

Bringing Healthy Communities Together Through Arts, Health and Wellness Awareness: A New Practice Model

Rose Grace*

Department of Music, La-Doris McClaney School of Performing Arts and Communication, Bethune-Cookman University, United States

Abstract

Purpose: A personal journey to recovery and functionality explores the healing powers of music and eastern medicine on the human mind and body to overcome life's greatest challenges. These experiences resulted in the establishment of a holistic, interactive practice model, which combines the power of music and the human brain with effective eastern approaches, validated by western medicine, to achieve optimal performance of mind and body. By raising awareness and education about these alternative strategies, the model aims to improve the health, wellness and longevity of communities across the nation. Additionally, by sharing preliminary results from the 2019 Symposium study, the article further substantiates the effectiveness of the proposed model to attain optimal mind-body balance.

Methodology: A total of 42 Concert Chorale participants. Using medically validated pre and post study questionnaires, via electronic data collection (anonymously assigned ID #s), to measure the group's performance outcomes and mind/body awareness observations.

Results: Pre-study questionnaire: 74% of the total participants experienced some type of physical discomfort >3, on a scale of 1-10. Post-study questionnaire, following the martial arts routine: 38% felt less stiff; 71% were mentally more focused; and 81% had more energized breath support.

Conclusion: A great need and interest exist for an interactive, holistic practice model, easily lending to customization and scalability, to bridge eastern and western medicine with the powers of music and the human brain to promote a natural balance of mind and body, ensuring wellness and longevity of society.

Keywords: Arts; Health; Wellness; Holistic model; Eastern; Western medicine

Introduction

Seven years ago, a diagnosis of a rare lung condition led me on a personal journey to recovery and functionality, through a combination of music, eastern medicine and medical research. My experiences in the healing power of music, Qi Gong and a newly found passion into the inner workings of the human brain, opened the door into the world of Arts and Medicine [1]. In 2014, I began developing a new pedagogical approach to effective piano practice and performance ("The Closed Piano Lid: Maximizing the Brain and Muscle Memory While Increasing Technical Facility"), investigating the latest published research on music and brain neuroplasticity, and continuing to study the tenets of Tai Chi and Qi Gong philosophy, incorporating them into my daily life.

My work has resulted in numerous conference presentations throughout the nation, sharing my insights about this new, pedagogical approach. While these discoveries were valuable, something was still missing! Since my encounter with the debilitating medical condition in 2013, I have been waiting for the right moment to share my recovery experiences about the healing powers of music, eastern medicine and the human brain [2]. Fate works in mysterious ways and in 2018, my long-awaited dream was realized after I attended a workshop session, "Exploring Traditional Chinese Medicine in Musician Health", at the USF-PAMA Conference in Tampa, FL, given by Stephanie Mayer-Sattin and Dr. David Kaplan. Their presentation embodied all the sensations I had experienced during the acupuncture treatments, Qi Gong routine and slow practice sessions at the piano in my daily physical and mental recovery process; however, because of Dr. Kaplan's expertise in anesthesiology and pain management, I now had the validation of western medicine to explain why these powerful forces

were so effective in my healing process. The result of our serendipitous meeting was the creation of a two-day Music and Medicine Symposium in 2019, entitled "East Meets West: Achieving Mind-Body Balance to Optimize Performance" [3-6].

To my knowledge, this type of symposium was the first ever held on an HBCU campus and in the Central Florida community. There were two unique features to the symposium:

1) The workshops redefined and expanded the definition of "performance", typically applied only to performing artists, now to include all individuals functioning in their every-day life's "performance".

