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**LISTEN TO YOUR BODY
AND IMPROVE YOUR MUSIC**

Yoga and Pilates Work Out

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To my sister and my cousin.

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1. INTRODUCTION.

The choice of the topic of my master thesis came up when I realized that quite often, after an ergonomic session, I returned to my practice room and the violoncello's sound was better, my arms and joints were more free. Therefore the study was more effective and I was closer to my big and final goal as a musician: feel the connection between me, the instrument and the music and make high quality music.

I always want to improve as a violoncello player and, of course, as a musician, so one of my goals is to make art, music and create a great sound every second that I spend with my instrument.

One day reading the work of Daniel Murat I read this sentence:

“Why do not musicians care about the physical and mental training as much as they care about the practicing and musical part in their preparations? Why not adapting techniques used in sport to prepare our body and mind to be competitive when you know that the difference between two performers in an equivalent level is between their ears!”

And now using this sentence I am going to write my master work, which is going to talk about my own experience and the importance of the physical preparation in relation with the music interpretation or the music play.

2. WHY I AM WRITING ABOUT THAT?

For many years, my sister encouraged me to do sport. She always told me that even if she does not know how to play cello or other music instrument, she was sure that sports can help me. It is important to be toned to be able to practice cello so many hours and also to carry it from one place to another in your shoulders. Furthermore, she told me that she could prove to me that if I do sport I will have less back and neck problems. She told me: “you are too young to be with pain and stiffness all the time”! But always my answer to her was the same: I am too busy, I have to do the homework and to study for the exams from the high school, I need time to go to the conservatory and the rehearsals and concerts during the week-ends, I really do not have time for sport!

But as everything in life, you need to have your own experience to realize about the importance of it. In this case, I think that my sister was right and I realize about that almost three years ago, when I started to practice in the practice room, I took a break to go to an ergonomic lesson and when the lesson was over I was going again to the practice room to continue with my cello practice. I was surprised about the increase in my productivity after the ergonomic lesson. Of course my technique level of tune, sound, articulation, etc. did not change during one hour of ergonomic class, but as I was getting better results, I started to ask myself what was the explanation for that.

Probably the answer might be that my body was stretched, more relaxed, with a better posture, warmed and oxygenated, and my mind was clearer, therefore I had more freedom in my movements. I could feel more the weight of my arms, the connection of the arms with the back and the shoulder blades, I didn't have unnecessary tensions and because of all of that the violoncello sound was different, it had better quality, was more deep, warm and free at the same time and more harmonics were sounding.

Also I experienced that I got least tired in the left hand, that I needed to press less and it also helped me to improve in some aspects as the tune, the vibrato, the speed, etc.

The mere fact of feeling connection between the music, the instrument and the body, feel that the violoncello is not a strange that I have before me, but it is the instrument that I need to be able to create what it is inside my mind makes increase my musicality level.

I thought that I had to get that feeling of freedom and harmony between those three parts all the time, because in many occasions I experienced the opposite: I felt stuck in both, the body movements, the study methodology and the mind. Of course it is not a positive feeling and it does not help us find the naturals that we need to feel the connection between the music, the instrument and the body.

However, the feeling of freedom made me feel much better, more useful and meaningful as a person and also as a violoncello player. The practice was more effective, I felt that I was making the most of the study time, and the time employed in the study had a reward at the same time that I had the feeling that to play cello was easier and therefore I enjoyed it much more.

I found it very interesting, and, of course that night I talked to my sister to tell her about the experience I had. She was so glad to hear that news. And after that day I started to practice sport almost every day.

I think almost every kind of sport has benefits for the health of mind and body and that the results are reflected in the daily activities, either play cello or be in front of the computer.

Nowadays, I have enough free time and I am doing a lot of sport: I go to swim, belly dance, aerobic, cardio box, pilates and yoga. From all these sports, and thinking in my professional life, I think that yoga and pilates are the ones that gives me the more benefits.

3. HUMAN BEING NEEDS MOTION.

The human being has been designed to work actively and the inactivity leads to a malfunction of the whole organism. A person, for his physical and mental functioning has to have a good shape and fitness and if not muscular and joints pain can easily appear.

If we consider our professional life, the body and its movements are a fundamental part. We must pay attention and take a lot of care of the body because if it is turn toned, relax and stretch, I think that we will get greatly benefit in the attainment of our musical goals.

For being able to play the violoncello, quite often we need to be more aware of our body, and in my case, to practice some sports as yoga and pilates helps me a lot. Later on I will talk about how they can help.

