

## Fingers to feelings by Mike Luce

Once upon a long time ago, I had ambitions of being a professional musician. I even went to college majoring in music. Beyond all the classes I took in theory, history and so on, there was a cornucopia of music for flute which I hadn't yet encountered. More than that there was just the immersion in a musical culture, the deepening of appreciation and understanding of what music could do, could express.

I spent uncounted hours in the practice room sweating my technique. I played scales and arpeggios until my chops ached. I came to an uneasy standoff with the metronome. I beat myself up for passages I couldn't reliably play the way I wanted. I paid a lot of dues to get the technique reasonably under control, meaning that as Click and Clack say it was unencumbered by the thought process.

That part is key. If you have to consciously think about the notes and rhythms, the fingering, the basic breathing discipline, then you're not bringing your full focus to actually turning notes on the page into music. You'll be playing about an inch deep, and for some music that's enough. For other music however, there are nuances to be explored and expressed which require full control of the technicalities to be given. There is a real heart to them, with ideas and emotions expressed in ways which are easily missed if you're still thinking about fingering patterns and such. That's the head stuff. Getting the fingers down lets you reach the feelings.

It's common for the composer to hide, sort of, a melody within lots of other really fast notes, which challenges the player to uncover it with subtlety. Or maybe there this fast swirl of notes that, when played with ease can evoke a movement and beauty such as you see in a swarm of starlings.

Now you can learn to play all of these notes with great technical proficiency. That's like learning vocabulary prior to poetry. Necessary but not sufficient. You could also be moved to express yourself poetically before you had a working knowledge of the language but that would be very limiting at the least. Neither is satisfying.

I may never have discovered the deep beauty and nuance in Mozart from the inside had I not spent those thousands or hours in the practice room learning the basics. I may never have subjected myself to such and extreme discipline had I not had a feel for that in my soul already. Heart, and head.

I've often lead with my heart and then enlisted my head. That was certainly true in my early career attempt in music. Of course it was only a little later that I figured out that music was much better as an avocation than a profession for me. I'm glad that it forced me to learn discipline though. It was also my heart that led me into my calling in community mental health. I stayed with my heart until I burned out. I never said I was a quick study about this. I took some time off, with a job, job and enlisted my head, at last, as to how I would return and survive. Coming here was one part of that. Worked oaut pretty well I'd say.

That relationship between head and heart is always going to be a dynamic one, so I'll try to keep paying attention. Anyway, it'd be boring otherwise.