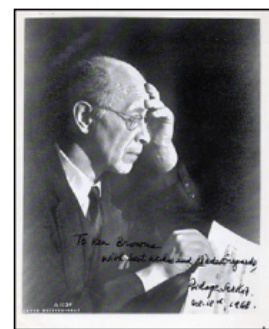


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## Seminar: Mental Practicing for Musicians



Mental Practice may be defined as “practicing inside the head and heart”. According to Dr. Eckart Altenmüller, as well as Dr. Hans-Christian Jabusch it involves “the mental execution of a process of practice *without* physical contact to the instrument ... [The musician] imagines music and develops it without working at his or her instrument”.

This course defines musicians' mental practicing, provides historical and interdisciplinary contexts, and most importantly engages in the systematic rehearsal of group mental practicing techniques. Students are encouraged to explore their own preconceptions and methodologies of mental practice, as well as to expand their understand of what mental practicing may encompass, with the aim of developing their own approach to mental practice as a complementary aspect of instrumental practice, in order to deepen their knowledge and experience with any given piece, and as a way to prevent or recover from injury. At a minimum, half of the time in each seminar will be spent engaging in practical group exercises that demonstrate particular theoretical or technical aspects of mental practice.

Modules from the Seminar:

1. *Definitions and historical /interdisciplinary contexts*: Students are asked to provide their own initial thoughts on the meaning and application of mental practice. Various aspects of mental practice are explored, for example neurophysiological mechanisms involved in (mental) practice, memory acquisition and maintenance, and visualization and audiation. Mnemonic techniques from Greek and Roman antiquity to modern advances in understanding of neural plasticity are presented, as are correlations to affiliated fields such as sports and theater science.

Five aspects of mental practicing are subsequently introduced:

2. *Developing and improving imagination of desired sound*: through practice in audiation (the ability to hear and understand music for which the sound is not physically present), students can improve their ability to create internal representations of timbre, articulation, agogic, and emotional content in music.
3. *Mastering technical difficulties*: mental practicing offers a possibility for creating, modifying, and strengthening plastic neuronal representations of sensory-motor patterns in the brain. This can be helpful for supplementing repetitive practice at the instrument, as well as to partially replace instrumental practice with the goal of avoiding or recovering from injury. Fritz Kreisler noted: "To rely on muscular habit, which so many do in technique, is indeed fatal. A little nervousness, a muscle bewildered and unable to direct itself, and where are you? For technique is truly a matter of the brain."
4. *Solidifying Memory / Reducing performance stress and anxiety*: Mental practice is an effective tool for strengthening different aspects of memory: aural memory, sensory-motoric memory, as well as procedural, semantic and episodic memory. Diversifying the types of memory used can reduce performance stress and anxiety, the piece becomes 'embodied'.
5. *Avoiding / Recovering from Injury*: Mental Practice is an invaluable skill when a musician is inhibited from instrumental practice by a physical injury or limitation. Most musicians only explore mental practicing when a playing injury inhibits their ability to work at the instrument.

A goal of the course is to have ample experience with mental practicing *before* one experiences an injury, mental practice can be part of prophylactic measures to reduce the risk of playing-related injuries.

6. *Vividly imagining performance situation*: through techniques such as the 'Performance Simulator' at the Royal College of Music in London, musicians learn to vividly imagine performance situations as part of their performance training. This module seeks to create, via technological tools such as the 'performance simulator' or through the strength of imagination a holistic performance situation. As Malva Freymuth writes: "Naturally, the vividness and accuracy of the images will influence the effectiveness of the technique. Although individuals differ in their ability to generate mental images, this capacity may be improved through regular and persistent practice. Heightened awareness of sensory feedback is the basis for success. As an individual becomes increasingly sensitive to the totality of his or her experiences, the vivid and accurate mental depiction of these events becomes more likely".

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