

Dynamix March 2009

Feldenkrais® and VocalDynamix News from Maggy Burrowes

Not drowning but waving...

How on earth do people manage to blog? To write so much and actually have a life to write about. I have been intending to produce this - only my second newsletter - for five years now. My various offices have been littered with half-started and half-finished pieces of prose on an array of different themes, and every so often I look up and "whoosh" another year has gone by. Those of you who joined my mailing list specifically requesting a newsletter must think I am a complete charlatan. Since that first newsletter in 2004 I have re-crossed the river and settled in south-east London, which I love. The Thames is not far away, Greenwich is full of tourists, and thanks to all the great colleges around here the area is a haven for musicians, actors, dancers and artists of all kinds. It feels very like my home town of Brighton - vibrant, exciting, and more than a tad grubby; living in north London always seemed a bit too much like living in Hove. I even had a couple of gigs in December - I hope to do a lot more performing this year, so watch this space...

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Classes and Workshops

I have found a peaceful and airy place to teach, **the Sunflower Centre** on the corner of Hilly Fields in Brockley, and **I am teaching workshops there two Sundays each month, and one-to-one Functional Integration lessons on Thursday afternoons.** Small scale regular workshops are great for trying out new themes, and I now have a wide range on offer - see the back page for details.

I also have a **regular drop-in class in the heart of the Telegraph Hill community**, at the community centre in St Catherine's Church at the top of the hill, with a wonderful view across the park to the London Eye. Go to their website for details of the **Telegraph Hill Festival**, March 13th to March 29th, with an astonishing array of cultural events of all kinds including live jazz (including the excellent pianist Paul Milnes, and Katie Ellen - www.myspace.com/katieellensing), The Threepenny Opera, classical music, theatre, open studios of original artworks, taster classes of all kinds - although not mine as no one ever reminds me that it is on! - and lots of events for children - www.telegraphhillfestival.org.uk

Customised Courses: I have been teaching the VocalDynamix course as a series of one day workshops, but this has not been as popular as I would have liked so I am on the lookout for a venue to teach weekends again, or possibly even the whole course over 5 days. If you think there is a suitable teaching space in your area do let me know. I am always keen to teach customised courses for small groups in private venues, so if you have an interested group, a suitable space, and would like VocalDynamix, Awareness Through Movement or a personalised singing course then give me a call.

Mini ATM Workshop Tasters

Getting the Most Out of These Mini Lessons

Whatever movements you are doing, **always put your own comfort first.** Never continue with anything that feels uncomfortable or painful. Take a rest as soon as you feel like it

Go slowly - moving slowly will make it easier for your senses to be aware of what each of your muscles is doing. You will learn more quickly this way.

Repeat each movement several times - your goal is to find a way of moving that is light, easy and pleasant to do.

Don't strive for perfection. Once you discover easy, pleasant movement, you will have achieved grace and elegance without unnecessary effort.

Do a little less than you can - and that way you will realise that you can do much more than you thought you could. It is often unfamiliar to work this way at first, so it is vital to keep your own comfort in mind at all times. If working with maximum effort is 100%, then aim for a level of effort between 30% and 60-75%. ***It is only by working this way that you will discover how powerful it is to work this way. This approach to change is so powerful it works even if only performed in the imagination.***

These are interesting movements to spend 5 - 10 minutes on. It is a good idea to start and end lying on your back for a short while, paying attention to what you sense about yourself from your contact with the floor. At the end of each lesson it is also useful to spend a bit of time walking around the room and noticing any changes to your gait.

Fully Functioning Feet, Ankles and Knees on Sunday March 15th

Problems in the knees are often a sign of subtle imbalances in our whole skeletal structure. Stand, and shift the weight around on your feet, what do you notice about your natural stance - is your weight more towards the balls or the heel? Are you more aware of the inside or the outside edges of your feet, and is the pattern the same for both feet?

1. Sit towards the front of a chair with a firm seat, and gently shift around on your seat until you can clearly feel your sitting bones underneath you. Allow your spine to curve gently as you shift in order to keep your head directly over your pelvis. Find the position in which you feel tallest - you may like to rest your hand gently on the back of your neck to help keep it lengthened.

