

## Catherine Cho: On Developing Great Rhythm (and Why Old-School Metronomes Are the Way to Go)

### Description

I've accumulated a number of metronomes over the years. My first one, which still sits on our piano today (and which my daughter sneakily keeps unplugging), is this giant black brick of a thing, and seems to vibrate and generate this whirring sound inside that you can hear between clicks.

I also still have my good old Dr. Beat, which remains in mint condition after some 30 years...having spent most of that time hidden away in the back of a drawer.

Needless to say, I was never a fan of metronome practice. In hindsight, I think some of this resistance was due to my not really knowing how to do it, or why it mattered. Specifically, I don't know if I really appreciated the difference between playing in *time* – and playing with a strong sense of *rhythm*.

Because practicing to play in time feels like a total chore. But cultivating a stronger sense of rhythm, on the other hand, feels more like you're getting closer to the essence of the music. And that's way more engaging and fun to work on.

So...how does one work on rhythm, and learn to do metronome practice the “right” way?

### Meet Catherine Cho

Violinist [Catherine Cho](#) is a member of the string and chamber music faculty at The Juilliard School. A prizewinner in the '91 Hannover and '89 Queen Elisabeth competitions, and a frequent guest with “Musicians from Marlboro,” she has also collaborated with many renowned artists and performed with orchestras around the world.

In this 36-min chat, we'll explore:

- The 4 elements that she feels are essential in her personal practice regimen (1:47)
- Why metronome practice often doesn't work, how to solve this issue, and why she likes the old-school “pendulum” metronomes best (4:56)
- Why she uses her feet (or encourages students to use theirs) to find the right rhythm or pulse (10:02)
- A cool technique to keep the two sides of the body in sync, and prevent one hand from playing faster than the other (14:01)
- Why slow practice should involve a “magnification” of your musical ideas, not a decrease in expression (16:48)
- How she maintains a sense of perspective and avoids getting all tight and paranoid when working on intonation (18:32)

- Why she thinks it's really helpful to focus each lesson around a single goal (22:11)
- The two themes she keeps coming back to in her teaching (26:18)
- How she became more physically aware as a player, and appreciative of the mind-body-spirit connection, in both managing and preventing injuries (27:58)
- A simple, but game-changing question that helps her be more effective with her time (31:51)
- How to breathe more effectively while playing, without suffering from paralysis by analysis – and the benefits of *exhaling*, rather than inhaling, before giving a cue and playing the first note (32:29)
- Her thoughts about the Instant Pot, and her favorite thing to make in a crock pot (recipe below in the notes!) (35:02)

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**Noa:** I'm usually curious mostly about practice to start with, because it seems like everybody has different personal practice, favorite methods. Like some people really like slow practice, other people really like the metronome. Some people do not like slow practice. Some people do not like the metronome.

**Noa:** Things change, I think, over time, as you get older you get more experienced. I'm curious about what, over your career and all the performing you've done, are your key principles for what you need to do to really feel confident and prepared going into a performance.

**Catherine:** For me personally, if I don't have a lot of time, I need to break up my practice into four parts. The first part always includes playing my scales. If I don't play my scales and some double stops, like slowly and really listening, I don't feel pure and cleansed and I just need that.

**Catherine:** Then I always do a few exercises, bowing exercises. I have to do my yoga. I have to get physically in good condition to be better focused, because otherwise my practice, I find is useless actually. I think the busier we get, the more efficient we need to be, so for me it's all about efficiency. I do my stretches, do my scales, double stops and then if ... it depends if I'm performing a concerto, I always need to practice slowly let's say, and I'm talking about a quarter tempo, half tempo slowly from beginning to end, if it's something I know really well.

**Catherine:** That way I feel connected physically and mentally to the music, study the score. Most of the music that you've played a lot, you don't need to practice that many times, but there's certain kind of cleansing routines that I feel like I have to do, otherwise I can't be efficient. That's my personal need.

