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MY STORY

"You can't play an instrument without your body!"

I am a professional musician, the clarinetist and executive director of the Orion Ensemble, founded in 1992. We tour throughout North America, present three series each year in the Chicago metropolitan area, and perform a live, internationally broadcast series on WFMT, Fine Arts Radio in Chicago. I am also Principal Clarinetist of the Lake Forest Symphony, and frequently perform with the Lyric Opera, Grant Park Symphony, Ravinia Festival Orchestra and the Chicago Symphony. In addition, I serve on the faculty of the Wheaton College Conservatory of Music.

In 2004, the Hal Leonard Corporation released my solo album of selected Bach unaccompanied cello and violin suites and sonatas transcribed for the clarinet by Himie Voxman. This represents the first time these transcriptions have been presented in a recording by a clarinetist.

My passion for my work has been boundless since the age of six, when I became inspired to become a musician. However, because of

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inflammatory conditions throughout my training and career, playing my instrument often entailed a great deal of pain and suffering. In my early twenties, whenever I practiced for long periods, I regularly experienced pain in my shoulders, arms and fingers. This would come and go depending on my repertoire and performance schedule. I never thought much about these symptoms because they would “go away.” At age 25, I developed TMJ syndrome, a painful inflammation that prevented me from opening my mouth—definitely an impediment for a clarinet player! I looked at more efficient ways to use my embouchure—the crucial facial muscles that wind players use to produce a beautiful sound—and began using a mouth guard at night to prevent my jaw muscles from clenching and the consequent inflammation.

It was during my late 20s, when I was playing in the Chicago Civic Orchestra, that my symptoms began to frighten me. My neck and back started to hurt, and my arms, hands and fingers had numbness and shooting pain. I had to quit playing for about a month and found only temporary relief from my symptoms through measures recommended by medical doctors familiar with musicians’ problems.

During this time, I was in the midst of auditions. Before the Milwaukee Symphony principal clarinet audition, I had to lie on ice cubes for relief from intense pain in my upper back. Luckily, I started working with a good chiropractor. I also studied the Alexander Technique, began regular massage therapy, used ice to help prevent and treat any inflammations, and supported my instrument with an ergonomic neck strap while resting the bell of the clarinet on my legs. These therapies helped to heal my body and became my prescription for taking care of myself and dealing with pain in my neck, shoulders and arms.

In my mid-thirties my career began to develop in many exciting ways. Besides orchestral work and teaching, I helped found the Orion Ensemble. However, I was plagued with a feeling of stiffness in my arms and back. I did not want to ignore this new symptom for fear of more serious complications. I found that by adding a regular yoga routine paired with muscle-balancing exercises to my daily fitness regi-

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men, I was much more limber. I literally became an expert on body-use and body-balancing techniques and the benefits of chiropractic care and massage therapy. I thought I could handle any pain!

I should also point out that I became deeply interested in nutrition at this time and sought answers to the question, “What is the most nutritious diet that I can follow?” I embraced the popular guidelines for healthy eating: lots of salads, whole wheat breads, vegetables and fruits along with some meat, chicken and eggs. I bought mostly organic foods at the health food store. I also took a carefully chosen array of vitamin and mineral supplements, including a whole food supplement called “Super Blue-Green Algae,” which was touted as being the greatest super-food known to man! My only vices were a few cookies and one cup of coffee a day. I wanted to be as healthy as possible, to feel my best and keep up with the physical demands of performance.

When I was 42, I realized I was developing acid reflux disease, a condition in which stomach acid is released up through the esophagus, causing damage to the esophageal lining. I constantly felt the need to burp, which resulted in the horrible feel and taste of stomach acid rising into my throat. With observation and personal experimentation I discovered that if I didn’t eat wheat, my symptoms would go away. I began following the principles of the “blood-type diet,” which for me, a type-O, meant eating more meat, fish, vegetables and fruit, drinking herbal and green teas instead of coffee, and switching from wheat to rice, rye crackers and wheat-free cookies—it was worth the sacrifice to feel better. I had made so many changes over the years to be “healthy,” I could certainly do this!

My new diet gave me some relief, but it was no cure. By age 45, my right arm and shoulder were hurting all the time. No matter what I did—chiropractic, massage therapy, stretching—all of the things I knew—the discomfort was constant. During the next few months I developed an inflammation in my spine that made it very difficult and painful to use my hands and fingers. If I used my arms to carry my compact clarinet case, lift a load of laundry or wash the floor, I

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experienced an increase in pain intensity for several days. At the time, I was playing in the backstage orchestra with the Lyric Opera of Chicago and preparing for five performances of the Brahms Quintet plus a multitude of other important concerts. My pain horrified me. What would the answer be this time—or would there be an answer? Would my career be over? I was at the height of my profession—I had worked for so many years—and I didn't want to do anything else.