In some occasions, while I am practicing or rehearsing, by mistake, I haven't thought of music, instrument, body and mind as a whole, but when I have got that wonderful feeling of harmony between all the parts I have felt much more satisfied and I have enjoy more the moment.

As I mentioned above, one of my main goals is to have a harmony feeling that makes me feel really good but which is not easy to find. I think that it is not a strange thing if I said that when I have had that feeling it has been when my body has been free, relax, warm and with a good blood and air circulation.

Hence the thought that to practice sport is essential in my life in both ways, in the professional one and to be able to be healthy.

4. CHAIN TO REACH OUR GOAL.

If we think in a chain which starts with our main goal and the other links are how to reach it, a possible composition will be like this:

- 1.- Create art playing high quality music.
- 2.- Recognize the inner feelings and the body sensations that will help us to control better the movement in a natural way.
- 3.- To play a high quality music we must find the naturalness, find the natural position for the body and the movements.
- 4.- To reach the natural position our body can't be forced, it should be relax.
- 5.- To be able to be relaxed in mind and in body we should not have muscles pain and we have to know the best position to perform the desired movement.
- 6.- Under my point of view, to practice some sports like yoga, pilates, ergonomic, etc, can help us to keep our body in a good shape, preventing the risk of feeling the sense of stiffness or pain.

5. AN ERGONIMIC LESSON

During my first year in SNOA there were two different levels of ergonomic lessons, “A” and “B”. As I remember “A” was softer, based in stretches and “B” was more dynamic and intense, based in strengthen and tone the muscles.

During my first months in Gothenburg, I was experiencing some difficulties with the English language and after attending to the two different levels of ergonomic lessons I thought that “B” lesson would be easier for me because I would need just to look carefully at the teacher to do the exercises correctly, even if I was not able to understand perfectly all the indications. On the other hand, in the “A” lesson, the teacher spoke about the different muscles, parts of the body and the feelings we should look for during the exercises. In this case, if I did not understand the instructions I would not be able to take all the benefit of the lesson.

The “B” lessons were funny and hard at the same time. Almost always we started the class dancing and moving the body with the rhythm of the music to warm up and relax possible tensions. Afterwards, the hard work started, with different exercises to strengthen abdominal, back, arms, legs and buttocks. And at the end of the lesson we had some exercises to add some more flexibility to our body.

Was after a “B” lesson when I experienced that I could get a lot of benefits from this lessons in the general life and in relation with the cello playing.

I think that an ergonomic lesson could be a mix between yoga and pilates, so I will speak about those two kinds of sport.

6. YOGA

Yoga is primarily an art, science and philosophy of life that integrates mind, body and spirit of human beings by developing their spiritual education.

The term “Yoga” means integrate; it can have other connotations as union or integration, and in relation with that work it could help us to find the integration of our body with the instrument to create music.

One of the major objectives of yoga is to feel the body. The word “feel” is an essential word, both in the yoga practice and in our profession, so I really think that we can benefit from that.

There was an Italian pedagogue, Maria Montessori, who said that:

“The senses are the base of the thought, without senses it is not possible to know or learn anything.”

http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Montessori

I am agree with her, through the feelings we get information, and if we listen to our inner sensations, think about them and be able to remember them we can build a lot of knowledge.

To make music and to play a music instrument is a skill and, the feelings that we need for that should come from inside us. There are not just notes in the score and fingers up and down or movements with the bow through the right and left, we need to feel every

movement that we are doing, experience with different sensations and remember the ones that feels right according with the movement and as a result the produced music.

Under my point of view Yoga asanas or yoga postures can make us feel and experience new feelings that may feel right, and then we can translate them to our professional world.

The yoga postures help us to wake up our body, our mind and our spirit feeling different inner sensations that can help us to build our learning.

Yoga breaks the armor and muscle tension by stretching to help with a mental state of relaxed awareness that is synchronized with breathing.

I am going to name some of them and their more significant benefits:

- Matsyasana or fish posture (Figure 1).

This posture helps to open the thoracic cavity, which influence positively in our mood, also is a really good posture for the violoncello players because when we open our chest we can feel more relax in the collarbone area and as a result of that our arms are also more relax, we use better our body and we produce a better sound.



Figure 1. Matsyasana or fish posture

- Bhujangasana or cobra position (Figure 2).

This one makes our spine and spinal column stronger, this fact can be very interesting in the violoncello player's life because with a strong spine we can avoid a lot of pain, and we can improve our posture. . Also stimulates the nervous system at the same time than press to the abdominal area and stimulates the inner organs.



