

How Zen and Qigong Helped Me ‘Get in the Pocket’

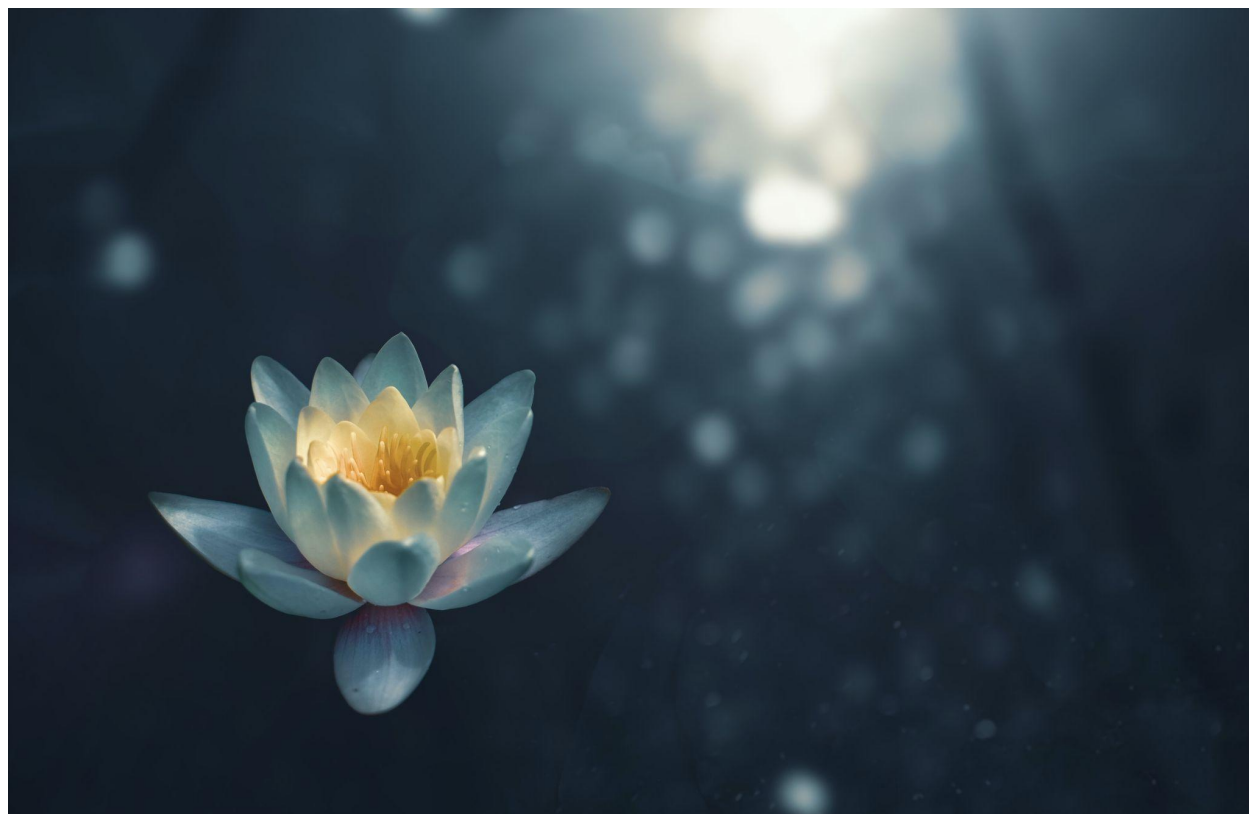


Photo by Zoltan Tasi

My Musical Background

By trade, I am an instrumental music educator. My primary focus is woodwinds, and, more specifically, the flute. But it wasn't until after college that I had an experience that helped me consistently find the elusive musical pocket.

When I stumbled upon Theo's Musical Yoga page, I had an ah-ha moment. While my experiences at a local midwest Zen and Qigong retreat didn't feel religious per se, they did change how I held my body, and, how I shaped my music.

Zen

One really interesting aspect about Zen that I didn't fully realize is that there are a plethora of musical instruments incorporated into the practice. Some feel that their Zen practice is strictly religious, while others feel it is solely spiritual, or even, simply, a lived human experience. I seem to fall somewhere in the middle, personally.

All significant actions in the Zendo are accompanied by instruments. There is a five-minute bell telling you to come back into practice, and there is a different bell denoting the beginning and end of a meditation session.

Zazen (meditation) made me realize how often I am away from my instrument, but also, it made me realize how frequently music was on my mind. As I was sitting (meditating), a number of odds and ends of songs popped into my head: All Time Low, Sousa, etc.

You sure do think about music differently when you aren't supposed to make any noise.

Qigong

Qigong is an ancient Chinese martial arts practice. As Piedmont.org describes it, it is "Movement that you do for a certain situation".

In a sense, every piece of music is also a movement you do that changes, in every given situation.

My experience with Qigong is admittedly limited. However, one half-hour session for a week left me noticing a lot of things. I found that the movement used to help open the lungs could be recalled (dare I say, in my mind's eye?) and lead to more relaxed breathing. Being able to recall this sense of calm and openness is another thing that helps me find my musical pocket more quickly.

Music Back Home

When I returned from the Zen retreat everything felt very loud and fast-paced. So this was the real world, but with new eyes. While it was all very overwhelming at first, I found that it helped me out in the long run. My experiences with Zen and Qigong could now be recalled, to help slow downtime, and ease my performance anxiety. I guess you could say that I was almost practicing Musical Yoga!

Thank you for featuring me on your site, Theo!



About the Author: Aleah Fitzwater is an arranger, blogger, and instrumental music educator. You can find more of her work on the ScanScore Blog <https://scan-score.com/en/scanscore-blog/> , where she shows musicians how to digitize sheet music with optical music recognition. You can find her art and music blog, Fusion, here” <https://aleahfitzwater.com/blog-fusion/>