

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF QI GONG FOR THE INSTRUMENTAL PRACTICE?

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as well as a Qi gong teacher.
She regularly organizes days dedicated to Qi gong and
instrumental practice at the Vandoren Paris showroom.*



Photo credit: Christine Ledroit-Perrin

#storytelling

by Stéphanie Carne

"How did I realize that Qi gong was helping me to improve my work with the clarinet ?"

At one time, I did not understand why I managed to play the clarinet more easily from one day to another. Sound was larger, I played with more flexibility, I had the feeling to make more quick progresses in my daily musical work. Then, I realized that it was always the case on Tuesday mornings... the day of my Qi gong lesson! It was a huge stimulus and I realized that practicing Qi gong, which was at the beginning totally independant of my instrumental practice, completely changed my rapport to my instrument. I became aware that I was also able to practice my clarinet with relaxation, and not only with my will, persistence and courage anymore! Then, I began more intensive lessons and internships, and training to become a Qi gong teacher, after my musician training at the CNSM of Paris. I finally combined both practices, hence my specific activity « Qi gong and instrumental practice ».

*"I realized that practicing Qi gong [...] completely
changed my rapport to my instrument."*

QI GONG: DEFINITION

QI

(= vital energy)

+ GONG

(= training / regular work)

= QI GONG

(= control of vital energy)

Qi gong is an ancestral practice, one of the five areas of the Chinese medicine. Its goal is to maintain a good level of energy, and to reinforce the proper physiological functioning of the body and the emotional balance.

As a internal energy-giving art, it is a bodily practice based on a series of slow movements, rhythmical slow and deep breathing.

This practice enables to work on the entirety of the person, on the physical as well as the mental side.

QI GONG EFFECTS

PHYSICAL



- ✓ Maintains the general flexibility of joints, tendons and muscles.
- ✓ Enables a better blood and energy circulation.
- ✓ Improves the vital functions (breathing, digestion, nervous and cardiovascular systems).
- ✓ Exercises enable an internal massage of organs.

MENTAL



- ✓ Enables one to enter into a calm mind.
- ✓ Enables one to gain concentration and self-confidence thanks to the control of the central nervous system.

SENSITIVITY



- ✓ Develops feelings, sense of touch, and refine perceptions in the body as well as energy perception.
- ✓ Someone practicing Qi gong develops the awareness of their:
 - support on the ground (establishment)
 - vertical axis
 - physical and energy-giving centers
 - proprioception (feeling all parts of the body and its movement into any space).



QI GONG AND THE INSTRUMENTAL PRACTICE

"Practicing Qi gong regularly leads us to calm our mind, and to access concentration more easily. Therefore, we are able better to handle stress and then gain self-confidence."

Practicing Qi gong offers a very large range of tools to help the budding or professional musician. It offers, most importantly, an availability to play, physically (without any tension) as well as psychologically (easier access to concentration). These tools, we all have in our body! But we still need to learn how to use them anywhere and at any time.

When we practice, Qi gong brings a general muscular relaxation; so that we can identify existing tension in ourselves more easily.

- It enables us to relax the upper body (more fluidness, ease), and to reinforce the lower body that sustains and ensures our establishment on the ground.
- It opens and makes easier breathing to prepare the body for instrumental playing (relaxes of the internal tissues, internally massages of the organs).
- It enables us to develop feeling, proprioception (to be conscious of the position of the different parts of our body) thanks to the strong involvement of neuromuscular pathways.
- More generally, Qi gong makes us aware that everyone has the tools in their own body to fuel their own art.

ASPECTS REVEALED BY QI GONG IN INSTRUMENTAL PRACTICE

<p>Physical aspect</p>	<p>Upper body: Open the chest, relax the diaphragm, give the neck and trapezius muscles freedom, get rid of tensions in back, shoulders, arms, hands and fingers. Relaxing the spinal column enables the nervous impulse to circulate, necessary for the proper functioning between the brain and the rest of the organism.</p> <p>Lower body: It is important to reinforce the lower body (muscles) and to do specific work for structured posture, balanced and flexible.</p>
<p>Postural and proprioceptive aspect</p>	<p>Posture progresses because body awareness changes: Qi gong enables to work on specific notions like centre, axis, balance, that are essential for the musician.</p> <p>Teacher helps the students precisely, on feeling, lateralization or coordination notions.</p>
<p>Energy aspect</p>	<p>Better comprehend our own emotions and recover our vital energy. Having a good general energy available is essential to play!</p> <p>Blood circulation is improved, energy runs more freely in the body: as a result, a real strength and therefore, less fatigue.</p>
<p>Emotional aspect</p>	<p>Manage stage fright! Calm and relaxed mind leads to a facility to be concentrated on what we are doing, without any parasitic thoughts.</p>

CONCLUSION

To resume: Qi gong movements series, cadenced by breathing, relax the tissues and offer a complete work of the body in relaxation. This relaxation, as well as the space that it creates in the body, makes easier the breathing of the musician in a first time. In a second time, slow breathing enables the musician to calm the mind and to reinforce the energy. At that step, the musician feels « available » with his body; he is attentive, able to be concentrated, able to imagine... thusly able to enter in their art!

In order to direct the attention of the youngest students (especially after a day spent at school...), nothing is better than integrating, at the beginning of the music instrument lesson, a short moment of bodily practice with simple exercises! This moment creates a kind of « break », and every musician of any age is able to get to grips with it, during a random day as well as before an exam or a concert. I so much would have loved to benefit from this bodily practice - essential and in fact, very accessible! - during my study years at the conservatory!

"Henceforward, I start from the body to go to the music, and not from the mind anymore."

Finally, to complete what I said and to go further into what Qi gong can bring to instrumental practice, I must mention here one of its fundamental aspects, lesser known for sure, that concerns the work on the « Tan Tien » (Chinese term - also named « Hara » in Japanese). « Tan Tien » is the energy-giving center of the body. It opens up the more subtle work of the energy flow, that enables us to be in movement and centered. That is the main difference with a simple physical practice; the energy flow is more dense and more harmonious, it influences tonus directly and our everyday balance. By practicing a series of exercises for the body, breathing or auto-massages and internal work with « Tan Tien », Qi gong is the work of the energy in movement.

In conclusion, I would say that first of all, I invite the reader of this article to discover Qi gong by concretely practicing, as everything goes through the body, through feelings and through an energy-giving work. It is possible to see all benefits of this practice very quickly, the only condition is to practice! I permit myself a few more personal words about these sessions dedicated to « Qi gong and instrumental practice » that I lead this year at Vandoren in Paris: musicians, teachers or not, as well as students taking part in these workshops share with us their keen and various comments. Each of them expresses the immediate wellness generated by the Qi gong session, some of them are surprised to feel unsuspected stresses during the one-hour lesson, and some others see very quickly at which point this activity comes as a complement for musical work and for themselves or their students. I am sincerely very happy to have the opportunity to share with them what has been a decisive discovery in my life as a musician. Thank you Vandoren!