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his issue explores the theme of cross-pollination: how the diverse backgrounds and interests of Rolfers™ support and inform their understanding and practice of Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI), and how Rolfing training and work in turn have an impact on their other pursuits.

Rolfing SI is an unusual profession, out of the mainstream and often found via a circuitous route of other varied careers before the future Rolfer hears about Rolfing SI, experiences the work, and decides to train. Before we were Rolfers we were engineers, dancers, teachers, lawyers, nurses, editors, professional athletes, psychologists, small-business owners . . . the list goes on and on. These careers gave worldviews and habits of thought that then encountered the Rolfing SI worldview in training. These mash-ups led to unique points of view that perhaps could only have arisen from those particular elements. I think of Rolfer John De Mahy, who understood the valuable efficiency of diagnostic algorithms from his prior career as an emergency-room nurse. As he practiced Rolfing SI and studied osteopathic assessment techniques, his understanding allowed him to create unique algorithms to assess low-back, cervical, and thoracic pain. He now teaches these algorithms in continuing education classes, to the benefit of us all.

Another factor that feeds cross-pollination is that Rolfers tend to be self-employed, allowing flexibility in scheduling one's life. This makes possible a dual career, if the Rolfer wants to continue a former vocation or add another in the future. And for those who are happy to have Rolfing SI as their only line of work, the flexibility can instead allow the passionate pursuit of a side interest or avocation. Thus, we have Rolfers who continue to be musicians, actors, yoga instructors, writers, and choreographers (among others), and we have Rolfers whose practice of Rolfing SI sparked lines of inquiry leading to a further career. Rolfing SI takes many into other body-related endeavors (e.g., Pilates or the Feldenkrais® Method), into mind-body considerations (e.g., Somatic Experiencing®), or into spiritual or energetic studies (e.g., meditation or SourcePoint®).

In the articles and interviews in our cross-pollination theme, we hear from quite a number of Rolfers with diverse activities. We open with an interview with Steven Hancock, who was the initial inspiration for this theme. An accomplished musician, Hancock, in 2015, released “The Bach Project,” which began as acoustic guitar transcriptions of J.S. Bach's The Six Suites for Cello Solo and then flowered into three CDs, a four-volume iBook, fourteen YouTube videos, and two full-length multimedia theatre pieces (with a third in the works). Also in the realm of sound and music, we hear from Lynn Cohen, who speaks to the interplay between learning/practicing Rolfing SI and learning/practicing cello, and from Maria Helena Orlando, who practices music and sound therapy.

We see cross-pollination with other arts in articles from Jason Sager, who taught swing dance and danced competitively, and from Szaja Gottlieb, who sculpted stone before switching to the human body as his medium. And then we hear from Heather Corwin, who is an actor-director-educator-research psychologist besides being a Rolfer.

In the realm of mind-body-spirit, we have a dialogue I did with Gregory Knight. Both of us are teachers of the Diamond Approach®, a modern spiritual path that has a unique understanding of the body and of the way that sensing and body awareness are useful in opening and pursuing the inquiry into other dimensions of reality and our true nature. The spiritual side of life is also examined by Tsuguo Hirata, whose study of Buddhism spans decades and is leading to interesting lines of thought and experimentation in his Rolfing practice.

Brooke Thomas and Owen Marcus share how their personal processes of education and self-development led to other endeavors. In Thomas's case, a curiosity to learn and share cutting-edge knowledge of the body and fascia led her to create The Liberated Body Podcast, while Marcus’s personal process to understand and cultivate Male Emotional Intelligence took him into leading men's groups, training other group leaders, and to his work being featured in a documentary film.

Our faculty are also cross-pollinators. Rolf Movement® Instructor Kevin Frank shares body wisdom he has learned through Rolfing SI, Rolf Movement work, and pruning an orchard of apple trees. Other faculty members contribute in our “Ask the Faculty” column.

The closing argument on cross-pollination comes from Heidi Massa, in the role of devil’s advocate. She disagrees with the whole notion of cross-pollination between two or more things, and argues that we each truly do only one thing, and that that one thing informs everything we do. A lawyer, Massa states her case quite persuasively.

Other than the cross-pollination theme, Lucia Merlino introduces the haptic sense in the “Rolf Movement Faculty Perspectives” column, Noel Poff shares his developing insights on closure, and Ritchie Mintz vividly describes what he calls ‘burned from within’ – a unique situation Rolfers may encounter where the client’s fascial layers are matted and ‘burned’ together, most commonly from radiation therapy. Mintz tells us how he figured this out, and what type of Rolfing touch is most effective to help these clients.

I hope this issue inspires you to consider what in your life cross-pollinates with your Rolfing practice or, as Heidi Massa would have it, what your own unique ‘trick’ or raison d’être is that informs how you practice Rolfing SI.

Anne F. Hoff
Editor-in-Chief
Ask the Faculty

Cross-pollination of Rolfing® SI and Other Endeavors

Q: Can you speak to something in your own life that has cross-pollinated with your Rolfing Structural Integration (SI) practice, leading you to a particular perspective, understanding, or way of working?

A: Speaking of the cross-pollinations that have affected my perspective on the body, and on Rolfing SI, the first mandate from Ida P. Rolf (IFR) was to stick with her way of doing the work for five years, or “until you think you know what you are doing . . .”. I have to say that I have yet to feel that I know what I am doing unto this day, but that I am driven by her mandate to keep at it.

The Rolfing work that I was taught was forged in the crucible of the human potential movement at Esalen Institute. Peter Melchior and I were the resident Rolfers™ at Esalen, and we alternated sessions on people who were in the residential program. The stated object of the exercise was to facilitate the psychological work that the Residents were exploring with Fritz Perls, Will Schutz, and Abe Maslow. This exploration did not exclude broader studies in exploring boundaries of all kinds.

When I left that environment and moved to rural northern New Mexico in 1971, there wasn’t another Rolfer for about 800 miles in any direction, and more importantly, no one had a clue what Rolfing SI or the human potential movement was. As I began to build a client base, I did all Ten-Series work most of the time, but at the same time people came out of the woodwork who needed immediate help, and came because I was the guy who worked on people’s bodies. It was an assortment of knees, backs, and necks . . . the usual aches that drive people to seek help. I worked with whoever showed up, adapting the elements of the Ten Series to the situation at hand. This was the only thing I was doing to make a living — it sure was not my hobby — so I was not so anal about only doing the Ten Series. Virtually no one came for personal growth, and I had to educate my clients about the other potentials of the work. Many of my ‘first-aid’ clients went on to do the Ten Series with me, and many sent their friends for Rolfing sessions, and first aid as well.

As I went along in those first years, I felt that I was woefully ignorant about the body, and I began to look for books by other practitioners who also worked on the body. It was not so much that I was looking for technique as for perspective and better understanding of the ‘nature of structure’. I got lucky in finding a copy of Osteopathy in the Cranial Field, by Harold Magoun. I read it front to back like a novel, and then picked it apart. I had no practical instruction, but it awakened me to the idea of fluctuations of pressure beyond heartbeat, peristalsis, and respiration. Hmmm, the body moves onto itself . . . it is not a discrete mass. Another book that came my way was a manual of chiropractic technique by a DC named Delarmette. He had a method, and I did my best to understand what he thought about the body. I was examining premises.

It’s important to realize that in those years there was no Internet, no seminars to teach nuggets of information and technique. If you wanted to know more about the field we were in, you basically had to steal it. There was an old-time naturopath in Santa Fe named Jay Scherer, who had a school of massage. He was a lifelong vegetarian, a bit of a mystic. He was a vigorous manipulator, and a hell of a bonesetter. I took a course of study from him to get my New Mexico massage license, and got lots of private work from him. I also gave him a Ten Series. He thought Rolfing SI was radical, and called me Mao Tse-tung because it hurt so much. I learned to do spinal manipulation from him, and had my first introduction to fasting and ideas about cleansing the body.

I was really lucky to meet Sensei Nakozono, who was a Japanese acupuncturist and shiatsu doctor, a master of aikido, and a teacher of a meditation system called kototama. He was a WWII veteran who had marched with the Japanese army into Machuria. I studied with him and got my introduction to oriental medicine. His treatments were more painful than Rolfing sessions, and he was relentless. I found this comforting, in a way: I was not the most painful practitioner around. Still, I learned through his hands, and his feet — in addition to shiatsu, and bonessetting, he also walked all over his patients, using his heels and the balls of his feet. At 5’8” he weighed about 180 pounds, with no fat. I sat with him in his kototama meditation classes for a couple of years, and endured his methods.

In those first years after my training, living in New Mexico, I did not get much Rolfing SI, as there was no Rolfer near me. Still, I sought out these people practicing ‘on-the-body’ techniques, and they formed a foundation that augmented what I had learned from IPR. By the end of 1974 I was back in Big Sur for the first Advanced Training (AT) with IPR. There were about sixteen of us in that class, and IPR put us through her newly designed advanced ‘recipe’, a four series that ended with what was the equivalent of a Seventh Hour. In retrospect, that advanced work did not impress me so much. I did not think another formula was where I needed to go. I wanted to go deeper into what I was calling the ‘nature of structure’. That is not to say that the time with IPR was unproductive: I loved being in the class, and with my colleagues, learning from my first real teacher. Still, her choice to come up with another recipe, as the AT, did not turn on the lights for me.

I can see that in the wake of Dr. Rolf’s passing, and with Peter, Emmett Hutchins, and I being the first Advanced teachers, the seeds of our differences regarding the work were sown in that first AT. I was sure that the way to train and develop a Rolfer beyond the basic Ten Series was to deepen the understanding of structure and the process of evolving the client’s inner connection to structure and function; to deepen the Rolfers’ ability to discern where their client’s growth was happening, both internally and in movement; and to function as both a manipulator and a teacher in support of that growth.

Along this path, there have been many more experiences and learning that have influenced my understanding of both the limits and possibilities inherent in Rolfing SI, but the foregoing represent some of my formative conditions.

Jan Sultan
Advanced Rolfing Instructor

A: I sit at an airport in Eastern Europe waiting for a flight back to Munich. And I remember the many ideas I exchanged with Ray Bishop, a Rolfing colleague and professional musician who is not with us any more. We had met many years ago at a workshop in Santa Fe. And I remember a few talks with my colleague Harvey Burns: a late evening after co-teaching in
Years ago, I spent hundreds of hours practicing the ability to play any rudiment leading with the left hand or the right. Now after more than thirty years I feel that I am beginning to bring this love of two-handed improvisation into my work and teaching, whilst still feeling I am playing the Rolfing ‘song’.

Harvey Burns
Rolfing Instructor
Rolf Movement® Instructor

A: Despite being raised in an urban environment, my upbringing included enough camping trips and excursions into nature to instill an early and deep appreciation for the phenomenal world. Growing up in the San Francisco Bay area also provided me an early introduction to meditation and contemplation. During a thirty-day meditation retreat in remote upcountry Maui at age nineteen, the serenity I felt when out in nature merged with meditation’s access to inner calm, and that forged into that “something” in my life that has richly cross-pollinated with my Rolfing practice.

Through meditation I discovered that the quality of presence I sought out and so valued in nature was available in my own inner nature. Over the years I’ve allowed myself to relax more into my practice (be it Rolfing SI or meditation). And eventually the efforts of trying so hard to achieve the goals of any given session or to sit still have given way toward a greater ease of being. Out of the various styles of meditation I’ve explored, the one I currently find most beneficial to my practice is the Tibetan Buddhist Nyingma tradition of brief and more frequent meditation. In both my meditation and Rolfing practice, allowing the dynamic of the breath to bridge the connection to gravity and ground serves to bring awareness out of the mind’s thoughts and into the realm of sensation in a relaxed and embodied way.

Jörg Ahrend-Löns
Rolfing Instructor

A: When I look back, it seems everything I’ve done has influenced who I am as a Rolfer. And now, being a Rolfer influences how I am in the world today. From the start of my working career, I’ve always been placed in leadership roles. Even when I started out on yard crews at fourteen years old, I had my own crew. Out of high school I joined the military and in two years became a sergeant tank commander. When I came home, I worked for an engineering firm that made mechanical parts and again took on supervisory roles. All of this helped me gain experience about creating ‘rapport’ with people and how to work with others to get things accomplished.

On a personal level, having three daughters educated me on the differences between the mannerisms of both sexes. My friends and family have also shaped me. Being with loved ones as they struggle with challenges such as divorce and addiction deepened my understanding of the relationship between physical pain and mental anguish that is so often the case for our clients.

Participating in a lot of different sports helped me understand the different ways clients relate to their bodies. Before I received Rolfing sessions, I treated my body as a tool that I could command to do things. After my Ten Series, I came to think of my physical body as a member of my team that needs to be understood, appreciated, and cared for.
My job as a mechanical manufacturing engineer helped me view things in three dimensions. Not only do I try to sense what’s on the side I can’t see, but also how it relates functionally to the side that is near me. Even now, when I look at someone in a session, I see lines, levers, and rotations.

My first experiences receiving bodywork were painful, humiliating, and ultimately educational. In my first massage, the therapist came in, uncovered half my body and jammed the sheets in places they didn’t belong to expose my legs — all without a word of warning. Naturally, my body went on alert and I tightened everywhere. Throughout the session, she wondered why my body was so “tight.” My second massage with a more experienced massage practitioner left me black and blue for a week. At the time, she thought that was why my body was so “tight.” But naturally, my body went on alert and I tightened everywhere. I am more compassionate. All of these experiences have helped me define who I am as a practitioner and how I related to others. They influence my ‘ways of seeing’ and how I create boundaries and a safe space that responds to my clients’ needs. Thankfully, my experience as a Rolfer has also bled over into my personal life. Because of my Rolfing training, I better understand my body and my responsibility to work with it. It changed the way I relate to my friends and family, increasing my sensitivity to what they were going through. I am more compassionate.

Lastly, it has made me more aware that processes in nature are different from manufactured parts. With guidance and education, profound change is possible; but natural change happens in its own time and sometimes it just takes a while. I am thankful for my life and my Rolfing career. It is a blessing that has helped me find happiness and joy on both the personal and professional levels. Thanks to all who have contributed, even that therapist who gave me a ‘wedgie’. I’ve learned a lot from all of you.

Larry Koliha
Rolfing Instructor

A: I had been working in clinical psychology with a body-oriented approach when I encountered Rolfing SI. Discussions about the body-mind conjunction were omnipresent in my field, and the main thing of value I brought from it into Rolfing work was the notion of process. That understanding of the unfolding of one’s existential path combined with the physical, structural transformation of Rolfing SI gave me a particular viewpoint on Rolfing work and its timing. This also allowed me to move into an understanding of non-formulistic work, strategizing sessions with a view that is not simply structural, but also process-oriented. This understanding of both the ‘Recipe’ and process helps me with the psychobiological unfolding that occurs as the Rolfing process happens.

Pedro Prado
Basic & Advanced Rolfing Instructor
Rolf Movement Instructor

A: In 1985 Tom Wing was the lead teacher in my Phase 2 Basic Rolfing training. I loved watching him work. I describe it as watching a Native American mold a fine piece of pottery. He was incredibly perceptive. I now know that what I was experiencing in his work was a profound sense of presence. After the training ended, I asked what else he had studied besides Rolfing SI that contributed to how he worked. Tom’s only reply was that he studied a form of Asian energy healing. I remember him saying that if I go to the depth and essence of whatever healing modality I am practicing, I will discover the essence of many other disciplines. I tell this story to students who ask me the same question, because I have found his insight to be true in the progression of my own practice.

Rolfing SI has deep roots in osteopathy. What has influenced me most is studying and deepening into the three models of craniosacral therapy as articulated by William Sutherland, DO. A common and important thread between the three models is the significance of fluids. Most fascinating to me is working with the ways the whole body responds to these different fluid models. These three models are biomechanics, functional, and biodynamic. Simply and briefly, the biomechanical model is anatomy oriented / fascia focused; the functional model is based on fluid flow and fluctuation; the biodynamic model looks at how fluids ‘breathe’. Learning how to shift my perception between these models, and how I have to change within myself to perceive the different fluid expressions of each model, has contributed the most to further my understanding of what we are practicing and what I do as a Rolfer. It has been a fascinating exploration to learn how I can augment each model to organize a leg, balance the autonemics, untwist a bone, and enhance integration.

The biodynamic model describes embryology from an epigenetic perspective, which says that there is a blueprint (an intention) that animates the fluids in the embryo, which then influences genetic expression creating the details that we recognize as a human being. This epigenetic process of embryogenesis is a function that spatially organizes the shape and then the myriad forms within the embryo through fluid movements. This inherent function of the fluids continues into adulthood and throughout life. This process is always ‘working’ to keep spatial order and function as optimal as possible. And, most amazingly, we can perceive these fluid motions with our hands and augment their ordering function to achieve the goals of Rolfing SI.

Dr. Rolf also spoke of a blueprint. However the expression of the blueprint will frequently be limited and distorted by the compensations required from the injuries and disturbances of ‘life’. Our purpose as Rolfer is to help our client’s body to ‘remember’ its blueprint. As Rolfer, we have a system (the Recipe) that can reorganize the pieces. The changes we see in our clients (enhanced space, length, depth, groundedness, and ability to orient to the environment) are our confirmations that this system works. We order the anatomy so these qualities can appear. The Recipe provides a framework that helps remove the impediments to the embryonic intention so that the expression of the blueprint can emerge.

Science says that 70% of the adult body is fluid. Yet we study and work with the 30% we call anatomy. As recent studies have shown, healthy, ordered fascia has a highly fluid quality. The anatomy is suspended in the fluidic fascial web. By working with and enhancing the fluidic nature of fascia, I am able to help order the environment in which the anatomy lives and thus am able to affect the ordering of the anatomy in a much more comprehensive manner. Even though I am often consulting one of my anatomy books, when I work now, anatomy is not in the forefront of my perception. I have learned to inquire, to ‘hear’ with my touch:

• Is there a rock in the stream inhibiting connectivity or flow?
• What is the shape of this area? Does it fit with the rest?
Is there fluid flow?
Are there enough resources for the tissues to be capable of taking on a new form or pattern?

I am also listening for wholeness as expressed by inherent motion. By synchronizing with the fluids, we have the potential to experience the body as one entire whole. Wholeness then becomes an experience instead of a concept. To experience the body not as bones, muscles, and organs, not as its details, but as one comprehensive whole is an amazing thing!

As I continuously deepen into my explorations working with the fluids, instead of trying to change dysfunctions I now seek wholeness within the dysfunction. I listen for what is working, where the kernel of essential health is. I can then shift within myself to synchronize with inherent motion so the dysfunction can more readily reintegrate into the whole. To do this, I have to practice presence. I have to change within myself. I have to respect the inherent wisdom within my client. When I’m working with fascia, I am always looking for ease in the tissues. This makes my work much easier on my hands as I do much less pushing, focusing, and directing. I attend to the perceptions I receive from the fluid system. I work slowly and with patience, allowing the inherent health of the body to guide my work and to reorganize itself in relation to the intention of the blueprint. To practice this relationship with the fluid body and partner with its inborn function by inherent motion. By synchronizing with the fluids, we have the potential to experience the body as one entire whole. Wholeness then becomes an experience instead of a concept. To experience the body not as bones, muscles, and organs, not as its details, but as one comprehensive whole is an amazing thing!

I grew up in an extended family comprised of, and networked with, social scientists, psychologists, and psychoanalysts. Thinking and talking about human behavior was a household pastime. That had some advantages probably. But, by high school, in the 1960s, I perceived troubling limits to ‘intellect-only’ ways to meet life’s deeper issues. I looked and stumbled into the Zen option. I found a Saturday morning class taught by one of Huston Smith’s students at MIT. (Smith was a professor of religion at MIT and had written the introduction to Kapleau’s Three Pillars of Zen.) The class introduced us to Zen, which involves a lot of sitting (zazen). The sitting crossed legged and staying perfectly still was an intimidating – as in, the hardest thing for me to even imagine doing. But, it also felt like maybe a good choice – maybe because it threatened everything familiar and everything for which I had some sense of competence. It turns out that even an overly intellectual, physically stiff, and moderately fearful person can participate . . . eventually.

Later, a takeaway gleaned from zazen – and before experiencing Rolfing SI – was that body posture is a precious and miraculous event. The body knows how to hold itself up, effortlessly. As the body stabilizes and finds support, there’s a platform for investigating being simply present, and also for ganryu questions – questions like, “Who am I?” or “How do I die?”; stuff like that. It’s ultimately movement-brain territory (below thought), at least after a while, because one’s struggle to think of answers fails. Something other than thinking has a chance to kick in.

Rolfing SI and Rolf Movement Integration offer people ingredients to access movement brain wisdom as well. In addition to an experience of plasticity in shape and movement, the work helps one distinguish what Jeffrey Maitland terms ‘pre-reflective’ experience from ‘thought-about’ experience. (Maitland has written lots of good stuff about the relation of Zen and SI.) When I started Rolfing practice, my go-to, for clients in distress, was to invite them to notice that when things are hard, thoughts don’t help much – and so I asked them, “What can you notice that isn’t thought?”

As I entered Practitioner (what we now call Phase 3) of Rolfing training, the universe was kind. Gael Rosewood assisted the course. (It was interesting to discover that Gael is Huston Smith’s daughter.) Gael offered a free Continuum class each morning before the ‘official day’ started. Continuum helped me reboot an “I can do this” feeling during training. Why? I would now describe the reason as that it promotes body security. Continuum helps one deal with psychological challenge – challenges like those that can occur in Rolfing trainings – in a movement-brain way. At times one needs better resources than thoughts and memories of former success – one really needs a quality of adequate body security. Body security helps one do the work, independent from the ideas about oneself – a way to step out of local identity and, at the same time, become more present. Specifically, Continuum offers ways to replenish the rich sense of body – a bodily sense of volume, density, and substance. The intensity of the (Rolfing) training, for me, had the effect of erasing that important sense of substance. It’s a movement-brain issue. We can’t will ourselves to feel our substance. But we can invite it, through playful improvisation in movement, imagination, breath, and sound expression, which, in turn, provokes sensory experience, and thus restores a welcome felt sense.

As the years of Rolfing practice unfolded, Continuum retreats helped differentiate my body maps. Better mapping permitted me to see/feel a more differentiated perception of client bodies. Freshly back from doing extended Continuum in a group, it was easier to see what was going on in people, and to better feel what to do about it. (Much later, while attending a Continuum-based workshop, a seasoned Zen teacher commented to me that it might be helpful for Zen teachers, in general, to do the sort of sensation integration and tracking that those workshops provide.)

Along similar lines – differentiation of maps feeding the movement brain – two other pieces fit this story: the experiential anatomy and the evolutionary movement curricula of Caryn McHose. After experiencing
McHose teach and experiencing her private sessions, I came to appreciate other, perceptual, dimensions of SI. McHose’s early self study, drawing on, among other things, Mabel Todd’s The Thinking Body and, later, Rolf’s Rolfing: The Integration of Human Structures, led her to perception-based approaches for shifting body maps. Her work produced (to me) impressive change in how people experienced their bodies, and how they moved. It would take me some time to articulate what I felt and observed, or speculate about why this happens. I would say now, however, simply that experiential anatomy demonstrates that the body is, effectively, ‘hungry’ to feel and know itself better, to know its bony architecture and articular capacities – to differentiate its maps. Better information gets recognized as such. Evolutionary movement demonstrates that body image is very plastic; the body hungers for morphological plasticity. The body is responsive to invitations to embody non-human life forms and shapes. In fact, these ‘other’ life form shapes are implicit – embedded within human morphology and movement.

The lesson to me is that movement-brain (subcortical) potentials lie dormant until called upon – until called to come alive through introduction of imagery, playful improvisation, embodiment of anatomical detail, and creative expression. The integration of thinking and movement-brain parts of our beings has, historically, either been largely implicit within traditional culture or explicit when pursued by fringe individuals who chose to separate from the larger societal context to study and live as shamans, yogis, mystics, monks, etc. The domain of persons who choose to separate has been considered religious or spiritual in nature. Rolfing SI has, in its own history, had trouble finding adequate and appropriate acknowledgment of these esoteric or spiritual implications of the work. We now have secular opportunities to learn what was formerly less available, and scientifically validated ways to talk about those previously elusive realms.

We never fully capture wordless consciousness with words, or represent the totality of personal or intersubjective experience in standardized categories. Nonetheless, grounding the cortical/subcortical integrative process in modern concepts from brain science and motor control helps allow our work to at least appear reasonable to a broader audience. When we support students to engage in processes that lead to deeper embodiment, their confidence improves. These sorts of processes foster practitioners who are better prepared; practitioners with critical skills for differentiating what they see, and for how they educate and find appropriate language to support a more varied spectrum of people within clinical practice.

The challenge remains: how do we translate the serendipitous processes many of us experienced over the past decades into user-friendly education that meets the contemporary student population for Rolfing SI and Rolf Movement Integration? Developing effective and accessible approaches to somatic education at the Rolf Institute, education that fosters depth of embodiment, is a fertile investigation.