Figure 2: Bhujangasana or cobra position

- Halasana or plough posture (Figure 3).

Stretches across the back of the back and gives much flexibility to the spinal column and neck. We spend a lot of hours sitting with straight back and if we do the opposite movement we can feel relief at the same time that we oxygenate the whole back. The same happen with the next figure, the figure 4.



Figure 3: Halasana or plough posture

- Ardha – Matsyendrasana or twist (Figure 4).

Revitalizes all the vertebrae 's ligaments and also stimulate the nervous system.

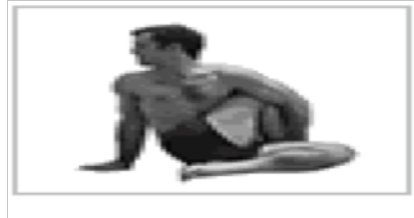


Figure 4: Ardha – Matsyendrasana or twist

- Tree posture.

Helps to find balance between body and mind. I used to do that when I need to calm down and get better concentration. If I get to find the balance just in my mind and body, then is easier to add the violoncello and the music and continue with the same sensation of body and mind control that I have got before while I was practicing the tree posture.



Figure 5: Tree posture.

Nowadays I am not attending any yoga lesson, but as I have said many times in this work, I feel great when I do it, so quite often I practice some exercises at home.

More generally I find wellness when I practice the warrior I, II, triangle poses (Figure 6 A-C) and sun salutation.

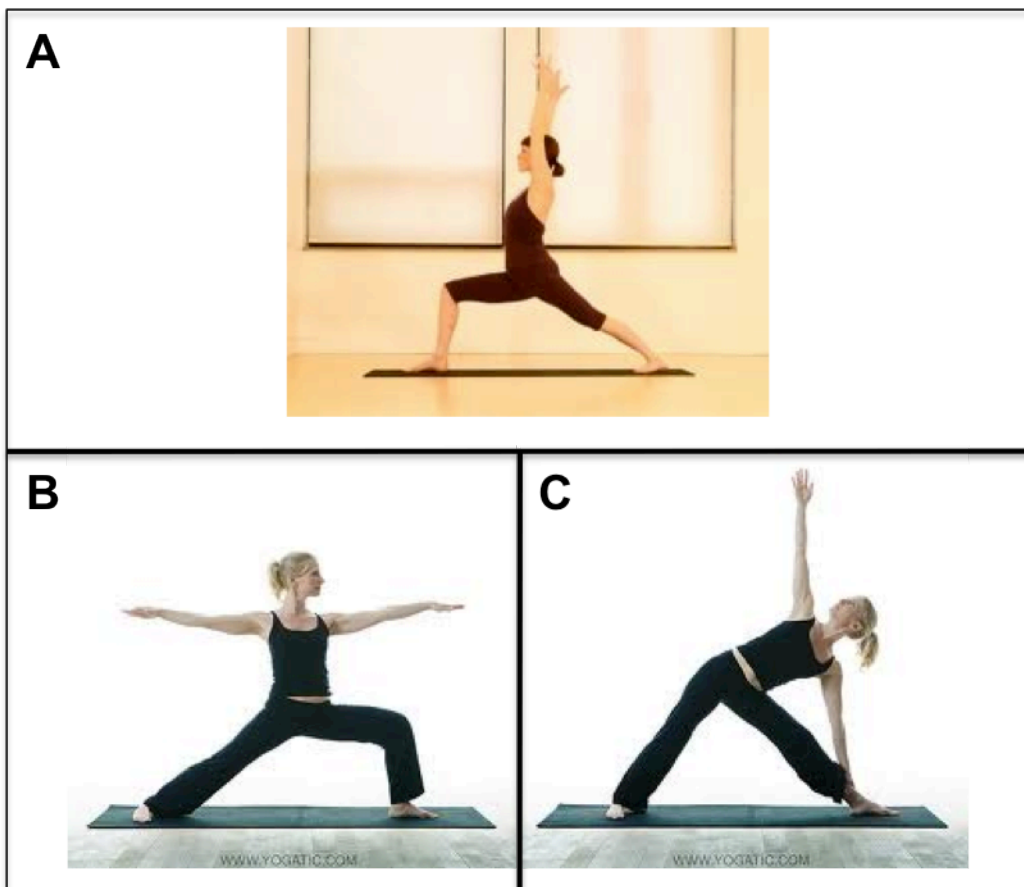


Figure 6: A) Warrior I, B) Warrior II, and C) Triangle possess

The benefits of WARRIOR YOGA for me are manifold. There are the obvious physical benefits of strength, flexibility, and balance. And then there are the psychological benefits of fusing the space between my thoughts and action.