**Catherine:** For my students, I do recommend the same, even if it's something brand new, is the organization of practicing in different ways, 'cause I think when people get too focused on the piece itself, they actually lose perspective. I do recommend for everyone to have that variation. It's good for their focus. If they're not listening, I always say to them to stop practicing, because if you can't really listen, then you're not really using your time well.

**Noa:** Just want to make sure I got the four parts. 'Cause I got the scales, was double stops the separate part. Or was that like a ...

**Catherine:** Yeah, scales are one part, double stops is another, and then the next one will be some sort of bowing exercises, and then the practicing slowly. I guess maybe the holistic aspect of doing something physical to prepare yourself could be the fifth part or could be as part of scales.

**Noa:** Does that come immediately before ... is that I get my body warmed up and kind of lubricated kind of thing before playing?

**Catherine:** Yeah, I get my body and mostly my mind lubricated too. Sometimes I drop down to the floor and I do some yoga in between one of those four things if I'm feeling like I'm not there yet. I've already started practicing my scales and I'll put my fiddle down, drop down and do some downward dog, and then go back to it.

**Noa:** When you say bowing exercises, could you say more about what that looks like? Are they like your own inventions?

**Catherine:** No, they're things that I've learned from the Galamian method, from Ruggiero Ricci, my teacher from my teenage years, I always do some sort of martelé and marcato strokes because I think that has a short shelf life. If you don't practice them, I feel like my articulation goes out the window. I do some kind of consonants and vowel practice.

**Noa:** And then the slow practice, I'm assuming that's with metronome or ...

**Catherine:** I'm a firm believer in the metronome that makes the sounds and also waves its arms around like the pendulum metronome, but I also like to practice without so I don't use that as a crutch or a substitute for feeling the rhythm.

**Catherine:** Nowadays I practice most of the time without the metronome, but I did a lot of metronome work growing up, so for my students I recommend like 50/50, because I think if they don't use the metronome at all, usually you lose perspective, and if you use it only, then you also lose perspective.

**Noa:** When they do use metronome, is it smaller beats or bigger beats?

**Catherine:** Both.

**Noa:** Both of them.

**Catherine:** And when you do bigger beats, making sure you still feel the small beats, 'cause if they practice with only small beats, usually they start to lose a sense of pulse because everything becomes too equal with the metronome.

**Catherine:** It's important to have the idea that the idea that flashes at you, especially, those are just beats. Until you organize then, they're not a rhythm. I think it's important to remember that you're actually looking

for rhythm and not just beats when you think of metronome.

**Noa:** Could you say more about the ... 'cause I know what you mean like the old school metronomes with the thingie that actually goes from side to side. Is there a particular reason why that one is preferred?

**Catherine:** I really feel like there's something about the visualization of the pendulum swing that assists people with finding their own internal pulse and rhythm and feeling of swing. Also, that helps to already organization a beat in certain sense because you have one on one side, and one on the other, so it groups it into a pulse.

**Catherine:** I have one in my closet. It's purple and it's broken slightly, so it's uneven pulse, but I still make my students use it so they can sense it. You do the walking method. You walk with the pulse and that helps you organize your beats into a rhythm also. I find that it's a lot quicker than when people use their light metronomes.

**Catherine:** Usually they start to play very stagnantly actually. They'll be exactly with the metronome, but they feel no pulse or rhythm whatsoever. I've decided to just stop using it altogether.

**Noa:** I never thought about that. That's really interesting because when you see the thing, you can guess when it's gonna click, and then you know when it's gonna click. It gives you a lot more information in between.

**Catherine:** Yeah.

**Noa:** That's really cool.

**Catherine:** Right, because a lot of what happens in the rhythm is what's between the beats, and it's that organization that changes the energy between beats. I find a lot of kids are using the lights, and I watch them, and they go, "Well, I practice with the metronome, and I worked my tempo up, and now it's not getting any better," and I say, "Okay, show me how you practice," and I watch them. You can see there's a stagnation in the connection to the pulse, and thus the music. If you're disconnected from the music, your practice isn't helping you to make music.

