alone away from bass: cardiovascular exercise
  - Then start gradually with bass: mid range, slowly, softly
3. **Workout: Technique Training and/or Repertoire**
  - practice, lesson, rehearsal, recording, or performance
4. **Cool-Down: Stretching and Release of Static Loading**
  - Start by decreasing intensity with bass: simpler rep
  - Then move to key stretches/movements immediately
  - Resume stretching later on in the day after all playing
5. **End:** Final Relaxation & Positive Visualization

## Meditation Techniques

- **Body Scan:** experience current sensations of tension, fatigue or pain in your body while sitting or lying flat
- **3D Breathing:** used by vocalists, wind, & brass players to expand the volume of air inhaled and exhaled
  - Abdominal, thoracic, and lateral breathing in all directions
- **Proprioception & Kinesthesia:** sensation of movement, effort, range of motion, & position of joints & muscles
- **Visualization:** mental process of imagining movements in great sensory detail without actually moving

## Martial Arts: Tai Chi & Qigong [Ch'i Kung]

- Ancient Chinese self-combat & moving meditation
  - Always slow & continuous motions; like long tones
  - “Sit back, relax, & put your weight in your heels”
  - Expands peripheral vision and cultivates soft gaze
  - Trains muscular memory with varied repetitions
  - Spinal Alignment: nose, sternum, and core in line
- Exercise: Perception and awareness of arm weight:
- Single arm circles with closed hand & torso rotation
  - Next guide another person's arm holding with 2 hands
  - Observe how much the arm weighs at each angle

## Nerve Flossing: A Once Daily Task

- Neuroplasticity resets after holding a static position or doing a repetitive activity for 20 minutes
- Take a 10 minute break, switch positions, and change content or repertoire if training for endurance
- Referred nerve pain in hands originates in other areas due to inflamed tendons in wrist, forearm, elbow, neck
- Smooth, fluid motions designed to painlessly mobilize and then release nerves from congestion and tension

### For Ulnar, Medial, & Radial Nerves in Arms & Hands:

Pouring Out Tea Cups – Owl Eyes – Ask “Why?”  
Swivel Head & Turn Arms – Namaste – Wrist Release

## Joseph Pilates (1883-1967)

- A series of core exercises on mat, chair, or reformer
- For strength & stability in back, abs, shoulders, hips
- **Reciprocal Inhibition:** muscle pairs contract and release in opposition; one relaxes while other works

### Vocabulary of Opposing Movements

Flexion vs. Extension                      Pronation vs. Supination  
Protraction vs. Retraction              Elevation vs. Depression  
Spinal Rotation: Cervical, Thoracic, Lumbar, Pelvic zone

### Selected Pilates Mat Exercises:

Chin Tuck – Front, back, & side planks – Twist – Saw  
Swan – Soldier Arms – Shoulder Bridge – Snow Angels

## Weight Training & Resistance Bands

- Open chest by strengthening weak back muscles
- Pectoralis major/minor vs. rhomboids/trapezius
- Exercises for scapular stabilization: 1-3 lb. weights
- 3 sessions per week, 1 set each, 10 reps per set
- Cushion forehead and/or hips with pillow or cloth
  - Letter A: progressive resisted extension (prone)
  - Letter T: scapular stabilization (prone)
  - Letter W: scapular retraction (prone)
- Bands: letters A-T-Y in front & behind body
- Choose resistance: high for strength, low for stretch

## Yoga/Stretching: Union of Mind & Body

- Muscles tighten automatically but need to be actively lengthened and invited to relax after use
- Sequences of poses to align and balance muscles
- Strengthens bones and releases joints as well
- Redistributes blood flow and lymphatic drainage

### Yoga Asanas (Poses) Adapted for Bassists

Sun Salutation – Fingertip plank on wall then floor  
 6 forearm & neck stretches – Shoulder stand – Triceps  
 Chest Opening – Standing balances – Inversions  
 Fish Pose – Locust Pose – Seated & Prone Twists

## Therapeutic Massage & Myofascial Release

- Foam Roller; Tennis Balls; Rolling Pin; Massager
- Massage Therapist or self-massage works too:
  - Thumbs, hands, forearms, wrists, shoulders, chest, neck
  - Ice massage or ice bath for forearms/hands afterwards
- Create spontaneous shoulder massage circles

## Guided Relaxation

- Regular practice eases mind-body connection
- Lie down, sit comfortably, or rest in an inversion
- Observe the changes since the start of this practice

## Recommended Resources

- Try many bodywork practices; find the best for you
- Daily cardiovascular exercise: jog, swim, hike, walk...
- Apply concepts & skills to musicality & technique:
  - Scales and arpeggios = Vinyasa Yoga Flow cycles
  - Hand expansion exercises = dancers' leg flexibility
  - Multiple stops = weight training for left hand only
  - Adding Compound Bow Strokes = Swimming Drills
  - String crossings = Tai Chi moves in space-time
- Reduce overuse/misuse by avoiding static positions:
  - Biking, computer use, racquet sports, manual labor

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