Kevin Frank
Rolf Movement Instructor

As: I laugh because I remember my father shaking his head and telling me, “You’re smart but you’re all over the place.” I’d majored in psychology in college and spent my summers interning at psychiatric facilities. The plan was to get my doctorate in clinical psychology, because I wanted to work one-on-one helping people help themselves. But when the time came to apply for graduate school, something in my gut just didn’t sit right. I wanted to work with skill-building and personal growth, and I was getting ready to spend the next seven years in an environment that relied heavily on pharmaceuticals. Something told me I was going in the wrong direction, so I stopped and decided to work for a while.

Qualities that served me well in counseling and academia – being able to listen, communicate, problem-solve, and develop strategy – turned out to be ideally suited to business. I worked in several manufacturing environments and eventually returned to graduate school, but not as previously planned. I received a master’s degree in business administration and specialized in operations management and management science. Basically, I designed systems to work efficiently. During graduate school, I worked part-time teaching prospective graduate students how to raise their scores on entrance exams. I was surprised how much I liked to teach.

By the time I finished graduate school, I’d consulted in enough large organizations to realize that the corporate rat race wasn’t for me. Again, my stomach tightened and I knew I had to readjust my goals. I was starting to worry I’d never find my passion. For a couple of years, I wrote marketing materials for companies because I could work for myself. It wasn’t my dream but I liked to write and I learned that I enjoyed running a small business. Eventually, long hours at the computer created pain and my yoga teacher suggested I see a Rolfer. One session, and I was never the same. Before my Ten Series was complete, I was signed up for Basic Training.

Everything I did before shapes the Rolfering practitioner and teacher that I am. I often say to students that we each have to find the Rolfer in us. This work is about being authentic, and becoming a good Rolfer is a process of self-discovery. My dear father thought I was unfocused, but my body knew better. Thank goodness I listened each time I needed to adjust my plan.

Looking back, everything significant that I’ve done influences my perspective as a Rolfer. I remember what originally drew me to psychology and counseling – I wanted to work closely with others to help them find answers for themselves. I wanted to help people create meaningful change. During graduate school, I learned I had a knack for explaining things and that I could make complex ideas relatable. Business school taught me to think about systems and how to target small changes that had global effects (this is key to the way I think about our work). Rolfing SI combines all these loves: I get to help people find ways to enjoy their lives more; I get to teach clients and students everything from fascia science to somatic awareness; I get to work for myself; and I work to find ways for systems to run more efficiently. I just work with fascia instead of assembly lines.

Bethany Ward
Rolfing Instructor
Rolf Movement®
Faculty Perspectives

The Haptic Sense, Part 1: Perception as an Active Process

By Lucia Merlino, Certified Advanced Rolfer™, Rolf Movement Instructor

The author wishes to express special thanks to Hubert Godard for bringing these concepts to the Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI) community.

To perceive is to construct a mental representation through the receipt of sensory input; i.e., we are conscious not of the things around us, but only of our subjective representations. For centuries, philosophers and scientists studying perception have affirmed this idea, which is foundational to the modern concept that the social world is a system of interconnected private worlds in which all values are subjective.

While the traditional perceptual categories are five – sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste – some have postulated a sixth sense, and variously described it as perception of movement, proprioception, or kinesthesia. Though there is not yet a didactic consensus, the sense of touch is now being redefined to encompass the haptic. The term haptic, according to Grunwald (2008), was introduced by German scientist Max Dessoire as early as 1892 to refer to the science of the human touch.

More recently, psychologist James J. Gibson has challenged the idea that the effects of objects on an observer’s nervous system are purely the result of stimuli acting upon a passive mechanical body. To the contrary, according to Gibson, the perceptual system is both active and intentional. Gibson was driven to redefine the perceptual system to include psychological processes such as memory, imagination, symbolic thought, and social interaction.

Gibson’s arguments in support of a new approach to perception give rise to a new psychology as well. He does not ask how the perceiver constructs the world from sensory input and past experience, but rather what information in the environment is directly available to be received. Gibson (1966) suggests that our perceptual systems are attuned to both invariant and variable phenomena, and that we actively seek this information through interaction with the environment. His perceptual systems are:

- orientation (gravity)
- visual
- tasting/smelling
- hearing
- haptic

Haptic, from the Greek ἁπτικός, means proper to touch, or touch-sensitive. The haptic system is a complex of subsystems arising from the simultaneous activity of tactile and proprioceptive receptors. It is the only sense through which we explore the environment actively – and the only one that allows us to perceive the three-dimensional geometry, surface qualities, weight, and texture of objects we manipulate, and to sense the effects of our manipulation as the effects manifest.

The haptic sense is highly developed in the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet. The skin’s tactile receptors, which register mechanical sensations of pressure, vibration, and touch, allow perception primarily of surface textures. Proprioceptors found in the joints, muscles, tendons, and skin provide information on body parts’ relative positions and movements, as well as the muscular force required either to maintain positions or to make movements. They also help us to discern the forms and qualities of objects. It is the haptic sense of tactility and proprioception taken together that allows us to pluck a raspberry without crushing it (Berthoz 1997).

While the haptic sense has invited exploration by researchers in many fields, structural integrators are indebted to our colleague and teacher Hubert Godard, who opened new paths to our understanding of touch and relationship with our clients through his inspiring and original concept of haptic function. When our hands palpate an object or our feet touch the ground, we use our kinesthetic and tactile senses simultaneously. And, how we relate to an object kinesthetically influences the kind of tactile information our skin receives from it. This multisensory activity permits haptic function – active kinesthetic engagement with the world that is at the same time receptive to tactile information from it. Godard finds a direct connection between touch and palpation of objects by the hands and the ground by the feet, on the one hand, and our gravity response and bodily posture on the other hand.

It follows that attention to the haptic sense improves the quality of our connection with both the ground and our clients. According to Godard, our active touch (kinesthetic) is more effective when at the same time we allow ourselves to be touched (tactile) – as opposed to only grasping with the muscles of the eyes, hands, and feet.

Lucia Merlino, PhD, is a member of the Brazilian Rolfing and Rolf Movement faculties, and has practiced in S˜ao Paulo since 1995. Prior to becoming a Rolfer, Lucia was a professional dancer. Her passions for both movement and Rolfing SI led her to pursue master’s and doctoral degrees, for which her focuses of study and research were SI, perception, metaphors, and memory.

Bibliography


How Suite It Is

A Conversation with Steven Hancoff

By Lynn Cohen and Steven Hancoff, Certified Advanced Rolfers™

The melody is the dance; the irresistible attraction to the tonal center is the gravity.

Steven Hancoff (from From Tragedy to Transcendence)

Note from Lynn Cohen: I spoke with Steven Hancoff by phone. He was in Sandwich, New Hampshire, towards the beginning of a three-month tour of New England and the Canadian Maritimes with his show From Tragedy to Transcendence, a multimedia presentation about the life of J.S. Bach and the improbable journey of Bach's music from near oblivion to prominence. A guitar player since childhood, Steven had recorded six solo guitar albums before devoting the past several years to his all-consuming Bach project, which involved the creation of his three-CD recording of the Bach Cello Suites for acoustic guitar, a four-volume iBook (Bach, Casals and the Six Suites for Cello Solo), fourteen YouTube videos, and the arrangement/transcription of all six solo cello suites for guitar (see resource list at the end of the article). More than an arrangement, Steven has taken Bach's iconic cello suites and filled them in with harmonies that clarify for us what Bach might have heard in his own mind. Steven continues to practice and to receive Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI), as he has done for over thirty-five years.

Lynn Cohen: Let's start with a question that can ground us. When and how were you drawn to guitar and to Rolfing SI?

Steven Hancoff: Well, I've played guitar all my life – since I was thirteen years old. But I first heard about Rolfing SI when I was about twenty-five years old, in the late '70s. I had just gotten a masters degree in social work from an absurdly inadequate psychotherapy course. I knew it was idiotic, but I wanted the license, so I stuck with it. I met somebody at a six-week Arica training, and he was living a life I envied. So, I asked him how he was able to do that, and he said, "I don't know, but I get Rolfing sessions once a week." I had no idea what he was talking about. All I'd heard about Rolfing SI was that it hurt like the devil, that they ripped your muscles off of the bone and then when they heal everything's better. Back then there may have been some truth to it!

Now, I come from a fairly tragic and traumatized life. And I had suppressed as much feeling about my traumas as I could. At the time before I got Rolfing work I barely knew what a feeling was. In other words, I did not know that I was angry, or sad, or resentful, or envious, or any of the dark side. I could not have told you I felt that way. In the six weeks of the Arica training, I started to learn how to feel emotion. You could say I started to experience my actual self. It was very powerful. And when this person told me about Rolfing SI, my inner 'angels' told me that this is a good process for me, opening this stuff up – as threatening and dangerous a feeling as it is, it has real value. I didn't know what that was, but I wanted to try it.

I was dead broke, living in my car, and was in California. I decided I was going to leave the country and drove to the East Coast, where I'm originally from, and I landed near [Washington] DC. There were exactly two Rolfers there, one of whom left the area and left Rolfing work, the other of whom I ended up marrying! [laughs] But not before I got a lot of Rolfing SI from her. In the course of my ten sessions, I remember, after the fourth session, I went home and the next morning a song came out of me and I wrote it down. I'd written a song! I'd always played guitar, and I wanted to be a folk singer, and now here I was, twenty-five or twenty-six, and after the fifth session, another song just popped out of me.

I did not feel the ten sessions from the point of view of structural physical work; for me it was all about awakening creativity, emotional release, recovering hidden memories, and the like. In fact, when I took my first class in 1977, I was shocked: I had no idea Rolfers were thinking about structure in terms of muscular attachments and fascial and segmental relationships, or even about gravity. I thought it was entirely about discovering and releasing emotion. Deepening a person's experience of self. That was my experience of it. I didn't notice, for instance, that I could move my arms more easily. What I noticed was that I was getting more creative, more energetic, and had deeper access to what had been hidden and to playing music. I have come to think those are all good qualities! Rolfing SI was a miracle to me, which got this side of myself liberated. I was entirely stunned that anyone was paying attention to things like muscular attachments. I just didn't know that's what it was about.

LC: How did that influence your training?

SH: I flunked! I took the course in Berkeley with Michael Salveson, and he told me I had to spend a year working on bodies before I could go on. In the meantime, I met Ida Rolf. My Rolfer/partner was Sharon Wheeler. She was taking the very last advanced class that Dr. Rolf taught. Sharon and I were living together, and it wasn't a secret – Dr. Rolf knew all about it. She was almost blind and in a wheelchair by that time. I had recorded my first album, having won a contest at the very first annual Scott Joplin Ragtime festival. Eubie Blake,
William Bolcom were the judges! I don’t remember how Dr. Rolf got her hands on my LP – I guess Sharon must have given it to her – but when Sharon introduced us, she got up out of her wheelchair and said, “Ah yes, young man, I hope you make a million dollars with your music!” Those are the first words I ever heard her say. At Dr. Rolf’s funeral, Joy Belluzzi, who was her secretary at the time, told me that Dr. Rolf used to listen to my first album every day. I can’t tell you how that filled me with pleasure, that really mattered to me!

To me, being a Rolfer and getting Rolfing sessions are inseparable. I am as much a ‘Rolfee’ as a Rolfer. Getting Rolfing sessions and being a Rolfer is my path to and through my art . . . not merely art, but through my life, to the experience and articulation and expression of my intellect, and my feelings, and my heart, my spirit, and my will. The reason that is so is because it works for me. I think it works for me because Dr. Rolf got it right. Hers is not the only work I studied intensively. I was also a colleague on the faculty of John Pierrakos’ The Institute of Core Energetics . . . he invented Bioenergetic Analysis [with Alexander Lowen], for goodness sake. But in my estimation and experience, it was Dr. Rolf who got it right.

Rolfing SI helped liberate the musician/artist in me by liberating the ‘emoter’ and ‘thinker’ in me. So, I get Rolfing work all the time. During the course of doing this Bach project, I made sure to get Rolfing work plenty. I don’t separate out the experience of living life from the experience of doing Rolfing SI or getting Rolfing work. I recently performed in a tiny little hamlet called Bethlehem (in New Hampshire). We stayed at a quaint bed and breakfast. Friday night we did a show, and Saturday morning I gave a Rolfing session to the lady who ran the bed and breakfast; she’d broken her arm and it had been immobilized for over three months. She complained at the lack of range of movement. Of course, her humerus was entirely jammed up into her axilla, and her ribs, clavicles, and scapulae were a mess. It took about twenty minutes for the humerus to drop out of there, is all. Yet she is thinking, “It’s a miracle,” while I’m thinking, “It’s so obvious!” So I don’t see a difference between the guy who’s articulated my impression of the life of Bach and the guy who got the lady’s humerus to drop out of the axilla. There’s no distinction between those two people.

**LC:** You’re talking about integration of the different aspects of being, you as guitar player/Rolfer/emoter of music, whether it’s Bach or ragtime. It’s artificial to delineate those aspects of who you are for the purposes of compartmentalization.

**SH:** I would say that’s true but go further: all those distinctions in any field of endeavor or thought are artificial. Knowledge is knowledge. Curiosity is curiosity. We set up our culture so some people study math, some people study physics, some people study history, etc. We pretend that those are different things. They’re not. It’s all one thing. Aristotle said, “All men want to know what is so.” I presume he meant women too! All people want to know what is so. It’s just inherent in being a human being. In order to not live according to that, you have to be like I was, hunkered down in an unwillingness to know because of the fear of what you might find out . . . that you’re not good enough, that you’re evil, you’re ashamed, and that you might have to do something about it that you’re afraid to do . . . whatever it is. In order to live according to a determination to not know, you are living a very, very distorted life. And a body responds to that accordingly. In order to receive Rolfing work successfully, you have to be interested in letting go of what was a ‘holding’, a contraction pattern, of which you hitherto were unaware.

**LC:** When you say the Bach project is your life work, what I understand now is that it’s not just the excavation of information for information’s sake; it’s a journey you’re invested in following because you don’t know where it’s going.

**SH:** It’s definitely a journey. I’d say an archetypal journey. And it was also an accident. I had decided I wanted to transcribe the Suites for guitar. Cello is a one-line instrument. With guitar, you can harmonize. A guitar is idiomatically suited to play chords and bass lines and such . . . to harmonize. I knew the music was profound, and wanted to serve that profundity, so I felt I needed to learn more about the man. Nobody knew much about him. I discovered that by the time he was thirty-five (when he composed the Suites), Bach had experienced a tremendous amount of tragedy in his life: both parents died when he was nine, three siblings had died, and three of his own children died. Now he’s married to the love of his life, and three kids of theirs have died. But now he has a family. He and his wife have four surviving kids. And for the first time, he finally has a satisfying gig. He comes back from a brief time away, returns home to find his wife, the love of his life and the only person who has ever actually cared about him, has just been buried. It was at that point he starts writing his masterpieces, the Violin Sonatas and Partitas and Cello Suites.

I told you before that I had a lot of tragedy in my life. I did not know when I started down this path of self-discovery that I was sad or angry or etc. How in the world, I wondered, did this man transcend his tragedies that...
were far grander than mine? I’ve seen a lot of the world: I’ve performed in fifty countries. One thing I see is that everyone’s bitching and moaning and competing to see who can be the bigger victim. That’s what kept me moving on this project. I wanted to find out how did Bach not hate God? Life? Not rail against the fates? Everything in his music is exaltation and upliftedness. Every note is always the right note. Giants like Bach— they worked at it, had to figure it out step by step like everyone else; they had wives and bills and bratty kids and self-interested bosses, they had regular lives. Johann Sebastian had to turn himself into the Bach that we think of as Bach. This is what drove my project. I didn’t intend any of this. In order to transcribe for guitar, I had to learn about the guy, and the more I learned, the more I asked, “How did he do it?” That’s what the iBook ended up being about. Let me also brag that I also turned it into a great art book as well. It turned out to encompass the largest collection of Bach-inspired visual art ever amassed in the world . . . and how that happened is yet another story!

I think of Bach as a kind of bodhisattva. He showed us how to endure our destiny and embrace our own greatness. This might serve Rolfer’s really well. We’re all trying to do this amazing thing for ourselves and the people we work with. It boils down to this: you’re nothing—in other words, you’re one cell in the organism of all that is. That’s on the one hand. On the other hand, you are the magnitude of your spirit; the universe was created just so that you can experience it. It was created for you. It’s incumbent on you to be exploring and expressing that magnitude. John Perriakos used to say that a person’s greatest sin was in not embracing and expressing his greatness. Dr. Rolf figured out and intelligibly articulated something that took humanity 200,000 years of human history to figure out, and it’s been handed to us on a platter as a silver gift. It’s not just that we give it to our clients; we have to be the ones to embody it.

LC: You’ve chosen, or have been chosen perhaps, to explore and honor the work of these two giant people who have transformed the world in their different ways. We, as interpreters or executors of their work, have a disadvantage because we’re not them.

SH: Bach showed us how to recognize how infinite you are and how insignificant you are. They’re both true. The whole universe was created for you to explore.

LC: That’s an idea that is so elusive when we’re going through the minutiae of our day, trying to please people, dealing with our psychological baggage, our identities . . .

SH: . . . And our feelings of both arrogance and being not good enough, and being victims ourselves. I’m sixty-eight now, and I don’t feel the tugs of the neurotic patterns and limitations that I had when I started down this path. That’s for sure. But there are plenty ways to go, and I get an awful lot of help as a client of Rolfing SI, because something that I didn’t know I was holding suddenly releases. I don’t think Rolfing SI stresses this so much, but I find that when I can make conscious that which I let go of, that helps me a lot more than just feeling my leg working better.

LC: That’s sort of the secret to it, isn’t it?

SH: Is it a secret? It’s not a secret to me! I guess you’re probably right. What I tell my clients when I give Rolfing sessions is, “Stay with, pay attention to, the sensation.” I find that when I do that as I get Rolfing work, that’s when the insight comes to me.

LC: How do you take that principle into your exploration of how you filled in the harmonies for the Suites? The harmonies are implied in the one-line melodies of the Suites. Your explicit renderings of the harmonies were, to my ears, delightful, arresting, surprising, even shocking sometimes. You had so many choices. I wonder, how fixed are these transcriptions? Because there are so many choices, so many different chord voicings you might have used on any given beat—the way, after someone receives Rolfing SI and stands, his her options for movement have increased. How do you relate that freedom of having received Rolfing SI to the harmonic choices you made in trying to fulfill Bach’s intentions?

SH: Yes, the harmonies are implied in Bach’s melodies. Bach’s written a melody. And for those who don’t understand this language, we’re talking about chord structure. Well, let me tell you that one of the things I say in the show (From Tragedy to Transcendence):

. . . the musician is compelled to stand with his feet solidly planted, steadfast and confident, committed to his tonal and harmonic choices, even though experience informs him that his conviction about the rightness of his musical choices can eunuses to who-knows-where because of who-knows-why. Life choices are tricky and uncertain.

So, maybe that speaks to your question. I feel it best to not screw with Bach’s intentions. When I put in a bass note or bass line, or play parallel thirds, or decide the melody note is really the flatted ninth of the dominant, I’m announcing that I think Bach’s intention was this chord and not a different chord. I’m trying to articulate a path that Bach took, that I also believe is an archetypal path that we all take, or can take. It’s a path that starts with innocence, optimism, and desire. There’s an innocence, a not-knowing about what life is, to childhood, to early life. I call it disappointment waiting to happen! What drives a human towards introspection is pain, tragedy, sorrow, loss. We each have a minotaur—the hidden negativity—smack dab in the middle of the labyrinth of our psyches. We are each a Theseus who must at least identify, if not actually slay, that monster. The act of profound introspection will eventually give rise to extroversion. You begin looking outward from a point of view of more secure groundedness in who you are, in reality. To answer your musical question, the ground can be very slippery. I might think I know that this is Bach’s intention, and then get to it the next day and think, “What the hell was I thinking? That doesn’t work!” But at some point, I felt I had to say, because it’s recorded and written down and I’m not going to keep revisiting it for the rest of my life, “This my statement.” I allow myself to express some of my own intention. Bach is the only composer, in my experience, whose every single note is the right note, a meaningful note. By a meaningful note, I mean he’s never trying to evade where the thing itself goes, the thing that’s inherent in the melody he’s written.

I think that, in dealing with clients and with ourselves, the emotional distortion that we’re reaching for is something that started being a distortion when the person distorted it, when the person said, “No, I’m not facing that; no, I’m not going there; no, I’m not feeling that; no, that’s not true” (when in fact it was true), etc. Maybe there’s a need in civilized people to appear to themselves to be ‘good’. And these matters tend to be things that have long been driven into the subconscious . . . which of course is why they are hard to
get hold of. Whatever the motivation, the beginning of the distortion is always conscious, even if it’s for a fleeting instant. That means we (as Rolfers) are getting our hands on a statement that says “No!” We’re getting our hands in the person’s negativity, in other words. We are explorers, hopefully, of our own negativity, and I think those of us who last doing Rolfing SI and turn it into a life path are people who, in spite of being afraid of it or resistant to it, keep doing it anyway. Or, they’re not afraid of it. So I’m hoping I live a long life and keep getting Rolfing sessions every week. There doesn’t seem to be an end to what internal stuff there is to explore.

The more a person forthrightly and successfully explores, the more true things he discovers. And this process must give rise to disillusionment . . . acknowledging your inner mistakes and misapprehensions, and stopping believing them and acting as though they’re true. Disillusionment is a necessary step, because it dissolves illusion, and the moment of disillusionment gives rise to cathartic release, and it is that release that eventually allows for the capacity of actual wonder to rise, without which transcendence is impossible. That’s the path.

As for the connection between Bach’s Cello Suites and the Rolfing process, you’d have to know about the structure of the Suites, like we seek to know about the structure of the body, or of a person. There are six suites, and within each suite there are six movements. It shouldn’t surprise you that the number six held significant metaphysical meaning for Bach. But that’s another story. Anyway, each individual piece of music has its specific structural purpose. It is entirely coherent standing alone as a piece of music, but it also is a piece of the structure and meaning of the suite; and then each suite has its specific structural purpose within the structure and meaning of the whole, if you can expand your vision to experience the Cello Suites as one very intimate piece of music.

I’d suggest that we can say the same holds true for each session of Rolfing SI, and for each group of sessions of Rolfing SI, not to mention the whole of the genius series that is Dr. Rolf’s gift to humanity. Liberating the functions that are addressed in each session has specific functional, structural purpose to that session. But the work of each session also has deeper purpose in relation to the entire process. Lynn, as we discuss this, I have no doubt that a person could write an entire thesis about it. But let’s let this suffice for what is, after all, a friendly telephone conversation between two colleagues.

In the end, I have concluded that the cello music is Sebastian Bach’s baritone voice uncondemnedly revealing himself as profoundly and deeply as he could, and as my presentation title forthrightly says, moving From Tragedy to Transcendence. And there’s plenty more to say about the music, not to mention the man himself; but let’s let this suffice.

I’ll probably get in trouble for saying this, but I think that why Rolfing SI hasn’t grown the way it ought to have, and why we are so split, is because, as an organization, we are made of people who didn’t do that forthright exploring work I spoke of before. What you’re really doing when you get the hamstrings opened up, or mobilize the ribs, etc., what you’re really doing is releasing a big ‘no’. And as an organization, we didn’t do that on ourselves.

**LC:** Now, of course, I want to know about the way, technically speaking, playing guitar and Rolfing SI inform each other for you.

**SH:** They don’t. I mean, they might, but my first impulse is to say they don’t. My biggest albatross as a Rolfer is that I’m always concerned that I’m going to hurt my hands on someone’s body. Jim Asher once told me my joints are hypermobile. And when I figured out what he meant, I realized that’s not a great thing for either a Rolfer or a guitarist. You want some sort of solidity. Injuring myself, or stiffening my hands, have always been my greatest ambivalences as a Rolfer. Reviewers have written about my “incredible dexterity,” meaning I can play fast and move up and down the fingerboard. Well, I don’t know about that, but that presumed dexterity depends on not being injured or stiff.

**LC:** What about the element of touch?

**SH:** Rosemary Feitis once said to me that in order to be a Rolfer you have to really like the feel of human tissue. I think that’s probably true. There’s nothing to like about the feel of a steel string pressing into your fingertips! However, what is comparable is the specificity of touch. Playing a melodic line or chords, you have to play the note right. And the right hand – people don’t realize that the right hand is far more difficult than the left, fingering hand. Where you play in relationship to the sound hole effects everything. Is it like that on the cello?

[Editor’s note: Lynn Cohen is a cellist, see next article.]

**LC:** Yes. The bow [in the right hand] is like the breath, and the left hand acts as the teeth and the tongue. The articulateness of the left hand is very important, but it’s the bow that draws the voice out of the instrument.

**SH:** That’s the same on the guitar. The right hand of the guitar is so much harder than the left hand! If you play near the bridge it’s more metallic. If you play over the sound hole, it’s sweeter. And those strings are close to one another. So, striking the right string at the right time is a difficult mission. You know Bach once said, “It’s easy to play a musical instrument. There’s nothing to it: all you have to do is touch the right key at the right time, and the instrument will play itself.” Maybe it was easy for him, but for the rest of us . . .

**LC:** Indeed! As we end, I want to give you the opportunity to speak to anything that I haven’t asked you.

**SH:** Okay, so the name of my performance is “From Tragedy to Transcendence.” I was recently asked for an explanation. This is what I came up with, and this is a description that could apply to the work we do as Rollers too: “What began as an exploration of the life of J.S. Bach has become an exploration of life itself.” Because, in a way, if Rolfing SI and receiving Rolfing sessions isn’t a mutual exploration of life itself, then what the hell is it? That’s what I’m doing when I’m on stage and when I’m giving a Rolfing session and when I’m receiving Rolfing work.