2) The theme of the symposium combined the power of music and the human brain with eastern medicine and philosophy, validated by western medicine and research. The 2019 Music and Medicine Symposium included not only a series of interactive workshops, but a brief research study, involving 42 members of a collegiate Concert Chorale Ensemble. The results gathered from the research study and the feedback obtained from the symposium attendees gave the impetus to establish an annual, holistic Arts and Wellness Practice Model, which integrates effective practices of eastern and western medicine

***Corresponding author:** Rose Grace, Department of Music, Associate Professor of Music, La-Doris McClaney School of Performing Arts and Communication, Bethune-Cookman University, United States, Tel: +5853623922; Email: gracer@cookman.edu

Received: October 20, 2020; **Accepted:** November 06, 2020; **Published:** November 13, 2020

Citation: Grace R (2020) Bringing Healthy Communities Together Through Arts, Health and Wellness Awareness: A New Practice Model. J Tradit Med Clin Natur 9: 292.

Copyright: © 2020 Grace R. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

together with the power of music to unlock a healthy balance of mind and body. The creation of a new practice model was realized in the 2020 Music and Medicine Symposium, entitled “Bringing Healthy Communities Together Through Arts, Health & Wellness Awareness.”

This article examines both alternative and conventional approaches, advocating for the efficacy of a holistic model through the discussion of the following concepts:

- 1) The benefits of acupuncture, Qi Gong and music in my personal journey to recovery.
- 2) Finding connections between the healing powers of Qi Gong, music and the human brain.
- 3) The description of specific workshops and preliminary results from the Concert Chorale research study.
- 4) The symposium’s impact through participants’ testimonials.
- 5) The scope and implications for music and medicine by the established Arts, Health and Wellness Practice Model.

Life Changing Journey

In 2013, I was diagnosed with a rare lung condition, which required a long term (more than 2 years), aggressive treatment plan involving high dosage of steroids-80 ml of prednisone daily. After seeking a second opinion at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, FL, a new diagnosis, with a much more promising outcome, was determined. Unfortunately, my current state remained grave, since the high dosage of steroids produced devastating effects on my body, and a gradual, 9-month long process would be required to safely wean myself off the steroids. I experienced severe, debilitating neurological and muscular disruptions, which included vision impairment, weakened coordination, unpredictable muscular spasms in my hands and fingers, unbearable fatigue, and an overall daily dysfunction [7]. All medical professionals unanimously recommended that I discontinue all teaching and performing obligations for at least six months to a year. No professional musician wants to accept such advice and I was no exception! While at that time I was physically and mentally incapable of carrying out any teaching and performing duties, I fully realized that giving up music for such a lengthy period of time would not only end my career, but it would completely destroy me as an individual. After all, music was my whole world! Shortly before I became sick, I had taken up Tai Chi an art form and philosophy I had admired for a while, but never had time to pursue. My Tai Chi master, Dr. Jean Caron, was not only an inspiring teacher of martial arts, but was also a reputable doctor of Acupuncture. Given my lack of options within conventional medicine, I turned to alternative medicine in the hopes that it would improve my daily function, keeping music in my life. When I initially came to Dr. Caron, he was reluctant to promise a “Miracle” to combat the devastating symptoms I was experiencing from the steroids; however, I was determined to try anything and he agreed to work with me, a process that would take approximately one year [8]. In addition to the neurological and muscular challenges, I suffered from shortness of breath and damage to vocal cords-both being the result of the lung condition. While the acupuncture sessions (2-3 weeks) lessened the severity of the hand/finger muscle spasms and improved my overall breathing and fatigue, they did not provide sufficiently long-lasting effect in between the sessions. As a result, Dr. Caron suggested to try a particular set of Qi Gong exercises to be done on a daily basis, two to three times per day, to see if they would add functionality to my daily routine [9]. To be perfectly honest, if I did not personally experience these sensations, I would have dismissed them as “Fairy-tales”; however, after not being able to hold a cup in my hand or play simple passages

on the piano because of excruciating spasms, I sensed an immediate physical relief from these severe disruptions, as well as an overall cognitive alertness and an ability to breathe more deeply [10].

Furthermore, I gained a new endurance and focus to do slow practicing at the piano, sometimes as long as an hour and a half in one sitting-something I could not do even for ten minutes prior to the Qi Gong routine. Aside from physical improvements, my spirits were elevated, finding a renewed sense of hope and determination to continue my teaching and performing engagements during the gradual process of decreasing the steroids as clearly shown in Figures 1-3.



