

# Heather O'Donnell

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## The Healthy Musician

### Seminar Profile

The development of a sustainable approach for a healthy musical life, with a focus on physical, psychological, situational, and meaning-generating factors

Definitions of health within the framework of this course :

Health is...

"...a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

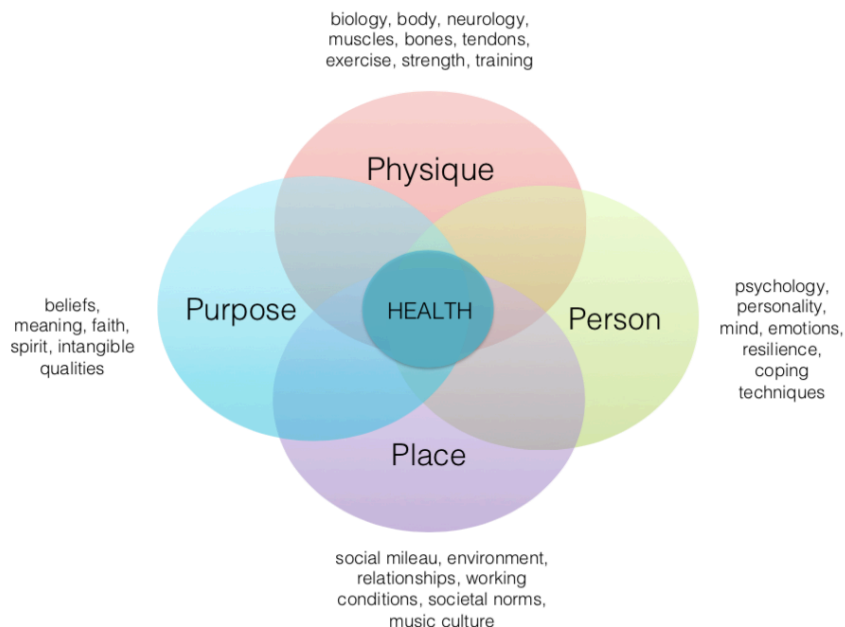
World Health Organization

"...the ability to adapt and to self-manage, in the face of social, physical and emotional challenges".

Machteld Huber

"We do not work with people's problems, but with their health. Health is the capacity to recover from shock; the ability to overcome obstacles; the capacity to live one's dreams."

Moshé Feldenkrais



This seminar offers an introduction to various concepts of health relevant for musicians, with opportunities for personal reflection and experiential implementation of health practices. The course seeks to offer students a "health tool-box" as an initial form of

support to accompany them throughout their studies and into their professional careers. The curriculum focuses on self-awareness/reflection, self-efficacy in making informed decisions on health matters, and identifying warning signs for excessive physical, mental and emotional stress and strain. The course is divided into 4 modules addressing physical, psychological, social and purposeful aspects of health. While the majority of the course is spent exploring salutogenetic topics [Salutogenesis: a medical approach focusing on factors that support human health and well-being, rather than on factors that cause disease], information will also be provided on prevention of physical and mental illnesses or disorders.

The four modules are as follows:

#### PERSON:

- Psychological factors or personality traits that potentially contribute or detract from physical or mental health
- The practice of developing resilience
- Managing (and learning to benefit from) potentially harmful psychological elements: stress, perfectionism, performance-anxiety
- Recognizing warning signs of burnout and depression
- Developing emotional literacy in recognizing and identifying psychosomatic signals
- Tools for psycho-emotional regulation: mindfulness meditation, stress reduction, cognitive-behavioral interventions

#### PHYSIQUE:

- An overview of the “body as instrument”, anatomical and functional components of the playing (singing) mechanism
- Introduction to major forms of somatic education (Feldenkrais Method, Alexander Technique, Body Mapping) and other health issues: nutrition, sleep patterns, “practice hygiene”
- Discussion and practice of various somatic offerings
- Discussion of symptoms for various music-related disorders: focal dystonia, overuse syndrome, (chronic) pain
- Resources and information on medical/physiological interventions and providers, and music-medicine institutions in Germany and abroad

#### PLACE:

- Discussing and identifying tensions and conflicts between individual preferences/needs and organizational, cultural, or societal expectations, revolving around the core questions: “How can I influence my environment to correspond to my strengths and weaknesses, and how must I adapt myself to effectively engage in my environment?”
- Learning to work within challenging working and living conditions
- Customizing instruments or playing accessories

#### PURPOSE:

- Discussion / reflection on the role of purpose in health development and maintenance
- A sense of coherence (Antonovsky): Comprehensibility, Manageability, Meaningfulness
- Case-studies of various musicians (Yehudi Menuhin, Yo-Yo Ma, Igor Levit, a.o.)

Lecturer Heather O'Donnell

After an extensive concert career (1995-2012: [www.heatherodonnell.info](http://www.heatherodonnell.info)) and in the wake of her own health problems and injuries, pianist Heather O'Donnell shifted her attention away from performance toward a full engagement with musicians' health. She has henceforth developed programs to assist musicians throughout the lifelong process of health development.

After studying Psychology at the *Freie Universität* of Berlin and receiving a certificate in Musicians' Health at the *Kurt Singer Institute / Universität der Künste Berlin*, she now works with musicians who suffer from playing blockages and disorders and educates young musicians on the development, maintenance, and recovery of health. She is also currently working on a Master of Science in Prevention and Health Psychology at the SRH Fernhochschule.

O'Donnell gave lectures at the International Symposium of the *Performing Arts Medical Associations* (PAMA) in New York City (2017), at Brainery Rochester (2017), at the World Piano Conference in Novi Sad (2016), and at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Rheinsberg (2015). She has been a guest lecturer at the iArts School in Hangzhou, China, at the New England Conservatory in Boston, the *Ostrava Music Festival* in the Czech Republic, and a jury member at the *Concours international de piano d'Orléans* (2012).

Additionally, she gave workshops, lectures and masterclasses at numerous universities, such as Columbia University in New York, Manhattan School of Music, Cornell University, the Musikhochschule in Mannheim, the Lebanese Higher Conservatory of Music in Beirut and at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. She taught in the Humanities Department of the Eastman School of Music until 2019 and gave regular workshops on musician health and practice strategies at the Eastman Institute of Music Leadership.