Let’s end with a quote from another of the grand geniuses, Felix Mendelssohn. I think it fits for anybody for whom Rolfing SI is a life path. In a letter to his mother, he wrote: “… I endeavor to make progress without any ulterior views beyond my own improvement.” I’d say that’s an excellent point of view both for an individual, being a musician, and for a movement whose purpose is the work of Ida Rolf.

Steven Hancoff “is an interpretive master who plays with fluidity, grace and passion” (Jazz Review Magazine). Steven is a Certified Advanced Rolfer. For fifteen years he served as an Artistic Ambassador representing the United States, concertizing in about fifty countries throughout the world. He is a grateful graduate of St. John’s College in Annapolis, Maryland,
Practically Integrated

Where Parallel Practices Meet

By Lynn Cohen, Certified Advanced Rolfer™

Mid-life, I found myself in need of a vocation. I had a bachelor’s and a couple of master’s degrees boxed up somewhere (along with two unpublished novels and a stack of short stories), and my dog-walking business had run its course. I needed inspiration and an income.

Surprisingly, I was drawn to massage. I loved touching people (the surprising part) and I loved anatomy. I was told I had “good hands.” One of my instructors came from a structural bodywork perspective. He taught us about fascia, how to work positionally and in layers. By feeling a shift in my left hip after receiving ribcage work, I got my first lesson in ‘where you think it is, it ain’t’.

Certified and employable, I worked in a spa for two years. It was grueling. I was vaguely embarrassed to represent an industry that used words like ‘pamper’, and ‘luxuriate’ on ads depicting towel-turbaned women, eyes serenely closed, whose creamy bare shoulders were being kneaded by a pair of impeccably manicured hands. I resented people snoozing on my table. The work took a toll on my body. I sought relief from colleagues and, though some were skilled, I learned that a bad massage was worse than none at all.

I began my professional life at age eighteen as an orchestral bass player. The bass is a large, clumsy instrument. More than twice as wide and taller by a foot than my 5’6” frame, it required a station wagon for transport. In the old days, the airlines sold me a row of seats when I traveled with it. Once famously put it. These are the pre-eminent, grand and the most profoundly serendipitous legends of Western culture itself and include storytelling, virtuosic guitar playing, music, video, historical images, and contemporary art. A third presentation is in the works: Johann Sebastian Bach and The Six Suites for Cello Solo, A Fanciful and Extravagant Allegory. (If you wish to be informed of Steven’s performance schedule or book one of these performances, please contact Steven through his website www.stevenhancoff.com.)
What I wanted was to be a Rolfer.

At age twenty-three, I left music for another career altogether. Thirty-two years and a few professional incarnations later, I had a thriving Rolfing practice in Los Angeles. A musician friend gave me his cello to keep while he traveled. It sat in the corner of my dining room. Every time I walked past it, something in me fluttered. Finally, I took it out of its case. It was thrilling, a greeting that promised great intimacy. But I couldn’t play at all. My hands were uncoordinated, my fingertips hurt pressing the strings, the bow felt like a club. I couldn’t make a sweet sound. If I was going to do this, I decided, I needed to do it right. I found a teacher.

While having played the bass helped to inform certain aspects of cello playing – bow grip, reading music, vibrato – my ‘bass habits’ worked against me as a cellist. The ‘right practices’ of cello playing diverge from the ‘right practices’ of the bass. Don’t shift when you can extend. Use more wrist than elbow for string crossings . . . It was maddening: I felt like a trans-instrumentalist, born a cellist with bass body parts. I wanted to be a real cellist. I wanted my fingers to kiss the strings. I wanted to sing, soar, and sob.

Learning an instrument involves much repetition of rote exercises. It may be tedious, but the fundamentals – the principles, the setup – are critical. By practicing scales and simple tunes, I was learning to discriminate between beautiful and not-so-beautiful sounds; my shoulder, elbow, and hand began to move in coordinated arcs; I found a way to change bows noiselessly; by using different pressure and angles of bow, I created different sounds. Having mastered the bass, I nevertheless felt more at home with the cello – my tuberosities weighted evenly in the chair, the long endpin rooted and centered along my Fourth-Hour line, the intimacy of the body-wood connection, the vibrations humming against my skin, penetrating through my layers to my bones.

I studied structural integration in fits and starts, beginning with a brief foray into Hellerman® SI, followed by enrollment at the Guild for Structural Integration. Learning the SI ‘recipe’ involved repetition and memorization (the map, the territory, and the goals). But I was also learning how to touch in a new way, through a set of ‘right practices’ that were different from those of massage. I was learning to feel the response, to have a conversation that exists beneath language – systems communicating with each other, too exquisitely complex to articulate.

“Follow the recipe and you will get a cake,” my Guild teacher said. “You can worry about the science of cake baking later.” He did not entertain questions about ‘why’; only ‘what’, ‘how’, and ‘when’. He assured us that knowing the goals and the territory for each session would reveal, over time, the ‘why’. Only much later would I appreciate this wisdom.

As a new practitioner, I had no idea what I was doing. I couldn’t ‘see’ what others saw. I made up plausible-sounding answers to clients’ questions. I felt like an imposter.

I took every continuing education class I could. Surely, I thought, having more information would make me a better practitioner faster. I was driven. I had to know more now. The classes I took were all taught by Certified Advanced Rolfers, respected in our community, who had developed their own teachable systems to address structural problems (visceral, cranial, biomechanical, osteo-SI, spino-mechanical, etc).

The contradictions and sophistication of these approaches confounded me. I left those classes frantic and frustrated, ashamed that I didn’t understand, convinced that I had no skills, no gifts for touch. Still, I kept cramming it in. I believed that if I took just one more class, I’d finally get it. The secrets of the elders would be revealed to me. I would know how to do . . . everything. I would finally feel legitimate.


I don’t feel advanced. Laid out across two pages are notes forming arcs, spikes, blocks, tied octave scales, and double stops. The clefs change from bass to tenor to treble and back. It looks ridiculously impossible, but I won’t know for sure until I get my hands on the cello.

Every new Popper begins like this, thrusting me back to a state of mild despair and conscious incompetence. My teacher assigned me #20 because he believes I can do it. I’m unconfident. My skills, such as they are, seem to me fleeting and inapplicable.

I have six days to prepare #20 for my lesson. It will involve hours of agonizing practice before muscle memory and instinct kick in, and I begin to feel comfortable. I will have frustration so intense I will want to smash my bow in half. Yet there’s only one way forward. I take it measure by measure, note by note, stopping to count the tiny lines above the staff to figure out what they are. It’s painful, to my hands and to my ears and to my ego. Yet I persist. I’m driven to get better. It’s who I am.

Three years post-Guild, still chasing after a confidence and a knowledge base that seemed elusive and fragile, I enrolled in the Rolf Institute® of Structural Integration (RISI) basic certification program. If I was going to do this, I decided, I had to do it right.

Students from both schools are understandably curious about the other. As I experienced it, the main difference (aside from the teacher, which is everything) was the inclusion of the Rolfing ‘Principles of Intervention’. Taking Basic again at RISI did not much change how I worked; it both filled and exposed holes in my knowledge. It showed me that I had indeed learned some things during my three years of practice and class cramming. Most significantly, the Principles provided insights into some of the ‘why’s’ I’d been asking.

Tuesday, day three of Popper #20. A perfected version of it insinuates itself into my brain. It’s there constantly, lodged like a splinter, playing over and over. I can’t not hear it. I hear it when I wake up. It’s there when I swim. It’s there when I chop onions and drive to the store, and it’s there while I’m walking my dog. Then life gets busy, and a day passes without practicing. The étude loops relentlessly in my head. A day later, when I go to play, it’s better than it was two days before. It feels easier. Passages I couldn’t manage have begun to flow. It’s resembling a piece of music. Without having touched the cello, I realized, I was practicing.

Of all the ‘rules’ I learned as a massage therapist, the most ingrained and resistant to adaptation as a Rolfer is: “never take your hands off a client.” It’s a lesson I have to keep learning and re-learning; allowing for time between contacts during a Rolfing session does for the client what missing a day of practice does for my cello learning process. It’s doing nothing. And it’s critical to integration.

I know when I’m playing in tune by knowing when I’m not. There is the wobbly sound of overtones clashing, a jagged
sensation transmitted through my maxillae. Playing in tune aligns vibrations, like iron filings obeying the power of a magnet. There is a deep sense of ‘rightness’ in the communion between me – flesh, bone, protoplasm – and this piece of wood; the vibrations that I make / it makes when I touch it / it touches me. The resonance affects me at a cellular level, awakening the optimistic part of me. It’s from that aligned place that I can best express who I am.

I know when I am touching the right place by touching the wrong place – the place where nothing happens. When I’m where I need to be, I can feel responsiveness in antagonistic muscles – twitches, pulses, vibration. There is movement. The person’s being responds. What my hands know can’t be replicated or prescribed. It is beneath thinking or language. I don’t even know what my hands seem to know. It’s some combination of analysis and intuition, informing each other, allowing me to be who I am.

I envy musicians who can sight-read well: they look at an unfamiliar piece and whip through it. If the music is easy, I can do that. But with any intricate rhythmic or notational patterns, I have to experiment with different fingerings and bowings, repeat and repeat before my brain understands what my hands need to do. I’ve always envied those Rolfers with ‘great eyes’ – the ones who look, see, and know where the work needs to happen. While my ‘seeing’ skills have improved over time, I still need to get my hands on the client before I will know where to spend my time.

Cellos are like clients; every one is as unique as the number of them in existence. The rare ones play themselves. The affordable ones all present challenges (the C string is slow to respond; the pleasing, round sound you hear under your ear can utterly disperse a few feet away; the upper register feels tight, etc). The overall quality can be dark, or bright, or warm, or penetrating. When I bought my own cello, I committed myself to a relationship. I must find ways to deal with its limitations in order to exploit its finest qualities.

Clients are like études; some are relatively straightforward, while others present major challenges. The dream clients: “I can breathe better, I feel so light!” (after the First Hour); “I feel so grounded!” (after the Second Hour); “I feel so much more three-dimensional!” (after the Third Hour); etc. . . . There are clients who come in with a never-ending list of problems for me to ‘fix’, or those who have no ability to sense change in their bodies, or who are attached to their pain for reasons I’m not in a position to address. I must engage with all of them, work with them, including their resistances and beliefs, in order to bring out all that’s available in them.

To play a ‘Double Forte’ (fortissimo = very loud), I use finesse. Squeezing or pressing too hard will produce an ugly, crunching sound. With bow speed and pressure, I need to find the sweet spot on my cello.

To go deep into tissue that is locked up, I must back off. If I push too hard, too quickly, it will hurt the client. I need to adjust my pressure and speed, perhaps broaden my touch, to enter into an acceptable contact with that person’s system.

To play ‘pianissimo’ (very softly) without losing substance in the sound, I lighten the pressure but speed up my bow to engage the strings, making sure my left fingers are pressing precisely. The notes ring, soft and clear.

How to enter into a client’s system? Pianissimo. Lynn Cohen is a Certified Advanced Rolfer, cellist, writer, and dog-worshipper who practices all her passions in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
Body as 'Portal'

An Exploration of Rolfing® SI and the Diamond Approach®

By Anne Hoff and Gregory Knight, Certified Advanced Rolfers™ and Diamond Approach® Teachers

Anne Hoff: Greg, we are both Rolfers, and we are both students and teachers of the Diamond Approach, a modern spiritual path. I believe we have similar periods of time in each of these. Let’s compare notes on what got each of us into each of these things and see if there are parallels in our trajectories, and flesh out a bit about these endeavors.

I became a Roler in the mid-1990s. I had first read about Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI) in John Lilly’s autobiographical book The Center of the Cyclone when I was a teenager. I was a little too young to be part of the 1960s human potential movement, but I was very impacted by how that wave moved through the culture. When I got a Rolfing series, what drew me was not pain or posture but embodiment. I knew that my embodiment lagged my development in other ways, emotional and ‘spiritual’ for lack of a better word. I was wanting to synchronize my clocks, so to speak, to land my development into my body. What about you? How did you come to Rolfing SI, and was it before or after finding the Diamond Approach?

Gregory Knight: It sounds like our trajectories have been very similar. I got certified as a Roler and Rolf Movement® Practitioner in 1994. I first heard of Rolfing SI during college. I went to the University of Chicago and studied philosophy and psychology, and was also exploring things like t’ai chi, yoga, and meditation. At some point in college I came across an article by Dr. Rolf and it occurred to me, “Here’s a person who’s got something interesting going on: interested in the body, its form and function, and at the same time interested in something more, in how our experience in our bodies says something about being human.” And the fact that Dr. Rolf was a trained scientist, that she had a certain kind of intellectual rigor, was also very appealing.

Over the course of a few years, as other interests faded, Rolfing SI kept coming to the surface. I had my first Rolfing sessions in part to help with chronic pain from old injuries and holdings, and in part to see if I would like doing the work. I was interested in being a Roler because I wanted to help people resolve chronic pain and find more ease and openness in their bodies. And Rolfing SI also felt like a practice that I needed to be in, that I would learn something about my own inner nature that would come out of doing this particular kind of work.

AH: Now let’s talk about the Diamond Approach (aka ‘the Work’). For myself, I’d always been a ‘seeker’ and had explored various teachings and meditation traditions, but I’d never found a path or a teacher to whole-heartedly commit to. Then in 1995, in the midst of big life changes and shortly after finishing Unit I of Rolfing training, I heard about the Diamond Approach. By my second retreat, I knew I had found my path. The felt sense and image of that realization was “I’ve gotten on a train, and I’m both excited and terrified, because that train is going to take me places I want to go, and also places I could never go on my own.” It was a deep and felt recognition of the Work as a living teaching that would move me to and beyond my edges. That has consistently proven true. What’s your story with finding the Work?

GK: I had been doing Rolfing SI for two years when I learned about the Diamond Approach. I was getting mentoring from Paul Gordon, a longtime Rolfer in Boston. From some of my conversations with Paul, he thought I might find the teachings of A.H. Almaas (the founder of the Diamond Approach) interesting. He gave me the name of one of Almaas’ books, Essence, and the contact information for a teacher who was going to be leading a local retreat. I really enjoyed the book. It had a kind of intellectual curiosity that I saw lacking in other spiritual books I had read, and it resonated with some vague experiences I had had. I went to the retreat and loved the work. I found the teachings and the exercises we did to be psychologically rich, heartfelt, and personally impactful. Like you, I felt the work could take me to and beyond my edges.

What really touched me were the inquiry practices we did. On that first retreat, the teaching was on an aspect of our inner nature we call Personal Will. This is a sense of inner support that does not come out of efforting, judgment, or ego ideals but rather simply arises naturally. It is both a sense of steadfastness and of effortlessness. So we spent time doing explorations into our experiences of efforting, into ways we resist certain experiences, and into the experience of not having inner support. I loved how the inquiries had a sincerity and openness to them. They kept me directly engaged in my own personal experience, not trying to make something happen but rather exploring what is actually hidden within my direct experience.

I kept going on retreats, began working one on one with a teacher, and over time got deeper into the teachings. About eight years ago, I began the teacher training (the teacher training is seven years long with ongoing continuing training after the ‘core’ teaching) and am now an ordained teacher.

AH: Yes, interestingly you and I met in the Diamond Approach teacher training, rather than through Rolfing SI, maybe because we live on opposite coasts. We became Rolfers about the same time, and we became Diamond Approach teachers about the same time. How would you describe the Diamond Approach?

GK: The Diamond Approach is a psychologically informed spiritual path: modern psychological knowledge is integral to the teaching, while the teaching leads us to inner experience that psychological knowledge doesn’t conceptualize. The primary practice is inquiry, a practice of exploring our immediate experience in such a way that we naturally discover...
The Diamond Approach is unique in part because of its distinctive understanding of how our essential nature manifests in various forms – like joy, compassion, personalness, peace, courage, emptiness, boundlessness, etc. – and how each relates to specific, universal psychological fixations.

The Diamond Approach has grown quite organically over the past forty years. Like Rolfing SI, the Diamond Approach emerged in this culture, during our modern time. A.H. Almaas is the primary person who has given voice to the Diamond Approach, and there are many books now about the teaching.

**AH:** That's a great description. I'd add a couple of things. The Diamond Approach is not transpersonal psychology, and it's not psychology mixed with spirituality. Rather, it's a mystical path of self-realization, and within the teaching there arose an understanding of how psychological issues directly relate to spiritual issues. For example, it's so common for people today to feel a sense of emptiness, or meaninglessness, a feeling they are not authentic or not living a real life. The Diamond Approach understands that from a psychological perspective, but also understands it primarily as a spiritual concern – that it expresses how our conventional ‘growing up’ process is incomplete until there is an awakening to essence that completes the maturation of the human being. This is why the Diamond Approach is a ‘work school’ – we don’t just receive teachings or meditate, we actively work our inner material, as in the breath work and inquiry process, to allow the opening to essence and guidance.

**GK:** Yes, the Diamond Approach emphasizes exploring the mystery of our inner nature while living fully in the world. Awareness of and curiosity about our direct, personal experience is the doorway to our deepest inner nature. This includes attention to our bodily experience, making use of different kinds of sensing practices and breath work to awaken our awareness and presence.

**AH:** I think that inclusion of the body is emblematic of the Diamond Approach work. It’s very embodied and palpable while also being spiritual in nature. I’d like to share an experience that illustrates how I feel there is a cross-pollination between our work as Rolfers and our work as Diamond Approach teachers. When I was in Unit II, Pedro Prado led us in an exercise of gradually finding our bodies on the ‘Line’. It was deep sensing, slow and meditative. As my body came to the Line, I felt this incredible updraft of energy, so strong that it almost made me nauseous. So of course I had to get off my Line! What I’ve understood since then is that the Line is a portal for beginning to sense the body as energy or space – a portal for the experience and expression of being rather than merely a physical structure. In Rolfing sessions we are removing some of the structural impediments to this opening to the body as a portal to the experience of true nature. This is why I’ve always been interested in Rolfer Will Johnson’s writings, he has a similar take: that the tension patterns in the body are egoic patterns, and that as the tension patterns release and the body is on its Line, we can begin to experience the body as a shimmering field, part of the ground of being.

So in Rolfing SI we are working with physical structure that potentially opens the door to more than physical reality. Then in the Diamond Approach we are also working with structure, but particularly how consciousness is structured. This happens through normal developmental processes (the neonate developing into a child who gradually develops a sense of self and other and world) and also through trauma and deficiencies in the environment. The result is a person (soul) convinced that she is a bounded ‘entity’, a self separate from nature, separate from spiritual reality. And who firmly believes she is defined as a particular sort of person, an identity. As we work with these structures in the Diamond Approach, both in retreats and in private sessions with a teacher, we can begin to dissolve the sense of entity, which leads to nondual spiritual experience, and dissolve the sense of identity based on personal history, which leads to experiences of essential states and also to what would classically be called ‘self-realization’.

**GK:** Yes, for me there was a natural progression from exploring my experience of Rolfing SI to exploring my experience through the Diamond Approach. That sense of inner space and support you get in Rolfing is a great door to exploring inner nature. And then my work in the Diamond Approach has had impacts on my Rolfing practice. For example, about five years into my Rolfing practice, and three years into the Diamond Approach, I realized how unclear I was about what I was touching. I had my vague notions of what I was palpating, but it began to dawn on me that my sensing was filtered through so many ideas about what I ‘should’ be feeling, transference of my own history, and countertransference with the client.

In spite of doing many trainings, knowing anatomy, and having sophisticated models for understanding the body, we often don’t learn tools to progressively clarify our touch, so our work ends up being filtered through our ideas of what is happening rather than our direct experience. I wanted my touch to be more precise, to know truly what was happening, and the Diamond Approach gave me the tools to really clarify what was occluding my touch. Since that time, when I’ve mentored other Rollers and bodyworkers or taught classes, I’ve used these lessons from my own experience along with some of the teachings of the Diamond Approach to help people really get to the point of what is actually obscuring their ability to sense clearly.

I think it’s also important to say that the Diamond Approach emphasizes that inner exploration is an adventure of continuous discovery. As you explore and realize more about your inner nature, you find all aspects
of your life becoming more fascinating, full of wonder and curiosity. This creates a rich platform for learning while working with Rolfing clients.

AH: As Diamond Approach teachers, we both work with ‘students’ doing spiritual inquiry sessions – part of the work that over time connects individuals to their own inner unfolding and guidance, the “adventure of continuous discovery” that you mention. In these sessions, we work with the content of the moment that the student brings in, whether, e.g., an expanded experience or insight, or being furious about something that happened to them at work earlier that day. We then see where the exploration of that content leads in terms of insight into the student’s personal history or essential nature or reality. An important part of the sessions is a unique form of breath work done on a mat, to bring awareness to the body – perhaps highlighting tension patterns, revealing inner ‘structures’, or opening access to various dimensions of essence and being – as just a few examples. So I’m wondering what cross-pollination you are seeing between your work with Rolfing clients, and your work with your Diamond Approach students?

GK: Having been doing Rolfing SI for twenty two years has certainly had an impact on my work as a Diamond Approach teacher. Spending so many hours looking at clients’ bodies through different lenses, different taxonomies – structural, functional, energetic, emotional, etc. – has given me a wide base of information to gather from when working with a Diamond Approach student. Also, I have enjoyed playing with the Rolfing Principles of Intervention – holism, support, adaptability, palintonicity, closure – in the Diamond Approach work, seeing how they are sometimes helpful to determining if a student is ready to inquire into something.

From the Diamond Approach perspective, the one-on-one work we do with students – the work we do with body, breath, and inquiry – really shows how any attachment to historical conditioning or set of beliefs, any ego identification, includes a bodily contraction. It’s very useful to be able to tell the difference between that kind of holding in the body and tensions that are rooted in something more physical, e.g. an old injury, when working with a Rolfing client.

Also being a Diamond Approach teacher includes learning to be aware of and track presence in oneself and a student in a session. And presence is not emotional energy, chakra energy, chi, or fluid circulation. It is the ontological being-ness of a person that is dynamic and expresses itself in various forms. Learning to be aware of true presence, I can now see when that is arising in a Rolfing client, appreciate its importance, and can bring the client’s awareness to it.

What do you find?

AH: Presence is key – to tracking what is going on, whether with a Diamond Approach student or with a Rolfing client. How explicit or verbal the cross-pollination is depends on the Rolfing client. Someone coming to me for pain relief may have no interest in consciousness or in other factors that could be influencing their structure. So it’s looking for an opening to subtly point to something and see if there’s uptake to, for example, how their identity or some attachment to something might be feeding into their structural issues. Other clients already have some organic sense of inquiry into their bodies and processes, and with them I can be a bit more explicit. So it’s really client-driven. I don’t ‘mix’ Rolfing work and the Diamond Approach, but there are definitely useful elements I can bring into the person’s field.

One that’s sometimes important to point out to a client is what we call the ‘super ego’ in the Diamond Approach – what is often called the ‘inner critic’ or the ‘judge’. The Diamond Approach has a quite unique understanding of and methodology for working with this critical voice until it loses its hold over us. With Rolfing clients, I often see it as a rejection of their body or their experience. It’s hard to get change in the body when the person is not holding his experience with kindness, or is driven to try to fix something out of a negative judging of his current state. So I do try to point out the harshness of the self-critique and encourage the person to be more welcoming to the body as it is.

GK: That’s a great point about having a way to engage Rolfing clients when they have a lot of judgment about what their body is ‘supposed’ to be. That makes me think of something similar. In the Diamond Approach we spend a lot of time realizing various essential qualities of our nature (what are sometimes called the lataif in Sufi teachings), like, Joy, Peace, Will, etc. When I finally began to understand what compassion and kindness is – not trying to fix pain, but a loving presence that brings sensitivity so the pain can be understood and metabolized – my touch changed. When a body is touched with kindness – and likewise with clarity, inner stillness, or gentle curiosity – the body armor that holds the inner critic softens. It’s a change that is happening through the physical contact rather than through dialogue.

Are there any challenges for you in keeping the two modalities separate from each other?

AH: I’ve had a couple of clients where a more explicit inquiry process has come into their Rolfing sessions. I wanted more clarity about this, out of respect for each modality, so I did a supervision session with Linda Krier, a senior Diamond Approach teacher and an Aston Patterning® practitioner. She still practices bodywork, so it was interesting to get her perspective. I got clear for myself that inquiry in a Rolfing session was not ‘mixing’ provided it was organically arising from the client’s own sensitive experience and not something imposed from outside. But for the most part I find that Rolfing clients and Diamond Approach students are coming in for different things, so it’s not a challenge to keep them separate. What about for you, any challenges?

GK: In my first couple of years of Rolfing SI and the Diamond Approach, it was sometimes hard for me to keep the views separate, and I would invite a Rolfing client into an inquiry rather than, as you say, letting it arise from his or her own experience. So there was a learning process. It’s not difficult now to keep things distinct. Going through it, in hindsight I feel appreciation for the process and the learning, and I am compassionate for all of us as we learn to integrate new experiences and understandings.