Figure 1: Qi Gong routine performed daily during the recovery process. Selected exercises from the Yi Jin Jing (The Muscle/Tendon Changing Classic) training featuring isomeric exercises-muscle contraction/relaxation-with diaphragmatic meditative breathing techniques.



Figure 2: Continuation of Qi Gong routine, contracting and relaxing the muscles, while using diaphragmatic breathing techniques.



Figure 3: Concluding Qi Gong exercises, used as part of a 12-step Yi Jin Jing (The Muscle/Tendon Changing Classic) routine to aid in recovery.

During my acupuncture, Qi Gong and slow piano practice regiment, I came across an engaging book, Daniel Levitin's *This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession*. It offered useful explanations on how and why music stimulates the human brain, particularly its multi-sensory engagement of the brain, which in turn interprets the information to send to other parts of the human body [11].

I began to incorporate some of this information into my piano practice sessions, hoping to discover solutions to new obstacles, which presented themselves in coordination and translation of visual information on a page of music into muscle/motor skills of my fingers-something I never found challenging before undergoing steroid therapy.

After devouring Levitin's book, I immersed myself in other published research on the brain's neuroplasticity, as well as different methods to improve "optimal performance." I began to adapt much of this information to my own playing and daily life's routines, maximizing the ability to "perform" and function throughout the day. I started to rely more on visualization and mental imagery to offset the physical time spent practicing at the piano. I wanted to further understand the complex network and processes of the human brain-a "fluid, transformative, multi-sensory system", not just a static memory and rote function. And more than anything else, I became obsessed with exploring why eastern medicine effectively worked alongside music, enabling me to function, while western medicine had failed.

The healing powers of Qi Gong, music and the human brain

For those who are new to the principles of Qi Gong and eastern medicine, this section will offer a brief introduction, linking its efficacy to music and the human brain through published, western research. The Chinese people have devoted almost seven thousand years to understanding and cultivating the meaning of life, in particular, seeking ways of living a healthy and happy one [12].

In their quest, they discovered Qi, "The energy or natural force which fills the universe-the heavens, the earth and every living thing". This interpretation of Qi has become the main tenet of eastern philosophy and medicine. Gong is translated as "Work acquired through perseverance and practice". Hence, Qi Gong could be interpreted as training in life energy which takes a long time and effort. For our purposes, the discussion will focus on the aspects of Human Qi, as they relate to health and longevity. At the root of Qi Gong practice, are three elements: Jing (Essence), Qi (internal energy), and Shen (spirit).

These elements constitute the very existence of our lives-they are inseparable, working as a unit, to "Refine conserve and firm your original Jing which in turn [inspires] Qi to flow throughout your body like an electric current [allowing] your Shen to be elevated and energized through your brain's concentration". When these systems work in perfect harmony, they allow for a strong and healthy life! Dr. Robert O. Becker, in his study of the human body as a network of electromagnetic fields, believed that the fuel converted from food and air-generated the electricity needed to keep the human cells alive, by flowing throughout the human body via electrically conductive tissue.

His theory not only lends support to how Qi flows, but also explains why the human brain improves functionality following Qi Gong exercises, which incorporate meditative breathing techniques, sending more oxygenation throughout the brain [13]. Since the human brain utilizes approximately 20% of the body's available oxygen, "Good circulation is extremely important for healthy brain function". Qi Gong

is predicated on slow, diaphragmatic breathing, which in turn slows down the main systems, offering a slower, effortless, and controlled function of the circulatory, respiratory and nervous systems.

It stands to reason that when the mind is in its most aware state, the addition of music stimulating both hemispheres of the cerebral cortex-produces a multi-sensory experience and engages the brain in a complete process, which physiologically translates into greater alertness and functionality, often referred to as "The state of flow" or "Mindfulness".

