

Balance Cues & Explorations for Rehearsals & Lessons

By Vanessa Breault Mulvey ©2008

These are examples of simple statements to cultivate awareness in lessons and rehearsals.

HEAD BALANCE at A.O. JOINT

- *Be a bobble head as you play.*
- *Let the spine deliver the weight of your head down.*
- *Notice where the head is in relation to the spine.*
- *Free the A.O. Joint and play.*

SPINE

- *Use the support of your spine so muscles are free to move!*
- *Remember the spine is long with 4 curves that are flexible.*
- *Notice the alignment of the A.O. joint and lumbar spine.*
- *The front of the spine delivers weight down.*
- *Notice the alignment of the three balance places for sitting as you play.*

ROCKER BONES

- *Find your rocker bones – they deliver weight from above to the chair.*
- *Muscles are free to move when we sit on our rockers.*
- *The rockers support you as you play so muscles are free to move.*
- *Feel the connection between the rockers and chair as you play.*

EXPLORATIONS

Experiment with sitting styles in rehearsal to see and hear their effects on music making. Give the following cues to the group in preparation for playing:

Try this...	Compare it to how this feels...
<i>Sit in a slouch.</i>	Sit in balance.
<i>Sit up straight with your shoulders back.</i>	Sit in balance
<i>Move the head forward off of balance to meet the instrument.</i>	Find head balance at the A.O. Joint
<i>Keep the head firmly fixed.</i>	Let your head bobble like the head of a bobble head doll as you play.
<i>Tighten stomach muscles.</i>	Sit in balance with flexible, free muscles throughout the torso.

Mapping Sitting Balance
A Plan to Incorporate Balance Awareness in Lessons & Rehearsals
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Map 1 – Rocker Bones

- **Identify:**
 - Rounded bones on the bottom of pelvis.
 - They help define the bottom of the torso.
 - Angled like the rockers of a rocking chair.
 - Curved for rocking/movement.
 - Centrally located when the body is balanced.
 - Rockers are below the hip joints/legs.
 - Sit on rockers frees the legs to move.
- **Locate:**
 - Have students sit on their hands and move the torso from a slump to hyper-extension to feel the rockers roll over their hands.
 - Relax back from the hyper-extension to the point where the rockers are most prominent.
 - This is the balance point.
- **Awareness:**
 - Encourage students to feel connection of rockers with chair as they play.
 - Experiment with slouching & hyper-extension to see how it changes sound.
 - Use Balance Cues in lessons and rehearsals.

Map 2 – A.O. Joint

- **Identify:**
 - Joint of the base of skull and top vertebra.
 - Located in the center of head left to right *and* front to back.
- **Locate:**
 - Thumbs point into holes of ears.
 - If the fingers extended to meet in the center they would be touching the A.O. Joint.
 - Move one index finger to the tip of the nose
 - Move the other index finger to the bump at the base of the skull.
 - The A.O. Joint is centrally located between the four points that the fingers define.
- **Awareness:**
 - Different feelings of balance and lack of balance at the A.O. Joint.
 - When the head is balanced, neck muscles are not involved in supporting the 8-12lb head, the head can bobble like a bobble head doll.
 - Bobbling the head like a bobble head doll & playing.
 - Balance cues to be aware of the A.O. Joint during lessons & rehearsals.
 - Review Rockers

Map 4 –Spine & Lumbar Spine

- **Identify:**
 - Properties of the spine: segmented, long, curvy, flexible
 - Vertebrae become gradually bigger down the spine.
 - Weight bearing side is the front where the bone is larger.
 - Top vertebra is the part of the A.O. Joint
 - Bottom vertebra meets the sacrum, the spine's base.
 - **Lumbar Spine:**
 - 5 bottom vertebrae
 - Largest vertebrae of the spine (in an adult they are the size of a small tree trunk.)
 - Interior curve reaches the physical center of the body.
 - Note the internal curve of the lumbar vertebra is greater than the external curve.
- **Locate lumbar spine:**
 - Behind belly button
 - Between pelvic crests on seam of shirt.
 - Place thumbs on top of pelvic crests at the seam of the shirt pointing into the body toward each other.
 - Thumbs point to the internal curve which is in the physical center of the body.

- Thumbs point to the middle vertebra of the five lumbar.
- **Awareness:**
 - Sense lumbar spine in relation to rockers and A.O. Joint.
 - Review A.O. Joint and rockers
 - Balance cues for lumbar awareness.

TIPS: Post pictures of joints. ✧ Use balance cues. ✧ Have a skeleton in your rehearsal room.

For more details consult books on Body Mapping

Conable, Barbara. **What Every Musician Needs to Know About the Body**. Portland: Andover Press, 2000.

_____. **The Structures and Movements of Breathing**. Chicago: GIA Publications, 2000.

_____. **How to Learn The Alexander Technique**. Andover Press/GIA Publications.

Pearson, Lea. **Body Mapping for Flutists**. Chicago: GIA Publications, 2006.

Mark, Thomas. **What Every Pianist Needs To Know About the Body**. Chicago: GIA Publications.

Flutist, VANESSA BREault MULVEY is an active performer and teacher. She has presented workshops at the Greater Boston Flute Association’s New England Flute Fair and Solo & Ensemble Day and at colleges, performing organizations, and music schools throughout the region. Ms. Mulvey is on the faculty at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge, MA and runs a private studio in Reading, Massachusetts. Ms. Mulvey bases her playing and teaching on the principles of Body Mapping, and teaches the course, "What Every Musician Needs to Know about the Body." Ms. Mulvey is a contributor to *A Young Musician's Survival Guide* (Oxford) by Amy Nathan and has been published in *Flute Talk* magazine. Ms. Mulvey holds degrees from SUNY Potsdam and the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. On Friday, May 30th at 8:00p.m. Ms. Mulvey will present her annual recital at Longy featuring music for flute with combinations of clarinet, voice and piano. Admission is free and the public is welcome.

**To organize a workshop or class at your school contact
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Topics Include:

- **Balance** for Standing & Sitting
- **Arms:** Four Joints Move Better Than Three
- **Legs**
- **Breathing:** Myths & Misconceptions
- **Performance** Master Classes
- **Flute**