This does lead to the question, though, about when a person who is a student of the Diamond Approach might want to check out Rolfing SI, and vice versa. One benefit of bodywork is that it makes your body more receptive to subtle experiences like those that can occur in spiritual work. If you have bindings in your body, it’s hard to sense certain dimensions of reality, or your experience will be split, with a kind of schizoid experience. Even when a spiritual path teaches that the body is an expression of one’s true nature, people still hold subtle
beliefs about their body as somehow a separate ‘thing’. Getting great bodywork can get past a lot of those beliefs, sometimes in a way that sitting on a cushion or doing inquiry for hours doesn’t.

What would you add to this?

**AH:** I’ve actually done Rolfing sessions on a lot of Diamond Approach students because I take my table to retreats and offer sessions in the time off. One simple thing is that Diamond Approach retreats, and many other spiritual paths, involve a lot of sitting, so people have the usual body issues that come up from that. Then, like you say, there’s the other dimension of getting bodywork to help open the body to more subtle experiences, which can be really useful in retreat settings, as well as on an ongoing basis.

But there’s also the flip side. People’s egoic patterns and ways of operating come into the Rolfing room, whether a Diamond Approach student or not. A primary tenet of the Diamond Approach is to be with your experience, not to try to force change, yet sometimes a student will approach a situation with his or her body from a viewpoint of ‘make it go away’ – particularly if it’s pain. So if the person on my table is a Diamond Approach student, I may suggest he or she consider whether the body issue is simply from sitting a lot at a retreat, or whatever the surface idea is, or whether the material of the retreat or the person’s process is landing in such a way that it’s bringing a physical manifestation to awareness.

And sometimes a student at a retreat comes in primed for a really powerful session because he or she is already deep in an unfolding line of inquiry and teaching, as I am, and we are in a potent field – at the largest teachings, there may be 500 students in the hall. This setting can bring a very exciting co-creation between the student’s inquiry drawing out the full and creative repertoire of my skills in bodywork and my presence and guidance to allow a very multidimensional session that is much more than a physical session although fully grounded in fascial work and resolving structural patterns.

**GK:** What is your experience of Rolfing clients becoming interested in the Diamond Approach?

**AH:** I’ve had a few Rolfing clients want to explore the Diamond Approach work. We talk about what that would mean, which includes wrapping up our work together doing Rolfing and having a clear break from that. That can be a difficult for some clients because they love coming for that work. There’s a transition, a kind of mourning of an old relationship, but also a beginning of a new one, one of teacher to student.

It’s been great to work with these folks. With people I have known for years and thought I knew well, of course I only knew a certain side of them. As Diamond Approach students, its opened up a whole new terrain. It’s wonderful to see them touch into their hearts, their soul and being, challenge themselves to be with what’s most intimate and real in their experience – maybe seeing a way they distance themselves from their own presence with judgment and how painful that is and seeing what underlies that. As they open to their real, essential nature there’s a grounding and enlivening they discover. It’s like the experience of ground and space that comes from Rolfing SI and yet completely different. And their Rolfing experience can prepare them to inhabit essential experience.

I’m quite curious about the relationship between body awareness and essential or inner realization. I think this will be a contemplation for me for awhile: how do somatic practices contribute to a spiritual practice that focuses on the embodiment of spiritual awakening? How to keep the streams of different teachings separate so they retain their unique understanding and clarity, and at the same time allow for influence between them?

**AH:** Yes, it is an ongoing inquiry. Interestingly, this dialogue, which began a while ago, is finishing while we are both at a Diamond Approach retreat on the Phenomenology of Realization – about how realization of various spiritual states is experienced in one’s subjectivity, one’s interiority, which includes the body. It’s very appropriately on topic.

If readers would like to speak to either of us about the Diamond Approach, we would be happy to share information on books, web resources, retreat groups, and private-session work. Anne can be reached at annehoff@mac.com and Greg at greg@gregknight.net.

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**Bibliography**


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I find I’m a person of strong doubt. Doubt is an unrelenting taskmaster, but it can lead to innovation. I tend to doubt the party line about why things work, at least until I can puzzle the story out. I was, from the start, skeptical of the Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI) ‘story’ – the part that tells us that our bodies are plastic because fascia is plastic, and that once you place things in order, the body says “thank you,” and stays that way. The work itself is fantastic; it helped (and continues to help) my body in many ways. It offered me an interesting career – no doubt there. The explanations, however, those words used to sell people on what we do, and why it works, felt simplistic; akin to a mutual agreement to believe in something that hadn’t been thought through deeply enough. What happens to our clients? If they like the work, and look different after a session, how do I know it isn’t mostly due to a placebo effect?

Rolfing practice, for me, has been a continuous question about what is really going on during sessions, because how much of what I tell clients is grounded in is what I directly know and feel? Each part of my work as a Roler and Rolf Movement Practitioner includes the questions: “How do I know this works? Can I feel the mechanism prove itself in my body?” After this, the next important questions become, “How do I access this mechanism in me? What activates it, at any time, or any place? How can I bolster my clarity and faith, and speak only from fresh experience? Why shouldn’t anybody be able to access Dr. Rolf’s understanding in simple accessible ways?”

About the time that I became a Rolfer, I started to plant and tend a small orchard of apple trees. The trees became a leitmotif for the act of observing shape and growth. Much labor was needed to sustain them, and to actually bring a crop to fruition. With time, the trees became a place to climb, and for extended times, while perched here and there in the geometry of the branches, a place to feel the shape, mass, and support of the limbs.

Four years after being certified, I continued to gnaw on the questions: What makes posture and movement plastic? How does change really occur? These questions got support from study with Hubert Godard, and the work known as tonic function. The orchard and the tonic function inquiry are now an interwoven story for me. When first introduced to it, the tonic function story made sense to me, and with the better story came a way to test Dr. Rolf’s premise in many different ways, and to feel it flower in the orchard.

A central feature of Dr. Rolf’s work, and also of tonic function, is the idea that when an educated body encounters demand, it lengthens – elongating rather than shortening, and continuing to act and feel longer and more spacious as demand increases. This is counterintuitive to what seems logical. Jeffrey Maitland found an ancient Greek word for this remarkable feeling – *palintronus*, a feeling of length occurring in two opposite directions. Another word for it is *eccentricity*, which means ‘away from the center’. Whatever the name, this useful quality is associated with an accompanying improvement in stability, security, and sense of well-being. The source of this elongation and increased stability is natural and normal. At the same time, it’s also natural and normal to acquire habits of effort that interrupt being able to lengthen.

Effort tends to produce compression and loss of space, described by the term *concentricity*. To undo patterns of effort, we learn ways to change the preparation to move or pre-movement. Is there clarity, though, that a pre-movement that produced a useful response in the past will be able to produce the same effect today?

Each day, as practitioners, as we prepare to practice Rolling SI or teach Rolf Movement Integration, from where does our confidence derive? What provides fresh evidence? Is it possible to test the fundamental hypothesis so that even a person with deep doubt can work with a certain degree of assurance, being reassured that there is integrity in the work?

I first tested the hypothesis with simple things; while riding my bike, I imagined a feeling of two directions in my spine and the pedaling became easier; when chainsawing a tree for firewood, feeling the contact of my hands and feet and the volume inside and outside my trunk allowed my belly to soften and the saw to feel lighter. These beginnings led to a catalog of ways to illustrate that our work is legitimate. To notice the difference between concentricity and eccentricity is a question for what happens every day – lifting groceries from a car, carrying a child, vacuuming, raking leaves, or throwing a ball; any catalog is only as helpful as it draws upon one’s life.

The apple trees got taller and gained in girth. Each year a tree needs to be pruned, to remove some of the prolific new wood, so the tree stays healthy and produces good apples. The pruning is a nice analogy to Rolfing work – both are satisfying artisries. The more potent lesson, however, occurred as I was up in the tree, setting root with feet and elbows and knees, so there was stability; then I could use one or both hands to reach out with shears, to prune and shape. Sometimes I reached farther and farther and the stability had to grow in many dimensions to support that reach. There were moments that it all became a little bit dangerous.

One wishes to sustain the reaching and climbing and chopping, aloft, for several hours, in a manner that feeds the body; confirming that bodies like to lengthen if you feed them useful information, and that a body that lengthens again and again stays happier. Tree climbing and pruning is a set of motions and actions that engage both girdles, all extremities, and all planes of motion in the spine. One immediately feels...
the usefulness of a robust sense of ground and space and omnidirectional awareness. The value of feeling into surfaces and textures in contact with the hands and feet becomes obvious. The activity confirms the principles of Dr. Rolf’s legacy. Confirmation gets repeated; confirmation awakens and sustains faith – faith that what we practice and teach is real. A fresh sense of ‘this is real’, in a body, communicates itself to others.

There are many self-care ‘exercises’ that allow anyone to confirm their faith in Dr. Rolf’s work. I teach them every day. It’s especially useful to find ways that her work interweaves with life activities we love, and to learn the crucial elements of perception and orientation that underlie the ability to change from effort to elongation, from frustration to satisfaction.

Just before offering a lesson to a group of students, or to a client, I find it handy to draw on a personal experience that answers the question, “Does this stuff still work today?” I probably don’t run out to the tree for prep, but use what I have learned in the tree to refresh a detail of pre-movement, some coordinative element produced in slow motion, in my office.

An apple-tree story from another person’s backyard. Atop an apple tree in lower Bavaria, I toss apples from newfound perches. To my surprise, and then delight, I experience a quiet presence that shows up to help: a mysterious movement guy below me, catching apples with one, and then both hands, each hand independent, each movement mindless and easy. One senses broad orientation to the open space – an autumn field of trees and grass and sky – an absence of focus on where the apples are – yet each one ends up in those hands.

Kevin Frank is Certified Advanced Rolfer and Rolf Movement Instructor. Kevin’s teaching and private practice are informed by study with Hubert Godard, Continuum Movement with Emilie Conrad and Susan Harper, and practice in Zen and Meditative Inquiry. Kevin lives and works on land in rural New Hampshire.

The Sound of Integration

A Conversation with Maria Helena Orlando

By Heidi Massa and Maria Helena Orlando, Certified Advanced Rolfer™ and Rolf Movement® Practitioners

Heidi Massa: Lena, you’ve been practicing Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI) for more than twenty years, right?

Maria Helena Orlando: Yes, after finishing my Basic Training in 1994, I got my Rolf Movement certification in 1998 and completed the Advanced Training in 1999. Then, in 2010 I completed a postgraduate program for Rolfer here in Brazil. Developed as a partnership between the University and the Brazilian Rolfing Association (ABR), it requires taking courses in research theory and methods at São Paulo’s Universitário Unifal; designing and executing a research project using the case-study method; and publishing the results. The subject of my research was Rolfing SI as an agent of integration among posture, behavior, and quality of life.

HM: Besides your clinical practice in São Paulo, you’ve given years of service to the Rolfing community, both in Brazil and to the international organization. Tell us a little about that.

MHO: I was president of the ABR, from 2003 through 2011. During that time, we met many challenges. We developed a modular format for the Basic Training; implemented a proper financial control system; created the Universitário Unifal postgraduate program; and moved the organization to a headquarters well-suited to the conduct of trainings and workshops. During that time, our number grew from only about eighty Certified Rolfers to nearly 140. And, from 2006 through 2014, I served as the international representative on the Rolf Institute® Board of Directors.

HM: Is there a key insight that your years of Rolfing practice and service to the Rolfing community has brought you?

MHO: In these twenty-two years I’ve been a Rolfer, I’ve always worked toward bringing more knowledge to my practice and expanding the possibilities for assisting my clients. All of this has been an apprenticeship, both professionally and personally, that has enriched my understanding of the complexity of the human experience in all its aspects. This is fundamental: we treat the person as a whole – not just the person’s physical aspect.

HM: You’ve established a second professional practice as a music therapist. What led you to add music therapy to your professional repertoire?

MHO: Music has always been a big part of my life. I play acoustic guitar and piano, and I love to sing. In my ongoing search for greater knowledge and deeper experience of the human condition, music therapy was one way to expand my horizon.
HM: What did your training involve?

MHO: I studied the Benenzon Method, recognized internationally as one of the five most important schools of music therapy. Its approach is interdisciplinary, bringing in concepts from philosophy, science, art, and literature. The confluence of ideas yields a complex system of theory and practice for how to use the nonverbal resources of the body, the vibrations, and music to establish a therapeutic bond between practitioner and client. Certain empirically based ideas are key – for example, that every person has a unique sonorous identity. The training covers both theory and practice, but the most difficult and richest challenge is to develop the skill of therapeutic listening as the main tool for accessing the client’s concerns. Because music therapy is almost entirely nonverbal, the interaction between the therapist and client takes place through sound. So – to attend to the client’s process and establish a dialogue, I have to tune in to the client completely by listening with my own body.

HM: Isn’t it also true in your Rolfing practice that you need to sense the client with your whole body, and that much of the communication is nonverbal?

MHO: Sure, this is a point in common: metaphorically speaking, we ‘listen’ in any therapeutic practice. But it’s not that simple. With music therapy, because communication must be established on a nonverbal level, the therapist’s presence and ability to literally listen are essential to establishing the basic understanding between the practitioner and the client. The therapist is particularly tuned in to the perception of the sounds, silences, and rhythms that appear during the interaction with the client. Something as simple as a sigh or a prolonged silence can be an important signal as the session unfolds.

HM: These days, what does your music-therapy practice consist of?

MHO: During my training, I was introduced to an approach called Sound Massage, which was developed by the German Peter Hess. It immediately touched me and made quite an impression. Sound Massage uses metal bowls, called Tibetan singing bowls (see Figure 1), that emit pure and perfectly harmonious sounds. We place the bowls on the client’s body and get them to sing by gently tapping them. The sounds of the bowls have a calming effect on the body and spirit. Their gentle vibrations spread gradually through the body to promote relaxation, comfort, and security.

The bowls are made of a combination of twelve metals, chosen for their capacity to emit perfectly harmonious sounds in frequencies that have therapeutic effects. Generally speaking, I use as many as seven different bowls during a session. Because the bowls are positioned on the prone or supine client (see Figure 2), when we tap them gently, their vibrations are transmitted to the client’s body. Each size bowl emits a particular frequency that tends to be therapeutic for a specific body area. Bowls emitting lower frequencies are used below the diaphragm, and the one emitting the highest frequency is used for the head. And the Universal Bowl, which has the broadest-spectrum frequency, can be used anywhere.

HM: So the bowls have physical effects?
MHO: They do. Vibrations are a physical reality. They propagate through fluids (Figure 3), and they’re amplified by gasses or fluids under pressure. To experience this, just hold an inflated balloon in the presence of vibration and feel the amplified waves. Now imagine how connective tissue is a fluid matrix – and how the human body is a pressure vessel – and you get the idea. The vibrations help to release soft-tissue adhesions, so using the bowls during or along with Rolfing SI can be very efficient.

MHO: The clients who benefit most from music therapy and Sound Massage have difficulty with anxiety, stress, and insomnia; and behavioral issues such as aggression, hyperactivity, and attention deficit.

HM: How do you decide which of your professional skills to use in working with a particular client?

MHO: I can get a sense of which approach would be most beneficial during the client’s initial interview. And, during the course of treatment, how things play out in the sessions indicates what approach would benefit the client.

HM: In terms of your ongoing personal and professional evolution, where do you go from here? What’s next for you?

MHO: Personal evolution is what I’m usually looking for when I choose a course of study, a therapy, or even a trip – and this shows in my work. As to what’s to come, I try not to have expectations or make big plans. After all, three years ago I hadn’t even thought of studying music therapy, much less had I considered working with Tibetan singing bowls, since I hadn’t even imagined that this kind of therapeutic approach existed. Recently, to cope with a personal loss, I’ve joined a singing therapy group where everything is just now unfolding.

The start of my work as a Rolfer brought quite a bit of stress. I was a businesswoman who decided to take a massage class without having any idea where it would lead me. I feel that life invites us, over and over, to take up various journeys and challenges. When we accept them with open hearts and minds, we’re certainly on an evolutionary path.

Maria Helena Orlando practices Rolfing SI and music therapy in São Paulo, Brazil. Her academic background includes business administration, and prior to becoming a Rolfer in 1994, she operated her own business. She was President of the Brazilian Rolfing Association from 2003 through 2011 and the international representative to the Rolf Institute® Board of Directors from 2006 through 2014.

Heidi Massa, a Brazil-trained Certified Advanced Rolfer and Rolf Movement Practitioner, has been guiding the somatic adventures of the discerning, the curious, and the brave since 1994. She has served on the Rolf Institute’s Ethics and Business Practices Committee for twenty years, and been an editor for this Journal since 2000. While Chicago is home to both her Rolfing and complex business litigation practices, as well as to her architectural and interior and landscape design interests, Heidi travels frequently to Colorado, where she maintains a fine pre-War home in impeccably original style, hikes in the mountains, and dances the tango.

Endnotes
1. For a description of the UniÍtalo postgraduate program, which awards participants the equivalent of a master of science degree, see Pedro Prado’s article The Case Study Method: Scientific Exploration of Rolfing® SI in the Holistic Paradigm, appearing in Vol. 39, No. 2 of this Journal (December 2011) and reprinted in the 2012 IASI Yearbook. Abstracts of the research projects of individual participants, including Maria Helena Orlando, are available at the Ida P. Roll Library of Structural Integration (www.iprlibrary.com or www.pedroprado.com.br).
Dancing Between the Lines

Rolfing® SI, Lindy Hop, and the Interplay of Play

By Jason Sager, Certified Advanced Rolfer™, Rolf Movement® Practitioner

In the summer of 2002, fresh out of college, I went to a swing dance for the first time. I was a shy young adult, grown from a shy child with no experience in music, and a weak high-school wrestling career as my most athletic endeavor to date. But something about dancing took hold of me and my attention in a way nothing else had up to that point. Inside six months I had come to the conclusion that I wanted to teach. Within the first two years I was taking lessons from everyone offering them in the area and beginning to travel to learn as well. At my height, I traveled to a workshop at least once a month and was taking three different classes from three different instructors, teaching not-terribly-complementary styles, in three different locations on the same night.

In the spring of 2007, I decided I wanted to be a Rolfer. After five years in dance and two teaching, I had begun exploring body mechanics and creative territories that most of my dance instructors had never taught me. Where my instructors had provided a form for students to fit themselves into, I saw the differences and sought a toolset to bridge the gap. I also knew by then that making a living in dance was not for me, but I needed to escape a life in computer programming to do something more physical. My first session of Rolfing Structural Integration (SI) with Bethany Ward confirmed that there was something here with at least an order of magnitude more information about the body than anyone I’d encountered in swing dancing so far. By late summer I had completed my Ten Series and was off to my Unit One training in Boulder.

Dancing in Denver

The Rolfing training took me to Boulder and Denver and an entirely different dance scene to the one I had grown up in. I had been traveling and competing rather unsuccessfully for several years at that point, so it wasn’t entirely out of my experience, but the level of play and skill in the Denver dance scene was something I found deeply intimidating. I can remember driving the hour or so to the Mercury Café in Denver just to sit on the bleachers, almost petrified, thinking “Oh s***, I don’t know how to have the kinds of dances these people are having.”

My competition career at that point had been clean but had failed to advance beyond first elimination rounds, because of similar inhibitions. The feedback I routinely received was that my dancing was good, but that I didn’t really stand out in any fashion. I’d struggled through tears and heartbreak for a few years with this consistent feedback, and while the Denver dance scene showed me what was possible, it didn’t fully help me to figure out how to achieve it.

Rolf Movement Training in Brazil

Fast forward about fifteen months from my Unit One, and I found myself in Brazil for Unit Three with Jan Sultan and Rolf Movement training with Monica Caspami. There were so many moments of brilliance and heartache throughout that training (including being dumped remotely, on week two of ten), but for the purposes of this story, I will share one of the moments that etched itself on my soul and radically altered the course of my dancing and teaching.

One day, we were discussing freedom of movement, and Monica made the amazing statement: “The primary cause of physical dysfunction is social inhibition.” In the days after that, I mulled over the dancing I’d seen and the way I had been trained. As I contemplated my home scene and training, there was a very clear feeling of “Oh . . . that’s what’s going on.” The dominant form of teaching was very much driven by the idea that there is one right way to do this, in effect installing the subtext that there is a lot of ‘wrong’. In essence, people learned to dance with an influence of “Don’t screw up,” rather than an influence of play.

Overcoming Inhibitions

Coming back from Brazil, I made it one of my missions to overhaul the inhibitory forces in my dancing. My goal became to try anything that came into my head on the floor whether I knew how to pull it off or not. Many moves failed; many moves came out weird: if I’d been trying to make a living from my dancing I’m sure I’d have starved that year.

However, out of chaos grew a new kind of order. As I was repeatedly presented with failed moves, I also started to learn better how to save them or make them into something new. When a dance partner ‘zigged’ if I had asked for ‘zag’, I began to ‘zig’ with her and make something new, on the fly, out of her contribution. And in the span of a year I went from being told I wasn’t taking enough risks in competition to being told I was taking too many. I also went from never making finals to consistently making finals, and then either placing or coming in dead last among the finalists.

Reworking Teaching

With the start of my own fundamental shifts in dancing, I found myself struggling to find uninhibited play with dancers back home. While I had changed, the local scene had not, and out of a sort of self-preservation I started to overhaul my teaching to try to evoke a similar sort of freedom amongst dancers in my home scene.

I began some of this going straight at the inhibitions, talking about how we tend to lose technique when we get scared, but my approach to teaching technique remained mechanistic at times. I started working to break movements down to a sort of ‘first principles’ level of ‘here are the absolute basic building blocks, and here’s how to practice them’, then combine that with an awareness of touch and social interaction with one’s dance partner. It worked, though not as readily as I thought would be possible, and students in my classes
Vaudevillian Revue: Bootlegger’s Ball at Southland Ballroom in Raleigh, South Carolina, 2012. Photo by Christopher Donald.

began to comment on how different the approach was, though they were at a loss to explain how it was different when trying to encourage their friends to join the classes.

I had a sort of “What have I done?” moment, feeling like Pandora might have, when discussing “oh s**t” reactions on the dance floor. We were talking about how mistakes tend to stop us in our tracks in different ways: some of us flip into apology mode; some scramble their feet; some stop moving, etc. One of the students looked at me with a semi-shocked expression and declared to the whole class, “That’s how I am in my whole life!”

I think the real *aha* moment came for me when I had a realization that has become one of my mantras for learning anything the past few years: “At some point in history, somebody made this up.” Swing dance started as a street dance, which means that the music existed, and people moved and played and made things up to it, until those movements coalesced into the dance that we call Lindy Hop.

**Watching by Feel**

One of my dance-influences-Rolfing SI-influences-dance moments came during an event called ‘The Experiment’, which I attended for a few years and which was a big influence on my approach to teaching dance. It’s a concept that still makes me wonder if it would work with Rolfing SI. Essentially, a group of very high-level dancers rented a beach house in coastal North Carolina, a few international-level instructors came, and we basically spent a week dancing, trading ideas, and, well, experimenting. The instructors set out a certain amount of material for the attendees to play with, but in general it was a free-for-all exchange of ideas.

On one of the days, we were watching clips of some of the original swing-era dancers now in their 70s and 80s, dancing at a place called Bobby McGee’s in California. The idea of the class was to try to replicate the moves from only the visual tape provided. As I watched around the room, something never seemed quite right in how my colleagues were replicating the moves. After watching and comparing for a while, it finally occurred to me that they were imitating eighty-year olds, but doing so as twenty- and thirty-year olds. Some of the dancers in these clips weren’t doing things that way because they particularly liked the aesthetic: they were doing it that way because they were protecting aching joints. As I settled instead into watching for how something felt (rather than simply looking for biomechanics), I felt my dancing begin to resemble what I saw in the videos, dancing as if my knees hurt. By taking on the moves from only the visual tape and comparing for a while, it finally occurred to me that they were imitating eighty-year olds, but doing so as twenty- and thirty-year olds. Some of the dancers in these clips weren’t doing things that way because they particularly liked the aesthetic: they were doing it that way because they were protecting aching joints. As I settled instead into watching for how something felt (rather than simply looking for biomechanics), I felt my dancing begin to resemble what I saw in the videos, dancing as if my knees hurt. By taking on the movements coalesced into the dance that we call Lindy Hop.

**Current Status**

In the past few years, my relationship with dance has gone up and down a great deal. I built and ran a dance studio for a few years right around the time that my Rolfing practice took off. While I continue to love dance like nothing else, the studio was ultimately a great deal of work for very little emotional payoff. About two years ago, I realized that Rolfing SI was rewarding me far more strongly, both in emotional and financial terms, and that I needed to close the studio doors in order to save my own love of the dance.

I’m currently making a slow return to dancing for myself, seeing if I can evoke the things that most charge me up in dance without having to teach them. I still hope to find a dance partner who’ll want to explore it in the ways I do: the relational aspect with another person and another body is one of the things that makes swing so difficult to achieve but also so awesome when it happens. It’s much the same energy that drew me to Rolfing SI, and I expect the two will continue to dance together in my attention and influence each other’s growth for the rest of my life.

