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## **Inner and Outer Spaces – an awareness to achieve flow?**

*Key words; Improvisation, Breathing, Presence in the moment, Awareness of sound and body, Awareness of acoustics, Flow.*

The purpose of this artistic development project is to explore how a musician can develop awareness of an inner space of sound and mind and how this affects the music. The music itself creates a tonal spatiality which is sounding in the outer space of the hall and continues to live in the acoustics of the room. Thus:

An inner space of mind.  
An inner space of sound.  
An outer space of music.  
An outer space of acoustics.

With *improvisation as the musical approach*, methods used to investigate this have been following two main tracks;

\**Meditation on sound and silence* inspired by exercises in Suizen (Blowing Zen) developed by Buddhist monks in Japan.

\**Modality*. The tonal limitations from a selection of modes from Western, Arabic and Indian music.

The method has consisted of a number of *laboratory experiments* in *different kind of acoustics* during rehearsals, concerts, recordings and teaching.

### **An inner space of mind**

To develop a connection with your inner space of mind is of course a lifelong challenge, with meditation, yoga or other spiritual practice. I have been inspired by a practice called **Suizen** (Blowing Zen) developed by Buddhist monks in Japan which consists of meditation on sound and silence. The monks used the shakuhachi flute as a tool for meditation (*Matousek, Schnee*). They used nine instructions and I will give you a few examples:

- Listen to how the sound starts and how it ends.
- Consider the silence in between the notes as a note. Listen to the shape of the silence.
- Follow your breath as you begin and end the note.

I have been using exercises inspired by Suizen in my teaching both in individual classes and mixed ensembles at the Academy, but also at summer courses and masterclasses. With a mindful presence in the moment, the musician appears to connect with a quality that makes the musical result more expressive. It contributes to an openminded atmosphere without prestige or fear where the essence of the music and the communication is in focus.

Student Quotes: *“By setting frames for the focus on presence and awareness of sound and breathing, I experienced that a curiosity to create and a desire to challenge oneself arose and that me and my fellow*

*musicians became more responsive to each other's person and playing and the music that came from it had a completely different and deeper quality than the one previously played by the same musician."*

Sara Aldén, (Swedish Singer)

*"I felt that the work with sound and breathing gave a lot to the presence and ability to listen. Listening to the others in the group felt more natural, came automatically, after the exercises."*

Jonas Liljeberg (Swedish Saxophonist)

### **An inner space of sound.**

As a wind player and also as a singer your sound is actually created with and within your body. A wind player will usually sound like him/herself even if he/she played someone else's instrument. You have your aesthetics, references but also your unique body, which work as a resonance, and your affirmation of your sound.

When working with the sound of students I encourage them to affirm that their sound is starting from their feet up through the body. The diaphragm, supporting the air and the chest, throat and head is filled with the sound, even before it is played. When the air is divided by the mouthpiece or makes the reed vibrate the sound is filling up the body and projects out in the room. Another exercise for the projection is to affirm you are playing for someone on a rooftop 200 meters away, but still play in a soft dynamic. After these instructions their sound always becomes more open, with a clearer core, although I haven't mentioned one technical instrumental aspect. This project confirms that with an increased awareness of the body as an inner space of resonance, the wind player gets a better sound and clearer projection into the room.

Student Quotes: *"I feel I have learned more about the presence (presence) of the music and the use of the room. I also feel that I have come closer to my goal of being in contact with my own hearing. "*

Mathias Aanundsen Hagen (Norwegian Saxophonist)

*"I have started to develop having a sense for the direction of the sound...Exercises in presence in the moment... helps you not to think too much about yourself when playing is a great thing to have. It gives the music focus and clarity."* Sami Nummela (Finnish Drummer)

**\*Musical example:** Suizen Exercise <https://filemaker-09.it.gu.se/artisten/detalj.php?id=1887>

Time (11.00) 12.45 - 16.15

In this example me and a group of students are doing a free improvised piece with focus on long notes, breathing, timbre and intonation inspired by Suizen. Standing in a semicircle round the audience and starting with one note each, then we gradually start sounding together.