East meets West

In 2018, I collaborated with my colleague, Dr. Diana Lee, Dr. David Kaplan and Stephanie Mayer-Sattin to organize a two-day Music and Medicine Symposium to come to an HBCU campus in Daytona Beach, FL. My goal was two-fold:

- 1) To broaden the definition of "performance" beyond performing artists.
- 2) To introduce the audience to a series of workshops, which combine effective practices of alternative and conventional medical approaches with the power of music to unlock a healthy balance of mind and body.

The Symposium's purpose was to bring awareness and education in the field of music and medicine, by establishing a connection between music, eastern medicine and western research to achieve an optimal state of wellness and performance in one's life. The priority audience included young and old; students and faculty; performing artists and athletes; individuals with neurological challenges, as well as medical and mental health practitioners. Figure 4 below provides the breakdown of the individual workshops, along with their content descriptions. The majority of workshops offered an interactive format, encouraging audience members to experience the new concepts introduced in each of the sessions were shown in Figure 4.

PERFORMING ARTISTS & ATHLETES (Part I): engaging mind and body in a warm-up routine to prepare oneself to undertake essential elements in one's personal and/or professional life

EFFICIENT STUDENT PERFORMANCE: customizing the pre-craft engagement into everyday life strategies and experiences to cope with daily challenges

SPIRITUALITY-PHILOSOPHY: developing the principles of spiritual awareness and wellness according to Daoism

PERFORMING ARTISTS & ATHLETES (Part II): engaging mind and body in a warm-up routine to prepare oneself to undertake essential elements in one's personal and/or professional life

MENTAL & PHYSICAL HEALTH: highlighting the current research in mental and physical health to help bridge eastern and western approaches in rehabilitation and improvement of the individual's quality of life

NEUROLOGICAL DISORDERS: hands-on workshop employment in specific strategies to improve control of one's mind and body in individuals with neuromuscular conditions

Figure 4: East Meets West: Achieving Mind-Body Balance to Optimize Performance: Summary of the workshops during the 2019 Music & Medicine Symposium..

The Symposium culminated in a brief case study, conducted with 42 members of the collegiate Concert Chorale Ensemble, examining the group's performance outcomes and mind/body awareness observations. The data were collected electronically through medically validated pre and post questionnaires, with an assigned ID# to protect the anonymity of each participant. The case study participants included both female and male college students, ranging in ages between 18 and 22. The results were generated through the Excel database program and recorded by the team's Primary Investigator was shown in Figure 5.

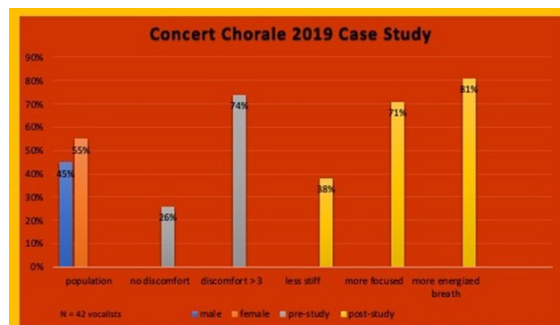


Figure 5: Preliminary results from the "East Meets West" Concert Chorale Case Study, conducted on February 16, 2019, at Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach, FL. A total of 42 Concert Chorale members participated in the study, ranging from ages 18-22.

Two astonishing results stand out:

1) 74% of the Concert Chorale were experiencing physical discomfort at a level greater than 3 (on a scale of 1-10) in the pre-study questionnaire.

2) A vast majority of the participants reported feeling more relaxed, mentally more focused and increased energy in breath support in the post-study questionnaire following the physical routine, which combined martial warm-up, acupressure massage, Qi Gong, and elements of Tai Chi. While these results are preliminary, they do support the findings of many publications on the benefits of Qi Gong and Tai Chi, which contribute to better health, longevity, reduction of stress, and treatment of particular musculoskeletal and neurological conditions. Furthermore, based on electronic feedback obtained from the Symposium attendees, it is clear that a practice model focusing on arts, health and wellness topics-is greatly needed, bringing wider awareness about mind-body balance to instill healthier habits among all individuals.