2. Shift your weight to the outside edges of both of your feet - are your knees moving? Can you make this action with your feet while keeping your legs vertical - feel free to rest your hands on your knees if that makes this action clearer?

3. Shift your weight to the inside edges of both of your feet - allow your legs to swing inwards at first, and then continue while keeping your legs vertical as before.

3. Now alternate with your legs vertical and your knees above your feet. Stand again, what do you notice now about how you stand?

Moving With Lightness and Grace on Sunday March 29th

1. Lie on your back, bring your feet to standing and then lift your legs so that you can hold your right knee with your right hand, and your left knee with your left hand. Lower your right knee towards the ground on the right, keeping the left leg vertical and your left knee pointing up to the ceiling. Explore until you can achieve this action, and notice that it involves opening outwards in *both* of your hips.

2. Once you can rest your right leg on the floor, gently lower your left leg to rest on top of the right, keeping hold of both knees. Now begin to raise the left knee back towards the ceiling, until you can roll gently back onto your back. Roll between these two positions until the movement becomes easy and smooth, *making sure you continue to move each leg separately* - this roll is easy and you may find yourself rolling while holding your legs still at a fixed distance which will nullify the benefit to your hip joint mobility.

3. Explore the whole sequence to the left - what is different about rolling to the left?

4. Alternate so that you can roll all the way from your right to your left side, and back.

Looking at the Vocal Folds in Action

It saddens me that despite my love of new technology I can be a bit slow to take advantage of the opportunities it affords; for example you are probably reading this in glorious black and white with neither photos nor exciting graphics to catch your eye as you read. I have fascinating videos of the vocal folds performing various functions at home but it is not always possible to include extra time for viewing these during my workshops, and not every venue has video watching facilities available. Nevertheless it has only just occurred to me that I should go looking for the same sort of thing on You Tube...

Be warned, the links below are to a vocal health site and there are unpleasant images of severe vocal problems on view, so be selective about where you are clicking if you are at all squeamish. I have picked out some illustrations of information included in the courses, but there is plenty more to see on You Tube and I will have more links for you next time.

The Vocal Anatomy

<http://homepage.mac.com/changcy/voice2.htm>

This is a link to a video of the endoscope entering through the nose, down past the soft palate and through the entrance to the larynx - the aryepiglottic sphincter of Twang fame - past the distinctive curl of the epiglottis to view the false and true vocal folds. This is better than the similar video on You Tube as the various areas of anatomy are clearly labelled. You may like to imitate the sounds the subject is making to increase your recognition of what you are looking at. By the way, it's a bit quiet so turn everything up.

The lower part of the screen is the front part of the respiratory "tube", so the soft palate and the tongue are at the bottom of the screen. If you have any illustrations of the vocal anatomy do compare the two dimensional image to the three dimensional reality. The vocal sound the subject produces is breathy throughout the glide and you can see that the folds/cords do not meet. Next, the strobe light is switched on, which makes it possible to view the wave-like vibratory action of the folds, and now you can see partial closure in the lower-pitched sound (thicker folds) however the higher-pitched sound (thinner folds) remains breathy.

Constriction of the False (Ventricular) Folds

<http://homepage.mac.com/changcy/voicerasy.htm>

Example 4: Muscle Tension Dysphonia (Lateral Squeeze)

This is a clear visual of false fold constriction due to excessive tension in the speaking voice, which clears when the speaker shifts up to her higher pitches, and returns on lowering. You can see the true folds disappear behind the false as the constriction returns in her speaking range. Be aware this is chronic tension that can be unlearned, not a pathological condition.

A second example of false fold constriction - <http://homepage.mac.com/changcy/voicebreathy.htm>

Links, Gigs, and Recommendations

The Sunflower Centre - www.thesunflowercentre.co.uk

I am a big fan of taking responsibility for your own health, which is one of the reasons why Feldenkrais suits me so well; I love the idea of teaching both practical and philosophical ideas for achieving our full potential. I first came to the Sunflower Centre as a punter, and I would like to personally recommend some of the many excellent practitioners available:

***Western Medical Herbalism with Rieko Oshima-Barclay**

I have found herbs to be a powerful treatment for both **gynaecological and skin problems**. Rieko is a highly intuitive and knowledgeable therapist, simply spending time with her makes you feel better. Coincidentally she is running clinic for these conditions on Monday afternoons.

