

Forthcoming College Events

continued

Pardee (Betts Scholar at the University of Oxford) will talk about Mendelssohn as a performer on the organ, as an editor, and about his following in England. William Whitehead (Trinity College of Music) will examine articulation and editorial issues—in particular whether Mendelssohn's original slurrings might carry important information about earlier articulation traditions.

Vanessa Latache (Head of Keyboard at the Royal College of Music) will discuss Mendelssohn's piano music and perform some of the opus 35 Preludes and Fugues. The day will end with a discussion forum led by Ann Elise Smoot and a concert of organ and piano music.

Saturday 28 November 2009, London SE21 CertRCO, ARCO and FRCO Study Day
To be held at St Barnabas' Church, Dulwich, this is an essential event for those preparing for the July examination session and a valuable opportunity to gain advice on preparation for those whose sights are set further ahead. Teachers will also find the day informative. Tutors: Timothy Byram-Wigfield, Robert Sholl and Simon Williams.

Saturday 9 January 2010, Newcastle upon Tyne Raise your game! RCO Workshop for Young Organists
See *Student News* section on page 14 for more details

27 February 2010, Edinburgh Choral Directing Workshop
Taking place at Canongate Kirk, this is a workshop for choral directors of all levels of experience (including beginners) under the expert guidance of Patrick Russill. There will be an opportunity for volunteers to work with a professional standard choir in the afternoon. This event is promoted in partnership with the Edinburgh Society of Organists.

Saturday 6 March, London SE1 College AGM and Conferment of Diplomas
The College's annual celebration of success will once again take place at Southwark Cathedral. More details will appear in the January issue of *RCO News*.

Saturday 13 March 2010, Ipswich Raise your game! RCO Workshop for Young Organists
See *Student News* section on page 14 for more details

13 March 2010, London SW3 Sing Messiah!
Rehearse and perform Handel's evergreen oratorio in one day in the magnificent surroundings of the Wren-designed Royal Hospital Chapel in Chelsea. The conductor will be Andrew Carwood (Director of Music, St Paul's Cathedral) with organ accompaniment provided by Ian Curror (Organist, Royal Hospital Chapel). Further details will be available in the January issue of *RCO News* and on the website.

Thursday 15–Saturday 17 April 2010 RCO Easter Course
Formerly known as the Cambridge Course, the College's much-appreciated annual course offering in-depth tuition and support for CertRCO, ARCO and FRCO will run again in April 2010. We are delighted that the College's president David Sanger is able to head the tutorial team. Further details will appear on the website and in the January edition of *RCO News*.

Saturday 19 June 2010, London SE21 CertRCO, ARCO and FRCO Study Day
See above (28 November 2009) for details.

For regularly updated information on College events please visit www.rco.org.uk where it is also usually possible to download booking forms. Alternatively e-mail events@rco.org.uk or telephone 05600 767237 to request the information by post. ■

Posture and Gesture at the Organ:

What's good and bad?

French physiotherapist Coralie Cousin, who specialises in work with musicians, shares some of her observations with *RCO News*. Ms Cousin works with Prof. Olivier Latty, the College's most recent Honorary Fellow, and with his organ class at the Paris Conservatoire. She also works as a consultant physiotherapist to the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, the Orchestre d'Île de France, and the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris.

What is the purpose of your work?

Organists and other musicians, like highly trained athletes, make demands on their bodies without always being aware of the consequences. I assist musicians to find a physical balance between energy and relaxation, which is absolutely necessary when playing an instrument. As a result of my work with Olivier Latty, Professor of Organ at the Paris Conservatoire, I have been able to learn much about the extremely complex techniques of organ playing.

Is there organ-specific tendonitis?

Before discussing injuries, it must be understood that playing the organ requires the whole body. The instrument demands much during performance, as the organist has to make a tremendous number of specific movements with both hands and feet in order to play the keys and pedals, and also to operate registration aids. Good posture is indispensable. It isn't so much the repetitive motions that cause muscular tissue trauma: what is dangerous is to execute them with a poor posture and reduced height. Six out of ten organists experience pain in the upper spinal column, specifically in the neck and shoulders, and predominantly on the left side of the body which has intense demands made upon it by the repertoire. The frequent emphasis of weight on the left side of the keyboards tires the left hand more than the right. Tendonitis in the left wrist is a frequent occurrence and is very often associated with pain in the left shoulder.

What is a good position when seated at the organ?

It is really important to take your time, concentrate on your posture, and not to rush to the instrument. When sitting, it's all a question of distributing the weight of your body. Try to sit towards the centre of

RCO

Member
Concert
Ticket Offer

25% off ticket prices for Wayne Marshall's forthcoming recital at the Royal Albert Hall.

Wednesday 21 October, 19:45

Tickets £12.50 to £20.00; for programme and other details see leaflet enclosed with this newsletter. Members should visit the RAH Box Office, or telephone on 020 7589 8212, and quote 'RCO discount' at the time of booking. To book on-line visit www.royalalberthall.com/tickets/wayne-marshall/default.aspx and use the offer code 4624

the bench, as if you were about to get up. If you can, adjust the bench's height according to your body's shape and dimensions, and be aware that the height of the bench might depend on the piece you are about to play. Of course, the bench is not always adjustable. The important thing is not to be too close to the instrument.

Before playing, concentrate on several points:

- Centre your body-axis without modifying your anchor points and move freely around this axis, giving due consideration to the flexing of the torso on the hips;
- Place your rib cage correctly and then exhale while stretching yourself towards the sky; at this point you must think of your body as elongating smoothly, as if the air you are blowing is helping to carry the music to your audience;
- Raise your arms without modifying your anchor points, or the axis of your body; the movement of the arms must seem weightless.