My chiropractor, Dr. John Turner, helped me to find the source of this inflammatory condition as well as the key to what had happened in years past. His diagnosis: an allergy or sensitivity to gluten called celiac disease. This disease often goes undiagnosed for many years until the symptoms become quite serious. With this sensitivity, gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye and barley, causes intestinal damage, which leads to digestive malabsorption and eventually severe malnourishment. A mere *microgram* of gluten can cause intestinal damage in people with celiac disease. When my pain reached its peak, I was only eating one or two rye crackers a day and no wheat at all. However, this dietary practice followed a lifetime of gluten consumption. I learned that gluten sensitivity is becoming extremely common, along with digestion and malabsorption problems.

My next self-imposed discipline was complete avoidance of foods containing gluten. This, by the way, is no easy task as many foods you would never suspect contain gluten, even drinks such as herbal teas and coffee substitutes with “roasted barley malt.” I studied the celiac disease list of “foods that contain gluten” with a fine-tooth comb so that I would not accidentally ingest even a microgram of the forbidden substance. Eating out posed unique challenges! At the same time, I gave up all sugar. After avoiding gluten and sugar completely for two weeks, I began to experience an unusual burning sensation on my skin from the top of my head all the way down to my toes, along with a feeling of nausea. This lasted for about three weeks. I learned that these sensations were a sign of detoxification. Although frightened, I accepted this as evidence that my body was going through a profound healing process. When you have an allergy or sensitivity to

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a food, you actually crave that food, and its use causes a drug-like addiction. The burning sensations were a sign of a drug withdrawal.

After following a gluten-free and sugar-free diet for about a month, all the inflammatory symptoms in my spine disappeared. The summer was wonderful! I was pain-free for the first time in a year and my practicing gave me great joy.

However, when my teaching and my performing schedule began in the fall, a new problem appeared: diarrhea. I was going to the bathroom about six or seven times a day, losing weight steadily, unable to sleep and feeling quite weak. More frightening was the fact that my embouchure was shaking uncontrollably. I could not even play one line of music without feeling that my sound was out of control. I was preparing to perform the Hindemith Quartet in our chamber music series and on WFMT Fine Arts Radio. The Hindemith Quartet requires more endurance than almost any other piece in our repertoire. I also had a challenging week playing with the orchestra. What in the world could be wrong with me now? I had been eating a completely nutritious diet. Why was I still so sick?

My chiropractor explained that my allergy had been causing intestinal damage for many years and that I had a long-term problem with malabsorption and its related malnourishment—that, even though I was eating a superb diet, it would take significant time for the digestive track to heal. I was literally *starving*. In terms of traditional acupuncture, embouchure shaking relates to the “digestion meridian” in the body. Because I was still in a very depleted state, the stability of my embouchure was affected. My insomnia was also related to my digestion problem. My doctor prescribed a new supplement with concentrated nutrition made from fish protein, which could be absorbed through the blood stream and could help heal my intestinal lining. This supplement, although very nutritious, was not enough to change my symptoms as quickly as I needed. I sought more information to correct my digestive disorder.

It was at this point in my odyssey that I discovered the work of Jordan Rubin, who nearly died and then recovered from a severe di-

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gestive disorder called Crohn's disease. The pianist in our chamber group, Diana Schmück, gave me his book, *Patient Heal Thyself*, which describes his descent into malnutrition hell, an experience that mirrored my own, including his frequent trips to the bathroom! I followed his plan for improving digestion. I started taking a concentrated whole-food supplement called Perfect Food, which offered an easy-to-digest source of concentrated nutrition. I began a superior powdered enzyme supplement, called Omega-Zyme, which helped my digestive system break down the foods that I was eating. I added a homeostatic soil organism supplement (HSO) called Primal Defense, as well as coconut oil, which helped me develop a healthy intestinal bacterial flora. I also added cod liver oil, which supplies the fats necessary for the proper digestion of foods and the fat-soluble nutrients needed for the assimilation of nutrients. Using Jordan's protocol I soon felt improvement. I stopped going to the bathroom so many times, and my embouchure gradually regained stability. Jordan's work helped me define the first principle of my recovery: establishing a healthy digestive ecosystem.

The second principle involves easy-to-digest foods that provide the gut with the nutrients it needs to heal. . . unfortunately the diet I considered so healthy was not providing these foods. My introduction to these foods came through the work of Dr. Weston Price, DDS, and his book *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration*. During the 1930s, Price traveled worldwide and carefully studied fourteen healthy isolated populations untouched by modern civilization, from isolated Swiss and Irish to Eskimos, Peruvian Indians and Africans. While their diets differed in exact details, all contained distinct common characteristics which, without exception, had given them vibrant health from generation to generation. Price analyzed their foods and found that they were very rich in vitamins and minerals and extremely rich in two specific vitamins, A and D. Price developed a therapy involving a combination of high-vitamin cod liver oil and high-vitamin butter oil, which he found miraculously effective for healing the tendons, muscles, nerves. . . and the gut.

