

***Yoga for All Musicians:  
A Multi-Age, Multi-Level Tool for Musical Performance Enhancement  
and Body Awareness***

Dr. Lesley McAllister, Baylor University, Waco, Texas  
International Society for Music Education Webinar, 2020

*Quick List of Research-Based Benefits Pertinent to Musicians and Music Education:*

**Physical**

Breath capacity / awareness  
Reduced fatigue, stronger immune system, greater endurance

**Cognitive**

Better awareness, attention, cognition, memory, and retention  
Planning ability<sup>ii</sup>  
Spatial memory<sup>iii,iv</sup>

**Emotional**

Performance Anxiety  
"Flow" state

**EARLY CHILDHOOD**

***Common Challenges:***

Attention<sup>v,vi</sup>

ADHD and special needs<sup>vii, viii, ix, x, xi, xii</sup>

Time to calm down (*Savasana*, or "resting pose")

***Focus of Lessons:***

**Movement and Learning:**

Contrast (ex., major / minor, up / down, duple / triple: Body scale, conducting  
Gross and fine motor skills: "Developmental progression"

***Yoga as a Supplement:***

**Cross-Lateral Poses** ("crossing the midline" for brain integration)

Revolved wide-legged forward fold (*Parivrtta prasarita padottanasana*)  
Eagle pose (*Garudasana*), "Sprinkler" pose, Balancing table (*Bharmasana*)  
"Hot Cross Buns," "Pat-a-Cake," dancing with scarves, Simon Says

**"Brain Breaks"**

Revolved stork pose (marching to steady beat), Cat/cow,  
Standing forward fold ("gorilla" pose, or *Paschimottanasana*)

**Partner pose:** "See-Saw" (partner seated forward fold)

**Breath Work**

"Bumblebee breath" (*Brahmari pranayama*): Pitch matching  
Lion's breath: Stimulates vocal cords and diaphragm

**Eye exercises** (*Trataka*): "eye rolling"

## ADVANCED MUSICIANS

### *Common Challenges:*

Anxiety and depression<sup>viii</sup>  
Performance Anxiety<sup>xiv, xv, xvi, xvii</sup>  
Flow<sup>xviii</sup>

**PRMD's** (Performance-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders, or repetitive stress injuries):  
Up to 86% of musicians experience one in their lifetime<sup>ix</sup>

### **Warming up before lessons or practice: Dynamic Stretches**

Shoulders and back: Chest opener, Easy seated twist, standing twist  
Wrists: Tabletop wrist stretch, belly dancer wrist rolls, prayer position flow

**Stretches to use midway through practice and to cool down:** Modified downward-facing dog, Puppy pose (*Anahatasana*), Upper back stretch with strap or door, "Clock" pose, cow face (*Gomukhasana*) arms

**Poses for carpal tunnel syndrome:** alternating flexion and extension of wrists, staff pose with fingertips pointing backward

### *Yoga as a Supplement:*

**Pre-performance routines:** Individualized, 10-minute routines  
Calming (more forward folds, slow movement, deep breathing)  
Energizing (more backbends and standing poses, faster movement)  
**Breath Work:** Alternate nostril breathing (*Nadi shodhana pranayama*)

## Resources

- Musician's Yoga Deck and Music and Yoga for Children Yoga Deck: Available on Etsy under YogaMusicStudio.  
<https://www.etsy.com/shop/YogaMusicStudio?ref=seller-platform-mcnav>

Broad, William. *The Science of Yoga: The Risks and the Rewards*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012.

Flynn, Lisa. *Yoga for Children: 200+ Yoga Poses, Breathing Exercises, and Meditations for Healthier, Happier, More Resilient Children*. Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2013.

McAllister, Lesley. *Yoga in the Music Studio*. New York: Oxford Press, 2020.

McCall, Timothy, M.D. *Yoga as Medicine: The Yogic Prescription for Health and Healing*. New York: Bantam Books, 2007.

