



Unleash the Power of the Flutist's Body: The Timani Method

Workshop with Christine Moulton

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Torso

Belly up and down / Mageslipp

There are some muscles in the body that do not create movement in the joints and limbs but have functions such as creating internal pressures to support the spine in a healthy way. The transversus abdominis is one of them, which you will get to know in this exercise. The pressures created by this muscle (and some more muscles with it) help with healthy movement, support and breathing. You will see that activating this muscle will only make the muscle become shorter and create a sort of belt or stocking around the abdomen/belly that pulls the intestines and organs together (belly up). Now, the abdomen is like a balloon. The content is constant, there is nothing coming in or out of the belly even if it is changing shape in this exercise.

The transverse abdominis muscle also contributes to the last part of expiration, or to the control of controlled expiration (as in playing a wind instrument or singing) and in expiration against resistance (a mouthpiece). However, it should be possible to activate this muscle independent of breathing, as it also has functions for stabilizing the torso when doing movement – like lifting the instrument or lifting the arms toward the instrument. A functional transverse abdominis will actually anticipate all movements of the limbs by naturally activating 30-40ms before the movement can be seen on the outside. The specific awareness-exercises for this muscle can help to regain this natural function and therefore contribute to better overall coordination.

Step by step

- Stand on all fours
- Release the belly down towards the floor (let the belly out)
- Draw/pull the belly button inward, towards the spine
- Repeat 3-5 times
- For a deeper sense of the exercise, visualize the transversus abdominis muscle while performing the exercise (as seen in anatomy pictures)
- For more strength, draw the belly inward, then lift your knees slightly off the floor, hold for 5 seconds and release slowly back down again. Try to keep the ribcage relaxed. Repeat.





Sitting shuffle / Sittende skyveøvelse

As musicians we need support and power to play and sing. Not only relaxation. However, the great thing is that when we get support from the right places in the body, it will feel more relaxed, even if we are still using muscles to hold ourselves in an upright position to play. If we are playing technically demanding pieces, pieces with high intensity of emotion or pieces with jumps or quick changes, we usually need more support. It is possible to get this from using the sit bones actively in the way you can do in this exercise. The “sitting shuffle” exercise is also great to give proprioceptive input to the brain, so that coordination generally is improved. The mental benefit that many musicians sense when proprioception is improved and the signals from the body/contact with the surface (in this case the chair) are increased, is a decrease of stress – for example in concert situations.

It is great to combine this exercise with the seated “Hip melter” exercise to avoid too much tension in the hips.

Step by step

- Sit on the sit bones, on a level, firm surface like your classic piano stool (see sitting bone exercise)
- Push one knee in front of the other, then the other, back and forth
- Feel how the movement pushes you up to tall sitting
- Let the body follow naturally, without actively moving the torso
- After going back and forth maybe 10 – 12 times, stop the movement and sense into how it feels to sit now. Do you feel more weight going into the chair? More contact between the sit bones and the surface of the chair?



Sitting shuffle: one knee forward, sitting bone down, body rises up

PART 2 – implementing into playing

- Find your favorite sitting bone (the one you feel best or is most comfortable), move and hold this knee forward (without tensing up in the hip joint) so the preferred sitting bone digs into the chair



Arms

Back arm line push- off / Bakre armlinje fraskyv

This exercise gives one way to get familiar with the activation through the back arm line as a result of the push-off. This can give a clarity of where you want to also feel a connection when playing the drums, stroking the bow, pressing the key or even lifting your instrument. We tend to think that only gravity is enough to do some of these acts, or that lifting the arm just implies using the bending movement of the arm. However, playing an instrument requires tremendous amounts of movement control. And if we don't distribute the forces to include both the muscles for bending the arm (like we have to do for basically all instruments) and the muscles that extend the arm, we are more likely to feel tension and/or a lack of possibilities in sound and phrasing.

The push-off connects us to the natural movement that we were born with, and a combination of push-off and holding/rising up was what got us off the floor and moving as kids. Regaining this ability at the instrument might change the perception of the contact with the instrument. This might provide both more options of sound production, more access to effortless power and increased endurance, like when holding the instrument, drumsticks, or arms up over long periods of time.

Step by step

- Sit on a chair
- Place the outside of the hand on your thigh or a table (*fig 1 and 2*)
- Extend your elbow slowly so that the hand goes into the surface
- Simultaneously let the force of the push-off move into the shoulder also, as though the shoulder is pushed slightly backwards and up. You might need to let go of some muscles in the front of the shoulder to let this movement happen (the chest muscles)
- Use your other hand to feel the triceps working (*fig 1 and 2*) in the backside of the upper arm
- Repeat a couple of times
- Then do the other side
- When playing, give the triceps some more attention and sense the push-off – for example from the bottom of the key in strong chords, the bow against the string for strings, the contact between the drum stick and the drum, or as you are lifting the wind instrument as in “pushing it up” instead of just lifting it (but without too much force)



Fig 1



Fig 2

For more information:



Unleashing the Potential of the Musicians' Body – anatomy and exercises for healthy playing

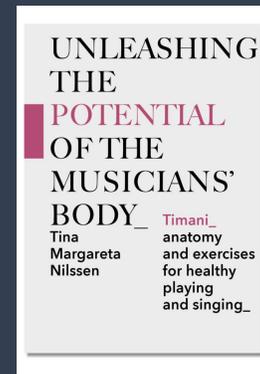
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Thank you for coming!