Jason Sager is a Certified Advanced Rolfer and Rolf Movement practitioner in Raleigh (and hopefully soon Durham), North Carolina. He is a recovering ‘danceaholic’ (not an actual diagnosis) and currently deep in some personal work discovering what life has to offer beyond the dance world. Jason occasionally blogs about Rolfing SI and dance and their intersections with his personal and professional life at sagermeister.com.
Body, Speech, and Mind

An Interview with Tsuguo Hirata

By Anne Hoff, Certified Advanced Rolfer™ and Tsuguo Hirata, Certified Advanced Rolfer, Rolf Movement® Practitioner

Anne Hoff: Tsuguo, you have a strong background in Buddhism and religious studies besides being a Rolfer and doing other kinds of bodywork. That’s an interesting combination and I’m wondering how these influence each other in your life and in your practice. But to start, tell us about your background with Buddhism, as that came first.

Tsuguo Hirata: First of all, thank you Anne for this honor of being interviewed for the Journal. Before talking about my involvement to Buddhism, I want to say that I trained in karate during senior high school. I wanted to be physically strong and was influenced by karate comics and the real-life story of the famous karate school founder. However, in the spring of my second year I got in a motorbike accident and my left lower leg was broken into pieces. After two and a half months of treatment, my concern turned to becoming a spiritually strong man who was not afraid of death, and I read books on Buddhism and Indian philosophy and searched for the best training such as yoga and meditation.

I then majored in Buddhism and Indian philosophy at university in Kyoto. My concern at that time was how I could become enlightened and what enlightenment is. In Japan, as well as in Asia, we have many schools and branches of Buddhism. I was checking into each school’s advocates and its areas of superiority to others, but this generated confusion. I asked my questions to students ahead of me and to my professors, but their study of Buddhism was strictly intellectual study of ancient texts, starting from language study. I almost gave up on finding excellent Japanese Buddhism teachers. So I spent my time reading books about the great teachers of the past: Kukai, the founder of Japan’s Shingon-Mantrayana sect of Buddhism, Tibetan yogis such as Milarepa, and Indian yogis such as Yogananda. But I could not get peace of mind just from mental speculation.

Ramakrishna, and Sri Aurobindo, and their influence on the subsequent hippie movement in California.

Then, after graduation, I spent twenty years being a businessman in the computer industry, keeping my innermost concerns for Buddhism inside. Towards the end of that career I attended Tibetan Buddhist retreats overseas and Zen retreats in Japan. Then in 2000, at the age of forty-three, I started learning Rolfing® Structural Integration [SI] in Boulder, quitting my company because I was totally bored with a corporate career.

AH: Now I see the path of Buddhism/ consciousness studies intersecting with the bodywork!

TH: Yes. As I studied subtle levels of touch and searched for more effective touch from the physical side, I noticed that what we gain and realize through Buddhist training is very close to what I was searching for as a bodyworker or in working with clients’ minds or beliefs. Buddhism teaches that our existence is made of body, speech, and mind. Our body, speech, and mind are working together incessantly; however, we do not know the integrity and the integrated state of Body, Speech, and Mind. Buddhist training has various kinds of practices to calm body and mind, to observe
body and mind, and to integrate body, speech, and mind. On the other hand, after a good Rolfing session, the client's body looks radiant, divine, and integrated, his mind has stilled, his perception becomes refined. Clients feel their body as fresh and new, they start to see and feel their world with new eyes. At that moment, or later on, they can rethink how they handle their potential.

In Mantrayana Vajrayana practice, we establish a calm and pure mind through visualization practice and observing *prana* (the life force moving in the body) and thus begin to control the life force. In visualization practice we have to use our mind’s creative ability with sharpness, clarity, and precision, projecting an insubstantial inner world that we explore and scrutinize with subjective inner perception. As a practitioner, I can apply this experience to my subjective experience of touch, to explore and scrutinize my touch perception clearly and consciously. It is helpful to distinguish between clear sensation and unclear sensation, as well as to catch the changes in gradation.

Also through Buddhist training, I have become more sensitive to pain and discomfort in both my body and in my client's body, and my touch has become more sensitive as well as more calm and subtle. So I can sum it up by saying that Buddhist training cultivates a bright and clear mind, and that strongly and directly affects my touch as attention, awareness, and the precise observation of process.

**AH:** I think this is a very valuable point. Meditation trains the mind in various ways. It can train the consciousness to be one-pointed, able to discriminate clearly and track in a precise nuanced way. It can also train the mind to open to spacious consciousness that is neutral and sensitively aware to the totality of the field. There’s no doubt that these are useful states for bodyworkers to cultivate. Tell us a bit about your practice.

**TH:** Besides Rolfing SI, I bring in mainly biodynamics’ fluid touch, visceral work, nerve/artery work, and Sharon Wheeler’s BoneWork. Depending on the situation and the client’s request, I mix those in a session. When giving movement sessions, I also introduce exercises and ideas from the martial arts of the Japanese ninja tradition. I have been taking classes in ninja martial arts for the past three years from a Japanese man in his thirties. His movement is so excellent – very fluid-like, fluent, free of tension in the body parts. He uses his bones as electromagnetic conductors.

**AH:** That sounds fascinating. I hope you will share more about the ninja arts in a future article. I have another question about your practice. Do you share any Buddhist or meditation ideas with your clients, or just let the way it has integrated into your touch have whatever effect it has on the client?

**TH:** That depends on the situation and the client. If a client shows interest in yoga exercise or meditation. I introduce some yogic breathing. If he relates that his brain functioning seems to be deteriorating (e.g., memory or perception difficulties), I recommend mantra recitation and visualizing a (written) character to enhance mental clarity and also coordinate the mind with the visual and auditory capacity. I have also experimented with visualizing a divine character and reciting a mantra while touching to monitor the affect on the troubled area of the client's body, and this does support change in the client's body.

**AH:** Are clients open to this? I think if you did that in the U.S., you’d be considered ‘new age’ and ‘flakey’ by many people. But Japan has a long Buddhist history – even though most Japanese do not practice Buddhism except to visit temples on particular occasions – so I suspect there would be more respect for such practices.

**TH:** Even in Japan I would be called a ‘flakey’ guy if I pushed these things on ordinary people in my sessions. I have introduced these Buddhist practices to just a couple of my long-term Rolfing clients, and I will introduce this idea to interested Rolfing colleagues in the future. I think it’s worth consideration as Buddhist practices have been devised, developed, and experientially ‘tested’ over two thousand years. As a biodynamics practitioner, I was taught that the slightest intention and strong attention affect both the practitioner’s touch and the client’s body.

**AH:** What are your current interests concerning Rolfing SI other than the topics we’ve discussed?

**TH:** These days I am interested in fluid work. Tissues need living fluid to recover qualitatively. This past January I took Jane Stark, DOMP’s workshop, “A Fluidic Approach to the Treatment of Connective Tissue,” where I studied the relationship between fluid and fascia from a different perspective than I knew from biodynamics. I’m interested also in the relationship between fluid in the body and gravity. In our work and experience as Rolfers, I believe we will learn more about the role and function of gravity on our structure. I believe that gravity is affecting our fluids, bones, and fascia, and that we will come to understand another level of Ida Rolf aphorism ‘gravity is the therapist’. I appreciate this opportunity and hope that this article will be of some benefit to the Rolfing community.

**AH:** Thank you, Tsuguo. You bring a very unique background and perspective to our work!

Tsuguo Hirata graduated from Kyoto University in Japan in 1981, majoring in Buddhism and Indian philosophy. After spending almost twenty years as a businessman in computer-related industry, he began Rolfing training in Boulder in 2000 and was certified in 2001. He became a Certified Advanced Rolfer in 2005 after completing Advanced Training in Europe. His Rolfing practice is in Tokyo, Japan.

Anne Hoff is a Certified Advanced Rolfer in Seattle, Washington. She is also a teacher of the Diamond Approach®, a modern spiritual path, and interested in the interface of consciousness and physical embodiment.

**Figure 1:** A Japanese scroll for meditation/visualization practice. The ancient Sanskrit character representing the character ‘A’ (sounds like ‘ah’) in the white moon translates as ‘the unborn nature of our mind’ or the mind essence. The white moon is a representation of purity of both mind and heart. The lotus is a symbol of supporting power and cultivates creative power for the mind and heart.

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I came late to my ‘Line’. At age thirty-one in 1978 I underwent a Ten Series in Santa Barbara, California, with Rolfer Hal Milton, ostensibly for a back problem. I did not know at the time that that life-changing event would be a psychic divide in my life. Until that point I had been wrestling with the religious ethos of my Orthodox Judaic upbringing versus the siren call of the ‘rational’ secular life. (I got my bachelor’s degree from Yeshiva University, a men’s college for orthodox Jews, then got my master’s degree in European intellectual history from the University of Massachusetts.) I didn’t realize that no matter what the degree of my rebellion, I was still a prisoner escaping from one room of abstract ideation to another. Ten sessions of Rolfing Structural Integration (SI) pierced that veil and suddenly my burdensome cerebral existence stood on one side and I, as a body, stood on the other.

Some who undergo the transformative experience of Rolfing SI soon travel a path moving from client to practitioner, but I was not to complete that journey for another twenty-three years, becoming a Certified Rolfer in 2001. The intermezzo was a period in which I was a manual laborer – including construction work, carpentry, painting, truck driving, and furniture moving – as well as being an artist and sculptor. In my own mind, becoming a Rolfer years later was simply a continuation of my career switch to manual laborer.

Exchanging the pen of the scholar for the hammer and chisel of the sculptor did not happen overnight. A life-drawing class from an artist, Margaret Singer of Santa Barbara, a Holocaust survivor like my parents, proved pivotal. Her instruction to me was to put the charcoal to the paper and look at the model without looking back at the paper as the drawing developed. This process-oriented method, which emphasized open-ended exploration, liberated me from the deadening idea that a drawing should look like what you see and instead freed my life force.

Other students in the class who saw my drawings commented that the work looked like that of a sculptor, emphasizing the physical aspects of space, form, mass, weight, and density. A series of fortuitous events led me to a stone-sculpture studio a year later, and I took up the art until the mid 1990s. In so many ways being a Rolfer simply feels like a continuation of my explorations as a sculptor, but now with a human body rather than stone or other materials. Upon discovering my background, clients often ask whether I still work as a sculptor. My usual reply is, “Yes, right now, on you.” This article is an exploration of the relationship between these two art forms and how they inform one another.

### Seeing and the Senses

The art of Rolfing SI and the art of sculpture are both explorations of space involving the senses of the body, the sense of seeing certainly being the dominant component. Dr. Rolf put a premium on seeing, and it was a tradition of the SI teaching model for many years to limit students to observation for a number of months before being allowed to actually put their hands on a client. Each observed session was thus an exercise in seeing spatial relationships in the body.

But Dr. Rolf’s concept of seeing was no simple affair. She suggested there were five levels of seeing derived from the ‘epistemological profile’ of French phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard. The first three levels are defined by mechanical, everyday seeing based on Newtonian mechanics. The fourth type of seeing, which she called ‘relational’, is based on visualizing how various structures of the body relate to one another. Significantly, she noted that this fourth level is the appropriate dimension for the Rolfer. The fifth level of seeing is based in the intuition, which may be available to an experienced Rolfer but which is a double-edged sword in that it may also undermine the logical foundations of his/her analysis and conclusions. Dr. Rolf’s comment is instructive, “I bid you to examine your own ways of thinking and looking. What you clearly do know, as long as you can measure it, is on solid ground. The ground becomes less solid in the fourth area, and when you get into the fifth area, your feet are off the ground. Your security lies in your ability to look at these levels of abstraction and thread them apart.
It will give you a great deal more security in your intellectual and emotional life if you can do this and not simply say, ‘I feel’” (Rolf 1978, 45-47).

The Rolfer and the artist/sculptor engage physical reality, not just with the eyes but with all the senses. An artist looks at the body and draws. The line on the paper not only expresses what the eye sees but also what the body feels. All the sense organs of the body are in a sense eyes. Similarly, when a Rolfer views a body, he or she is not just seeing that structure but feeling that body through his/her own. The more the Rolfer can feel the client through his senses while delaying cognitive conclusions to appear, the better.

So says Dr. Rolf, “There are five senses and here are five ways of getting experience into you. Rolfers need to be able to focus on the level that impinges on senses. The sense of taste doesn’t really enter into it: the sense of smell sometimes enters into it, but not often. What can be seen is the most important clue; describe what is visible. Typically, we like to think quickly, to think and to infer, to get on with it. But there is too wide a gap between experience and inference. Mistakes get made” (Rolf 1978, 107). Clearly, Dr. Rolf celebrated body experience as superior to cogitation.

This body-to-body information is instrumental in evaluating not only the client but also our own work during the process of a session. In a recent interview Advanced Rolfing Instructor Michael Salveson spoke about the importance of a practitioner knowing his information system: in other words, how he or she receives information while working. “Every practitioner needs to have confidence in their data set that they use to determine whether or not the organism is actively integrating as a result of what they are doing. You can watch the nervous system or the energetic flow; or, you can watch movement. But there needs to be a way” (Gottlieb and Salveson 2016, 15). Clearly the process of an SI session between Rolfer and client is a body-to-body experience at the sensory level. Said Dr. Rolf, “When I am ‘Rolfing’, he and I form one [my italics] for at least the time that I’m working. Look and feel. You don’t need feedback, you need to look at what’s there” (Rolf 1978, 96).

The artist and Rolfer both withdraw to their place of seeing, studio or office, to engage the object. In the case of the sculptor, the object might be a piece of stone on a table or a rock large enough to be freestanding on the ground. In the case of the Rolfer, it is a human body, but I would submit, an object nevertheless. The history of science from the time of Galileo is a movement from the belief that phenomena revolve around humans to an understanding that humans are part of natural laws that govern all phenomena, including humans. And here I would like to stop for a moment to fully realize the radical implication of Dr. Rolf’s vision which I believe is underappreciated – that everything, both living and nonliving, is equal in the field of gravity. The human body thus takes on the same quality of ‘thingness’ as every object in the gravity field. Some might instinctively recoil to being classified an object, feeling perhaps their humanity is being questioned. However, I submit that the Rolfer’s first critical task is to demonstrate this ‘objectness’ to the client as it implies that he or she accepts living in the gravity field along with all other matter on earth. One might consider this acceptance as the first step of embodied awareness in the SI process.

Rolfers and sculptors both view the object with the goal of remodeling its spatial organization within the larger gravity field. As object makers and shapers, Rolfers thus have more in common with the manual laborer and craftsman than with the university professor and academic. Their proper sphere is the physical plane, not the cerebral one. This explains why Dr. Rolf many times eschewed intellectual approaches to SI, particularly in prospective Rolfers, preferring more direct hands-on experience. “In this culture we tend to overweight the importance of head judgments. You could make a good Rolf practitioner with a man who’s deaf, dumb, and blind, guiding his hands along. His hands could function” (Rolf 1978,179).

**Embodiment**

Ideas expressed or manifested in the physical universe are ideas embodied, and this concept of embodiment is fundamental in SI. The dictionary definition of embodiment
is “a tangible or visible form of an idea, quality, or feeling” or “the representation or expression of something in a tangible or visible form.” In SI, the practitioner, in his role of educator, leads the client into a greater awareness of his body in the gravitational field to manifest, for example, the Line when walking, or feeling balance through the ischial tuberosities when sitting. The essence of this concept of embodiment for a Rolfer is for the client to internalize a concept and then express it in his body structurally, particularly through movement so as to, as Rolfers often put it, ‘own the work’.

In the technological, cerebral age we live in, with computers, cell phones, etc., the clients who walk through our doors are often disconnected and disembodied. During SI sessions, clients often ask the practitioner for help to define their experience. Our job at this critical point, according to Dr. Rolf, is to refer them back to their own physical sensation. “It is very important to make the person being ‘Rolfed’ realize he is the one who can do the feeling about what has happened to him. So many people are still asking, ‘What should I feel?’ I say to them, ‘Well, who the heck knows what you should feel except you. I can’t feel what you feel.’ It’s very important with some people to shift their attention and get their agreement to take responsibility for themselves)” (Rolf 1978, 58).

Similarly, the client’s complaints can be presented to the client as an invitation to engage, to listen, and to reintegrate with a body that he or she may relate to only if there is pain. This reintegration with his or her body, this body embodiment, is no small matter; it seeks to address and resolve a fundamental division in Western culture between mind and body. And, it mirrors the attempts of phenomenological thought in the twentieth century to bridge this great divide between mind and body that, as practitioners, we see clients display every day in our workspace.

Embodiment is quintessential in art in two ways. First, the thoughts and emotions within the artist are transferred into the physical universe, in different media such as stone, clay, paint, or, as a dancer might, with his or her body. Second, the human body, whether in the work of Michelangelo or the more contemporary Picasso, is the central symbol, the touchstone, of all art as far back as we can trace it, even to the Paleolithic cave paintings in France and Spain. We even refer to the artist’s output as a ‘body of work’, an interesting counterpoint to the bodywork of the Rolfer.

However, the body as a repository of values, as a truth, has been traditionally looked upon with suspicion by the value drivers of civilization, philosophy, and religion, even to the point of religious prohibitions on creating images based on the human body in Judaism and Islam. This divide between body/mind, and this deep distrust of the body in religion and philosophy as a repository of truth, deeply embedded in Western culture, was recognized by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in the nineteenth century. Some of Nietzsche’s comments about the body are notable in their defense of the body as a source of truth and inspiration:

“My genius in my nostrils.”

“There is more wisdom in your body than in your deepest philosophy.”

“Body am I entirely and nothing more; the soul is only the name of something in the body.”

Though we as Rolfers may not realize it, I believe that one of the critical tasks for SI is to restore the body as a touchstone of truth and what one might call a reality generator within our society.

**Space**

Besides being material, the body is of space and in space. Ostensibly the art of practicing Rolling SI on a body and the art of sculpting a stone would seem to be analogous in that both the Rolfer and sculptor are shaping material to realize form potential. As Rolfers we might refer to this as plasticity. However, the primary relationship begins not with the becoming of the material but with the being of the object in space. The primary relationship is thus not between Rolfer and client, or sculptor to stone, but of object to surrounding space.

We experience this interaction when we visit an artist’s studio or a gallery or museum. The art work, sculpture, or painting sits within a cleansed spatial setting, removed from the distraction of the world, offering the possibility of experiencing the physical world in a new way. The client, similarly, stands or moves within the space of the Rolfer’s office, removed from the usual artifacts and usual human relationships, and is given an opportunity to experience his physical existence differently as a result of changes in his spatial organization. Even the changes the Rolfer performs on the client lying on the table are not activated until the client stands erect and vertical in space, once more in the gravity field, which
is why Dr. Rolf said that gravity, not the Rolfer, was the therapist (Rolf 1978, 87).

It may be said that Rolfing SI is about simple things that are overlooked, simple things like the constants of the gravitational field or breathing. The physical location and orientation of the body might be considered another one of these overlooked factors. There is a famous work, a triptych, by the French painter Gaugin, painted in 1897, entitled, Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going? – valuable questions in considering our identity. But, perhaps, the key question in discovering ourselves in terms of identity is missing, “Where are we?” In practical terms, where is our body at the present moment in space?

Spatial awareness as a key to knowing self and identity is a relatively new idea in psychology. “Who we are might be integrated with where we are and impact how we move through space” (Proulx et al, 2016). Asking clients where they live will usually elicit the street address of their home, but if you remind them of the present body that they entered this world with and the very same body that they will leave when they expire, their concept of ‘home’ is immediately and dramatically altered.

Leonardo Da Vinci’s famous drawing of the Vitruvius Man, which can also be referred to as the Vitruvian Compass, expresses this directional spatial awareness. The ten-session series thus can be presented as a series of sessions to reorganize the client’s directional awareness of space: the first session, up or north pole; the second session, down or south pole; the third session, sides; the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh sessions, center (lower), center, center, center (upper), respectively.

The idea behind this spatial awareness model is simple enough: it’s difficult to go anywhere if you don’t know where you are starting from. Also its corollary: without an embodied awareness of gravity, direction is difficult to find. Ostensibly, Vitruvius Man is about the proportions of the human body as applied to architecture. But when you look closely there is much more. The feet stand on a square, an ancient symbol of the earth, and the figure is inscribed within a circle, a symbol for the cosmos, indicating, as in our own work, the relationship between structure, integration, and higher consciousness.

Szaja Gottlieb first received Rolfing sessions in 1978, which resulted in him becoming a stone sculptor, which, in turn, led to his becoming a Rolfer in 2001. He lives with his wife Ko and daughter Judith in Los Osos, California and practices in San Luis Obispo. He believes in the transformational potency of SI.

Author’s Notes


Though I have only scanned it, I want to mention Advanced Rolfing Instructor Dr. Jeffrey Maitland’s latest book, Embodied Being, as it discusses, probably with greater depth, some of the topics in this paper.

In regards to the topic of the ten-session series and sensory awareness, Certified Advanced Rolfer Dr. Ed Maupin has covered this topic more extensively in his writings on expansional balance. See “Expansional Balance and the ‘Line’,” which was published in the June 2014 issue of Structural Integration: The Journal of the Rolf Institute® 42(1):19-21.

Endnotes

1. Nietzsche: www.azquotes.com/quote/365108
2. Nietzsche: www.goodreads.com/quotes/68916-there-is-more-wisdom-in-your-body-than-in-your

Bibliography


Liberated Body – Where Body Nerds Unite
A Discussion with Podcast Creator and Host, Brooke Thomas

By Dorothy Miller and Brooke Thomas, Certified Rolfers™

Introduction by Dorothy Miller: At the time of this interview, Brooke Thomas had just wrapped up the third season of her Liberated Body Podcast. During the first three seasons, Brooke produced sixty-one shows in which she explores the work of researchers, practitioners, and educators from a variety of fields that focus on the amazing entity that is the human body. If you have not had a chance to explore the work she has created, all the shows can be found at www.liberatedbody.com or on iTunes or Stitcher. I had the opportunity to speak with Brooke after she wrapped up her final taping of the season. We talked about some of the people she has interviewed and how her work on the show has informed her work as a Rolfer.

Dorothy Miller: What prompted you to start Liberated Body? Can you talk a little bit about the evolution of the show and how it ended up where it is today?

Brooke Thomas: There were two main motivators to start doing this work. Like many in these fields, I came to Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI) through my own healing crisis. After I got better, I was really motivated to share the work with other people. I have been a Rolfer for sixteen years and after having many one-to-one interactions with clients, I wished there was a way to let more people know not just about Rolfing SI, but the wide variety of manual and movement therapies that exist, and how much they can help. Many clients I worked with would ask, “Why didn’t I know about this sooner?”, so a big motivator in my work on the show has been to find a way to make these fields more visible.

I started Liberated Body as a website with a blog and self-help videos. However, it started to feel too narrow and was too focused on me and my ideas. I was posting things that were important to me and my clients at the time; for example, what might help piriformis syndrome or issues like that. Ultimately I was much more interested in all the really amazing people, practitioners and researchers, who had their own input to share. That’s when the second main driving force, which was to use it for myself as a learning tool, made me want to go down the rabbit hole a little bit.

I had been in practice as a Rolfer and was enjoying it and helping people, but you get to a certain point where things start to feel a little stale and I felt like I was doing the same thing all the time. Instead of having any particular continuing education path calling to me, I turned the podcast into my continuing ed path. I have to do so much prep for each interview that I was reading all of this amazing research. It definitely changed me and changed my viewpoint of the work and of the human body generally, way more than I thought it would.

Dorothy Miller: What have been some of the biggest surprises you have encountered as you have produced the show?

Brooke Thomas: It’s awesome that it has helped all these other people as well. When you first started the work, it was more to give additional information to mostly clients. At this point, do you have a sense of your audience? Do you feel like you are talking to mostly practitioners in the field or clients?

BT: When I started it, I remember the question I asked myself was, “Why don’t I just put something out there, a blog or something, where the things I say a million times to clients, I just say in a more public place so more people can hear them?” I definitely was thinking of it as helping people as a practitioner, the same way I would in my practice. Very quickly though, once I started the podcast, I realized that that was not at all what this was about. It quickly became a show for other people who are in practice. I would say that the audience is undoubtedly mostly other movement and manual-therapy people of all stripes – bodyworkers, movement educators, yoga teachers, Pilates teachers, fitness people, all different things.

Dorothy Miller: It think it is terrific that you were able to transition it in that way. What do you envision the show looking like a year from now, or five years from now?

BT: I honestly have no idea. I would say that the show has surprised me a lot more than I have planned it. It’s led me around by the nose completely and I continue to let it do that. It is about finding a balance. Since I have developed this platform where I am able to communicate with a large group of manual and movement therapists, I would like to continue shining a spotlight on all those people and their work. On the other hand, it is also about my own learning journey, and I am the kind of person that can only do the stuff that I really care about, so that gets me into different rivers and streams. I don’t know where it will take me. I am just ending season three and it is a natural pause point. I am looking ahead to season four and I can’t quite envision yet what it will become. We’ll see.

Dorothy Miller: What are some of the biggest challenges you have encountered in terms of producing the show?

BT: There are a few categories of things that have changed the way I am working with people. One is understanding the new paradigm of the body. Even though I went to the Rolf Institute® and have been in practice for a long time, there were still things that were very hard for me to grasp;
like biotensegrity, that thinking about a muscle as one thing doesn’t really make any sense, it’s more about motor units or, as Robert Schleip says, a school of fish that swims together when it performs a certain action. I got a much better handle on that and started working differently with people because of that. My work became a lot more holistic. I have become less PT-like.