What is a poor position when seated at the organ?

A poor position manifests itself in three ways:

- The weight of your body is not distributed correctly on its anchor points, and your shoulder line becomes uneven. When you raise your arm, it is heavy. Please note: an asymmetrical sitting position can cause a deviation of the spine and the rib cage can become closed and off centre; this may stop you from breathing correctly.
- You're arching your back to keep upright. This is a common mistake. You can't lean on your feet to help yourself, and you try to make yourself taller when seated at the edge of your bench. You throw your head forward because of your arched back, and this creates tensions in your neck.
- You pivot your pelvis backwards, rounding your back and closing your shoulders. This poor position is responsible for stiffness in the rib cage, which is off centre, and you are unable to breathe correctly.

It is important that you repeat the movement I mentioned earlier of lifting your arms a countless number of times. Remember that it is your centre that is leading you, and not your hand: that is what has to register in your mind. Always remember that your body works as a whole unit.

How do you know when your position is incorrect?

Being able to relax whilst remaining balanced and centred is the main criterion of good posture at the organ or any

instrument. I have an example. Ted, 22 years old, explained to me: 'I got my position wrong during my first year of learning. I was so scared of being tense, that I confused tenseness and stiffness. My teacher always told me to relax, so I ended up not training my back at all. I was worried about feeling my muscles working, so I tried to eliminate this physical sensation'. Don't confuse slumping for releasing or for relaxation! If before playing you let yourself go by slumping, you must correct this, as it is a misinterpretation of the body. You often do this believing that you are relaxing, but in fact it has nothing to do with the physical sensation of releasing or relaxation.

Do you have any other case studies you can share?

Yes, one important case comes to mind. 'I have at last found some long-forgotten physical sensations, as if my body memory had failed me', Christiane, a 55-year-old organist, explained to me. 'I have regained control over my pedal technique. My body now works as a whole again; the logic of movement has returned.' I recall that when Christiane wanted to hold herself upright, she arched her lower back, which tilted her pelvis forward, thus creating a huge tension in her neck and shoulders. She asked me for advice. She wanted to be in good physical condition when the time came for her to retire so as to be able to play and learn new pieces. Over time, she had brought her bench forward, thus compressing the range of her movements. Reducing the space between player and instrument is a common mistake, which contributes to altering the muscular memory of the body. 'Even if the movement is small, I feel or sense it in a big way', Christiane said and 'to "think big" also expands your range of tonal colours'. I watched Christiane play the organ and asked her to move her bench back slightly, so that she could sit a little less on the edge of it. At first, Christiane was completely thrown off balance. She felt as if she was falling. We then worked on the tilt of her pelvis, the locking of her lower abdominal muscles, and concentrated on reintegrating hip flexion from the torso. I was adamant about wanting her to recover the scope of her movements, as it is this that allows one to bend towards the score without breaking the motion, especially around the neck. Christiane was soon able to read music again without pain in the neck, and she increased her playing time from 30 to 90 minutes. Her progress continued and after 10 sessions everything was back to normal.

To conclude, I would like to show you two sketches I have made (Figures 1 and 2). In Fig. 1 (Good posture and gesture), thanks

to the maintenance of the lower abdominal muscles and the power of the back's muscles, the organist is stable and supple. He is better balanced, is sitting straighter, and his left hand has suppleness. In order to control nerves this organist concentrates on his posture.

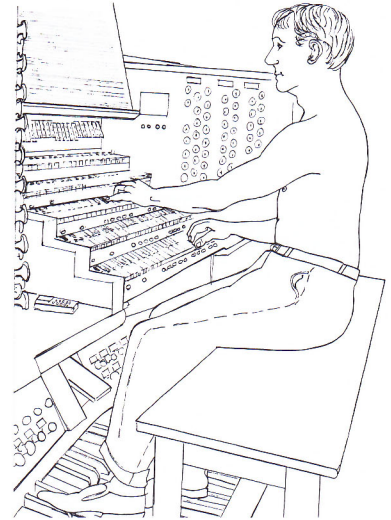


Fig.1: Good posture and gesture

In Fig. 2 (Poor posture and gesture) the organist leans backwards, which makes his back convex and leaves the shoulder without support. He is slumping. Out of balance, he leans to the right, making his left hand less precise. This produces excessive muscular tension and pain in the left hand and shoulder. With such poor posture this organist cannot control his nerves.

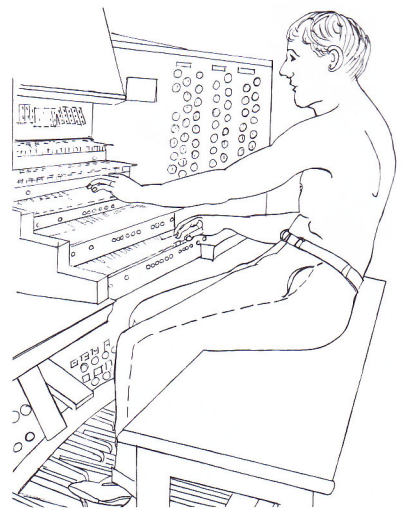


Fig.2: Poor posture and gesture

Finally, you can find more in my book, *The Musician: A High-Level Athlete*. The book is available on Amazon www.amazon.com and it's also possible to find it on my website: www.physiotherapy-for-musicians.com.

Ms Cousin: thank you for talking to RCO News. ■