**Catherine:** I think that's one of the problems with the metronome being used as a crutch or a substitute. It's very useful, but if used well.

**Noa:** Do they still make those?

**Catherine:** Yes.

**Noa:** Do they really?

**Catherine:** Yup, I have one in my closet. Amazon.com still sells those, but actually it was not that easy to find in a store. I couldn't find one. I had a wooden one that you wind up.

**Noa:** Oh, wow. Do you think ... is it perfectly linear in the motion, or is it ... doesn't really matter if it is or

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isn't. It might just be interesting to know.

**Catherine:** Yeah, it would be interesting to know, but I can tell you from experience that none of my metronomes have been exact. I know that for a fact, but I still feel that it affected my sense of pulse to have one. Every single one I've had has been slightly lopsided.

**Noa:** Well, and the reason why I'm kind of thinking, I don't know if this is true, but I think it may not matter in a sense that it's still gonna hit in a predictable time, right?

**Catherine:** Yeah.

**Noa:** So it's still gonna be in rhythm as it were, even if it's not precise time.

**Catherine:** And symmetrical, yeah. Exactly.

**Noa:** I think that may be is what your speaking to as far as pulse goes. It's like you get an up beat and then you know where the down beat's gonna be based on the up beat, even if it's not a metronomically precise unit of time.

**Catherine:** Right. That's likewise with conducting, so when I talk to my students about conducting the music themselves, I always say, "Well you should know how you're going to play the down beat by the up beat that you're having me." When you're playing with the bow, too, it's the same idea.

**Catherine:** Your up beat will inform of us on your down beat, inform you and your pianist or your quartet members, so I think the metronome, as you're saying, does a similar thing, as you can sort of sense how the next beat is going to feel. That's the hope.

**Noa:** Right, right. Well, Julie Landsman talks about subdivisions and pulse as far as how she plays, and even swims, I think she said in 12/8. I've heard of people running in rhythm and so forth.

**Noa:** She actually actively keeps this pulse going on in her head. Is that how you do it as well, or is there a different way in which you've internalized the sense of pulse and rhythm and timing?

**Catherine:** That's fascinating. There was a time where I used to practice ... it's a little different, I used to practice walking in different tempo markings at home, but also on my way to the subway, and also in the lessons, when people couldn't find an andante, say, "Okay, let's walk in andante style, and see what that means," as opposed to just trying to find a metronome marking 60, but see what that style is.

**Catherine:** It's really interesting how different people have a different sense of andante, right, and for some people they just can't find it for a long time. You have to just keep working on it. I find that eventually people will find the character of a tempo marking, 'cause I think it's really important to know when you see a tempo marking.

**Catherine:** Well what does that capture? What is that telling us in terms of the character, the music, not just it's a number. That's at least how I used to use walking.

**Noa:** Like meaning you would be seeing the Tchaikovsky concerto in your head as you're walking, in the way that you walk.

**Catherine:** Yeah, or if I'm working with a student on finding an accelerando into a presto, for example, well let's conduct it, but let's also march it into that characterization as a way of embodying the pulse.

**Catherine:** I find that the feet are very useful, 'cause sometimes people can't feel it in their arms, so if you go to their feet first, inevitably they will find it, and then they can connect that embodiment of the music to their upper body, which is a lot of what we have to use holding the violin and bow.

**Catherine:** I like to go to the feet.

**Noa:** I imagine it's harder to move abruptly with your feet, but like you can do it abruptly with your upper body, but with the feet, so maybe that helps to make sure things are kind of organically tied together.

**Catherine:** Yeah, and it's also really easy to be in one tempo in one hand, and another tempo on the other.

**Noa:** Right.

**Catherine:** We work a lot on that. That happens a lot in fiddle playing I find, is one hand will be considerably faster than the other, or one hand will move a little bit ahead of the other, but all the time. It throws off the flow and rhythm of the other hand, so finding that collaboration is important.

