

SET TALK

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Enhancing “Voice” as an Instrument

In the past we have talked about breathing but not the specifics of how breathing affects the performance of musicians whose instrument is their voice. “Singing is controlled screaming” – a quote from Dr. Mike, a college music professor and voice instructor. He was at my office for therapy for a bad back and in our conversation he mentioned how difficult it was for many vocalists to fully let go and open their instrument (voice) to reach their potential. During his treatment he noticed a significant change in his own ability to open his breathing and throat. He was going to do a recital and was very excited because his voice had not been as strong and full of emotion for years. He felt the changes had come from the therapy he was receiving for his back and wanted to know more about what had happened to release his breath and voice. The explanation was in his case history.

Mike had arrived for therapy after straining his back doing yard work around his house. He had severe low back pain and pain in his shoulders. He also stated this was the fifth time that his back had gone into spasm and this was the worst. I asked him how old he was when he first had his first occurrence. He said it was before a major voice performance when he was a senior in college and needed an outstanding performance to be accepted into grad school. Like many college students he was sleeping on a bed in the college dorm that had a sag in the middle which was not providing adequate back support. The back spasm caused a postponement of his recital and it was only on the recommendations from his teachers that he was finally accepted into grad school.

Mike was able to describe every one of his spasms and associate them with a time when the stress in his life was at a peak.

Initial evaluation of Mike showed that he was in the core distortion with the twist and spiral running down his entire body. This twist especially in the pelvis was causing an exaggerated curvature of the lumbar spine and his body’s response when put under stress was to collapse into spasm. His exaggerated curvature in the lumbar spine was repeated through the thoracic and cervical spine. This resulted in the thorax being tipped down to the right. The right shoulder was medially rotated and lower and the left shoulder was higher. The neck was pulled forward to the right and the head was

tipped back to the left to compensate. The rotation of the iliums created a functional long left leg and short right leg with distortions in the left leg all the way into the feet to compensate for the functional longer leg.

This structure was inadequate to support Mike in life including his vocal performances.

In Mike’s first session Cranial/Structural Core Distortion Releases (CSCDR) were applied which started to release and unwind the imbalances in his structure. As the rotations in his iliums lessened his leg length evened out and the weaknesses in his legs from the imbalance of the distortion disappeared. The exaggerated curvatures started to release from his spine and thorax. As the curvature of the spine in the thorax began to unwind the restrictions on the diaphragm started to release. In the upper chest the pectoralis muscles and intercostals also started releasing especially on the right which had been tipped down and forward. On the back of the thorax on the left the intercostals, latisimus dorsi, serratus posterior, trapezius/rhomboids and levator scapula also started to release their holding patterns and unwind. In the neck the SCM and scalenes on the right and the trapezius, levator scapula and splenius capita on the left released and unwound as the structure improved. There was an immediate improvement in Mike’s breathing as the tension left these areas.

Pelvic balancing myofascial soft tissue protocols were applied to the legs, pelvis, abdomen and low back further releasing tightened tissue that had been restricted in the old pattern. While working with the diaphragmatic arch Mike had an emotional release that started with crying and ended with a loud scream. He was quite intrigued and asked me if it was possible to release emotions from other parts of his body. The answer of course was yes. I assured him that I could work with his breathing to build up a charge of energy in his body so that when the soft tissue was released any emotional energy that was trapped would be pushed through into release. Through three more pelvic balancing sessions Mike had emotional releases that included a temper tantrum, hysterical laughter, and deep sobbing. Mike felt he was getting as much out of the emotional release as he was out of the relief from structure and pain in his back.

After the pelvic balancing sessions Mike’s head still appeared forward of the rest of his body so a head/neck/shoulders myofascial soft tissue protocol was applied to balance that area. While working with the anterior neck Mike again had major sobbing. Afterwards Mike stated that he felt his neck and throat relax beyond what he believed was possible. He also started talking about how he was feeling more connected

and supported while singing, and his confidence was building for his upcoming performance.

The imbalance in Mike's shoulders seemed to be the remaining imbalance from the core distortion so a thoracic session that released the deep abdominal muscles and all the other muscles surrounding the thorax was applied. When the tissue that attached to Mike's sternum and rib heads was released Mike started to hyperventilate and had an anxiety attack. He was encouraged to continue breathing with the anxiety attack until the energy released. Mike continued to breathe rapidly, shaking and shivering, which happens when energy is releasing. The anxiety and shivering increased until Mike released a loud scream of terror. This went on for several minutes after which Mike's breathing returned to normal and the shaking and shivering slowly reduced. At the end of the release Mike was in a very deep state of relaxation and felt very comfortable and somewhat euphoric.

It was after the thoracic session where Mike released the terror that he noticed such an improvement in his singing that we had the conversation with the quote from the beginning of the article. Mike also wanted to know from my perspective what had happened that had allowed his singing to improve so dramatically.

I explained to Mike that there were at least three factors in the improvement. The first was structure. The core distortion had been released from his structure so there was less structural distortion. He was standing straighter and was more evenly supported by both legs. As explanation I also showed him how the muscles of the inner thighs connected to the psoas into the diaphragm and that releasing them would free up some of the restrictions on breathing. I showed him how bringing the iliums into balance created a level support for the spine releasing the exaggerated curvatures and allowing relaxation of the intrinsic muscles necessary for standing and support. I also showed him how the rectus abdominus, obliques, psoas, quadratus lumborum, and intercostals all restricted the thoracic downward and prevented expansion during breathing and singing. Next I explained how the pectoralis and serratus muscles restricted breathing and singing in the upper thoracic and pulled the shoulders forward affecting the rhomboids and supraspinatus. Finally I showed him how the position of his neck affected the tension on the esophagus and jaw and how all of this would dramatically affect his ability to sing.

Second I explained to him the concept of character armor which is chronically tightened muscles that block the expression of emotion. The emotion builds up in the body behind these blocks which continue to tighten to

contain the emotion. These blocks restrict breathing to try to minimize the intensity of emotions. An accumulation of blocks (character armor) would dramatically affect breathing, emotional expression and singing. Releasing the chronically tightened soft tissue that was tightened because of the structural imbalance allowed the emotional release that he had experienced during the sessions. Once this emotion had been released, the character armor softened and lengthened so he could maintain the structural improvements, the improvement in breathing, and the ability to fully express emotionally, fully using his voice as an instrument.

Third, the improved structure and energy flow would now allow energy to flow through his body providing support. This grounding would support him at times of stress and anxiety that were associated with performance. Because the imbalances were out of the structure his muscles would be working much more efficiently. Consequently he would have more strength and coordination along with the grounding, all of which would support him while singing. Mike was very pleased and sent numerous voice students for treatment as part of their development in voice.

Please visit our website for more information – www.StructuralEnergeticTherapy.com. You may also contact me through that site with any questions you may have.