



Expressive Nature, Dynamic Life, Making Art • Perils and Power

Innately Expressive Beings: We are communicating beings. Our survival depends on our ability to express our needs and understand the needs of others. Expressing needs, wants, ideas, our experiences is foundational to life. Making art is an extension of this need to communicate, to tell stories, to understand and be understood.

Performers predicament: Some of the most common statements I hear from singers/conductors are: “I need to be more expressive.” “My expression interferes with my tone/my gesture.” The predicament seems to be:

- a. When there is free and natural expression the structure/instrument is contorted.
- b. When there is an attempt to keep the structure from contorting, like working on posture, free and natural expression is constrained.

Emotion and Culture. In order to be safe and appropriate in a social system our system holds back our free flow of emotional expression. We have executive function to inhibit our emotional reaction to keep ourselves and others safe. We don’t throw the baby out the window. We don’t hit another person. We don’t dissolve in tears on the bus. We don’t laugh at another person when they fall.

The Invisible Confusion. The result of this important aspect of social life is that we confuse the feeling of holding back the full expression of an emotion with feeling the emotion.

Say the following phrases with the emotion that goes with them:

1. Please, NOOO don’t let this be true. This can’t be true. NO No no.
2. WATCH OUT! STOP! RATTLE SNAKE!
3. Oh Wow, This amaaazing! I love this. I want some more, yum, delicious.

Each phrase may feel totally different to you: shock and grief, fear and warning, pleasure. Is there an underlying common sensation? Say them again.

Notice that there is a slight bound, grip to each one. If you didn’t notice it. Say them again. It is like a holding in, or holding back. This is our social appropriate inhibitor in action. This grip of holding back feels like authentically communicating the emotion. We confuse the grip, the bound sensation, with the feeling of the emotion.

This grip to feel is the aspect of ‘natural’ expression that interferes with our structure, our instrument. **It isn’t emotion that interferes with voice or gesture, it is the holding back of the emotion that interferes.**

Expressive Affinities. Our comfort range with emotional expression is determined by our cultural background, family background, life experiences and our nature. We all have a comfort range and affinities.

Artistic Expression. The beauty of artistic expression is that it is a social situation in which it is safe to let expression flow freely. In fact, free flow of expression is an essential requirement of art. The story you are telling is often rooted in culture and experience that isn’t yours. The job of an artist demands a larger expressive range, usually beyond your affinities. Just as you have a vocal comfort range, a tessitura, you have an emotional, expressive comfort range or tessitura of emotion. Just as you can develop your range vocally you can expand your expressive range.



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Postural Manipulation. One strategy people use to support free expression is to work directly on freeing the body and having good posture. When you understand how your system is always in the coordination of your attention and intention you have the information to understand why manipulating your body, whether it is by trying to 'relax' or trying to 'have good posture', doesn't generally work.

- You can't hold back emotion and be relaxed.
- You can't be free to express when your sternum is held.

Understanding Dynamics of Expression to Free Yourself from the Performers Predicament.

Alphabet of Expression • Expanding my expressive palate so I have more choice • Detecting my limits so I can choose to expand range if I am ready.

Tell a story. *It was a dark and stormy night. We all sat around the campfire and the Captain said "Tell us one of those good old fashion stories." And Jack began.*

Words are louder, softer, lingered upon, brisk, dwindled, boomed. Depending on how you say one word it can convey many meanings. The body is hunched, poised, sharp, languid, big, shrunk. Depending on what is happening in your face, body and movement one word can convey many meanings.

Non-verbal Communication. You have something to say and your system changes tone, shape, energy, direction, phrasing of your words and body. You are expressing. If you are listening to someone you pick up those cues, interpret them and communication occurs. Most of what is happening in communication is happening in the other-than-conscious part of our system. The meaning your system makes of someone else's expression comes primarily from the tone of voice, the visual cues of body and face and only a tiny part of your understanding comes from the meaning of the words themselves.