**Noa:** How do you get them to do that?

**Catherine:** We clap. I always say to them, "We don't clap with one hand encroaching the other. We usually go with the two hands together in the middle." Everyone always laughs, but I say, "Let's actually practice that," and then we start clapping together, and they feel that your rhythm is coming from the center of their body more. Then I'll have them apply it to the instrument, but without holding the instrument yet, like try to move one hand in one tempo with the fingers moving in the air, and then the bow together, and then you put the bow in the hand and do it on an air violin, and then the violin in steps.

**Catherine:** Very quickly people will find their own pulse. Little kids usually have a really good sense of that. They hear music, they immediately start to move and dance in the rhythm, and often in the character too. It's something we just have to get back in touch with that innate sense of the music.

**Noa:** You can tell when the two hands are in different tempo because it's rushing, or it's just ... like how do you, obvious question, but how do you know when that's what's happening?

**Catherine:** Sometimes the rushing it caused by that, like one hand is just a little bit ahead of the other, or they'll say, "I'm having trouble coordinating this. It doesn't sound clear." That will be another manifestation

of it. Or you'll find someone feeling very "stuck." That's one of the most common things that I hear, "Oh I feel stuck, Ms. Cho. I feel stuck on this."

**Catherine:** I'll try to figure out well, why do they feel stuck. Is it mental? Is it rhythmic? Is it physical? Are they not singing the music? A lot of these times it has to do with the rhythm, either they're not feeling any rhythm or their concept of their rhythm is in their head, and then different on one side of the body from the other, and that's what makes them feel as they say "stuck."

**Catherine:** Sometimes it also slows them down.

**Noa:** Isaac Stern once suggested, and I don't remember why, so I've sort of had to, in hindsight, make up reasons for why he said this, but he suggested, you know in a tricky passage, obviously fingering in the left hand, but also fingering along in the right hand on the bow simultaneously, and I wonder if it's related to that sort of making sure both hands are together kind of thing, instead of rushing.

**Catherine:** I'm glad to hear that quote, 'cause I've made students do that, just because I was trying to figure out a way, and I know that my reasoning for doing that was that they weren't feeling that connected rhythm on both sides, so I feel a little less crazy now.

**Noa:** Well it seems like a cool thing that helps. There are a lot of excerpts where you're string crossing, and one hand seems to be ever so slightly ahead or behind of the bow, and so it just sounds off.

**Catherine:** Also my guess would be sometimes I use it for students when they're playing Beethoven because you do wanna be able to speak the music from your bow, and it's easy for your bow to start gliding across the strings, and this sort of one-dimensional aspect because people are trying to be smooth all the time.

**Catherine:** Sometimes I have people do that so they feel enunciation, even under a slur, like a pianist does, so that pianistic approach on both hands can also help you connect to a speaking element. I can imagine that with Isaac Stern as well since he played in such a speaking way. I guess we both have to guess.

**Noa:** And the other thought that came to mind is Fleisher once said that between melody, harmony, and rhythm, he thinks rhythm is by far the most important. You've talked a little bit about rhythm, and I suspect you agree.

**Catherine:** I do.

**Noa:** I wonder if you can explain that to me, because I don't know if I could ... like I agree with that too, but I don't have a very articulate rationale for why that would be.

**Catherine:** I'm sure people would argue with me on this, and I bring that up a lot with my students. I always say to them, "It's not music until you have rhythm." My reasoning for that is I still think of, for example, a rhythm pattern as music. Then next will come the harmony.

**Catherine:** I like to think that we don't have to choose between the two, but if one had to choose, I would say that that's what leads the harmony. If you have a connection to the rhythm, that gives you the foundation on which you then build choices about what you're going to do with the harmony.

**Catherine:** But people could argue, "Well you could just have harmony, and put them together, and a zero sense of rhythm and still have music," but for me, in my own connection to what music is, that doesn't compute in my brain anyways. So, I do agree with that.

**Noa:** When you're doing slow practice, say, is there something that you do to make sure that it doesn't over time become kind of divorced from a sense of pulse or rhythm, or is that not something that one needs to worry about?

