

CONNECTING UPPER AND LOWER BODY FOR A BEAUTIFUL SOUND: TAI CHI FIGURE EIGHTS

One of the best ways to maintain a relaxed, strong, yet constantly releasing posture while holding the violin is to feel the connection clearly between the ground, your feet and legs, and your upper body. When you are in alignment and able to make your energy flow directly from your legs and lower body into your violin, it will be much easier to practice and perform many hours without tiring.

Stand with your feet parallel at a width directly under your shoulders. Your feet should be soft and relaxed, your knees slightly bent, your lower back in neutral (not arched – release your lower back so that your pelvis relaxes under) and your hips loose.

Push into the ground with your right toe. Notice how your body will react by shifting to the left and up. Repeat on the opposite side. Continue to shift back and forth between your legs, alternating the pushes from your feet.

Now as you shift, instead of going directly across, trace a figure eight around your feet. Feel your weight as it passes from the front of your left foot backward around the outside, then around the left heel, then shifting weight, going diagonally to the right toes, then along the outside of the right foot into the right heel, then forward along the inside of the right foot and across to the left toes. Do you notice how relaxing this circular movement is for your lower back? (To feel an extreme contrast, straighten your legs, lock your knees, and shift your weight from one foot to another, going directly across.)

Now return to the circular motions. Make the figure eight with your hips, allowing your left hip to drop back as you shift onto the left leg and then allowing the right hip to drop back as you shift onto the right leg.

Play air violin with this hip motion. Put your bow at the imaginary tip; shift your weight onto your right foot; drop your right hip back, shifting your weight onto your right heel. Push off from that heel; allow your right hip and entire right side to come forward, turning slightly leftward. As your weight shifts onto your left foot, allow your bow to travel to the imaginary frog. Let the motion of your body carry your bow; your arm should feel relaxed and passive.

At this point your weight is on your left leg and your bow is at your imaginary frog. Drop your left hip back, shifting onto the left heel. Push off from that heel, allowing your left hip and entire left side to come forward as you turn slightly toward the right. As you shift your weight onto your right leg allow your bow to open in a downbow to the imaginary tip. Now you have returned to your right leg and can repeat the circle.

Remember that the figure eight you are making, initiating in the feet and reflecting in the hip movement, has an overturn; this means that you will be in one continuous flow of movement. *The overturns anticipate the movement of your bow.* Start your air upbow after dropping the right hip back and beginning to move your right side forward; start your air downbow after dropping the left hip back and beginning to move your left side forward. You may be able to notice how soft and relaxed your hands feel. (To feel an extreme contrast, stand still and move your arm in upbow and downbow motions. Where do you feel the work?)

Repeat all the steps above with the violin. Try to feel the movement of your bow arm initiating from the hip. Your arms and torso should feel like one continuous flow. Do you notice anything about your sound as you draw the bow? Your ability to hold up your violin? The ease of movement in your arms? The release of tension in your back and shoulders? The arms begin in the lower back, and by moving in this figure eight you are constantly releasing those deep muscles, allowing your arms to work more freely and naturally. Put your awareness in your feet and legs, allow a subtle shifting and circling, and notice how much easier technique and expression become. *Bayla Keyes*