

Musicians Health

Body Mapping

Reduce injury and improve performance by changing your mind's perception

BY RUTH KASCKOW

Just like athletes and dancers, musicians move for a living, the only difference being that musicians' movements are smaller, faster and more precise. Movement creates sound, and the quality of movement affects the quality of sound. Just like athletes and dancers, musicians can benefit greatly by understanding how the body is put together and designed to move.

Body Mapping is a kind of movement education that promotes ease and comfort to improve performance and reduce tension, pain and injury, and is based on some very simple ideas. Each one of us has a body map; a perception in your brain of how you think your body is put together and designed to move. Whether your perception is accurate or not, your body is going to move according to that perception. You will move according to how you think you are structured, and that may or may not be how you are actually structured.

When your perception, or map, is not accurate, and you try to move in a way that is not the same as your true design, you create extra work and tension which can result in pain and injury. Your thinking guides your movement. To illustrate what I mean, here are two examples of body maps that show how your perception influences your playing.

Imagine a trombonist who thinks his shoulder blades are attached in a fixed way to bone at his ribs. He moves his slide in and out with that belief, and his arm movement is always constrict-

ed. The reality is that the shoulder blades are not attached to the ribs and are very mobile. The two shoulder blades are attached to the two collarbones and the collarbones are attached at a joint on either side to the sternum. The trombonist with this knowledge can correct his body map and now fully extend his arm with full movement and mobility of his shoulder blades and collarbones.

Now imagine an alto sax player who thinks she should open up her upper and lower jaw to take in enough air to play. When she opens up her upper and lower jaw her head goes back and she feels like her air flow is being cut off. The reality is that we have one jaw called the mandible. The jaw is attached at two joints on either side of the skull in front of the ears called the temporomandibular joints (TMJ) which allow for easy hinging down and slight gliding side to side. The jaw does not open up, but simply hinges down for taking in air. The alto sax player with this knowledge can now correct her body map to open her one jaw while taking a breath without her head going back and impeding the flow of air.

In each of these cases, the musician's perception created movement that was limiting, causing tension, and probably resulting in pain and injury. By accessing their body map — how they perceived their body structure and movement — they were able to correct it and enjoy free, painless and effective movement.

By discovering how your body is actually put

together and moves, movement becomes freer, more effective and efficient. That means a reduction of tension, pain and injury, and improved performance!

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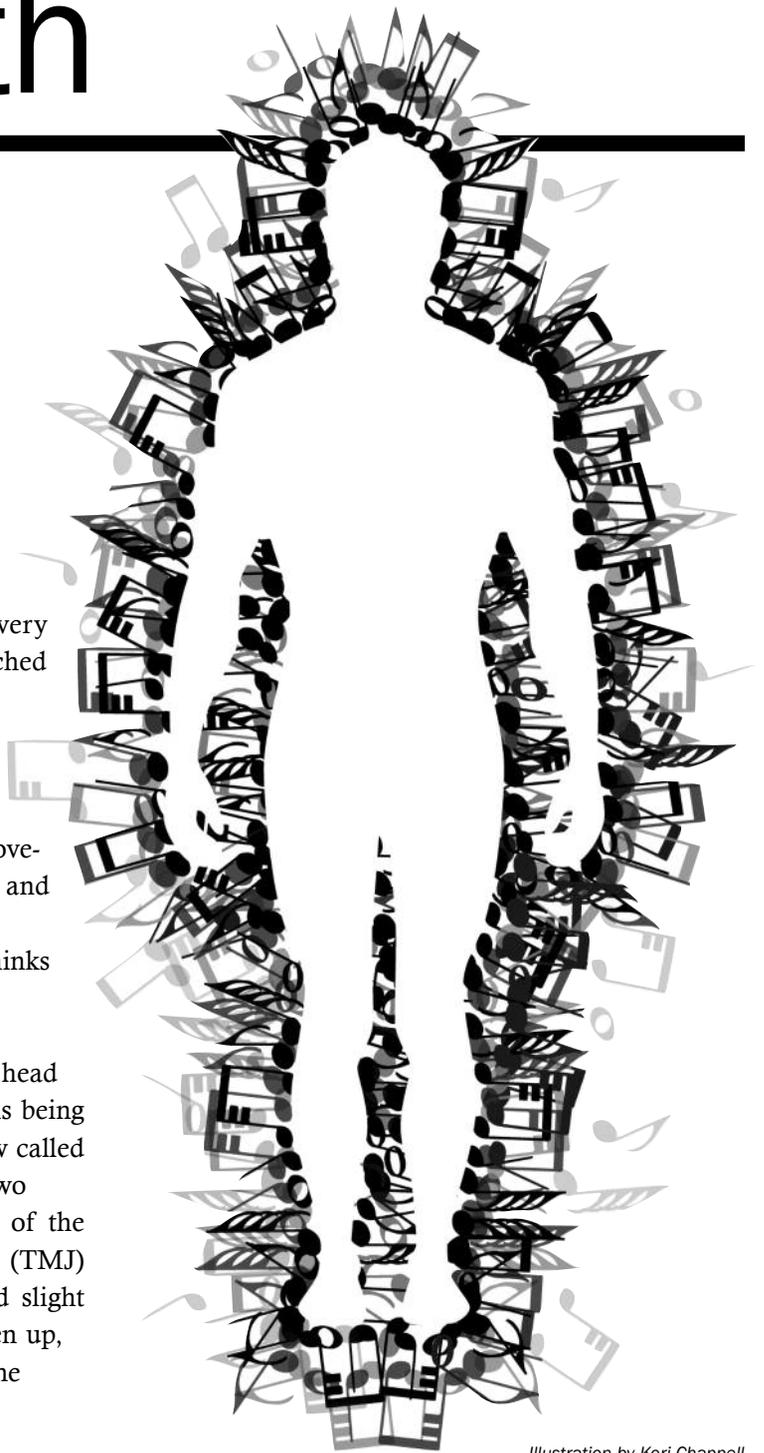


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