### **An outer space of music.**

Tonal modality.

In many classical music traditions the name of a mode is describing something physical, i.e. *maqam* (a valuable place), *raga* (to color with beauty). The music being played is itself creating a spatiality. While practicing "scales" or rather modes one can enhance this spatial quality by embracing the mode's character and emotional value.

The use of tonal limitations with an approach of embracing the mode and experience its gravity, reinforces the presence of mind and listening qualities of the musician and thus also the sounding music.

Student Quotes: *“I learnt opening my ears again in many ways. For acoustics, for inner voices, for feedback...I must practice to make music by seeing the simplest technical exercises as music. I think this is something that was really great and has helped me a lot already.”*

Katrien Hermans, (Belgian Double bassist)

**\*Musical example:** “A Melodic Melange between Nordic Jazz and Arabic Maqam” – An Artistic Development Project 2012 -13. (Hagberg, al Khatib)

<https://open.spotify.com/album/3DCTYnbz5xzRncgfAyJz8L?si=IOjCYl2yTOasG4b30h0TcA>

### **An outer space of acoustics.**

As a musician one naturally always will be challenged to rehearse and perform in many kinds of halls with different acoustics, visual appearance and narrative. The topic of acoustics has been a field of much research and I am not going in to this in particular.

My purpose is more to spotlight on an awareness of the room and the acoustic as a coplayer in music. This is of course quite obvious in music where there are open spaces for improvisation, however I suggest that all music can be interpreted and performed in a close dialogue with the actual room in the present musical moment.

*The player, the sound, the room and the listener vibrate together!*

Since 2015 I have had an ensemble course where the acoustics has been one important element. During 2019, this was the main focus of the course where all classes were held in different kind of spaces. The final concert was held during a cite specific performance in a number of exhibition halls at the Gothenburg Art Museum.

As part of my present artistic research I am exploring acoustics through a number of solo performances where I play a selection of compositions in different contexts.

Student Quotes: *“One thing that is very important and useful to me is to listen, focus and embrace the room before I start playing. To feel more that the room will be some kind of foundation to stand on. I liked to think that I was playing with the room and that the acoustics are not just something that can be good or bad.”*

Joel Persson Haag, (Swedish Pianist)

*“It is a powerful feeling, and I really felt that I used the room and got help from it. I also realized, that playing in halls with very long decay is something you can really develop and to improve in learning to use big acoustics.”* Jonas Liljeberg (Swedish Saxophonist)

**\*Musical Example:** Acoustics, “Temple of Culture” .

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZOJpuNVb6Y&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZOJpuNVb6Y&feature=emb_logo)

### **Conclusion**

Medical research shows that calm, deep breathing and meditation positively affects both our body and mind. (*Goleman, Davidson*). People who sing a song together (and breathe at the same time) get their heart rate variability synchronized (*Vickhoff*). Recent neurological studies on music in the brain shows that musical improvisation activates many parts of the brain, especially those associated with flow. (*Ullén, et al*)

*It seems like the combination of improvisation, conscious breathing and mindful presence can*

*make the playing more qualitative and focused. This project suggests that the use of the above-mentioned tools increases the likelihood for a musician to play in a state of flow, both while practicing and performing.*

Swedish poet Gunnar Ekelöf has written: *“What is the bottom in you is the bottom in others as well.”*

Could it be, that when a performer is finding his/her inner source and contact and fills the music with these experiences, this quality will be heard by the listener? Working with this project in addition to my experience as a performer and teacher indicates this possibility.

Arvo Pärt: *“I believe that the truth that exists in art and music causes a deep and secret resonance in a human being. It happens when you need to find the truth yourself and have the ability to recognize that truth.”*

The German theological, philosopher and mystic Meister Eckart (1260 – 1328) expressed it even more concise:

*“Going in is going out and going out is going in”*

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