

POWER SIT
REVERSE & QI BREATH
ENSEMBLE CIRCLE
University of Minnesota School of Music
BUD BEYER
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POWER SIT

And let's get to work. Would you put your feet down in front of you. And let's go back just to refresh you about what I refer to as the Power Sit from Qigong, in which you can take all that wonderful energy that you work with in Projection. And you're going to take it, and you're going to drive it through your legs, down through the arch of your foot, and anchor yourself as far as your imagination can go. In things like extending energy, if you can think beyond the walls and you can think to the horizon, if you can think to the stars, that's great. If you can just make it to the ceiling, that's okay, too. But anything you can do with your imagination to push those limits, to push the architectural limits, is very positive since it is your imagination finally that comes to bear when you are working with pieces for which you don't have any emotional context. And you need to build one, and you need to have one, and you need to find one. And you need sometimes to imagine one. Imagination in that term means to live it as if it was real, to believe it as if it was real, not as a game, but as a reality of yourself during the time that you've worked with the piece that you're working on.

So, pushing imagination, getting your students to push imagination, to have exercises which exercise their imagination is a very positive element, which you'll get great benefits from back into the playing, into their relationship with composition.

So as you extend that energy, if you can really anchor all the way down, and of course, it has kind of an immediate effect of just to make you sit up straight. It's really hard to slouch when you're extending energy everywhere. It just doesn't make sense. It's kind of an opposition. "Look at me extend my energy," doesn't work. So as soon as you extend energy, you get a kind of natural uprightness and an upper energy for yourself. So you just keep that.

You know, for a little while, you have to keep thinking about making the connection between the arch of your foot (Bud gestures to his arch) and down through the earth and to keep that flow consistent and constant and going. I just thought of an exercise we could do right away to give you that - I think we'll do that - just to push it down and to have it continual. You need to remind yourself because it's easy to forget. And then just readjust. Don't punish yourself for forgetting it because eventually, it should just be automatic. You sit in the position of Performance, ready to play, and that's the natural state for Performance. And you don't think about it anymore. But for a while, you have to. Good.

There's also a bunch of things you can do, and these are all basically from Qigong. There are things you can do sitting for stretches. So with an ensemble, you don't have to stand up to work out. You can kind of do it in your chair, which is very interesting. So we'll do a couple breathing exercises just to give you some of that, and I'll keep trying to add to that as we go on.

REVERSE BREATHING

So the first thing we're going to do is just put your hands down just a little below your belly button here. Good. And as we talked yesterday, that's the dantian. That's the center of the place where everything comes, a place where you draw things into. And the breathing exercise, the form is very simple. You're just going to take your hands, and you're going to just cup them one in the other (below belt buckle, the dantian). It doesn't matter which way. And as you inhale-- you don't need to do the breath yet until we get the form down. As you inhale, you pull up.

What's interesting in Chinese form is that they have a different way of breathing. And I learned this in the martial arts, and then I was astonished to stumble on it again in Qigong. They call it Reverse Breathing, in which you inhale by drawing upward. You start filling the lung from the bottom to the top, but you do it this way (Bud inhales from bottom to top). And you inhale. It's almost like you inhale - pardon me - through your groin. And you inhale up. And then when you exhale, there's a tremendous relaxation as you empty the lung completely by doing what we normally do on an inhale, which is to allow the whole abdomen to push outward on the exhale, rather than as we do it normally. We inhale and push out; we exhale and pull in.

It's an interesting difference in breathing. At first, it was very alien, but after awhile, I found myself just doing that all the time. And then I got these amazing results in pulmonary tests when I was going through that lung stuff, and so I just adopted it. And sometimes when I'm not thinking about it, I go back to our usual breath of extension on the inhale, compression on the exhale. But it's an interesting thing to think about, to pull upward. So do whatever that makes sense. You certainly don't need to include this when you're working with the students. You can just have them inhale however they want to. But if you want to explore different breath motions, think about inhaling up through the groin and exhaling back out so that this is all completely emptied (Bud indicates Torso area) in the process.