**Catherine:** I think that's very, very challenging, because it's really easy for us to get into this sterile way of practicing slowly, so I do insist, at least in my teaching, hopefully I insist on it in my own practice, to stay connected to the musical idea while you're practicing slowly.

**Catherine:** The slow practice is actually a magnification of what you're going to hear when it's in tempo, so if you're doing it quarter tempo, I always tell everyone, four times as much magnification, rather than a decrease, 'cause a lot of people end up decreasing the expression or decreasing the contour of the line, or the enunciation when they practice slowly.

**Catherine:** Then when they play faster they say they feel that they can't do the same thing that they did when they were slow, but it's because they were literally not connecting it to their vision of the future. I do think it's important to think of technique and music in a way of being inextricably linked and connected, so when you're practicing something for "technical reasons," it's because of an artistic purpose.

**Noa:** So do you mean like four times louder, maybe not literally-

**Catherine:** Or contrasting or understanding the density four times as much, because this is what ... going inside the music more deeply by going more slowly, as opposed to becoming more distant from it or detached from it.

**Noa:** Yeah, I think it's probably natural to do four times less when you get slower.

**Catherine:** Yeah, you don't have as much bow, or a lot of times we're practicing slowly, a string player's for intonation. There's nothing like practicing for intonation to make you feel extremely tight and uptight inside.

**Catherine:** I think it's really important for us to remember that intonation is inside your sound. It's part of your sound. It's part of your voice. You don't know what kind of intonation you have until you've chosen the sound you're going to use to play that note for example.

**Catherine:** I could play a note fortissimo and it'd sound like a different pitch if I play it super light, so I always think it's important for us to connect to the sound we're going to want in the future. That's how you



can choose your pitch.

**Noa:** How do you not get, like you were saying, super paranoid, and small and tight, when you're practicing intonation? That's like the primary thing that you're trying to do. How do you get away from that?

**Catherine:** Oh, that's such a huge challenge, isn't it? I think perspective is really important. I think that's why, at least for my own practice, I always have to make sure to keep perspective by practicing in different ways, so thus the four categories I was talking about.

**Catherine:** I think if you only practice your repertoire for example, you've already lost perspective. If you forget about keys and the essence of keys by not practicing your scales then it's really hard to relate the larger meaning of life and music when you're practicing your Sibelius Concerto, for example.

**Catherine:** I think it's important to have that variety of what you're practicing and also how you practice. If you only practice run throughs, you also lose perspective, right, the details. I think zooming in and zooming out helps people to keep perspective and feel a little less uptight when they're practicing intonation, which is a detail.

**Noa:** Do you mean like giving yourself permission to not necessarily always play in tune, or how do you mean perspective?

**Catherine:** But that's not the goal, is to play perfectly, right? I think it's unmusical if it's all out of tune. I think the goal is to play artistically and to speak with your true voice, meaning of the music as you know it and see it at that moment. We're always seeking the truth.

**Catherine:** I think that also includes playing with a great sense of rhythm, and as in tune as possible with a sound that's appropriate for the character. If you miss a couple notes here and there, fine. If your whole sense of pitch is migrating throughout a piece, that's not okay, for example.

**Catherine:** I think it's okay to give yourself permission. We will make mistakes, but to remember what the actual purpose is, definitely. It gives you perspective.

**Noa:** Okay, so having a variety of things that are really important too, so all your eggs can't be in the intonation basket.

**Catherine:** Right, because it's not only about the intonation. It's about the art.

**Noa:** Which changes probably priorities and practice time too.

**Catherine:** Definitely. But perspective is tricky right, Noa?

**Noa:** Yeah, I mean 'cause there was a time where I easily would spend all my time in the intonation department, because it's, I don't wanna say fun but, you can never finish really there, so it's tempting to spend all your time there.

**Catherine:** Of course. It's a lot of fun. And intonation has a short shelf life also, so you have to keep

practicing. It's like your flossing your teeth, if you stop then it decays. It does take work.

**Noa:** How do you get yourself or maybe the reluctant student to leave that alone for a little while and move over to ... because sometimes it feels like that's the thing I really wanna work on. How do you balance all the other things that need to happen and then prioritize?