Before, people used to come to me with tissue damage because of something that had occurred and I would fix it by being my good Rolfer self. I have come to feel that that is not what I am doing when I help people. People are still getting helped, but I am able to see their lives in a more whole and continuous way. As tempting as it is to use anatomical words when people ask “What are you working on right now?”, I want them to understand that it is never just one thing. I want them to understand that their pain does not necessarily correlate with tissue damage. Their whole life informs what the sensation feels like in their bodies.

The other big change that has also changed the path forward for me in my career, because it is what calls to me personally, is somatic meditation, somatic psychology, and somatic spirituality. This has become a huge part of my life over the last couple of years. I am inviting people into their own sensation more. I am inviting them to trust their bodies more, instead of thinking of them as just broken down. I am not super ‘woo-woo’ about that in practice, as my practice is on Yale’s campus and I work often after-school hiking. It helps connect him to the natural world and get back into natural human movement. We also do a movement scavenger hunt. For example, today is a climb-over-things day and you find as many things as you can to climb over. Often he will pick two things, like it’s a pick-up-things and a balance day, so we’ll pick up rocks and logs and we’ll find fallen logs or stone walls to balance on. It injects fun and playfulness into things instead of me just telling him to sit on his ischial tuberosities all day. The screens do exist, school does exist . . . but we’ll also have furniture-free days at home. I try to do stuff that feels playful instead of just lecturing. He does seem to get it. At the end of his last school year, they made a crazy project and crazy on their own. They have to do it themselves.

BT: It is that holism thing again. Your body is not separate from the environment that it operates in. I love that. The natural movement piece has become really important to me. We don’t think about it. Our world is just our world, our chair is just our chair, and we get into the habits we get into. I don’t have many young children in my practice but I am having conversations with their parents. My son is going into fourth grade. You really see their bodies start to change in first grade. I try to control what I can, like our environment. We do a few things, like before-school hiking and often after-school hiking. It helps connect him to the natural world and get back into natural human movement. We also do a movement scavenger hunt. For example, today is a climb-over-things day and you find as many things as you can to climb over. Often he will pick two things, like it’s a pick-up-things and a balance day, so we’ll pick up rocks and logs and we’ll find fallen logs or stone walls to balance on. It injects fun and playfulness into things instead of me just telling him to sit on his ischial tuberosities all day. The screens do exist, school does exist . . . but we’ll also have furniture-free days at home. I try to do stuff that feels playful instead of just lecturing. He does seem to get it. At the end of his last school year, they made a crazy on no-running-at-recess rule. He came home and told me that he had all the kids at recess to sit around a tree and just stare at the tree so that they could protest the no-running rule. I feel like some of my propaganda got in there [laughs].

DM: I bought Kathleen Porter’s book, *Happy Dog, Sad Dog*. When I showed my kids the pictures, it was easy for them to pick out all the Sad Dogs with unsupported structure versus the Happy Dog bodies that were supported. It seems like a huge opportunity to get this generation of kids to learn about their bodies and movement.

BT: There is also some follow-up on these practitioners. Kathleen Porter has a new documentary called *Born to Move*. The organization Stand Up Kids, which is Juliet and Kelly Starrett’s organization to make schools chair-free, has partnered with Let’s Move, which is Michelle Obama’s active schools initiative, so that is exciting. They both have the personality and charisma to move that forward, so I am really excited about that.

DM: Another personal favorite of mine was the interview with Christopher McDougall, the author of *Natural Born Heroes*. One of the many things that are meaningful to me about Rolfing work is the hope and ownership of one’s body that it instills. In this book, Chris’s telling of the story of the Cretan rebellion during WWII is an amazing tribute to what the human body is really capable of. Can you share with us some highlights of your conversation with him, specifically relating to the research into fascia and movement that he did for the book?

BT: He got interested in fascia in a student/superficial way. He studied with Tom Myers and Robert Schleip. What was so cool about Chris McDougall having an ‘aha moment’ on fascia is that he is so good at bringing these concepts about what the human body is, and what it is capable of, into mainstream culture. He got really interested in the elastic recoil property. He was also looking at how parkour uses it. It all came back to springiness in the body, which is totally different from the Newtonian idea of a machine of parts connected by pins and hinges. It was exciting to have Chris, who is so great at conveying these concepts to a wide audience, letting people know that the body is not what we think it is.

DM: The research piece of your show is so important to keep people up to date on what questions are being looked at. For example, the research on the role of connective tissue in intracellular communication and inflammation that you spoke about with Dr. Helene Langevin is fascinating. Would you be willing to talk about your conversation with her on this research or any other research that currently has you excited right now?

BT: I am particularly excited about the research coming out about cancer and fascia. This past year there was a joint conference on acupuncture, oncology, and fascia at Harvard University that Dr. Langevin headed up. The reason why I am personally most excited about that research is that it is going to be a huge motivator for mainstream culture to start to get holism and continuity. What they are finding is that understanding that is the key to curing cancer. Cells don’t just go AWOL and crazy on their own. They have to do it within a framework and that framework
is fascia. So if you can understand fascia, which means you have to understand continuity, then maybe you can actually disrupt this whole cancer thing. This is exciting for me because it is going to force people to see the body in a different way. You can’t think of it as divide-and-conquer anymore. You can’t think of it as attacking the faulty broken part. One of the reasons that cancer treatments don’t work the way we want them to is because cancer metastasizes. How does it metastasize? It does that along the fascia.

The other thing that I personally have a lot of interest in is all of the interoception research that is going on. I think we can get excited about the complexities of the human body, but the interoception work is really showing the simple, yet profound, basic fact that if you can cultivate a relationship with your body, that involves listening to the sensation of your body, your life actually improves. It sounds weird because we have very little regard for the body in our culture, but here are researchers showing that if you can have a better internal sensation map, many issues like depression, substance disorders, and eating disorders can resolve. That is pretty amazing. Beyond the fact that stuff gets better, it gives people’s lives an opportunity to unfold. It seems weird to the outside world, but we Rolfers know that when people go through a series with us, they don’t just feel better, they don’t just lessen their pain or improve their mobility, their lives change.

I think our relationships with our bodies are way more powerful than we think they are. In our realm we get that to a certain extent, but it is exciting that there are these researchers gathering to talk about this. Bo Forbes has created the Interception Tribal Council to gather and share ideas. A lot of them are neuroscientists. I spoke with one, Norm Farb, and most recently I talked with Cynthia Price. Her work really stands out to me. She started the Center for Mindful Body Awareness. She is based out of the University of Washington. Her works is exciting to me because she started out as a clinician, with over a decade as a massage therapist, before she became a researcher. The work that she is doing is in the realm of using touch to help educate people about their bodies so they can start to develop a relationship with their bodies. She is working with people who have very significant chronic pain; people who have been traumatized; people dealing with PTSD, substance abuse, and eating disorders. She’s in the Biobehavioral Nursing Program. She is bringing the importance of touch to the forefront in its ability to heal.

DM: I completely agree with how important touch and interoception are. I talk to my clients about their role in the Rolfing process and the importance of what they feel on the inside and finding new ways to move. It’s not about something happening to them; for there to be lasting change, the change has to come from within them. A challenge for us as practitioners is finding the right way for each client to hear this in a way that makes sense to him. You’ve mentioned other trainings you have taken. Which trainings have had the most impact on your personal life and your Rolfing work?

BT: The somatic mediation work, which I have studied at Dharma Ocean and with Judith Blackstone, has changed the way I approach working with people and has also completely changed the whole orientation of my life. MovNat has also been a really important part of my life and is how I train. Because people come into our practice with the concept of the body as a machine that has busted parts, and they want to know how they can fix that one part, MovNat has been a really useful and playful tool for me to give to clients to experience the idea of continuity. It also helps them not obsess about the ‘broken-part’ idea. If someone comes in with plantar fascitis, [he is] often looking for ‘parts-based’ exercises that [he can do to fix] [his] foot. I may give some self-care that involves the foot, but I may also give a playful MovNat sequence that involves very easy balancing exercises or walking on uneven terrain when appropriate. It starts to open up a way for [people] to see their environments as connected to their bodies and that their healing may not just be about them sitting alone in their bedroom doing exercises. It can help them cultivate a more playful relationship with their body. It is definitely responsible for me feeling good in my body during all these years in practice as a Rolfer. It has been an important part of my self-care toolbox.

DM: Are there any other trainings that you want to touch on?

BT: The other training I find myself using a lot with clients is Yoga Tune Up, which is Jill Miller’s work. She uses therapy balls to teach people self-myofascial release. I know that has been contentious in our community: there is a sense that people could harm themselves with therapy balls or that they will continue in their ‘parts-based’ way of thinking. That’s true enough, but with the way that I use them in my practice, I have found that it empowers clients to touch themselves and access themselves and give their tissue little bits of nourishment without having to be on my table. I’ve found that kind of work really does speed people’s healing, as much in the fact that they feel empowered about healing their own bodies as anything else. I think that is a beautiful gift to give people. I have found the therapy balls to be a very straightforward way to give people that gift. Also because of who I am, I am always educating my clients in continuity, so they don’t just find some ‘hot spot’ and ream on that. Sometimes when they do that anyway, they feel worse and then they learn something. People can have very nourishing aha moments with these therapy balls when they work a totally different part of the body from where the pain is and find that they get relief.

DM: Are there any guests who have had a particularly big impact for you?

BT: Joanne Avison and John Sharkey are two separate interviews. [Editor’s note: the John Sharkey interview can be read in the December 2016 issue of this Journal.] Both of them really get the new paradigm about the body. They are also both brilliant teachers of that. Some people get it but it’s hard to convey, but John and Joanne are both really good at communicating concepts like continuity of form, individuality of anatomy, biotensegrity, and bound water and how fascia is responsible for our fluid volume. They have helped me to have many aha moments about understanding the human form that I’ve been trying to get for years.

In terms of shifting the way I feel about pain, Steve Haines, Neil Pearson, and Todd Hargrove helped me to see that pain isn’t about tissue damage. Steve Haines actually has a short pamphlet, more like a graphic novel, which is illustrated really beautifully, called Pain Is Really Strange. I highly recommend it. It is a very straightforward illustrated guide to how there is no division between our mind and our body, and our pain can be as much about how we feel about our pain and our lives – our body is being very effective at trying to get our attention about the fact that we are discontent somehow.
With the natural-movement/natural-world stuff, Katy Bowman and Erwan Le Corre were great interviews. Katy Bowman is the founder of Nutritious Movement and Erwan Le Corre is the founder of MovNat. Frank Forencich also talks about the ‘long body’, the idea that we are not discontinuous from our environments and how our environments shape us. [Editor’s note: the Frank Forencich interview can be read in the November 2015 issue of this Journal.] This has changed how I see the world and how I talk to and educate my clients.

DM: That is all great information. Is there anything else you want to add for our readers about having an extracurricular activity, like your podcast, outside of their Rolfing practice?

BT: I didn’t realize how nourishing and revolutionary it was going to be for me personally, as a human being and a practitioner, to do this project. I would encourage people to take on some kind of learning project, besides just going to a continuing ed workshop; something that requires that you go on a journey in a certain way. Everyone’s journey is going to take [him or her] somewhere different. All I am doing is learning in public on this show. People get to hear the paths that I got interested in, but other people will get interested in different things and discover different ways and have different aha moments. Anything that commits you to doing that is really powerful. There is so much good work going on, and I think that we are culturally at the beginning of a sea change of coming home to our bodies and seeing them for how sacred and amazing they are.

DM: Agreed. It seems like we may have come to a tipping point where all the pills and surgeries that maybe had been ‘fixing’ things before in a more duct-tape solution aren’t working all that well. People I am seeing are more open to coming back to their body and learning things. Any last things you want to share about upcoming projects you are working on?

BT: I am starting another podcast with my friend Vanessa Scotto, called Bliss and Grit, that is more about being on the spiritual, embodied path.

DM: Does this stem out of the somatic meditation work you have been studying?

BT: Yes. Two years ago, I became engaged in a practice in the Dharma Ocean lineage, a Tibetan Buddhism lineage, that is my own personal spiritual practice. This is the direction my personal and professional life is going, so I am creating this to have another podcast in which I can continue learning. The format will mostly be a conversation between me and Vanessa about being students on the path and bringing in teachers sometimes. It will be less about interviewing people about their work and more about having a conversation between two people who are very much in process, as opposed to ‘experts’. It will be of most interest to people who are on some sort of spiritual path. [The website] is www.blissandgrit.com.

DM: Thank you so much for your time today and for all the work you put into creating Liberated Body. I am happy to join you in “making the world a more embodied place.”

Brooke Thomas is a Certified Roler who has been practicing for over fifteen years. A self-admitted body nerd, she teaches movement and hosts the Liberated Body Podcast as a continuing-education resource for those in the manual- and movement-therapy fields. Visit www.liberatedbody.com, or visit www.newhavenrolfing.com for more information about Brooke and her practice.

Dorothy Miller is a Certified Rolfer in Bend, Oregon, practicing since 2014. She is passionate about healthy movement and helping people feel better in their bodies. You can find out more about Dorothy and her practice at www.rolfingconnections.com.
Masculine Emotional Intelligence

A Way to Set Men Free

By Owen Marcus, MA, Certified Advanced Rolfer™

Being an emotionally intelligent man is not an oxymoron. Being behind the emotional curve is the fate of most men. We can’t seem to connect emotionally. We try our best, but so often fail at expressing what we feel. We leave interactions feeling incomplete and unable to articulate our experience to anyone. We go off to lead lives of quiet emotional desperation. Men who could understand and appreciate our destiny we don’t speak to; women who we can confide with can’t understand why it’s such a struggle.

I fell into developing my Masculine Emotional Intelligence (MEI) because my relationships were failing. I was smart enough to realize that I was the one consistent variable, so I started working on it. My first approach was to try to heal it all by myself like I healed my dyslexia, dyspraxia, and Asperger’s Syndrome. Sure, there were some things I healed, such as my PTSD state when I spoke to women.

But the more I tried to do the guy thing, ‘fix it’, the more frustrated I became. Gradually I realized that my problem wasn’t a problem, it was a lack of modeling and teaching. Unlike my mental ‘problems’, with this challenge it was important to recognize that I had companions. I realized other men struggled with emotions and connecting, too. As men we all share not being taught what works for men. Once men begin to connect with other men, they realize that how they feel, express, and connect can be different than how woman do. A woman will appreciate a man’s unique orientation to emotions when she encounters a man who is connected to his MEI.

Twenty years ago, I went to my first men’s group, frightened that I would have to show up vulnerable. My expectation was correct, but I wasn’t alone. Every man had fear about being vulnerable and authentic.

Ten years ago, I took the traditional model of men’s groups and reinvented it. I created a format where the focus wasn’t on doing any particular technique, it was on taking men deeper into their own experience. I created a few processes that facilitate going deep; where it’s more about applying a series of skills than a formulaic technique. Quickly men learned how to be present. They learned how to ask questions that weren’t about what was going on in their heads rather than their hearts or bodies. They learned to focus on just being rather than fixing.

After watching a couple hundred men go through our free groups, having a documentary film made about us (About Men; see http://freetowin.co/men-film/), and starting a business teaching other men how to start and lead their own free groups, we figured out how to teach MEI.

Key Observations

Ever since we left the format of the tribe 10,000 years ago, how boys were trained to experience and express emotions changed. Two hundred years ago, when we left the farm for the factory, men lost male modeling and teaching. With the fathers away at work, mothers became virtual single parents raising the kids. Gradually, what it is to be a man emotionally skewed toward a feminine perspective.¹

For generations, our emotional instructors were our mothers, female teachers, female counselors, and female partners. No, this is not a conspiracy. It’s women and men doing what they had to do. We never stepped back to look at the impact this has had on men. With 90% of the therapists being trained today being women, the traditional institutions are not changing the paradigm.

What We Can Do

First we need to understand that how a man experiences and expresses an emotion may be different than how a woman does it. As Alison Armstrong² says, “A man is not a hairy woman who is misbehaving.” (For sure, we are more similar than different.) A man will shut down when asked what he is feeling. We know he’s feeling something, we suspect he’s not aware of what he is feeling – that’s probably true. How he frames that emotion may be different. When an expression is linked to weakness, even in a therapeutic situation, most men will not speak. If he is considering speaking, he’s translating it to fit the model he was taught. For example, we are taught not to raise our voices. For a man that can be like telling him not to speak. We accept a women crying; a man shouting scares us.

Without knowing it, his attempt to feel and share his emotion is like a woman’s. That is natural when women were his only models for emotional sensitivity and expression. He is certainly not going to ask a male friend for emotional guidance or support. He may ask his wife or a woman he knows.

We want our men to be emotionally present; we tell them how to behave. When they don’t behave the way we want, we correct them. Men might be emotionally illiterate under certain circumstance, but they aren’t dumb. Men will pick up that they did not perform well, if only unconsciously. With performance being important for men, our failure is another arrow in our backs. After a while, men give up.

I’m not saying women are to blame or that men are innocent victims. Again, it’s the culture we inherited. Supporting men to learn what they never got to learn is the most powerful and freeing support for all involved. When women aren’t around, and men interact more honestly with other men, they start modeling and getting cues from someone other than a woman.

Men need to express with their bodies. As Rolfers we all know too well how bound up men’s bodies are. In spite of that, men express with their bodies. We take action. Trained not to sit and emote, we become an emotional ADHD man when we try to do it the way we were taught. One way we can support men is to encourage our male clients to find ways to move their emotional energy through their bodies. We have all seen the bound-up athletes. I’m not talking about using exercise as an escape.
I’m suggesting getting the man to go for walks in nature, take a yoga class, or take up a sport that is new to him that will cause him to use his body differently. Doing his normal activity will tend to reinforce his physical-emotional pattern. Taking up a new activity that is slower and in a different setting fosters more awareness and new movement patterns.

Men run from therapy. So many men feel ganged up on by a female therapist. Even male therapists intimidate men. Men don’t like to do things that we can’t win at. Feeling handicapped emotionally, we see therapy as another loss in the emotional game. It’s a crisis that gets a man to see a therapist. If the therapist is good and the man brave, huge things can come from it. Seeing therapy as the only solution can shame and trap many men.

Framing their emotions as stress and a physiological phenomenon usually gives the man a frame he can use. Explaining to him how his body and his emotions might be having a mini-PTSD experience tells him that his mind is not screwed up. It’s his body doing what all bodies do under stress.

**Traits of Masculine Emotional Intelligence**

From observing men, and feeling the need to create a new model that works for men, I created the five MQ (Masculine Quotient) Traits. Briefly, these are the key aspects of the five traits:

1. **Emotional entrepreneur – orientation towards action**
   - The ability to initiate
   - Willingness to take responsible risks to succeed
   - Feel and express as you act
   - Your actions come from your deep purpose
   - Take a stand that is bigger than you
   - Dance with chaos

2. **Having a person’s back**
   - Love through the action of taking risks for another
   - Taking a stand with another person or for another person
   - “It’s not that others have your back, it’s that you have theirs.”
   - Honor is love for a man
   - Having the ‘back’ of a relationship (being willing to fight for relationship success)

3. **Deep purpose**
   - Having a mission in life
   - Living beyond self
   - Allowing your unique creativity to manifest
   - Serving through your purpose
   - Living your own life
   - Following deep desire(s) that give you deep pleasure
   - Passion follows purpose

4. **Holding space**
   - Supporting others no matter what’s occurring in your own life
   - Standing for what is best for another
   - Speaking and hearing the truth
   - Holding space for your deepest purpose
   - Providing and serving emotionally
   - Keeping healthy boundaries, saying “No” and backing it up
   - Creating a container for the relationship
   - Fostering community and brotherhood

5. **Assertive vulnerability**
   - Emotional expression with strength in vulnerability
   - In the face of fear
   - The openness of vulnerability with the strength of commitment
   - Expressing while holding the space for yourself and others
   - Leading with your vulnerability
   - Not collapsing
   - Risking with vulnerability the expression of emotions and wants for something bigger

**What Men Get**

We all know the biggest catalyst for men to look at changing is a relationship. We get men coming to our men’s groups and trainings because their partners sent them. In most cases, men are stepping up because they see the need to grow. We come to this scared; performing in an emotional arena was not where we excelled.

Once a man joins one of our free groups, he quickly sees an entirely new model of communication occurring with the men in the group. Men are vulnerable and real. They aren’t speaking some new age gobbledygook – they are speaking directly about what they feel. He immediately experiences the brotherhood of the group. Men are intimate in a way only men can be. It’s obvious men care for each other in a real way. They are kind, but honest. A man may get mad at another man, but he doesn’t attack the man, he simply speaks about his own feelings.

Quickly a new man realizes that a man is honored for taking emotional risk in and out of the group. A man who never expressed his anger and gets angry at a man in the group is encouraged to express. Years of repression come out. Not only is the release of that pent-up tension significant, seeing that he is not shamed for his anger is a substantial reframe.

The skills a man first sees then practices in the group rapidly transfer to his relationships. He finds himself communicating to his wife or partner in ways he never imagined. When she is upset, he listens rather than...
checking out or attacking. Through having a safe place to feel and express in the group, a man learns what he was never taught. He starts having deep conversations with his kids. Rather than just passing by them as he leaves the house, he sits down and asks them about their lives.

Ever since women started being the sole teachers of boys and men, women became the responsible party for emotional communication and the relationship itself. With men only being trained by women, we default to their expertise. Because this also gradually escalated over the years, women don't feel the full impact of being the one responsible. Women I don't know will come up to me on the street to thank me for what the group did for their partners. They speak about how they changed, how they fell back in love. These women often mention how their relationships are no longer so much work. After centuries of women getting used to a certain role, when a woman doesn't have to do all the work, it's like living in a new country where life is easier.

Offering Resources

When you see a man struggling, suggest he find a men's group or start one. A good group will give him a place to release, learn, and grow that won't strain his relationships. One of the benefits of the group is that for the most part, their relationships are in the group. They don't sleep with or work with their fellow group members.

One of my reasons for starting a men's group was to offer my male clients support for their Rolfing changes. I know of other health-care practitioners, including therapists, who use a men's group to support their clients. It makes their work easier.

By providing a new model for men for their emotions, we allow men to relax into feeling and expressing their emotions, something few men would claim proficiency in doing. Supporting men to join a men's group organically teaches men this new model while providing a place for them to practice. For us as Rolfers, a group can serve the social and emotional needs of our clients in ways we can't in a session. For some men, relating to a female Rofler is exactly what they need. For others, they need to develop an ability to relate to men. Like many female psychotherapists, a female Rofler can encourage a man to participate in a men's group (see Resources, below) to provide the masculine support he needs.

The emotional changes Rolfing SI produces go a long way to having men be emotionally literate. Breaking up the old emotional structure and models puts a man on the road to being his own man. Giving him other men to help teach him what he never was taught will escalate his progress. No longer will Masculine Emotional Intelligence be an oxymoron.

Owen Marcus, MA, founded the Sandpoint Men's Group and the nonprofit Men Corps. He trains men around the world on how to start and lead a group through his company Free to Win. His blog www.owenmarcus.com offers free resources for men.

Resources

If you or a client have any questions, please contact me. I would be glad to direct you or him towards the best resources. Below I list some you can consider.

- I am working on a free Google map at www.freetowin.co/mens-groups-2 where a man can insert his zip code to find a group near him.
- The nonprofit ManKind Project® has a network of groups: www.mkp.org.
- We started a nonprofit that gives a free set of protocols to men for starting a group: www.mencorps.org.
- We also have more services available at www.freetowin.co for starting a group.

Endnotes

1. I explain this in my TEDx talk, “What 10,000 Years of Progress Cost Men” (see http://tinyurl.com/OwenMarcusTEDx).
3. Visit www.mqtest.org for an MQ Test where you are scored on your Masculine Quotient and given a book on how to raise the score.
Melding Interdisciplinary Fields

Performing Arts, Bodywork, Psychology, and Teaching

By Heather L. Corwin, PhD, MFA, Certified Rolfer™

The Pieces of My Puzzle

People are diverse. Lives are complex. Interests diverge and intertwine as people gain wisdom and experience. This shows up in people’s lives through how they educate themselves, where they live, and what career(s) they pursue over a lifetime. Personally, my convergence of all of these areas can be defined as a through line (theme) in my life, or goal, that stems from helping people discover who they are and how they operate in the world. My catchy way to say this is helping people become more comfortable in the skin they’re in. I do not think I am unique in having a wide range of interests in my life. The key to success when a person embodies a span of interests and knowledge is to be able to link the interests in such a way that value can be mined. In this article, we will explore the disciplines of performing, bodywork, psychology, and teaching. Then, we will examine how the areas combine to form a fulfilling and sustainable career. Lastly, I will suggest how a person might discover the connections to manifest a diverse and personally driven livelihood.

Acting on stage has been dear to me as far back as I can remember. The kindergarten hula dance when I was on stage front and center began my fascination with performing, and it grew from there. The draw was not attention – though that certainly did not hurt my attraction to acting. Rather, what drew me (what I can now articulate) was the ability to make others feel something. Whether my performance would make people laugh, cry, gasp, or cheer, I found that people would engage with me in performance; and they were changed by me. Change is powerful.