So hands here (Bud's hands are cupped in front of the dantian). And on the inhale, we're just going to lift our hands gently, nice and relaxed, upward. And when we get to about chest-high, you're going to turn your hands and finish off the inhale, and both of your hands, fingers pointing at each other, hands sort of parallel, focused inward, palm flat. Good.

And on the exhale, we'll come outward, and this is the point in which you think in your imagination of drawing Qi (chi) in on this long exhale, all the way into here (Bud indicates dantian). Hands are relaxed. Faces relaxed. Good. Exhale where you are in your breathing. And slowly inhale up. And just try and reach in as you

finish the inhale. Exhale. And then draw in the Qi, a big bubble of it, as you're pulling in and compressing, and into the center of your body. And you can just breathe normally for a moment.

And then again, hands down, exhale, and inhale up, hands turning, very relaxed, stretching the arms high. Exhale. And right into another one. Hands in, inhale up. Exhale up. Good.

Okay. You keep working like that. It doesn't take very long to get the endurance to have the breath, both the inhale and exhale, last the length of the time of the gesture. What's fun about that, to do it, is that everybody breathes together, so the action is what tells you where you are in the breath. So the whole ensemble is now breathing together. They're not breathing to play. They're just breathing to be together. So they're doing it in concert, so they are together in that breath.

QI BREATH

(A solution to keeping lips parted, mouth relaxed)

In the actual Qigong breath, you stick your tongue just against the roof of your mouth, both on the inhale and the exhale, and oddly enough, that forces your lips open a little bit and lets your mouth relax.

I don't know why in their philosophy they do that, but I like it because it gets at what I keep poking at all of you about, which is facial tensions and the tendency to clasp your lips very hard when you're not playing the instrument, when you're just breathing. Oftentimes, what happens is that the embouchure that you use in your instrument continues into your normal breath. I used to see that with conductors all the time. It got to the point it was almost a game for me. I could almost tell what the conductor's instrument was when they were conducting because their mouth would immediately go into it, a very recognizable embouchure, rather than now, having a whole different facial tone for conducting other than when you're playing - but we can talk about your playing also - so that the face is relaxed. And that little tongue up against the roof of the mouth is good.

To Patti's comment about sound, it's okay at first to make that sound, but eventually, you want it to be silent, because it's probably more powerful. But allowing each other to hear the breath is also a very nice community sensibility. It's also something you can do, and we'll do it while we're standing in the circle. But you do some little action that gets you all breathing together, which is a really nice, unifying force that you create.

ENSEMBLE BREATHING/THE CIRCLE

(Bud is standing outside of the Circle. Participants have been gathered into a close Circle, not touching shoulders, but near each other.)

Shake out just a little bit, shake your arms, your hands, shake your body, your head, good.

Now, what I want you to do is to just, gently, just look at each other, person to person, it will take a little while because there is 14 of you. Good. See if you can't make contact eye-to-eye, person on your left and right, as well as across from you. There's no big deal about this, you are just making a silent "hello."

Some acknowledgement that you are on this little journey for these couple of days together, not a lifetime commitment to each other (all laugh), but it is for this moment – there we go, a little laughter. (All laugh)

If you start to giggle a little bit, that's normal, just like your students, if it is, you can put your head down or turn away for a moment until you get some control and then come back, and if that happens, the rest of you need to make him welcome as he comes back, or help him over that moment, because it doesn't mean anything. It's lovely. It's very vulnerable actually.

Good. Make sure you are making contact with everybody. You can, without making too much of it, start to think of the group as Us, We, Not Me & Them, but Us.

For the purpose of the two days, you need each other. If you are working with an ensemble that has been working together for some time or is of a certain age, you have to say to them, that at this point, if there is anything negative about anybody in the group, for this time, to just let it go. Just for this time.