**Catherine:** Yeah, it's challenging. It's interesting. Students go through phases of obsessions/passions. I think as a teacher it's so important for us to let them be, not get in their way, but also give guidance so they maintain perspective.

**Catherine:** I always have to ask myself is this the right time to steer them a little bit to the right now, or to the left because you don't wanna squelch their fire. The fire in itself is good. Having the drive and passion is good.

**Catherine:** I think in the lessons I really try my best to also offer perspective by keeping the lesson varied, even if the main message is one. You have one main message, maybe it has a few branches coming off of it, because otherwise they feel overwhelmed, but if there are many ways of trying to attain that message, it helps to give the students perspective.

**Catherine:** If they're listening to the music, it also helps them not to get too fixated on just I'm not in target practice.

**Noa:** Not to put you on the spot, could you give me an example of what you mean by one main thing, but then multiple offshoots?

**Catherine:** Sure. I learned that from my teacher at Juilliard, which was Dorothy Delay. She used to say to me when I started teaching, "Honey, remember it's one idea in every lesson. Only one." Then I would spout out arguments against her and she'd just smile and would not engage with me, and she wouldn't say anything until I finished spouting everything off, and then she'd repeat herself, and infuriate me.

**Catherine:** Of course now in hindsight she's a genius, and I'm thinking oh, you were so right. For example, she would say, "Okay, let's say the main message for this week is going to be a student refuses to hold their violin parallel to the floor. It's just drooping down, and because of it, they can't play in tune, they can't make a sound. They're bow is skidding off, then their self esteem is falling with it. If the main message is to keep the fiddle up, you can't spend the whole lesson with their scroll against the wall. You could for a couple minutes or you could play games with trying to project out your back, or you could have them close their eyes and imagine the space that they're in, and try to resonate through their whole body, and inevitably one of these exercises will help them to hold their fiddle up, but it gives them perspective because they'll try it in a lot of different ways."

**Catherine:** Of course the whole time you're playing with sound. So let's play with this kind of sound that resonates into a cello that's next to you, and then through a voice next to them. Then we're gonna play on a prairie field. You just create different ways of offering perspective in their imagination, and also in their listening and in their body, for example, if you're dealing with something physical.

**Catherine:** If you're dealing with phrasing or rhythm, it's the same idea. If you're trying to work on their rhythm to help the music, sometimes I'll take different passages in different movements of the piece that they're playing to address that particular focal point, for example.

**Noa:** Yeah, so ultimately when they leave the lesson, hopefully they take away something, but relate it to the main thing that you're trying to work on.

**Catherine:** That's right, something concrete. Then when they say, "Oh, I can't wait to go practice," then I know that that's been a useful lesson. If they feel that they don't know how to practice, then I know I have failed and I need to do better.

**Noa:** Meaning they don't know what the one thing is.

**Catherine:** Yeah, or they don't even know how to apply everything you just said to them to their practice.

**Noa:** I've noticed that teachers seem to have themes, like when you see somebody give a master class multiple occasions across a wide variety of students, they seem to keep coming back to some of the same things.

**Noa:** I don't know that I could articulate what those things are for the teachers I've had, but when I see them teaching, I'm like oh yeah, that reminds me of my lesson decades ago. Do you know what your themes are, or the things that you keep coming back to, 'cause they really are important to you?

**Catherine:** I would have to guess that my students would probably say I come back to sound and rhythm a lot, maybe because I think of rhythm as being the canvas and you can't do any painting with your sound until you have that paint. I do talk a lot about sound and rhythm, and listening to the harmonies, and reacting to the harmonies.

**Catherine:** When you're teaching, you do hear yourself repeating certain concepts, and I do hear myself screaming at the top of my lungs passionately about the sound because of the rhythm in that passage and the phrasing and the harmony. I would have to say those are probably the same three elements that I come back to, then the physicalities of how to do it.