Over the years, I also found I had a talent to act because everyone told me so. Listen to people. If two people share a positive observation of your talent, they are being kind. If hundreds tell you over time and your heart soars with excitement at the knowledge you have talent, pursue that road. This quickening of the heartbeat is the body’s way of telling you that you are revealing a deeper truth about yourself. Following your bliss, as Joseph Campbell would say, will make you happy. Listen to yourself.

Theatre artists require years of training to develop the skills necessary to project the voice; adapt to any character physically and emotionally; learn behaviors and mannerisms of historical periods; and understand and execute with any success methods of actor training. What’s more, to become a great actor, one needs to expand imagination and focus. Actors spend time with scripts across the ages to historically understand the great playwrights who told stories that withstood the test of time. Reading, traveling, and trying new things are all helpful tools for the actor to expand understanding of culture and how people live differently with unique choices and hierarchies in society. Actors are taught to identify impulses informed by sensations that lead to action and understanding of self and wants/needs. In art, we examine relationships and the destructive mechanisms human conditions can supply to supplant happiness.

Hamartia, the Greek word for ‘fatal flaw’, is one element Aristotle names as necessary for a tragedy to occur and it is found in the hero of the play. Another vital element is hubris, which is defined by Merriam-Webster as ‘a foolish amount of pride’; it always leads to the downfall of the hero. These ideas have stuck with me through life because art imitates life. Regardless, the most important element of actor training that seems to impact my life in all spaces at all times is the skill actors work on to be ‘in the moment’. Being present is necessary for all sorts of authentic and meaningful interactions. This vital skill helped me discover how to fully make contact with others through touch in a healing capacity. Most notably, this skill is what brought me to bodywork and Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI).
Bodywork is not simply a healing art form that my clients are able to enjoy. The act of being in the moment with my clients gives my very active brain the space to slow down and let whatever other things might be happening in my life fade into the background. The therapeutic relationship I practice with my clients is one that focuses on their experience now and how we can make this existence more vibrant and easeful. Just thinking about an intention, like helping others exist more vibrantly, calms me as I work because I have a focus and purpose for what I’m doing that can only be measured by the client’s experience. I tend to mirror and reflect energetically and verbally what I witness to add clarity to the moment-to-moment work. How a person exists in this moment is also revealed in how the body physically presents. The body is the map for our journey through wellness; anatomy is the key.

Anatomy is endlessly fascinating to me. Exactly where muscles exist is always unique to the person. Which muscles will be particularly outstanding to me? Will this person’s psoas be short or connect to a place other than anatomy books suggest? How does this person’s point of view on the world impact how she lives in her body? As I work, I often have so many more questions than I have answers. Bodyworkers are always ready for a mystery, because bodies always present interesting bits of information that intrigue. Yet, at the core of all of this work is the simple fact that when I was growing up, my mom loved for me to rub her back. She loved it when I would soothe her aches and pains, and I loved helping her feel better. My work is infused with the simple truth that I really love to make people feel good. This led me to the idea that if I can make people feel physically well, and if I could perhaps help people understand what motivates their behavior, I could help transform their lives. Here enters the field of psychology.

Much overlap occurs between addressing the mind and dealing with the body: so much of the therapeutic work Rolfers do has psychological underpinnings. The difficulty in what we do as Rolfers lives in the fact that many people are not psychologically healthy and ready to change even if their bodies are presenting with pain suggesting change is necessary. This is where other skills can converge to aid in helping others. Yet psychology is not a pursuit for the faint of heart. Considering the multitude of ways people can suffer in life and family, the lists and lists of conditions that stymie people’s interactions in the world, the task of helping others in this field can be daunting.

Fundamentally, I do not believe that people can change unless a variety of personal and physical resources are available. These resources are monetary, but also the cognitive, empathetic, and neurological are primary. In truth, becoming a ‘talk therapist’ was never appealing to me. Rather, research is a way I can use my knowledge of psychology and study people to explore avenues for people to change.

Cultivating awareness is a large part of psychology, and also of teaching – another of my endeavors. Where psychology examines how people exist in the world, teaching helps people discover who they wish to be in the world. Teaching is an effort of love. I’ve been a student the majority of my life, and I have always found that the most inspiring teachers share their deep appreciation and value of the material. I have a deep love for acting, and sharing this love through teaching brings me great joy – hence, my joy is twofold. I am able to share a skill I love and guide the student within the realm we explore, which is actor training. An additional element to great teaching is the ability to arouse the process from the student, shining light on the student’s potentials and joys, rather than having the student mimic my process or become a replica of me. This is where high-school learning, which is primarily regurgitation of facts (a valuable endeavor), differs from college learning, which ideally integrates ideas to produce ownership of critical thought.

The final area of teaching I find present in university – and in Rolfing sessions – has to do with seeing the student or client as they are and as who they have the potential to become. In a romantic relationship, it is a bad idea to fall in love with the potential to become. In a romantic relationship, it is a bad idea to fall in love with potential, because, as we have noted earlier concerning psychology, people do not often change. However, as a teacher and as a Rolfer, I am invested in the idea that you have the ability to change and that you are with me precisely because you wish to change. The change can be in the form of knowledge, ways of being, ways of moving, and/or ways of understanding how you exist in the world.

One Person’s Trajectory

The ways in which I have pursued my career include formal education and experiential work (doing): earning undergraduate and graduate degrees in theatre; earning a PhD in clinical psychology with a somatic concentration; being a massage therapist for eighteen years; becoming and practicing as a Rolfer. All prepared me for my current role as the Head of Movement for Actor Training.
at Northern Illinois University (NIU). The research I do looks at how performing arts impact emotional intelligence.

What does all of this mean? To me, it means that I love working with people to discover what they’re good at and what they want to be good at. My journey along my path was slowed at times because others did not always see the path, even if I spelled it out for them. Worse, when I lived in certain areas of the United States, bodywork as a profession was akin to admitting I was a prostitute. (Alas, that is a whole other article.) I bring this up because I want to acknowledge the fact that some people are thrown off their paths because of cultural stigmas that have nothing to do with reality.

We are bodyworkers. When I was studying theatre as an undergraduate at Millikin University, I took a stage-combat class. My instructor, Robin McFarquhar, had a terrific knowledge of kinesiology and anatomy and I was rapt. In a fortunate conversation with him, he suggested I investigate Rolfing SI. Although I did not seek the work out immediately, I did experience the Ten Series at the age of twenty-three, and this forever changed my understanding of aging and pain in the body. My dance minor in college had made me think pain was an inevitable part of life that would worsen as I aged. Chronic foot pain from dancing and neck pain from a car accident seemed to be my lot for life until Rolfing SI intervened. After the Ten Series, I no longer had pain in my big toe and my neck pain had decreased. My story is not unique. At the time, I was a massage therapist, so my attention went to considering becoming a Rolfer in conjunction with an acting career.

But my life shifted again when I worked on a production of W;t at Tennessee Repertory Theatre (TRT), where the Artistic Director at the time was David Grapes, who was close friends with the head of Florida State University (FSU) / Asolo Conservatory. Better yet, one of my cast mates in W;t was Barbara Redmond, who at that time was Head of Acting at FSU / Asolo Conservatory. Although FSU/Asolo was in the top ten for MFA acting programs, I had never heard of it. I was applying to Yale, Harvard, University of Delaware, and Rutgers. Professor Redmond was not interested in conversation with me, so I considered her ‘antisocial’ and gave her plenty of space. I assumed I would not like to be in her program, yet added FSU/Asolo to my list of places to audition based on the advice of people I respected, and on the fact that Redmond is a tremendously gifted actress. I auditioned for all of the programs I was considering, gaining insight into the types of people I would be working with as students and as teachers. Astoundingly, FSU/Asolo was the only place I recall hearing laughter. The people who auditioned me were kind and perceptive and inspired me as we worked. Jim Wise, who was the first-year acting teacher, took the time to have a conversation with me. We are both from Chicago and we hit it off. He made me laugh many times, and I saw that in this program I would be able to work hard but not take myself too seriously.

I was not invited to the FSU/Asolo program but was put on the wait list. I’m not put off that easily, so I moved to Florida ready to begin my training the following year. I was not going to take ‘no’ for an answer. I didn’t even make the wait list the following year, but I did get into an original musical with American Stage based on Shakespeare’s Love’s Labour’s Lost. All of the FSU/Asolo faculty came because there was an alumnus in the show, and one night I had a note in my trailer asking me to phone Brant Pope, the head of the conservatory. It could only mean one thing – I was going to be asked to join the incoming class.

During the program, my persistence led to my becoming one of the first interns for Margaret Eginton, the Head of Movement Training. Thus began my dissection of how to teach others to work on awareness in a practical way, as well as how to support students in their personal evolution through physical expression.

Graduating with my MFA, I needed to be able to make a living, and I needed a break from acting. Rolfing SI seemed the next logical step. I took it. Then it was back and forth. After becoming a Rolfer, I was an assistant professor of theatre in Ohio. I loved my students and colleagues, but the man I loved lived in Los Angeles, so I quit academia and developed a thriving Rolfing practice there. But I missed full-time university teaching, so sought out adjunct positions at Pasadena City College and Azusa Pacific University.

Education helps me discover ideas and ways of approaching material. I decided a PhD would be fun and help me reach my goal of regaining a full-time teaching position. I spent five years earning my PhD in clinical psychology with a somatic concentration, again weaving the threads of my interests. My dissertation is titled, “The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Sanford Meisner Actor Training.”

As the pieces come together, I am now an interdisciplinary academic with the ability
to produce research – not a skill many actors have. I recently found my academic home at NIU where I serve as the Head of Movement for Actor Training. NIU is a research university, so I also have the support to conduct research and expand contributions to the fields of acting and psychology – a delight and honor. At the same time, I work with graduates and undergraduates to grow their physical and psychological connection with their whole person. We play, we imagine, we extend mind and body, we sweat, we laugh, we cry, and we evolve. This work is the stuff for which I am meant to be on this earth and makes my heart happy – which is how I know that I am living right for me.

How Does Your Puzzle Come Together?

The way to guide yourself towards a successful convergence of the pieces of your own life’s puzzle is to continually ask yourself the questions:

- Does this make me happy?
- Should I be doing something else?
- How does my body feel when I’m doing this work?
- What other type of person do I need around to make this better?

When you have answers to these questions, you may not be able to make a change immediately; but you can map out a plan to address what you need over time.

I’ve also learned that I have to pick one thing at a time to work on until I have the courage and ability to chuck what I’m doing and boldly change my life – which for me has included quitting a job or moving across country. Not everyone has the ability to do that or would want to, so you have to determine your bottom lines and what you’re willing to negotiate for what you need. This process is what works for me: continually assessing my life, thereby fostering a personally driven and satisfying life.

Compromise is often necessary, but acting from self-knowledge you will discover a path that can join the many skills you have with the career you create. Not everyone will understand or appreciate the work you put into your life to manifest your goals, but you will know you are living the life you crave. If or when the hunger subsides, transfer those skills to a new hunger that is waiting for you in your heart. To paraphrase, go boldly in the direction of your dreams!

Heather L. Corwin earned her PhD in clinical psychology with a somatic concentration from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology, Los Angeles; her MFA in theatre from Florida State University / Asolo Conservatory; and her BFA in theatre from Millikin University. She has practiced Rolfing SI since 2005 and practiced massage for eighteen years. Currently, Dr. Corwin is the Head of Movement for Actor Training at Northern Illinois University. She is married to Douglas Clayton and has a daughter, Cassandra, who is in kindergarten. Dr. Corwin’s research focuses on performing arts training and how that impacts the skills of emotional intelligence. Find our more at www.BodybyHeather.com.

Heather Corwin (left) acting in an Asolo Theatre Festival production of The Imaginary Invalid with Dean Anthony (center) and Lucianne LaJoie (right).
Human Doings of Human Beings

A Conversation with Heidi Massa

By Anne Hoff, Certified Advanced Rolfer™ and Heidi Massa, Certified Advanced Rolfer and Rolf Movement Practitioner

Anne Hoff: Heidi, you’re active as both a Rolfer and a lawyer. Aren’t those radically different professions?

Heidi Massa: Not really. Right after finishing my training as a Rolfer, I mentioned the new career direction to a medical psychiatrist I know. His astute reply: “It doesn’t matter. Either way, you straighten people out.”

AH: So – do you agree with him?

HM: Absolutely. The main idea that informs how I practice both law and Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI) is rectification. That means moving from disorder to order; from disharmony to agreement and congruence. It’s about putting things right. That’s just what I do.

AH: What other concepts from law come over to your Rolfing practice?

HM: Rectification isn’t a concept from the law. It’s an aesthetic that informs my particular legal practice. It can also inform SI, architecture, interior design, gardening, writing, and a host of other fields one might think of – but those are a few I happen to care about.

AH: What did you do first – law or SI?

HM: I think SI came first. My mom tells a story about my first real words: as an infant, I was crawling around on a floor of age-degraded 12x12 tiles. I stuck the pointed end of a pencil into the tiny space where four tiles met, and when the pencil stood straight up, I exclaimed, “How nice!” So there you have it – an infant’s recognition of support in the field of gravity. By grade school, they say, I was remarking to friends and acquaintances about posture – stuff like, “Why are you always looking at the ground when you walk? Why don’t you stand up straight and look where you’re going?”

AH: So when did law come into the picture?

HM: Early grade school. Childhood was a chaotic experience for me; and very early on I discovered the organizing power of language. As a kid I got preternaturally good at language. Law, like philosophy, is an instantiation of that – organizing the world through language. So even as a kid, I knew I wanted to be a lawyer.

AH: What did you study in college?

HM: Officially, political philosophy – but at the University of Chicago in the 1970s they let you study pretty much whatever you wanted. For me, one thread was the purposive nature of living beings, including humans. In that regard, two modern authors stand out. Philosopher Erwin Straus (1952) wrote a remarkable essay on the meaning of the upright posture and what it tells us about how humans should be in the word. Zoologist Adolf Portmann (1952) describes his book Animal Forms and Patterns as a study of the appearance of animals. He explores the meaning of animal gestalt, and of what we can learn about the essential nature of an animal just by looking at it. These authors’ inquiries are scientific and philosophical, but also aesthetic. And they’re fundamentally Aristotelian – both the authors and the questions of form they’re exploring. So there’s SI again – and then I went to University of Chicago Law School and became an attorney focused on complex business litigation. That was a full-time gig for nearly ten years.

AH: How did SI come into the picture as formal study?

HM: That’s funny – and also too long of a story here – but it’s always been in the background. In our culture, anybody with a big left brain who can string a sentence together is shunted into being an information worker – regardless of whether that suits the animal. At one point, the need for physical labor and manual work became clear to me, so the question was what kind.

Now even though my law practice never had anything to do with bodies – no personal injury, and no medical malpractice – I had these laminated anatomical charts behind my credenza and staff members would come to my office and say, “Heidi, I hurt my whatziz-whoziz . . . what should I do?” And they’d always want me to touch them.

Maybe it’s atavistic. My dad was a gifted orthopedic surgeon who thought surgery was usually a bad idea – but he’d tell you he was “the best cast man in Denver,” and probably was because he grooved on bone setting and other minimally invasive restoration techniques. In fact, he taught in the medical school there how to set complex fractures by feel without cutting the patient. And when there was no choice but to cut, it was always, “Take it back to where the body’s still good and build out from there.”

AH: I’d like to take a step back to those fields you said can be informed by an aesthetic of rectification. These areas can be pretty subjective. How can you go about ‘putting things right’ in something like design? Isn’t what’s ‘right’ more a question of taste?

HM: Not at all. Taste is what someone happens to like – not what’s good or what’s right. Whether I prefer blueberry pie to cherry pie is a question of personal taste – and the answer, whatever it is, says exactly nothing about whether fruit pie is good food. We like lots of stuff we wouldn’t call good in the sense of being excellent, advisable or suitable.
AH: Okay – but it seems hard to call any one thing more ‘right’ than another in an aesthetic sense, don’t you think?

HM: I disagree. There’s often more than one way to be right, but there are myriad ways to be wrong. Just walk down the street and you see wrong all over all the time – but you see right only once in a while.

Last month I was planting a parkway bed outside my Mies van der Rohe condo building. The bed has a tree in the middle of it. It was just diagonal lines of plants – two purple and one white, over and over – but it’s outside a Mies building (Mies began his career as a bricklayer), the lines had to be oriented strictly with respect to abstract space. A neighbor came to help and installed the plants where I’d placed them – but in her mind the lines oriented on the tree. Her section looked pretty cool – it had a curved surface like a Grant Wood painting – but it had to come out because in that context it just wasn’t right.

The point is to have the ability to recognize a right option and the willingness to choose one. At the margins, it becomes an ethical question.

AH: So how does it play out in the therapeutic relationship with your SI clients? Are you defining what is ‘right’ for the client, imposing it from outside? Wouldn’t that be authoritarian?

HM: That would be – but that’s the opposite of what I do: I tell every one of them on the first walkabout, “You’re the one who’s lived in that body for however many years and knows what right is.” So there’s nothing authoritarian in the sense of me telling the client how things should be. In fact, when the client asks me if some structural or functional thing is ‘right’, my response is, “Why ask me?”

AH: So the client has the answer?

HM: Of course. My job is to guide the client to find at least one instantiation of right and to recognize it.

AH: How do you get clients to that place?

HM: The starting point is helping the client get to and what he is – as an upright human being in general and a unique individual in particular. Then I guide the client to find ways to be more right in the sense of being more his better self. Of course, where any one of us is at any particular time is somewhere on an asymptote with respect to the ideal of being rightly.

AH: So there are limitations and you work within those to get the best you can?

HM: Or the best they can – exactly.

AH: What’s your tactical approach?

HM: Show and tell: I show – in the sense of shining a light on what’s happening – and the client tells. Once the client observes and perceives his own experience, telling it – putting it into language – crystallizes it. So language is a self-organizing tool. The conversation with the client is a give-and-take, an iterative process, the same kind of Socratic process I learned in college, the same kind of conversation I’d have in prepping a witness.

AH: So your SI process is similar to what you do as a lawyer?

HM: Sure – in many ways it’s the same thing. As a lawyer, I take in a big tangled mess of data and put out a clean, coherent narrative. It takes an instinct for the jugular, which sounds a lot like, “Find the most obvious restriction and go from there.” It also takes an eye for the incongruent, for where the story doesn’t add up, which is the same idea we use in body reading. In both fields, the points of incongruence show you conflict, and working through the conflict, rectifying it, reveals what’s true.

And that circles back to language as an organizing principle: whether I’m working with a Rolfing client, a deposition witness, a space to be designed, or even an author of a Journal article [Editor’s note: Heidi has been on our editorial team for more than fifteen years], there’s nothing more important than articulation of what’s right – or to say it another way, what’s true. “Tell me what” and “Tell me why” – asked in that order – have enormous power to get to the essence of things. And when we do get to it, we can feel it.

AH: You mentioned that at the margins, the aesthetic we’re discussing can be an ethical question. What do you mean by that?

HM: Ethics is about how to be in the world. We’re not only particular human beings, but also particular human doings – and the doing is inseparable from the being. The thing is, when a person recognizes his one trick, it’s a very powerful lens for detecting both opportunities and pitfalls.

We can use me as an example. Since my one trick is rectification, I’m drawn to opportunities to straighten stuff out particularly by guiding others to articulate their truths, which is what I do as a lawyer and as a Roffer. Beyond that, in our SI community, for instance, I look for colleagues with great ideas who have a hard time getting them on paper, and I help them to do that; and I serve on the Ethics and Business Practices Committee at the Rolf Institute® – which is the best job going, by the way, because its process, which I wrote back in 1997, requires getting things totally straight.

On the flip side, knowing my trick lets me stand back and recognize that just because I can put something right doesn’t mean I have to. I don’t have to jump into every steaming vat of silly string in my path and untangle it.

AH: You try to pick your battles?
HM: Yes. I’m trying to stay out of those that aren’t worth the aggravation.

AH: You called the Ethics Committee “the best job going.” Why is that?

HM: We’re the fire department without the sirens. Because fortunately we don’t have much to do in the Rolfing community; hardly anybody has even heard of us; but when needed, it’s a dirty job that somebody has to do and we’re remarkably good at doing it. The Ethics Committee exists to protect the Rolf Institute – period. But the Institute is protected when its members behave well – which helps both the members and their clients, and at the same time protects the public. Totally aligned interests. With rectification, everybody wins.

AH: We’ve talked about helping clients to recognize their tricks, as you call it. But what about practitioners? Should we be identifying our own?

HM: Absolutely. First off, to know your trick – or raison d’être, or calling, if anyone would prefer one of those terms – is to know your sweet spot, which helps you choose the clients you can help the most and refer out the rest. So when the client’s big focus is to improve his triathlon time, I accept that his concern just doesn’t interest me and send him to someone else. Everybody wins. But more important, when we know what it is we really do, we can distinguish what we are doing, on the one hand, from how we’re doing it, on the other hand. Now for our readers here, even though the what is personal and individual, the how of SI is the same for all of us: it’s basically a discipline of working in the connective-tissue matrix and the perceptual systems to improve structure and function in gravity. So when that psychiatrist told me that I’d “straighten people out,” he was commenting on what I, Heidi, would be doing as a Rolfer – and not on the nature of the work itself.

AH: Why is that distinction important?

HM: Because each of us needs some modesty and sense of place. We need to avoid conflating our personal sh*tick with the work itself. Otherwise there will be a big mess . . .

AH: . . . that you’ll be tempted to straighten out?

HM: You got it.

AH: How would I identify my trick?

HM: Notice what you do over and over. Discern the patterns, draw the analogies, and find the universals of which the particulars are instantiations. Or else just ask your oldest and closest friends.

AH: Would our profession benefit from more of us making that inquiry?

HM: I should think so, since making it involves discriminating the personal from the general and cleaning up our perception and language accordingly.

Take the adage, “If the only thing in your toolbox is a hammer, everything looks like a nail” and turn it inside out: “If what you do is drive nails, then everything in your toolbox looks like a hammer” – to you. After my dad closed his human restoration practice of orthopaedic surgery, he started treating rare books. In the bookbinding shop at the back of the house, he still used the old familiar tools – the scalpels, clamps, scissors, suture, whatever – but since his new patients didn’t benefit much from plaster, he added a ripping press and some other book-specific stuff to his restorer’s tool box. My point is that the surgical tools remained surgical tools – even though he deployed them to restore books.

And one time my elderly and way-too-dotty dentist needed a smooth bit for burnishing a gold restoration. When he could find only regular barbed drill bits, he ran out and returned with a frigging carpenter’s hammer, of all things, and announced, “This will work fine!” Imagine . . . Even though he used the hammer as a dental implement – if only to burn the barbs off the regular drill bit so he could use it for burnishing – the hammer stayed a hammer.

So, whatever the practitioner’s particular trick happens to be, SI remains SI and doesn’t morph into something else by virtue of sitting in that guy’s toolbox.

AH: How would that idea affect how we talk about and think about SI?

HM: Well for starters, maybe Rolfers who see themselves as ‘healers’ could spare us their insistence that SI is a species of healthcare – or, God help us, ‘alternative medicine’ – before they bring a supersized ration of regulatory crap down on our heads. That they do their health-care worker’s or healer’s trick through SI doesn’t make SI ‘health care’ . And maybe the ones who come from massage could refrain from calling SI a type of ‘deep-tissue bodywork’. ‘Bodywork’ is what they do – not what SI is.

The engineers, mechanics, and others in Hephaestus’ camp – bless their hearts, I’d be a wreck without their fine work – stay pretty quiet. They don’t need much external validation, so they rarely bloviate or toot their horns or otherwise make an issue of their worldview.

We do have a few shrinks and shamans among us who believe that SI is a form of somatic psychology, emotional release, whatever. Two of my instructors in what was the precursor to today’s Phase I were from that tribe. Just because one might like to practice psychology or shamanism or induce catharses or visions or whatever through SI doesn’t mean that what SI is – and anyone who says it is will just scare off the poor guy whose back has been hurting for twenty years and he just wants it to stop already.

There are lots of other examples, but those are a few. Meanwhile I won’t insist to our colleagues or to the public that SI is an existential and ontological inquiry into how to be more fully human in our bodies – even though that’s what my clients and I do.

AH: In closing, how is this interview an example of what you do?

HM: Open a door to cleaning up an existential discussion and I’ll walk right through it. Just can’t help myself . . . Thanks for the opportunity!

AH: Thank you!

Heidi Massa, a Brazil-trained Certified Advanced Rolfer and Rolf Movement Practitioner, has been guiding the somatic adventures of the discerning, the curious, and the brave since 1994. She has served on the Rolf Institute’s Ethics and Business Practices Committee for twenty years, and been an editor for this Journal since 2000. While Chicago is home to both her Rolfing and complex business litigation practices, as well as to her architectural and interior and landscape design interests, Heidi travels frequently to Colorado, where she maintains a fine pre-War home in impeccably original style, hikes in the mountains, and dances the tango.

Anne Hoff is a Certified Advanced Rolfer in Seattle, Washington.

Bibliography


Closure

By Noel Poff, Certified Rolf™

When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.

Viktor Frankl

Author's note: This was written in August 2016 and read to my graduating class.