Again, it is not a lifetime commitment, it is simply a commitment for the days or the period of the rehearsal or for the concert. It is just an acknowledgement that you are working together. And really, to look at each other.

Later on, when we are doing this, I'll give you a little task to do as a group, silently. But for now, just make Contact. Good. Very nice.

(Bud walks into the Circle)

Okay, now, Together, just from yesterday, put your hands down here (Bud has hands cupped together and at the dantian, below belt buckle) and trying to work together, facing each other in the Circle, working together, so you are kind of aware of where everybody is in this, without breathing at first, just the action, bring your hands up, and turn (Bud's palms turn upwards), and up (Bud's arms are stretched to the sky), and down (Bud's palms go down to waist level), to here (Bud's arms gather the qi as they once again are placed at the dantian).

And open (Bud's hands are cupped and raise again), Don't worry about your breath (and Bud's palms turn out and up to face the sky), and out (Bud's arms go down to waist level), and in (Bud's hands rest at the dantian).

Now, start working together. Don't look at me. (Ensemble begins to move in unison). That's it. That's it. Beautiful. Again. You may have to slow or speed up, in order to stay with everybody. Keep going. Make those little adjustments

so you are working together. That's it. There you go. Keep going. Don't stop. Good.

Now. With your hands in position, cupped and at the dantian. We are going to breathe together. (note: place tip of tongue to touch the roof of your mouth, which will help keep lips parted.) Good. We will all breathe together. Not with me, but with each other, so you are all doing it at the same time, you might have to adjust your breath a little bit. Okay.

If you have deep breath control, you may have to shorten it a little bit, if you have a little struggle, you may have to lengthen it a little bit, try to work together.

Wherever you are in your breathing, EXHALE. INHALE AND BEGIN. On the Inhale, you are inhaling all the way up, and your hands turn, and up, and then EXHALE, hands coming down and flatten, pulling in all the way through the exhale and pulling in to here (Bud's hands are at the dantian).

Open (palms) INHALE. If you have to speed up, that's fine (Bud is now looking around inside the Circle). If you have to slow down, that's fine too. That's it. That's it. Stay relaxed. Just breathe, really breathe now. (Musicians' hands are at the dantian).

INHALE (Bud is working with them), keep the Inhale going, hands still crooked at the wrists as you come down, then at shoulder height, the hands flatten, and then pull until you finish the EXHALE.

Hands open, INHALE, that's it, that's it, mouths are relaxed, face is relaxed, mouths open a little bit, deep breath and flow.

(Bud is walking out of Circle & Observes Them)

Sensing each other, sensing each other's rhythms together, that's it, that's it, that's it. Good. Now, at this point, you will stop. Put your hands down. Keep Breathing. Put your hands down by your sides. Take again quickly, another look at each other.

That was fun. You did very well together. You breathed together, something you can do. Great.

Very nice. You can sit down.

It's called "The Circle."

If you have somebody in your Ensemble who does Yoga, or somebody in your school who teaches Yoga, you can have somebody come in and teach your Ensemble "The Sun Stretch," which is a breathing and moving, and really has a larger movements, not hard to do, can be done at different, varying levels

physically, but has a much stronger physical thing than just our qi-breath. It is an amazing thing to do.

And you can start with, if you have a huge ensemble, and you break the ensemble into little groups. Try to cross-over instrumental groups, so you have some of each in a group, and break it into 2-3 different Circles. That's fine.

And then, eventually, you can make it 2 Circles. You start with 4 Circles of 12, 14 people, then you have 2 Circles, and then you make 1 big Circle. And you can have it where the whole Ensemble is working together. It's astonishing what can happen. It is really amazing. They let go of everything.

They let go of the day, they come together, they are already, in effect, making music before they sit down to make music, because they are breathing together, and they are moving together.

What is the difference between that and them making music together? They are in Contact With Each Other. It's a wonderful thing to do. I urge you to see what is possible with this.