**Catherine:** I think it's so important to give them practical ideas because all of this philosophy and conceptual talk is inspiring and fun, but if they don't know what to do in order to get there, I think it doesn't really help the student in the long run. I do try to make sure they're really practical suggestions as well.

**Noa:** You've mentioned a few times already today, or you referenced the body in one way or another, whether it's your yoga, when you're practicing, have you always been sort of physically aware in that way, or did that come at some point, or was there injuries? How did that become an increasing part of your both teaching and presumably playing?

**Catherine:** That's a great question, Noa. I think it came in and out. I remember reading the Menuhin book when I was nine with my dad who's a doctor. He found it fascinating. He would make me do all the

exercises, which I now realize in retrospect, they're yoga exercises.

**Catherine:** I remember being very resistant. I did not want to do them, and he would make me do them before practice, because he said, "Medically it seems to me, it would be a good idea to stretch before you practice." I remember being very annoyed at having to do them.

**Catherine:** Then when I came to Juilliard I rebelled against it completely, and I didn't do anything physical. I stopped playing tennis. I stopped exercising. Then I remember starting to feel really terrible, so then I started exercising again and feeling much better.

**Catherine:** Then, actually, after I got pregnant, I got de Quervain's and I couldn't use my wrist, the elongation of the ligaments in your wrists due to the pregnancy, and after I gave birth they didn't go back, so I couldn't play or use my wrists for six months. During that time I received some great physical therapy.

**Catherine:** I saw a full-body therapist, not just for my hands, and she taught me a lot about the core. I did Pilates, and started to do yoga again to just regain the use of my hands. That taught me a lot about how important it is to be mindful of the mind/body/spirit connection. Then basically, I couldn't live without it, so it's become a very important part of daily life, and also my teaching because so many students end up with injuries, or fatigue syndromes, and we have to be equipped to help them as best that we can in the lessons as well.

**Noa:** Has that experience or the awareness, do you see it changing how you practice in specific ways?

**Catherine:** Yeah, definitely. Well, first of all, my teaching has changed my practice tremendously. I realize when I was practicing just the other day, that I wasn't doing what I would tell my students to do. I thought well, maybe you should take your own advice, and helped me to fix some of my own not so good habits, and experiment is a constant search. You never have all the answers, right? You're always looking for answers. You never have them all, so I keep looking for answers and trying out different things physically to help connect to the voice and access and channel.

**Noa:** Any recent ... 'cause I always used to enjoy those little micro-epiphanies that you get, like oh, I figured something out. Do you remember whether it's in the last few years, or more recently, do you remember having one such thing like oh, this is cool?

**Catherine:** Yeah, two actually. So breathing techniques. One of my physical therapists helped me with different breathing techniques, not just yoga breathing, but different ways of using the ribs for breathing or using the abdomen or using the chest. I've had different people teach me different ways to breath, and they've all been life-changing.

**Catherine:** That, and also the fact that you have the ability within yourself to change your own life because of your brain. That taught me a lot, also, about feeling nervous onstage, is taking that moment to be able to think a thought before you say it was also a big life changer for me.

**Catherine:** Even in terms of how you use your time during the day, so sometimes I'll ask myself the question is this really the best use of my time right now whether I'm practicing or not, but also when I'm

practicing, and that was yeah, game changer for me.

**Noa:** Seems like such an obvious question, but it's huge because oftentimes the answer is no, I am not doing ...

**Catherine:** Yeah, or being aware enough to be aware of what you're doing, and also in the moment. So if you're in the moment, chances are you might make some better decisions than if you're stuck in the past or always looking to the future.

**Noa:** I have a quick question about the breathing because, it's been a long time since I've played, but I remember once I became more conscious of breathing, then I didn't know how to breathe because I was like when do I breathe? Do I breathe now or in this phrase or at the end of here?

**Noa:** How do you be aware of that and practice that without being too aware and getting paralyzed?

**Catherine:** I like to do a lot of breathing exercises, actually away from the fiddle, because if you start to teach your body how to regulate deeper breathing, and also more full exhalations, 'cause I think that was my particular issue, I wasn't exhaling fully, on the floor, I did a lot of floor breathing before coming to the instrument, so your body already has a different sense of breath, so you're not trying to connect breaths to up bows and down bows too literally, otherwise you start to trick your brain into feeling like it can only do that.