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I then applied Price's principles of a nutrient-dense diet by obtaining naturally raised meats, eggs, raw dairy and poultry from a cooperative of farmers dedicated to raising their animals on pasture. (Pasture-raising maximizes the nutrients in our food, especially the fat-soluble vitamins like A and D in the animal fats.) I began, for the first time in my life, to drink clean raw milk (made into a fermented drink called kefir) and experience raw cream, cheese and butter—all traditional foods that had nourished healthy populations for thousands of years, but ones we now mostly avoid due to the mistaken notion that these high-fat foods are bad for us. I began the high-vitamin cod liver oil and high-vitamin butter oil therapy. I also learned traditional techniques of preserving food through lacto-fermentation, a process that was used universally before refrigeration and is still practiced in nonindustrialized cultures. I prepared lacto-fermented foods such as sauerkraut and a medicinal drink called beet kvass from traditional recipes. They provided enzymes, beneficial bacteria, lactic acid and many nutrients in easily assimilated form, all of which benefit the digestive tract. These extremely nutritious foods and supplements became the backbone of my healing regimen.

By the time of my Hindemith performances, I was well enough to play. I gradually put on the weight that I had lost, was able to get restful sleep at night, and could tell that my body was beginning to absorb more of the incredible nutrients in my diet. There is a saying, *"It's not what you eat, it's what you absorb."* I truly learned that truth first hand. How many years had my body been unable to absorb the nutrients in the foods I was eating? I suspect it may have been my entire life!

Even though I was much better, I still experienced some symptoms of long-term malnourishment. I was preparing to play a sonata in our series and was doing about 15 minutes of practicing while standing every day—I generally play orchestral and chamber music in a seated position. After my second month of preparation, I experienced quite a bit of pain in my right shoulder. Apparently, even though I had used a neckstrap, the pressure from pushing my instrument for-

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ward in a standing position without the benefit of leg support caused a soft tissue injury in my shoulder due to my body's still depleted condition. Then, in trying to stretch the tight muscles in that area, I actually sprained my neck! Just to be sure I didn't have a disc problem in my neck, I underwent testing and was relieved to learn that my cervical vertebrae had excellent spacing. But this very painful sprain and soft tissue injury took about six months to heal.

This injury convinced me that I should fine-tune my dietary approach by seeking consultation with a doctor who specialized in treating chronic illness with a traditional diet. I began to work with Dr. Ron Schmid, a naturopathic physician from Connecticut, who had 25 years of experience specializing in healing chronic illness through traditional foods and the principles of Dr. Weston Price. Dr. Schmid had recovered from a serious digestive disorder many years earlier, and his recovery inspired him to become a naturopathic physician. With the aid of a special blood test to help determine my health status, he was able to help recommend a few additional dietary measures that enabled my final recovery. Under Dr. Schmid's care, I continued the primitive diet that I had already developed from my own research, but with some changes: I significantly increased the amount of clean raw milk kefir from pastured cows in place of fruit or nut snacks; added homemade gelatin-rich bone broths to my diet; eliminated even gluten-free grains such as rice from my diet; doubled my dose of cod-liver oil and high-vitamin butter oil; began special vitamin E and vitamin C supplements, plus additive-free calcium/magnesium, a multi-vitamin and milk thistle supplements which Dr. Schmid developed; and took two other supplements to help build my depleted adrenal glands.

Within two weeks of these additional measures, I was totally pain-free and felt a heightened sense of well-being. It was so exciting to feel well! I knew these additional details were the missing elements in my path to optimal health.

Dr. Schmid explained that my embouchure-shaking symptom was very serious. Had I not taken the steps to heal this symptom, I

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could have become gravely ill.

It took well over a year-and-a-half to recover completely, and I continue to notice improvements in my health. I now follow a gluten-free, nutrient dense, high-enzyme diet that includes an abundance of foods to maintain the healthy bacterial flora in my digestive track. I make sure my diet contains optimal amounts of vitamins A and D. My diet includes a wide variety of specific high-quality unprocessed fats and oils that promote good digestion and assimilation, cell building, repair and a healthy nervous system. In addition, I include bone-broth soups in my diet daily and eat meat, poultry, dairy and eggs from traditionally-raised pasture-fed animals. I eat absolutely no refined foods of any kind.

My lifetime passion spent as an artist and teacher is far too precious to lose. My goal is to continue performing for many years to come. But I can't play music without my body! I am grateful to be playing my instrument, performing and enjoying life—pain-free!

