

## Trust Your Body

When you are playing or performing, it is easy to get overly involved with the music—to become conscious of too many details. This can have a negative impact on the music as concerns with notes, fingerings, and other details can interfere with the mind's natural ability to unconsciously store what is learned. The conscious mind simply does not have the ability to grapple with large amounts of information in activities where complex skills evolve automatically through training and repetition.

The mastery of difficult music best proceeds when practice is slow and deliberate, and the player is conscious of every detail. In this manner, the unconscious mind learns effectively, and the performer can learn to trust his body's natural ability to produce in performance what is learned in practice. This idea is repeated throughout many disciplines. In sports, Timothy Galway relates it to tennis in *The Inner Game of Tennis*:

As you are letting your serve serve itself, your job is simply to observe. Watch the process without exercising control over it. If you feel you want to help, don't. But don't watch with detached objectivity; watch with faith. Actively trust your body to respond to your programming. The more you can bring yourself to trust in the natural process that is at work, the less you will tend to fall into the usual interfering patterns of trying hard, judging, and thinking—and the frustration that inevitably follows.

In *Zen and Japanese Culture*, Daisetz Suzuki applies the idea to using a sword: "In swordplay, all the technique is to be forgotten and the unconscious is to be left alone to handle the situation, when the technique will assert its wonder automatically or spontaneously." This approach is written about and applied to music in a variety of sources, including Barry Green's book, *The Inner Game of Music*, which is written almost entirely with this idea in mind. In his book, *The Psychology of Music*, Carl Seashore writes:

No one acts musically until the techniques have been shoved back into the unconscious where they take care of themselves as habits. . . . At the learning stage, be intensely conscious of the element involved in the particular that is to be learned, then relegate these elements to habit and in musical performance give yourself up to the situation as a whole guided largely by a feelingfull intelligence.

Often it is self-consciousness and a heightened concern for how we are doing that inhibits our natural ability. Philosophers and instructors regularly argue that the learning and mastery of a complex skill proceeds best when the performer is not attached to the result of the effort. This fosters a relaxation that allows the body to function naturally and effectively.

Pianists, more than likely, take different approaches to how they think about a piece as they play it and what they focus on. It is not as though a performer concentrates on nothing; on the contrary, to play well, he or she does have to be focused. The question then becomes a matter of what a performer should focus on in a performance. First, hearing the piece internally (*audiation*) will likely take one's mind off of the details so that they do not interfere with the body's natural expression. As the player becomes familiar with a piece—either through playing it or listening to it—the way it evolves in sound becomes a tangible force that guides the player through its expression. Second, the larger facets of organization—keys, scales, chords, and chord progressions allow the performer to keep the broader picture in mind and avoid being distracted by the details. This is why theory is a useful area of study relevant to music performance.