

EXERCISES TO DEVELOP THE SAITO TECHNIQUE

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The basis of technique in the Saito method is control of acceleration and deceleration in the conducting motion. The basic skill in the Saito Conducting method is the arm drop. By allowing the arm to fall by the force of gravity alone physical effort is reduced and even the loudest sounds can be shown with ease. Precision in the motion and artistic expression result from the timing of the drop and control over the rate of acceleration. The size of the arm drop and rates of acceleration and deceleration can show the articulation, dynamics, character of the sound or timbre.

Students of the Saito method usually begin with an arm swing and gradually learn the feeling and timing of the arm drop. Practice the following exercise. Begin with the feet spread at shoulder width to provide stability as the arm is swung forward and backward in a large arc. The arm, outstretched and free of tension, should be placed in an erect, balanced position above the head. From that position, the arm is allowed to fall forward and downward in an accelerating, swinging motion. The arm continues upward in a natural, relaxed follow-through, and decelerates, until it reaches the original upright position. Rotate slightly at the waist to avoid hitting your leg with your hand.

Learn the arm drop by practicing the following exercises. Sit with a stack of pillows placed on your lap and allow your arm to collapse into them from the erect, balanced position above your head. Then practice making an upward-bursting motion from waist height. While standing, stretch out your arm as if to open a door and then suddenly and briefly contract the brachioradialis muscle in your lower arm. This contraction will jerk the arm upward causing a slight bend at the elbow. Immediately following the initial burst, the arm muscle should be relaxed and the arm allowed to "float" upward. After floating to the head position, the arm is allowed to fall and bounce once, as if rebounding on an imaginary trampoline positioned at waist height before being shot upward again by another muscle contraction. This exercise creates a usable two beat pattern. If you allow your arm to decelerate too rapidly it will stop for part of the beat and make the motion appear jerky. Enlarge the motion in a gentle glide or pretend to stretch a weak elastic band to make the deceleration even.

Prof. Saito called the swinging motion Shakui (SHA KWEE). It resembles that of a pendulum with regular and even acceleration and deceleration. Use the following exercise to feel the transition from acceleration to deceleration at the bottom of the downward motion. Place the music rack of a Manhasset type music stand in a flat horizontal position with the lip of the rack turned away from you. The stand should be adjusted to a position slightly above waist height to provide a "target" at the bottom of the field of beat. Imagine three spots on the rack. The first is on the far left, the second is in the middle and the third is on the far right. Using the three-beat Shakui pattern allow your arm to swoop downward to the targets, brushing each lightly at the bottom of the motion. The brushing will occur at the Point, the transition where the motion begins to decelerate. The motion in this exercise resembles that of a child swinging and lightly touching his feet on the ground at each pass. Adjust the music stand carefully to assure that it is at the proper height.

The following exercises show the importance of acceleration and deceleration in conducting gestures and the relationship between before-Point and after-Point motions. Set a metronome to sixty beats per minute and, using wrist motion, tap your hand on a table at that speed. First, make the upward and downward motions at an even speed without acceleration or deceleration. In the Saito method this motion is called Heikin Undo (HAY KEEN OON DOE). Next, decelerate the

upward motion and delay the downward motion so that you will have to accelerate rapidly to reach the Point on time. This delay should cause you to strike the table harder, creating a heavier accent. This resembles Tataki (TAW TAW KEY). Then, reverse the procedure by lifting your hand rapidly as if pulling away from a hot stove and then decelerating gradually so that you touch the table again coincident with the next tick of the metronome. At the instant the hand touches it should be suddenly pulled away again and the cycle repeated. This motion is called Haneage (HAW NAY AW GAY). Although the three motions, Heikin Undo, Tataki and Haneage, are at the same tempo each serves a different purpose.

Be aware that some motions, such as Tataki and Shakui, are used to forcibly impose a Point while others, such as Haneage, confirm an established pulse by moving along with it. By combining a variety of gestures you can clearly convey your artistic ideas.