

The holistic approach to musical success

The sphere of music education is a broad one. It encompasses the intellectual, emotional, artistic as well as physical development of the student. Many students at Sevenoaks learn to play a musical instrument, but why do some develop the skills for peak performance, whilst others falter? 'Practise, practise, practise', though some of that is certainly necessary, may not be the key to achieving the break-through of genuine self-improvement.

In an age when even the England football team travel to the World Cup with a physiotherapist and a psychologist, musicians likewise have recognised the importance of fine-tuning the way they learn and perform. In the pursuit of this objective, the Centre for Holistic Studies was set up as a focus within the Music Department to promote complementary teaching methods that develop the student as a whole person.

Disciplines such as the Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, and Dalcroze Eurhythmics are well-established in the music profession and in music education. Broadly speaking, these methods help general well-being by addressing posture, improve sensitivity through awareness exercises, and develop a more natural understanding of rhythm through physical motions.

Whilst these are pursued with improvements to music making in mind, students will also benefit from a higher awareness of the connection of mind and body, improved relaxation and handling of stress, as well as the development of learning skills and a passion for discovery.

Music is sometimes seen as a mental skill. The holistic approach recognises that movement is essential for music making, and seeks to improve the way our bodies work, in tandem with the mind. Anita Strevens, who is a Dalcroze Eurhythmics specialist, has witnessed students improve their sense of rhythm through exercises involving dancing and bouncing balls.

The Feldenkrais Method addresses the very concept of learning, seeking to maximise learning in all its senses and through all senses. Here the student is encouraged to learn kinaesthetically, improving awareness and becoming more discerning of differences.

Sports Science, which is a subject taught at IB, involves the application of scientific principles and techniques with the aim of improving sports performance. One could easily substitute the word 'sport' with 'music', and come to an understanding of the aim of Holistic Studies in music. Alexander Technique teacher Charlotte Higgs works with students on optimally skeletally-aligned posture, in order to help students cope with the stresses of extended hours of instrumental practice, and performance nerves.

An efficient posture has many wider benefits, with the Alexander Technique being linked to remedying dyspraxia, asthma, and stress. It is also used by actors and

speakers to help them project their voices effortlessly, and could be useful for athletes who are seeking to improve their endurance.

Perhaps students in the future will do a bit less of the 'practise, practise, practise' by being more efficient, scientific and holistic!

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