Testimonials

The following section offers readers to hear direct testimonies by three attendees of the "East Meets West" Symposium. The testimonials are presented as written excerpts from recorded video interviews, conducted by the study's Primary Investigator. The interviews were obtained voluntarily, with signed consent forms, whereby the three individuals agreed to public dissemination of the interview content.

Robin L Weiss, MS, A speech-language pathologist, practicing in volusia county public schools, Florida

There was tremendous overlap between the eastern and western approach. There was no conflict what's so ever! The eastern approach was consistent 100% with what I know about voice physiology and production. They were very easily integrated-that was very interesting to see, because I hadn't really anticipated that the two would flow so well together because I participated in some of the [demonstrated] hands-on exercises, I felt very positive, energized and just felt great afterwards! I also felt relaxed, and immediately felt the difference within myself. I also thought to myself that this is such an easy thing I could integrate into my daily life. Then, of course, the workshops had a lot of professional applications. Right off the bat, I saw an application for children who have disorders with vocal quality or insufficient volume-they were very obvious candidates for these techniques. Also, children who have "low tone" in oral musculature. What happens to those kids in lengthy utterances or in conversations is they become more and

more difficult to understand; you can compensate, to some degree, with improved respiration, improved breath control, improved posture and these strategies would clearly support all of that. [Additionally], these approaches could be used to decrease anxiety-say with children who stutter, or those who have anxiety about participating in group discussions-for example, children with autism have a lot of anxiety, because they don't have great social skills and communication. Therefore, they immediately tense up, even before their actual participation in the activity-same with people who stutter.

Of course, the tension makes the outcomes even worse! Therefore, these types of strategies beforehand, may help bring their systems down and under control. No question, [these strategies] are useful-they are free, easy to use, require no special equipment anyone can do it and doesn't take a long time to do them.

Sarah slaughter, a junior, music education major, with a concentration in alto saxophone

I was not familiar with eastern philosophy before the Symposium. I had heard the terms, but that's about it. At first, honestly, I was a little worried, because I have never done this before But once we got into the exercises, and I saw that it was really intriguing and I personally, learn better from a hands-on experience, it definitely helped a lot! OK, [the Symposium] was about a month into the semester and I was already really stressed things like Theory, applied lessons Being ignorant in the subject, I was a bit uneasy at first, but the presenters-the way they explained everything-made it quite easy to understand and with them demonstrating the routines, it was better to just "mimic" their moves. At first, I was getting a little upset with myself, because I was doing all kinds of weird movements, but once I got the hang of them, I felt that my mind and my body were like one, working together. Being completely honest, I didn't think of anything else at that moment; it's as if my thoughts just flew out of my brain. Usually, my sub-conscience always focuses on something else, but this time, there was literally nothing Life is so stressful that it just becomes overwhelming sometimes, and so thinking about what the presenters showed and talked about, does help. I tend to just shut down when I become overwhelmed, and these simple movements, the breathing, the simple meditation really do help [14].

I especially do them when I practice my instrument-it definitely makes a difference.

Sarah Crum, a senior, music major, with a concentration in voice performance, and a participant in the concert chorale case study

I have heard of them, but I had never done them myself, or even really had seen them demonstrated, except maybe in movies. I found them very interesting and eye-opening! Before the routine, I was into the usual performance mode-you know it's a performance, so I do what I have to do: put on a smile and perform! After we did the exercises, I calmed down, and everything relaxed; and not just myself, but I heard other people's voices become more relaxed. When people are in performance mode, many tend to tense up, posture especially. I know personally, I often have to massage my shoulders in order to relax. So, after the routine, I just felt very relaxed and open, and I was no longer focused on just "Performance mode, Performance mode", but instead, felt freer.

The implications and summary of the established practice model

In today's fast-paced and high-productivity world, it is often a challenge to find a balance of mind, body and spirit to meet the stressful demands of life. The proposed practice model, entitled "Bringing Healthy Communities Together Through Arts, Health and Wellness

Awareness", continues to follow the original aims of the "East Meets West" Symposium:

1) To include a broader definition of "performance", extending beyond performing artists.