**Catherine:** It's a great exercise, but it's only one way that we can connect the breathing, so I think it's one way that's excellent, but I think it's also important to have perspective and realize that it's not the only way to breathe. I think that's what helps students of mine who felt exactly this sense of paralysis if they were trying to coordinate their breathing in a certain way, or aware of the fact that they weren't breathing when they played.

**Catherine:** Something that helped a lot of people, including myself, is the idea of starting your exhale before you start your first note, as opposed to breathing in, which is what most of us do when we cue, and then start to play with this held breath. The idea of starting the exhale, and then playing, seems to help a lot of people with feeling stuck in their breathing.

**Noa:** That's interesting. Yeah, 'cause that's the opposite of what you would think to do. I heard someone talk about, I think he was a wrestler, he was talking about the importance of, he called it choo choo breathing, where you do a few quick exhales to make sure you've exhaled completely, and then when you do that your lungs automatically want to inhale, so then new air comes in, as opposed to, apparently I guess we get stale because we don't really fully exhale, and then we're trying to fill in more air on top of the air that hasn't been expelled yet.

**Catherine:** That's right, so there's a lot of toxic air in there. The idea of singing also is so healing, not only because you want to connect to your actual singing voice, but if I have my students sing and play, naturally they have to be connected to exhaling because in order to sing you have to be exhaling some of the time anyway, and that seems to help people to stay connected to their breathing in a more natural way.

**Noa:** I want to thank you for your time, and kind of wrap up, but I also read that you bake, and you use your crock pots. No instant pot yet?

**Catherine:** I just got one. My husband just bought me ... you're gonna love this Noa, everyone's raving about this InstaPot, it does so many things. This is the new wave, get something that does everything. I got the InstaPot, oh yeah it's so amazing, and I must be an old fashioned girl because after having it I told my husband, I said, "I think I like my crock pot better," and I went back to it. It does one thing, but it does it so well, that I've stuck with it.

**Noa:** Do you have a favorite crock pot recipe or a favorite baking recipe that you'd be okay sharing?

**Catherine:** Yes, I'm a big fan of chicken stew and bone broth, so I put the whole chicken in that we've just eaten, and get the bones in there and whatever leftovers, and shove it all in there, and I would use a lot of cumin and Chinese five spice, soy sauce, sesame, ginger, garlic, whatever veggies you have, pour water over the whole thing, cover it up, give it a little meditation, turn it on low and go to bed.

**Catherine:** In the morning you wake up to that comfort aroma and you're just happy. The whole house is happy. My cats are happy. I'm happy. Then you drink this bone broth and then your immunity is improved. Your mood is improved. It's just good for all. Highly recommend it.

**Noa:** Great, well thank you so much. It's been awesome to pick your brain a little bit.

**Catherine:** Thanks, Noa. My pleasure.

## Notes

[1] What's this pendulum metronome all about? There are a whole slew of them [on Amazon](#) (many of them under \$35) – and even one shaped like a cat (?!) (4:56)

[2] I refer to horn player Julie Landsman's use of subdivisions and an internal pulse; you can hear her describe this in more detail in [this previous episode](#). (9:36)

[3] Catherine referenced a book by Yehudi Menuhin, that described stretching and some physical exercises. He actually authored or was interviewed in a number of books; the specific one she was referring to is Menuhin's "Six Lessons with Yehudi Menuhin." It seems that there are several editions of this one, the most recent one perhaps being the 1981 version [here](#). (28:30)

[4] Want to try out the bone broth recipe that was mentioned right at the end? Here's Catherine Cho's recipe for [Brandon's Magical Bone Broth](#) (35:02)

## Another interview with Catherine Cho

Hear more of Catherine's insights on a range of practice and performance topics in [this interview](#) on the Greenroom Conversations podcast.

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