

STRETCHING EXERCISES FOR FLUTISTS

In my previous HALFTIME column from September, 2014, *Getting in Shape after Summer*, I mentioned the importance of stretching exercises. Stretching frequently in a practice session increases flexibility, reduces tension that builds up and develops focus instead of frustration in the minutes and hours required to develop concentration and mental energy needed for musical performance. Try these simple exercises to make new habits and reduce physical tension in your playing!

Body Stretches

For general body stretches, stand straight and tall, focusing the eyes ahead, relaxing shoulders and arms, releasing tension throughout the body. Now stretch your arms high above your head, reaching for the ceiling but grounding the feet firmly on the floor. Count to ten while you hold the stretch then repeat the exercise up to ten times.

Embouchure Stretches

For embouchure/facial muscles, try a simple stretch (*The Lion* in *Yoga*) to increase circulation and flexibility in the face, neck and throat. Open your mouth as wide as possible, saying the word **Owwwww!!!** and moving directly to the word **Oooooo!!!** with lips moving forward, together and away from the teeth as if blowing a kiss. Count to ten while you hold the stretch then repeat the exercise up to ten times daily to maintain embouchure flexibility and build strength.

HAND AND ARM STRETCHES

For hand/arm muscles, it's important to stretch before, during and after practice sessions in to maintain good technical skills and a healthy body. Small muscle groups in the hands are particularly susceptible to tension and stress on the marching field because of long rehearsals, cold temperatures, and the position of the flute to the right of the body and parallel to the ground. Here's a simple hand exercises to try.....extend both hands, creating space between the fingers and stretching them apart to increase circulation. Here's a great arm stretch for flexibility.....start with the right arm and tuck

it behind the back to the other side of your body then hold your right hand with the left one to extend and maximize the stretch. Now repeat the stretch with the left arm and right hand.....this is a favorite exercise of my students to release tension in the middle of a practice session.

Good luck with the new stretches.....and remember to be creative and develop stretches of your own!