

Delving below the surface

By Nicole Wilson - 09 April 2017
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There are so many different approaches to playing a musical instrument and combatting physical stress and performance nerves. Norwegian pianist Tina Margareta Nilssen, has developed [Timani](#), a unique process which explores the connection between the specific muscles we use when we play and the performance we produce.



Tina Margareta Nilssen - Photo: Oda Hveem

So what made Nilssen look at specific muscles?

'I was studying in Berlin in 2004 with a piano teacher who brought an anatomy book to the lesson. She put it on the piano and said 'you're supposed to play with *these* muscles' explains Nilssen.

'I was surprised because I had never heard about these particular muscles and the minute I understood where these muscles were, I played with a better sound than I had ever had in my whole life! It was that immediate change of sound which inspired me to do what I do today. I wanted everyone to know about this - people who are searching inside of their bodies but don't know which muscles to connect to.'

So is just being aware of which muscles you should be using enough to change your playing?

'Awareness alone isn't enough unfortunately. It's of course important but you have to know how it feels when you're actually using the right muscles, having the

coordination skills and learning the exercises to know you're connecting to the right muscles. Timani is extremely specific about the anatomy and learning which muscles to connect to.'

How qualified is Nilssen to understand the effect of stress on the body and how it affects performance?

'I did a massage therapy degree, kinetic control for physiotherapists, yoga teacher training, trauma therapy courses, a meditation teaching course- I sat in the mountains of Spain for 6 months meditating... I saw I had to widen my knowledge so I could understand how we work in order to find out what is necessary on stage *and* in the practice room.

My whole relationship to being a pianist changed so radically. I went from feeling disappointed with myself if I didn't learn something as fast as I wanted or not being able to play as well in a concert as I did in a practice room, to really learning about the body and understanding why things happen and how they're connected to the mind. Through all the extra courses and educations throughout many years, and through teaching more than 2000 musicians from 20 different countries, I developed what is now Timani. I realised that I needed to put a name to it, as it does not quite resemble any other approach to working with the body and playing an instrument. '

[Timani introductory courses and workshops](#) are found in many different countries and span from 1-3 days long. People travel from all over the world for this unique experience.

'We start with a lot of theory, anatomy, what is needed from a musician's body and the essential muscles and principles that are important for musicians. We do need tension when we play but most people don't know where to get the right kind of tension for supporting their playing and therefore get the freedom in the muscles which can then be released. So we go through the layers of the body talking about which muscles should be relaxed, which muscles should be used, which muscles are for free breathing, and how to access them. We then go on to some simple exercises for the feet and the hands - that's just the Friday evening.

For the next two days we explore highly relevant muscles in the body in depth, talking about where they are, how it feels to use them and how to apply them to making music. We also use a masterclass setting where a student plays and the Timani teacher observes and gives feedback on which muscles are being used and which are not. We change their coordination through exercises and then they play again so people can see and hear the difference and the player can sense the difference in their own body and talk to us about it.'

There is tremendously positive feedback from students who experience this intensive 3 day Timani experience and the Timani teachers give their students follow up lessons live or online after the weekend to make sure they remember all the details.

‘There are now also [e-books and online courses available](#) on the website for those who live far away from a course. And for the musicians who want to delve deeper into it, there’s a 3 year certification programme. Over 70 people in 14 countries are currently taking it. I started the course 3 years ago so I could train people to help me with my expanding client base but I never imagined to have so many people so quickly - it just tells me that there is huge need for this knowledge.

My goal for every student is to connect to their unique sound and authentic musicianship as they learn to understand how our bodies work and learn to use the correct muscles for playing. Musicians should become stronger and healthier through playing music and not feel worse. We should all feel better, like we have had a nice and comfortable workout after practising, not that we should need to go to the gym or a therapist afterwards to help us recover!’

To read more about Timani and hear about musicians it has helped, visit www.timani.no