2) To bring a holistic model, which combines the power of music and human brain with eastern philosophy, validated by western medicine and current research. The 2020 model's workshops included topics, such as acupuncture, body mapping, dance and movement therapy, mental health, and nutrition-reflecting not only a holistic approach, but underscoring the important connections between mind and body, which exist in both conventional and alternative techniques. After carefully reviewing the data from the case study and the two symposia's general surveys, it is evident that the arts and alternative strategies are key to introducing greater health awareness, education, and a medically non-invasive approach to improve the community's long-term wellbeing.

Conclusion

Furthermore, a format offering wellness and education through interactive workshops was fully embraced, particularly among the under-served populations, since such topics are rarely available in these communities. The proposed practice model not only offers a holistic alternative, but it is easily replicated and scalable to the demands and size of the priority population. By sharing the proposed practice model, I encourage more communities and organizations to adopt it, customizing accordingly. As I write in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, an easy adaptation of the proposed model is to offer these holistic, interactive workshops as virtual webinars, providing a vital tool for stress reduction and wellness support directly into everyone's homes. The power of this model lies in its ability to bridge distant worlds-east vs west; arts vs science-into a whole, which provides the necessary, natural balance of mind and body to produce a healthier, functioning society.

References

1. Anaya E, Pisoni D, Kronenberger W (2017) Visual-Spatial Sequence Learning and Memory in Trained Musicians. *Psychol Music* 45: 5-21.
2. Keller PE (2012) Mental Imagery in Music Performance: Underlying Mechanisms and Potential Benefits. *Ann NY Acad Sci* 1252: 206-213.
3. Kraus N, White ST (2014) Music Training: Lifelong Investment to Protect the Brain from Aging and Hearing Loss. *Acoust Aust* 42: 117-123.
4. Levac D, Driscoll K, Galvez J, Mercado K (2017) Optimal Practice Conditions Enhance the Benefits of Gradually Increasing Error Opportunities on Retention of a Stepping Sequence. *Hum Mov Sci* 56: 129-138.
5. Linnemann A, Wenzel M, Kubiak T, Nater UM (2018) Music listening and Stress in Daily Life: A Matter of Timing. *Int J Behav Med* 25: 223-230.
6. Molsberger F, Molsberger A (2012) Acupuncture in Treatment of Musculoskeletal Disorders of Orchestra Musicians. *Work* 41: 5-13.
7. Nichols ES, Grahn JA (2016) Neural Correlates of Audiovisual Integration in Music Reading. *Neuropsychologia* 91: 199-210.
8. Schellenberg EG (2005) Music and Cognitive Abilities. *Curr Dir Psychol Sci* 14: 317-320.
9. Sloboda J (2004) Music: Where Cognition and Emotion Meet. Exploring the Musical Mind Cognition, Emotion, Ability, Function. *SAGE Open Med* 9: 332-344.
10. Tao WW, Jiang H, Tao XM, Jiang P (2016). Effects of Acupuncture, Tai Chi, Qigong, and Traditional Chinese Medicine Five-Element Music Therapy on Symptom Management and Quality of Life for Cancer Patients. *J Pain Symptom Manage* 51: 728-747.
11. Trappe HJ (2012) Role of Music in Intensive Care Medicine. *Int J Crit Illn Inj Sci* 1: 27-31.
12. Weber A, Werneck L, Paiva E, Gans P (2015) Effect of Music in Combination with Vibration in Acupuncture Points on the Treatment of Fibromyalgia. *J Altern Complement Med* 21: 77-82.
13. Winter HN (2016) The Link Between Music Lesson and IQ in Children. *American Music Teacher* 66: 13-18.
14. Wollner C, Williamson A (2007) An Exploratory Study of the Role of Performance Feedback and Musical Imagery in Piano Playing. *Res Stud Music Educ* 29: 39-54.