***Jo Mitchell DO Principal osteopath**

Osteopathy is a subtle and sophisticated approach to structural mobility, and Jo is one of my favourite osteopaths.

***Midge Vill - Aura-soma and Astrology**

email: midge@aura-soma.net - Before Feldenkrais I worked as a colour and image consultant for many years, and the aspect of the work I enjoyed the most was exploring the psychology of colour. The accuracy of Aura-Soma counselling is truly astonishing and I cannot recommend Midge highly enough.

Five Rhythms in Greenwich with Peter Wilberforce

www.bodyvoiceandbeing.com

Recently someone said that dancing is the most reliable route to happiness for women, and after joining this session on Saturday mornings I have to agree.

Paul L Martin - www.paullmartin.com

Paul is a wonderful singer AND a tireless supporter of other performers. His shows make you laugh and cry in pretty much equal amounts. On his website you can see and hear some of his performances (check out "But is it Art?" and "Shiver My Timbers"), and if you would like to be included in the brand new performers database he and his partner are organising, click on "mmp" at the bottom of the page. For info on upcoming performances click on "gigs". Wide-Eyed and Legless is highly recommended to fans of great singing and great songs.

Feldenkrais Professional Training - Lewes v

Garet Newell (Educational Director) - www.feldenkrais-itc.com

It is still possible to join the Lewes V Feldenkrais Professional Training as there are make-up sessions going on in the Spring. Do have a look at the International Training Centre website for full info.

Workshops for Spring at the Sunflower Centre

Sundays 12pm - 6pm £45 (£35 concessions)

Fully Functioning Feet, Ankles and Knees - March 15th

Problems in the knees are often a sign of subtle imbalances in our whole skeletal structure. Improving connections and mobility in the lower joints can relieve pain in your neck and upper spine as well as locally. It was avoiding surgery for an early knee injury that inspired Moshe Feldenkrais to develop this highly effective approach to self improvement.

Moving With Lightness and Grace - March 29th

This collection of sophisticated and enjoyable awareness through movement lessons are designed to enliven your whole self, harmonising elastic muscle with stable skeleton for maximum mobility. The day will enable you to rediscover the playfulness and agility of youth, and awaken the graceful dancer within.

Ease and Mobility in Neck, Face and Jaw - April 19th

This workshop will feature lessons designed to decrease tension and discomfort in your neck, face, jaw, throat and tongue, improving mobility and increasing expressiveness. Release of chronic tension in these areas is highly effective for lowering your general stress levels. It will be particularly useful for anyone with jaw problems, including teeth grinding during sleep.

Freeing Your Lower Back and Hips - April 26th

This workshop will feature lessons designed to decrease tension and discomfort in the hip joints and the lumbar spine, increasing flexibility in the whole of your spine and greatly improving both stamina and mobility in sitting, standing and walking. Discover how more functional walking can be used to improve your general spine health and chronic back pain conditions like sciatica.

Fully Functioning Arms, Shoulders and Hands - May 10th

This workshop features lessons designed to decrease tension in the arms, shoulders & hands, and increase flexibility and ease in the whole of the shoulder girdle, reconnecting the arms deep into the torso. It will also influence the muscles of the neck and is thus a natural partner to the neck themed workshop. Particularly helpful for people with upper back or shoulder pain, or any symptoms of RSI.

Whole Self Breathing & Vocal Power - May 24th

This workshop will feature lessons designed to greatly improve the fullness, depth and ease of your breathing, enabling you to rediscover your natural breathing coordination, and to recognise where breath inhibition is limiting your emotional expressiveness and vitality. We will also connect this fuller breathing to greater vocal control and power.

Awareness Through Movement lessons take place on the floor and you should wear loose, comfortable clothing, and bring a blanket or mat to lie on. Notes will be provided to help you achieve the maximum possible improvement from continued exploration and practice following the workshop.

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