It contributes immediately to a greater sense of physical and mental integration, confidence, motivation, focus and clarity. I learn to move toward a point of stillness within my own awareness, from where it is possible to act powerfully and decisively.

Those poses help me a lot to relax and strengthening the body, and my mind becomes more clear and open.

The warrior series and the sun salutation are great to help to open the hips, build strength and stamina. When done right maybe it can be quite hard but it feels great.

Is quite common that people accumulate tension in the hips area, so if we work for opening them, probably we will feel freedom both in body and mind.

When I am going to practice and I feel that my back is tense in the lower back or in the scapular area, that I am not able to find a good and relax posture, feeling the weight of my arms, the contact of the bow brushing the strings and the natural vibration of the instrument, or those days that I am not concentrated because of different reasons like some worries, sadness, bad mood, etc. and the sound, tune and musicality are not good enough, take a break and practice some of the yoga postures during 20 or 30 minutes and do some sun salutation often help in the following way:

The down dog posture (Figure 7) (posture that I practice inside the sun salutation), help me very much to feel connection of the shoulder blades and the back, feel how they can move and get closer to each other.



Figure 7: Down dog posture

Precisely this feeling help me when I am playing the cello, if I feel the movement of the bow from the scapular area I get my arm more relax and I achieve to use better the bow, keeping it in 90 degrees with the string, with the benefits that this entails a technical level and of course raising the musical level and the quality of the interpretation.

With the other movements of the sun salutation (Figure 8) I get to oxygenate the whole body, I experience a fluid movement at the same time that I am stretching it, feeling right after much more flexible, which I can translate in more freedom in the movements, therefore better quality in the sound, articulation and music in general.



Figure 8: Sun salutation sequence

After the yoga practice I always like to end with the child pose (Figure 9) because it is a great posture for me to relax and stretch totally the whole back at the same time that I can feel the breath through it.



Figure 9: Child pose

A chain to reach our main goal from the yoga practice could be like this:

Back and arms tense, without connection of body, mind, instrument and music.

1. Break and practice yoga for 20 or 30 minutes.
2. Listen to my body and focus on the inner sensations.
3. Oxygenate the body, open the hips and stretch the muscles.
4. More freedom in the movements therefore more naturals.
5. Better concentration.
6. Higher music quality.

7. PILATES.

Pilates is a complete exercise method developed by its founder Joseph Pilates over the course of a lifetime dedicated to improving physical and mental health. Pilates focuses on building your body's core strength and improving your posture through a series of low repetition, low impact stretching and conditioning exercises.

There are many muscles which make up the core of our bodies. These muscles are not limited to the abdomen, but rather include a variety of muscles which include muscles from the back of the neck all the way down to the thighs. These are big and powerful muscles which provide a foundation for movements for the rest of the body. Through Pilates, you will be able to develop these muscles without adding bulk, increasing your flexibility and agility and at the same time toning the stomach and thigh muscles.

Pilates goes far beyond your core muscles however and not only provides a complete body workout, but also helps you develop an awareness of how your body works, helping mind and body to work in harmony.

Pilates is based on six principles:

- **BREATHING:** It is important to be aware of the relationship between the breathing and the movement. We have to avoid the apnea and in most of the exercises we should exhale in the point of bigger effort. A correct breathing is essential for the optimal physical performance.
- **CONTROL:** The muscular control is essential to have a good posture and a correct alignment. If you can focus in a concrete muscle group you can reduce the implication of other parts of the body. One of the main subjects of Pilates

is to find the optimal balance between the muscles, a correct alignment of the body and to get freedom in the movements avoiding tensions.

- CONCENTRATION: The Pilates technique required constantly attention and focusing. You should keep the posture and feel the movement. During the Pilates practicing, the mind is on the movement, on the muscular action, the exercises should be done slowly, with precision and keeping all the time a perfect control and technique.
- FLUID MOVEMENT: All the movements have the origin in a strong center and they flow out with control and in a slow way. Every sequence should be repeated using a continued and fluid movement with the rhythm of your breath.
- PRECISION: We need to be patient, practice and be focus.
- RUTIN: Practice regularly, even if it is for a short time. This will help to improve the technique and skills.

If we look at the exercises closely, we realize that all of them are very important also in our professional life and if we use them probably we can be more effective in our practicing and in our performances.