Elements of Expression. These changes in shape, direction, energy are the elements or ingredients of expression. You can define them. They are what allows computer engineered voices to sound expressive and animated objects to look alive and express feelings. If an object turns to each side in short darting actions while moving slowly forward, we pick-up a cautious, sneaky creature. Combination of dynamic and spatial elements communicate emotion.

Dynamics. Moving through the activities of everyday life demands a wide range of dynamic responses. When you shovel snow, you are in a different dynamic organization than when you are hanging a fragile ornament. You use your energy differently. Dynamic change is a natural part of life. The movements for the tasks of life are the same ingredients we use for emotional expression. Dynamics in the music are the cues to communicate the emotional story of your song. Dynamic cues in music, whether added by composer or editor, are serving the telling of the story.

The challenge for an artist is to have authentic feeling and expression without interfering with the instrument. Artistic expression doesn't need to contain or control. The flow can be open and free and powerful.

Exploring the elements of dynamic movement is a powerful tool for:

- Allowing the flow of feeling and expression in order to have an unimpeded instrument
- Expand your comfort zone or your tessitura of expression
- Gain another way to gather information about the piece you are exploring by changing dynamics as you explore it.



We all have dynamic qualities that are more comfortable to do than others. We call this our dynamic affinity. You may be quick, direct and strong while someone else tends to be indirect and sustained and light. Characters also have affinities. To be a facile artist it is essential to have access to a wide range of dynamic choices. Similar to expanding your vocal range, you can also exercise your dynamic range. Below is a process for expanding your range in the elements of expression as a tool for expanding your comfort zone, a pathfinder for developing freedom in expression and deepening interpretative possibilities. It helps you have more expressive options available to you as you traverse and engage in the telling of the myriad stories of art.

Laban Movement Analysis describes a wide range of dynamic qualities. It breaks dynamics down into single elements and then combinations of elements. Real movement is always a combination of elements. As you explore different dynamic elements you'll notice that different dynamics evoke different emotions, different emotions evoke different movements. It feels different to punch than it does to tap; it feels different to float than to wring.

Consider:

1. Exploring through movement and/or sounding the single dynamic elements and their combinations.
2. Can you tell which elements are easier than others? Identify your affinities this way.
3. Make a mixed playlist of a wide range of dynamic music and dance to it.
4. Singing a piece changing the dynamics in your body and notice how the change effects the sound, your feeling or anything else.

Dynamics in Laban Movement Analysis are described as follows:

- **Time** continuum: quick and sustained

Quick is time cut in small pieces; sustained is continuous relationship to time.

Example would be cutting a carrot versus smoothing a blanket

- **Force** continuum (Weight is Laban word): strong and light

Strength is using your forces for effecting action; light is using less force to effect a less demanding action.

Example would be shoveling versus catching a bubble.

- **Space or direction** continuum: direct and indirect

Direct is going from point a to b; indirect is meandering from point a to b.

Examples are shooting an arrow, kid in candy shop being sidetracked along the way.

- **Flow** Continuum: bound and free

Flow is more about perceiving interference with emotional freedom than it is an element to exercise.

Flow is about muscle tone. Bound is held stiff; free is out of control.

Examples are a robot compared to someone drunk.

These 3 core continuums, (Time, force and space), combine in movements like:

Dab—quick, direct, light

Flick—quick, direct, strong

Wring—sustained, indirect, strong

Glide—sustained, direct, light

Float—sustained, indirect, light



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Press—sustained, direct, strong

Punch—quick, direct, strong

Slash—quick, indirect, strong

Body Mind Centering™ work explores dynamic expression through what they call the ‘mind’ of our tissues. Imagine moving from your:

- Bones—the scarecrow in the wizard of oz—freedom
- Muscles—rich, strong movement, tiger—rhythm, power
- Organs—belly dance—emotion
- Lymph—clear, direct movement like karate-boundaries
- Fat—hula dance—sensuality

There are many more possible tissues to root yourself in for dynamic qualities, character and expanding your potential.

Shaping your body is also another doorway to explore your freedom of expression. Make a big shape with your body, then a small, crunched shape, then a middle range. Notice how shaping your body makes you feel. Sing a piece as you change shape. Notice how the shaping changes how you understand the piece.