I just finished my third ever Ten Series with a client from the public. The completion of these sessions goes along with the completion of my Basic Training at the Rolf Institute® of Structural Integration (SI) and the end of a life chapter beginning more than a year ago. It has been a long time coming and it will be a short time going back home.

With all of this and other big changes in mind, I have been thinking a lot about the word ‘closure’. Being a natural lingerer I never really had a knack for ending things. In most settings I kind of just waited until I was the last person to go so I didn’t have to say goodbye: I just wanted to hold the space and keep holding it until the people who left returned. The same applies to how I operate throughout the day: I just keep doing things until I pass out because I don’t want to end the day, I want to hold onto it and make it last as long as possible so there are more opportunities for people, places, and things to continue adding to my experience of it. It is a bit tiring to say the least but oftentimes feels rewarding. So even though I’ve been thinking a lot about closure, I still don’t believe I understand it or how it applies to my life. But some wisdom began brewing within me when I was introduced to Closure as one of the Principles of Intervention in Rolfing® SI.

There are many moments in my life where I find myself living with a Zen-like rhythm. Most people have experienced something like it, where in the midst of an activity they realize they could just keep going. It could be a long run or hike. It could happen while painting a picture or jamming with friends. It could occur while lovers are enjoying the company of one another. It could be someone getting on a roll with projects at work. I think it is a wonderful feeling, even more so when I have a real passion for the activity. With such engaging delight it is difficult to know when to stop or when the time is right to be finished. Is there ever a right time? If so, what determines that? How do I know when the moment is done when there is so much more that could be done? Am I ever finished?

I guess we could say that nothing is ever entirely finished. There is always more to do. Even with more to do we could also say that there comes a point where we don’t have to do anymore. Take something like Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa: sure, it could have been added to – but I think the general consensus is that is was best that “Leo” left it as it was when he realized he was done. There are points when we know we are finished as creators, and time is not always the determining factor. Time is indeed influential in how we finish things, but there are still a lot of ways in which the developing art of closure can make that limitation seemingly nonexistent.

We need closure. We need it not just as a means to navigate personal relationships but also as a means to navigate through many of our daily practices. Even things like going to bed require a certain form of closure that allows us to let go of the current day thereby enabling us to wake up for the next.

There are places where I have wanted to remain forever and moments I never wanted to end. There are sessions where I feel like I could keep working with that Zen-like rhythm. Sometimes I feel like I can dig deeper and keep uncovering new territory, but something stops me. It is not just the time, the overload, or the realities of getting tired and hungry. Instead, it is for the sake of growth. Things need space and time between interventions if they are to evolve. The silence between experiences is just as important as the moments themselves. That silence, that nothingness, is being in its purest form. The form responds to the interventions made by us. When we let go of that form and free it from the confines of our intentions it can then grow into what it wants to become.

This is getting heady but the main point I wanted to make is that the word ‘closure’ has come to mean something more to me than what it initially did. As a principle
‘Burned from Within’ and Droop Neck Syndrome

By Ritchie Mintz, Certified Advanced Rolfer™

Author’s note: This article was not originally intended for Structural Integration: The Journal of the Rolf Institute®. It was written as a post to a Facebook page. In that context, I hope I have exerted enough ‘scientific caution’. But I felt the personal experience, the casual tone, and the lack of original research disqualified the piece as a journal article. That was, until I received enough feedback that indicated I had ‘struck a nerve’. I then thought this article might be worthy to submit to the Journal because of the fact that Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI) can help this structural condition, now named by medical science.

I learned a lot about bodies and about Rolfing SI in my training at the Rolf Institute®. But I learned a great deal more from my clients and their bodies through the practice of the art and science of Rolfing SI. This article is about what I learned from two particular clients.

People and their bodies get pretty banged up here on planet Earth. Most people recover from their injuries and move on without a second thought. On the Rolfing table, however, many clients report remembering old and seemingly insignificant injuries. Many times, in the recall of the event, clients realize that the injury was more severe than originally thought at the time. This tells me that fascia is one location where the record of traumatic events is stored.

Most injuries are imposed upon the body from the outside. Boxing is an example of a sport where simple impact injuries are common. When a boxer takes a left hook to the head, the force clearly comes from the outside and is directed inward. In a punch to the abdomen, try to imagine the shockwave that spreads from the impact site through the body. Consider other examples that lead to a myriad of other injuries, e.g. an auto collision, a fall from a ladder or down a flight of stairs, stubbing a toe. If the blow to the body is forceful enough, a bone may fracture.

After the initial impact, fixation is the next phase in an injury to a bone. Bones are highly vascularized, with a rich blood supply. When a bone fractures, blood seeps into the surrounding tissues. (Bones do not have to break for blood to infiltrate surrounding tissues. A simple bruise is caused by broken blood vessels.) After the bone is set and begins the process of healing, the liquid portion of the blood infiltrate (plasma) is slowly reabsorbed into the body. Some of the cellular matter of the blood can also be slowly metabolized and returned to the body as waste to be excreted, but a lot of the cellular particulates do not reabsorb. They remain engorged in the layers of the tissues surrounding the fracture and they fixate into a gooey, gluey cast that restricts future movement. This restriction is not just for the duration of the healing; it remains an impediment to normal movement from that point onward. That is the nature of injury: impact and local fixation.

I worked with the first of these two clients of which I speak at the beginning of my Rolfing career, and I must admit that I was unprepared for what I was about to encounter (although I did eventually figure it out). The second client was later in my career, and when I encountered this similar situation, I was better prepared to work with him.

Client One – Struck by Lightning

My first example introduced me to a different kind of injury. I was a pretty fresh-faced Rolfer, but I had taken quite a few people through the ten-session series of Rolfing SI. I had also done enough post-ten work to have a pretty good feel for bodies and their tissues. However, from my first touch, this woman felt different. Gooey and gluey does not begin to describe the level of fixation that I felt. It was as if the goo and glue permeated to every layer and level from her skin to her bones and beyond. It was not fixated locally; it was everywhere! Every attempt of mine to penetrate and release it was met with resistance. Everything I tried to input bounced off and got reflected outward. Her entire body was matted and welded into one immovable unit from left to right, front to back, top to bottom, inside to outside, locally, regionally, and globally.

Furthermore, she was in great pain and hypersensitive to my contact. She winced with every touch.

I knew in the opening moments of the first session that something about her was different from all the people I had ever touched before. I asked her, “Have you ever had any accident or injury that might have changed your tissues?” She assured me that, no, except for the usual fender benders and falling off her roller skates as a kid, nothing untoward had ever happened to her. She continued her series with me, and the work went on. Many times throughout her series, I had to stop and ask again, “Are you sure you never had some kind of really traumatic injury?” “No, nothing,” was her reply.

This went on, week after week, until we got to the middle of the ninth session. Every other person with whom I had worked had made significant progress toward integration by this time in the series. But here, I felt I had barely made any progress and, truth be told, I was a little exhausted from feeling all my input getting bounced back at me. I paused the session to take a breath and ask yet again, “Search back through the feelings of my input. Are you really sure you never had a bad wreck or traumatic event?” I could see in her eyes that she was leafing through the Rolodex of her life. Suddenly, her eyes lit up and she said, “Well, I was hit by lightning when I was nineteen. Is that what you mean?”

We looked at each other in silence for a long time. Now my mind was racing. “Wow,” I finally said. “Bless your heart. And you didn't think this was worth mentioning to your Rolfer?” And she said, “It was so long ago, I forgot all about it. I just remembered.” Only then did she tell her story. She had been a counselor at a summer camp. There was a thunderstorm one afternoon, and she had gone running back through the rain to the tent to secure the flaps so the bunks would not get wet. The flap rope was tied to a nail in a tree. Just as she touched the nail, the tree was split in two by a lightning bolt. She was badly burned and taken to a hospital for a day and released.

In that moment, it all made perfect sense. This was not the usual type of injury I had dealt with. This was very different. The impact did not come mechanically from the outside. In this case, every atom of her body had been instantly lit up from the inside. Because the body’s interstitial...
fluids are naturally ionized by virtue of their electrolyte content, the fluids were a perfect conduit to distribute electrical current to every cell of her body at once. Imagine dropping a plugged-in toaster into a bathtub of salt water; a toaster, however, operates on 110-volt house current, and this woman's body fluids were conducting perhaps millions of volts. To add to the trauma, consider the suddenness of the event. A mechanical injury spreads through the body in a progressive shock wave. A lightning strike illuminates the entire body at once.

When I considered all this, it made sense that every layer of this woman's body would be fused together from stem to stern and from port to starboard. It explained a lot. I thought back on my experience of every other body with which I had worked. To work with most bodies is somewhat like untying a shoe. When tying a shoe, you begin with a half hitch and then tie a bow on top of that. The bow functions to keep the half hitch in place so that it remains tightly cinched. When you want to untie it, all you have to do is pull out the bow and the half hitch comes loose. With my previous clients, if I untied enough knots, I would come to a place where the deeper layers would give it up and let go. But not here! Here, every layer had to be 'peeled' open one layer at a time, in order, from the surface inward. I say that because, as I mentioned, this client was hypersensitive to touch. In order for her to tolerate the work, I had to peel her layers open from the outside in, one at a time. Any time I peeled too much at a time, she squirmed and gasped.

I was already in the middle of the ninth session when I had this insight into my client. I knew I only had a session and a half to do as much as I could. The first shift I made was to drop the goal of getting her to where I was able to get everyone else in ten sessions. I recognized that the extremely rare event of getting struck by lightning made this client unlike most of the rest of humanity. We did the best we could in the remaining time left in her series of Rolfing work.

We continued with advanced work for several years. Those advanced sessions confirmed for me the effects of electrical burns in the body. My strategy for the work was the same; peel her burned and boiled-together layers apart in small increments that she could tolerate. I knew that if I exceeded her very sensitive boundaries, I would lose her trust. Because of that, I developed a way of working that I called 'shaving a balloon'. It was deliberate and delicate work. The delicate balance was getting that close shave without popping the balloon. Popping the balloon, in this case, meant eliciting any kind of pain response, even a twitch. But after a few years, we were able to accomplish many goals.

I only encountered one other client through the years who had suffered a similar injury. That was a carpenter who had accidentally drilled into a 440-volt cable. He told me about getting electrocuted in our introductory consultation. As soon as he mentioned it, I thought, "Oh boy, here's a great chance to check my theory." His tissues were sufficiently similar to the woman struck by lightning for me to conclude that there is a special type of injury that I can call 'burned from within'. The good news is that this kind of injury is quite rare.

**Client Two – Cancer Survivor with Radiation Sequelae**

This is where the story gets personal. If you know me, you know my wife, Gloria Gene Moore. Gloria is a three-time, thirty-seven-year cancer survivor. She was diagnosed with stage three Hodgkin’s lymphoma, her first cancer, at age twenty-eight. She had a fist-sized tumor growing around her aorta at a time when Hodgkin’s was considered a death sentence. Her doctors told her there was hope, and sure enough, she was among the first to survive Hodgkin’s. The survival was not without its costs, though.

Gloria told me her story when we met. Her surgeons performed a thoracotomy (chest crack) to excise the tumor and followed up with radiation. I heard what she said but it didn’t connect with me until the moment I touched her tissues, after we became a couple. I expected to find structures out of place and out of proper alignment because that is the usual aftermath of any surgery. What I didn’t expect to find was that the radiation that saved Gloria’s life had also ‘burned her from within’. The usual structural displacements from the surgery were there, but in addition, those displacements were solidly fixed into place by the ‘boiling’ together of her tissue layers from the radiation burns. It was the lightning lady all over again!

Lightning injuries are extremely rare, but radiation after-effects are rampant. Nuclear therapy is a standard part of cancer treatment today and its use is growing. I can still say that in my whole career I have had only one person as a client who was hit by lightning; the number of cancer survivors who come to my Rolfing table with radiation sequelae is immense.

It started innocently enough. Gloria and I were at an SI conference where Dorothy Nolte led the group in her exercise of “Drop a line from the front of your sacrum and hook it to the center of the earth; now raise a line from the top of your head and hitch it to a star.” I had no trouble following the imagery but Gloria told me, “I can’t do that.” And, sure enough, she couldn’t find her ‘Line’ because the radiation-treatment sequelae had shortened the front of her body.

Soon after that, a seventy-seven-year-old client came to me with his head, neck, and thoracic spine positioned so severely anterior that he couldn’t lie on his back without nine inches of pillows under his head. His friends and family said he was “bent with age,” but his story held other clues. In his initial consultation, he told me that he’d had thyroid cancer that was treated with large doses of radiation. The treatment worked, the cancer was gone, but the scar tissue that formed from the radiation had left him bent and bowed over in front. He said he couldn’t understand why the cancer treatment had changed his structure. I was no longer a rookie about burns from within, so I was able to help him. After that, cancer survivors with forward-head posture sought me out.

**Droop-Neck Syndrome**

One evening, Gloria and I were sitting at home on the couch. I was watching TV and she was reading a Facebook page called Survivors of Hodgkin’s. Suddenly, she said, “There’s this thing here that they’re calling ‘droop-neck syndrome.’” I grabbed the remote and shut off the TV. She had my complete attention. As we perused the page, I knew that I, and the entire SI world, had a syndrome on our hands. Unlike years ago, when I struggled to understand why my lightning client was so different, I knew that Rolfing work could be effective for people with tissue damage from radiation.

The general mission of Rolfing SI is alignment of the body with gravity, as seen in Figure 1. Applying these alignment...
principles to droop neck syndrome (DNS) becomes problematic when every fiber of tissue in the body is ‘burned’ and fused into a web of seemingly intractable fixation. DNS is not an exception to any of the foundational ideas of SI, but it is an exaggeration of the patterns that afflict every human on Earth. Therefore, it falls squarely within the spectrum that Rolfing SI can address. We, as practitioners, can help, but only if we know with what we are dealing. This combination of severe misalignment plus burned-from-within fixation makes for a daunting long-term project.

The Work Required

I would like this next section to be read like an open letter to SI practitioners, but the public is invited to read along and listen in. On the one hand, I apologize for the jargon, but on the other hand, I welcome its use, because it is time to educate the public about human physical structure. Our fascially illiterate public must set aside its obsession with bones, muscles, and nerves and consider that fascia, the soft-tissue frame of the body, is the organ of structure and support. Since DNS is a fascial issue, this is a teachable moment.

For a random structure (the normal client who has not received any SI work), it is common for the structure to slump forward. If you are working on a client with a combination of DNS and ‘burned from within’, ten sessions will be just the beginning, but it is a good way to begin because the Ten Series is designed to create balance between the front and back of the body.

Take the case of my seventy-seven-year-old thyroid cancer survivor who was “bent with age.” I don’t see him as bent with age. I see a neck and thorax that was ‘burned’ through so that his flesh became like parchment shrink-wrap. A quote from Dr. Rolf (that I cannot attribute) speaks to this type of tissue fixation, although she probably was not referring to what I call burned from within: “The problem is there’s nothing to work with because it’s all stuck to the bone. That’s your job: Get that tissue up off the bone.”

Figure 1: The Little Boy Logo showing the ‘mission’ of Rolfing SI.

The neck has no chance to launch upward; instead, it is forced anterior into the droop shape of the syndrome. If each rib is rotated downward in front, the sternum will be dropped in the front relative to the vertebra in back that launched the rib. That is the hallmark of DNS: the sternum is dropped in front relative to the spine. To undo the syndrome, the Rolfer’s job is to de-rotate each rib-vertebra unit upward in front so that the sternum and each rib can lift instead of collapse. Then, the neck can rise upward instead of being forward and droopy.

That sounds easy to a Rolfer and in most cases, it is. But here, the collapse is compounded by the burned-from-within fixation. All the tissues are desiccated, fused together, and fit the bones like a tight shrink-wrap. A quote from Dr. Rolf (that I cannot attribute) speaks to this type of tissue fixation, although she probably was not referring to what I call burned from within: “The problem is there’s nothing to work with because it’s all stuck to the bone. That’s your job: Get that tissue up off the bone.”

So, that’s the Rolfer’s job: get that tissue back to being layered and lifted up off the bones. If that sounds easy, it’s not. To a client who is truly burned from within, every touch feels intrusive. It brings us back to the strategy I developed of ‘shaving a balloon’. Shaving the balloon means peeling the stuck layers in tolerable increments. After many advanced sessions of shaving my way in from the outside, I found I had reached a point where my clients could allow a deeper form of peeling that I call ‘tissue loading’. Tissue loading means that I gather any loose fascial layers that I can find and deftly press (load) them against a handy nearby bony margin. If I load at just the correct angle and in just the correct direction, I can feel the deepest layers open. I feel deep fixations release. I feel joints de-rotate. I feel the body differentiating sleeve from core and able to find its front and its back. I feel the body find its alignment with gravity. These are changes that Rolfer’s routinely achieve in ten sessions. But in a body that is ‘burned’ through, it takes a lot of gentle ‘shaving’ to release the deep pressures that make the body hypersensitive and hypervigilant. Only after the fascial body is decompressed and desensitized is it ready for tissue loading.

Thus ends my professional counsel to any practitioner of SI who might find a client with DNS following radiation therapy on their table. To any reader who is experiencing DNS, or if you know someone who is, my advice is to find a practitioner of Rolfing SI and share this article with him or her. My experience is that it will probably take a lot of delicate work, but results are achievable.

Reviews

Centered: Organizing the Body through Kinesiology, Movement Theory and Pilates Technique by Madeline Black (Handspring Publishing, 2015)

Reviewed by Stefan Knight, Certified Advanced Rolfer®, Rolf Movement® Practitioner, Masters Certified Pilates Instructor

I should start by saying that if I were going to write a book compiling how I work with folks from a movement perspective, this book, Centered: Organizing the Body through Kinesiology, Movement Theory and Pilates Technique, would cover most of it. In fact, it would serve as the perfect text book for a program I currently offer called Integrative Fitness®... even though I've never worked with the author Madeline Black before. The collective consciousness at work, I suppose.

Coming from a broad perspective as a dancer, choreographer, weightlifter, Pilates instructor, anatomist, manual therapist with inquiry into physical therapy, osteopath (among others), Black brings it all together in this guide for both the practitioner and those looking for a path for self-care and exploration. Black's experience in various fields of study is clear to see. While many of the 'exercises' are variations of Pilates exercises, many look similar to Rolf Movement work, and others might include kinesis-taping or manually evaluating nutation of the sacrum, utilizing muscle energy technique, or traditional Pilates abdominal work.

Black is a real resource in the Pilates community and her book demonstrates that. I have always been equally interested in muscle activation as I have been with 'releasing stuff' and Centered presents them as truly two sides of the same coin. If there were such a thing as Rolf exercise, this would be it. Just looking at the title you can hear echoes of Dr. Rolf – “Organizing the Body...”. Black incorporates a combination of manual techniques, kinesiology-informed movement, and strengthening with bias toward muscle recruitment as the best way to bring a body from dysfunction to strong and good functioning.

She begins with the feet (of course) as our base, leading the reader down the path of awareness-based kinesiology as a primer, then through the relevant anatomical structures involved, as well as the physiology. From the feet, Black traverses her way upward through every joint and joint system all the way to the head, peppering the reader with clinical insights, research, invitations to participate, recommendations for verbal cueing, and what to look for in practice. She speaks to the psychobiological implications and to the interrelationships to the structures above. Black pays strong homage to the role of fascia and then takes you through somatically rich movement exercises for the embodiment piece.

This is a practitioners’ manual, clearly illustrated with both photos and diagrams. She offers insight into the energetics of how to see movement in others and feel it in our own bodies. The final chapter entitled “Perception and Felt Sense” goes deeper into the value and perspectives of somatic mindfulness as well as qualities of touch and sensing into others to perceive states of being.

Black's aim here is clearly (but not limited to this) to turn Pilates teachers who 'show' exercises into practitioners who embody the art of teaching, bringing in relevant science to provide depth and quality to the practice. She presents many tie-ins to Pilates utilizing most of the available equipment, and many without, making this book good for both professionals with equipped studios and anybody equipped only with interest and a willingness to explore. This book is an extraordinary resource for the Pilates community that I have been a part of for fifteen years. It is extremely user-friendly and accessible to any Rolf or other movement professional. I invite any practitioner (whether a hands-on therapist, movement practitioner, or personal trainer) to dive in and actually participate in body and practice.

Black has produced a real resource of rich, valuable, and usable insight, from my humble perspective. It's the book I wish I had written. A wonderful contribution that bridges the gap between ‘letting go’ and ‘firing it up’.

The Bach Project (CDs, iBook) by Steven Hancoff, 2015

Reviewed by Gil Hedley, PhD

I spent yesterday in a rapture as I drove for hours from Denver, Colorado west across the Continental Divide, on my way to Paonia, Colorado, a small town in a beautiful Rocky Mountain valley. I was traveling in a rental car, and had brought as musical accompaniment the masterful CDs of the Rolfing Structural Integration community’s own Steven Hancoff, who was playing Bach’s Cello Suites on guitar. I got to know Steven first when he attended the very first dissection workshop I ever offered back in 1995. At the time, I marveled that he had at that point travelled the entire world for the State Department as a ‘musical ambassador’ for the United States, playing American ragtime and folk music on goodwill tours, in addition to being an avid whitewater rafter, Rolfer™, and an incredibly intelligent and insightful human in general.

Remaining connected as friends afterwards, some years later Steven contacted me to read over the liner notes he was writing for the recordings he had produced of Bach’s The Six Suites for Cello Solo, having painstakingly transcribed them in their entirety for guitar. Steven spoke eloquently of the depth and power of this music, of Bach’s genius, and of his passion for rendering them accessible to the world in this way. It was a monumental project to which he devoted himself for years.

I was already a fan of Steven’s own musical genius, having spent years listening to his exceptional finger-style guitar recordings on several albums he had produced, and consider him one of my all-time favorite musicians. I was excited to hear the recordings, but several more years passed before I had the privilege. That is because in the interim, Steven had expanded the liner notes themselves into a multi-volume, multimedia iBook set amounting to a comprehensive account of Bach’s life and work, epic in scope, particularly with respect to the development of his The Six Suites for Cello Solo. When he eventually shared those volumes with me, along with the recordings he made from his transcriptions for guitar, I was truly astonished. I felt myself a witness to musical history in the making, so thorough, so captivating, and so masterful were both the historical accounts and musical renditions of these deeply beautiful works. Steven has rendered Bach accessible in a whole new way to the world, and there is no praise really sufficient to account for his accomplishment and contribution for having done so.

I have since spent many hours delving into the iBooks, which are treasure troves of music, art, and history relating to Bach and
these Suites, and have many times enjoyed listening to the recordings. And so it is not surprising that I would have chosen this CD set alone to be with me on a long-needed solo vacation. Driving through the Rocky Mountains is itself breathtaking. But doing so with this music was transformational. Steven’s mastery of the instrument literally boggles my mind. I am not in any way knowledgeable about music, but I do have an innate appreciation of beauty. This is beautiful music that engages the listener beyond expectation. Hancock plays the guitar, and Bach’s genius flows with his own. Steven’s capacity to render the underlying spirit and intention of Bach is felt in literally every note and chord. But beyond this, Steven does not merely play the guitar, nor even merely Bach. He plays the human heart, the strings of which vibrate and the depths of which are opened by the most caring and uplifting touch. I openly wept as I drove with a complex of feelings that I cannot fully describe, but joy and awe figure prominently in the mix.

I believe with certainty that Steven’s skill and decades of experience touching people in his Roling practice profoundly impact his capacity to deliver the message and power of Bach’s music in this way. He perfectly translates his empathy for Bach’s scope of feelings, embedded in these cello suites, to his own instrument, and then conveys this to the listener in a way that is biologically active as it were: the effect is palpable. One could marvel at an intellectual level at what Steven has accomplished here, and be on the mark. But if you stop there, you will miss the most significant, and lasting, effect. Listening with your heart, you can understand with feeling much more deeply the transformative power of these extraordinary works, which will work their own wonders in you. Thank you Steven, you have outdone yourself, and possibly Bach for that matter, and we are all the beneficiaries of your shared genius.

The “Bach Project” consists of

- The three-CD set entitled The Six Suites for Cello Solo by J. Sebastian Bach for Acoustic Guitar by Steven Hancock (available at CDBaby, Amazon, Apple iTunes, and wherever CDs are for sale).
- The four-volume iBook (not ‘e-book’) Bach, Casals and The Six Suites for Cello Solo (available for Apple computers, iPads, and iPhones, from Apple’s iTunes; go to http://tinyurl.com/stevenhancoff-itunes).
- A series of fourteen videos at Steven Hancock’s YouTube channel (http://tinyurl.com/stevenhancoff-youtube).
- The written transcriptions for guitarists – or for people who like to read along while listening (available for free at StevenHancoff.com; go to the Contact page and click to download).
- Two full-length multimedia theatre pieces: From Tragedy to Transcendence and From Obscurity to Pre-Eminence (The Almost Unknown Saga of How the Extraordinary Interactions between the Bach and Mendelssohn Families Saved the Music of J. S. Bach for All of Us). A third presentation is in the works: Johann Sebastian Bach and The Six Suites for Cello Solo, A Fanciful and Extravagant Allegory. (If you wish to be informed of Steven’s performance schedule or book one of these performances, please contact Steven through his website www.stevenhancoff.com.)

In Memoriam

Structural Integration: The Journal of the Rolf Institute® notes the passing of the following member of our community:

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