**Contact:** Lesley\_mcallister@baylor.edu  
<http://www.Yogamusicstudio.com>

- 
- <sup>i</sup> D.P. Madanmohan et al., "Effect of Yoga Training on Reaction Time, Respiratory Endurance, and Muscle Strength," *Indian Journal of Physiology and Pharmacology* 36, no. 4 (1992): 229-33.
- <sup>ii</sup> N.K. Manjunath and S. Telles, "Improved Performance in the Tower of London Test Following Yoga," *Indian Journal of Physiology and Pharmacology* 45, no. 3 (2001): 351-4.
- <sup>iii</sup> N.K. Manjunath and S. Telles, "Spatial and Verbal Memory Test Scores Following Yoga and Fine Arts Camps for School Children," *Indian Journal of Physiology and Pharmacology* 48, no. 3 (July 2004): 353-6.
- <sup>iv</sup> K.V. Naveen et al., "Yoga Breathing through a Particular Nostril Increases Spatial Memory Scores without Lateralized Effects." *Psychological Reports* 81 (1997): 555-61.
- <sup>v</sup> L.J. Hopkins and J.T. Hopkins, "Yoga in Psycho-Motor Training," *Academic Therapy II* (1976): 461-5.
- <sup>vi</sup> Shirley Telles et al., "Improvement in Static Motor Performance Following Yogic Training of School Children," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 76 (1993): 1264-6.
- <sup>vii</sup> D. Zipkin, "Relaxation Techniques for Handicapped Children: A Review of the Literature," *The Journal of Special Education* 19 (1985): 283-9.
- <sup>viii</sup> Heather L. Peck et al., "Yoga as an Intervention for Children with Attention Problems," *School Psychology Review* 34, no. 3 (2005): 415-24.
- <sup>ix</sup> Pauline S. Jensen and Dianna T. Kenny, "The Effects of Yoga on the Attention and Behavior of Boys with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)," *Journal of Attention Disorders* 7, no. 4 (May 2004): 205-16.
- <sup>x</sup> L.J. Harrison, R. Manocha, and K. Rubia, "Sahaji Yoga Meditation as a Family Treatment for Children with Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder," *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 9 (2004): 479-97.
- <sup>xi</sup> K. Uma et al., "The Integrated Approach of Yoga: A Therapeutic Tool for Mentally Retarded Children: A One-Year Controlled Study," *Journal of Mental Deficiency Research* 33 (1989): 415-21.
- <sup>xii</sup> D.L. Redfering and M.J. Bowman, "Effect of a Meditative Yoga Relaxation Exercise on Non-Attending Behaviors of Behaviorally Disturbed Children," *Clinical Child Psychology* 10 (1981): 126-7.
- <sup>xiii</sup> D.T. Kenny and M.S. Osborne, "Music Performance Anxiety: New Insights from Young Musicians," *Advances in Cognitive Psychology* 2: 2-3 (2006): 103-112.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Sat Bir S. Khalsa and Stephen Cope, "Effects of a Yoga Lifestyle Intervention on Performance-Related Characteristics of Musicians: A Preliminary Study," *Medical Science Monitor* 12, no. 8 (August 2006): CR325-CR331.
- <sup>xv</sup> Sat Bir S Kalsa et al., "Yoga Ameliorates Performance Anxiety and Mood Disturbance in Young Professional Musicians," *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback* 34 (2009): 279-89.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Sat Bir S. Khalsa et al., "Yoga Reduces Performance Anxiety in Adolescent Musicians," *Alternative Therapies In Health & Medicine* 19, no. 2 (March 2013): 34-45.
- <sup>xvii</sup> J.R. Stern, S. Khalsa and S.G. Hofmann, "A Yoga Intervention for Music Performance Anxiety in Conservatory Students," *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 27, no. 3 (2012): 123-8.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Bethany Butzer, Ahmed Khalique, and Sat Bir S. Khalsa, "Yoga Enhances Positive Psychological States in Young Adult Musicians," *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback* 41, no. 2 (June 2016): 191-202.
- <sup>xix</sup> C. Zaza, "Playing-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders in Musicians: A Systematic Review of Incidence and Prevalence," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 158, no. 8 (April 1998): 1019-25.