

Long Tones – A Meditation in Sound, Breath, and Resonance

Long tones — a practice often seen as boring unless you understand its depth — can become a source of profound musical inspiration. Even advanced players benefit greatly from this seemingly simple exercise when approached with awareness and imagination.

The most commonly used reference is **Moyse's "De la Sonorité"**, but in this session, we step away from sheet music. Instead, we focus on **breath flow, internal resonance, and sound awareness**. Play any note you like — freely, without being bound by notation. When you feel like moving to the next note, just do it naturally.

Breath Flow & Inner Awareness

Think of breath as flowing from your abdomen like a fountain: **constant and centred**. Don't forcefully inhale — just breathe in deeply and naturally. Visualise the air gently rising from your core without collapsing your belly.

Another image: breathe *into* your own body, not just outwards. This is inspired by the “elevator breath” method used in vocal training.

Internal Resonance

- For **low notes**, resonate as if saying a deep “Oooh” in your chest — try vocalising it to feel the sternum vibrate. (When I explain to Japanese students, I say like “Yooo” of the No theatre)
- For **high notes**, imagine the air flowing through your nasal cavity and resonating toward the back of your head. It's subtle but helps create a clear, ringing tone.

Also, relax your jaw and focus on the openness around your **temporomandibular joint** (jaw hinge). Resonance requires **relaxation**, not force.

High notes often tempt players to tense up. But remember: it's not about pressure or narrowing the oral cavity. It's about **increasing the speed and direction** of air while maintaining internal space.

Long Tones as Sound Meditation

When you fully focus on breath flow and inner resonance, long tones become a kind of **sound meditation**.

Let your sound feel good to produce — not tense or forced.

The result is not just a rich tone, but a state of flow — where you might begin to hear imaginary streams, soft wind, or the distant ring of temple chimes...

Practice with Imagination

Even the most technical practice must be infused with imagination. A “neutral” or “stable” tone may be functionally correct, but if it lacks inspiration, it risks becoming **emotionally empty**.

For example, in arpeggio practice, precision is important — but consider the **harmonic color** too. C–E–G doesn’t feel the same as A–C–E. Try playing the chord on a keyboard, or practice with a drone or pedal note to develop harmonic awareness.

Even a single long tone can change drastically depending on its imagined context:

- A note following the sound of a **drum hit**
- A note echoing after the **soft ring of a bell**
- A note rising as **wind flows**
- A note embedded in a **string orchestra backdrop**

Let each note have **a story, a purpose, a sound world**.

With imagination and awareness, long tones become one of the **richest, most expressive practices** — even for advanced musicians.