An example of this relationship could be:

- BREATHING: It is quite often that when we have a difficult passage to play we forget to breath. The apnea does not help in this case, so here we find a similarity between pilates and cello playing. We should attend to the breath in the most difficult parts.

- **CONTROL:** We need to control body and mind to be successful in our performances. Pilates help us to know better how the different muscles, joints and bones work in our body. So we will use better using only the muscles that we really need and be able to be relax as much as possible the others. For example in Pilates we work quite often with the scapular area and the shoulder blades. If we get to move correctly this scapular area we could feel benefits in the right arm and the movement of the bow, because if we look carefully this movement starts in the scapular area and not in the forearm as by mistake people can think.
- **CONCENTRATION:** of course we need a high level of concentration to be able to perform and practice successfully. But here we also can learn a lot of things form Pilates.
- **FLUID MOVEMENT:** To reach the naturals, the movement has to be fluid, as I have mentioned before, to make high quality music we need naturalness and freedom. For example, if we have our left hand rigid is more difficult to make vibrato, to play in tune, to make big shifts, to play double stops, etc. So it can be very good if we think most of the time in fluid movements and never in stiffness.
- **PRECISION:** When we are practicing to reach a high level of music the precision of the movements are an important part, we need to control the precision of each movement. For example if we are playing chamber music we need to be precise at the beginning and at the end of the phrase, we need to be precise in the articulation, etc.
- **RUTIN:** It is really important that we practice our instrument every day so we can automate and consolidate movements as for example the shifts, also we can

include here the pure technique exercises as scales, arpeggios, octaves, thirds and so on.

7.1 WHY IT IS GOOD TO PRACTICE PILATES?

Pilates is a gentle form of exercise that literally re – introduces you to your own body.

The better you understand your body and how it works, the easier it will be for you to use it correctly, release unnecessary tension, be aware of the different feelings that you experience and get the most out of it.

Here I will write some of the reasons while it is so good to practice Pilates.

- IMPROVED POSTURE.

The spine supports the weight of the body and allows it to move with ease and comfort. That's the theory anyway. But in practice the violoncello players spent a lot of hours sitting, that means that the spine's natural S shape can be lost, resulting in back pain and rounded shoulders. If we practice Pilates it will help us to re-align the spine, with that comes better posture and it help us to realize more natural and effective movements and as a result of that naturalness we will get better results in the music and the sound.

To sitting properly and have the back with a good alignment can be a huge benefit for the sound that we produce. If we are sitting in the optimal position and our chest is lightly supported by the instrument we put on the bow the weight of the back and the whole arm so we get a deep and warm sound.

In the other hand, if our body is not in the optimal position and we are reclining on the chair we need an extra action to bring the weight to the bow and probably the result sound it is not that better.

- RELIEF FROM BACK PAIN

As mentioned above, a great deal of lower back pain comes from poor posture and our daily mistreatment of our spines. By re-aligning your spine and improving your posture, lower back pain can often be eliminated entirely.

Always is good to have a good health and if we have stiffness and pain is more difficult to find that naturals and that harmony feeling between music, body and instrument that we are talking about.

- INCREASE YOUR STRENGTH AND STAMINA.

Pilates helps to increase both the strength and stamina without adding unwanted bulk because it focuses on developing the "core" muscles - muscles found in the abdominal and pelvic regions as well as in the back -. By toning and stretching these muscles, and by correcting your posture, your natural strength and stamina will improve in leaps and bounds.

As violoncello players we need to have a good stamina. Sometimes we have to face with major concerts as for example Dvorak Cello Concerto. The concert has a length of 45 minutes more or less and we need a huge sound and a really high technique level for approach it. If we have a good stamina I am sure that it will help a lot to deal with it.

- IMPROVE YOUR BALANCE AND COORDINATION.

Pilates helps improve your balance and co-ordination by realigning your spine and strengthening your core muscles.

Balance and coordination are also really connected to the cello playing. It is obvious that we need to find a balance between the bow speeds, the weight of our arms, and coordinate properly our brain, arms, fingers, body movements and breathing to get better results in music.

8. CONCLUSION.

I think that it is really important to listen to our sensations and look inside our body to understand what are we doing.

I am not a very experience person with sports because I began doing sports recently, more or less three years ago, but I think that is something that all of us should experience in life.

Now I have some sensations, but I am sure that if I continue in this way, listening to my body I will get more and more new feelings and I will also develop the ones that I have already.

It has being really useful to write this project because I have had the chance to look at myself, to think about all this wide subject and to express it through the writing.

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