

## **Vibratory Listening:**

*How do you physically FEEL your playing and what does it do to your musicianship?*

Do we only listen with our ears? What if I told you that what we perceive as listening is really a combination of multiple senses working in tandem. Think about the time you saw a person fall from an uncomfortable height. You watched them fall, you felt the ground shake, you heard a thud, you may have even felt secondhand adrenaline. All your senses are always active to create the big picture that you know of as your reality. What if you isolate these senses so that your focus is drawn to a very specific part of your reality?

This is a common meditative practice that acts almost as a focus exercise at first. You can feel the feeling of your feet in your shoes and focus on that familiar yet exotic sensation. You can not only hear but become very attentive to the low hum of a train. You can examine how beautiful that tree is so deeply it opens a new feeling of love.

One feeling that is ever present but rarely noticed is sensation of vibration. Sound is made up of vibrations. Vibrations are in everything we hear. Vibrations are also something that we can feel so do we feel sound? I would venture to say, in a lot of ways, we do! This is why people love bass heavy music in their car. They feel the sound in its truest form! It is a whole *new* way to experience sound. It's one thing to feel it in hip hop but is it possible to feel it in every sound that crosses your ear?

This is a concept that I have been toying with for some time. It started with me on a train. Sitting there for hours in silence allowed me to explore new areas of my attention. I found it quite easy to cling onto the feeling of being vibrated by the moving train. I planted my feet on the ground and felt the movement of the train. With that movement came a visualization of the train moving. I felt the rumble made by the train through my back and that transferred through my arms and my head. I've been on trains hundreds of times before but why have I never experienced this? I have never focused on this single aspect of my reality before. Now that I have, what do I do? Does this change anything? Is it merely an exercise in focus?

That is when I brought it back to my instrument. Keep in mind that I am not a master at this, I am just a student who is telling you what I have experienced and learned from a curiosity standpoint.

### **How do I use this musically?**

Well, the first step has nothing to do with your instrument and everything to do with your general awareness. You will have a hard time using this in your playing if you can't experience this in your moment to moment. The next time someone talks in a room, see if you can feel the vibrations of their talking coming through the floors and the walls. Depending on the volume and quality of their voice, you may be able to pick it up more than or less. The next time someone walks into a room, see if you can feel the slight vibrations of their footsteps. The more you do this, the more you realize that every sound can be felt. You can even feel the vibrations through the air.

This is also a good time to talk about placebo. I can constantly feel the vibrations in the air of someone talking, of a car horn honking, of a leaf rustling in the wind... but can I really?? In actuality, I don't think I can. I think that it is a combination of my sight and hearing telling me that I should feel the vibrations. Even though I know this, why do I still feel them so clearly? I

could be wrong, and often I am, but I think that your brain can create this experience if you are actively looking for it. That is just as powerful and valuable as the actual experience of feeling. So, if you are going through this and thinking that it is total BS, maybe it is! But maybe it is not. How mailable is your thinking?

With that being said, you can certainly feel vibrations from sound. It is a fact of life. However, how much of the vibrations you feel relate to how open your mind is to this new understanding. Once you tune into this, you are ready to approach your instrument.

*It is also very worthwhile to mention that this is a concept that has been heavily explored before by many deaf musician and people. Evelyn Glennie, a deaf marimba player speaks on this topic extensively. I even heard that Beethoven used to have his piano on the ground so he can feel the music when he went deaf.*

The second step of this has to do with playing a single note. Play the lowest note your instrument can make. This works best in a room, rather than outdoors. Play the note and feel the vibrations through your feet first. Then in your head. Then move to feeling it in your body. Then in your hands. Play the note until it fully decays and then play it again.

Drummers – Just do this with the kick drum or the floor tom.  
All other melodic/harmonic instruments – hit your lowest note. Then play your second lowest. Then your third. See if the notes feel different. Keep doing this until you feel the change between notes 1 and 2. I can promise that there is a vibratory difference. I can't promise that you can feel it though. This is where the power of may placebo kick in. Focus/stay attentive on the sensation of the vibration. Don't listen to the tone your instrument is making. Just feel the vibrations of the instrument.

Once you feel like you can feel a distinct (enough) difference in notes, now put two notes together (if you can with your instrument). If you play an A simultaneously while you play an Ab, you will hear the wave. It sounds like wowowowowow. Of course, there is a scientific reason for this but that's not what this paper is about. That is the easiest diad that a person can feel. From there, play a tritone. Compare that feeling to the feeling of a perfect fifth or fourth. There is a very distinct sensation for dissonant diads. Try every combination of diads that you possibly can. Play them until they fully decay and then play them again.

***Remember – This is all about personal experimentation. Everything that I suggest are from the learnings and experiences that are specific to me. It is my hope that these teachings also translate to the person and musician that you are.***

From diads, go to triads. From triads, go to 7<sup>th</sup> chords. Explore the feelings of all of the different available (and not available) tensions. Then experiment with cluster chords! Do all of this with intense awareness on the vibrations through your entire body.

From there, you are ready to experiment with playing pieces/whole songs or improvised solos. Your primary focus should continue to remain on the vibrations. Don't worry about what you're playing. It is totally OK to suck because it will all FEEL interesting towards your body.

### **How does this make you a better musician?**

If ideas flow more naturally when you are in a meditative state (the zone/the space/the void), this is yet another way to swiftly send yourself there. It also allows for you to have a judgment free experience when playing or listening to others play. When I practice this by experiencing a live drummer, I don't think about what they play. I am just feeling what the kit does to the air around me. The way I bounce off that in my improvisation is way different than my approach when "listening". Listen back to a recording of yourself experimenting with this concept. You may love or loathe what you hear. You may not hear a difference at all. Even if you don't hear any change in your playing, isn't it absolutely amazing that you can experience sound in this completely new way?