

Case 3 – Monica, 27 years, the flutist

I really enjoy working with musicians: both because I, personally, used to play a musical instrument in the past and I love music, and also because it's a chance for me to balance myself and find renew energy, after working with clients affected by serious problems.

Monica, 27, is a flutist. She is very curious; she loves, in fact, studying and learning about everything that concerns sound and gesture. Probably because the flute is a sort of "angelic instrument", Monica seems to never touch the ground. She walks in my studio with grace, she is slender and flexible. I imagine her dancing on the stage.

She sits down in front of me and begins telling me about herself: how she found me on the Internet and how immediately felt attracted to FM, a method she found very similar to an experience she had with a music teacher. I listen to her and watch her while she is talking to me: she is a bit slouching with the belly in and the chin high. I reflect about the fact that a flutist needs to go toward the instrument and engage the head and the neck in an almost unnatural way.

While she is talking, I think that this kind of instrument causes lots of restrictions in movement for a musician, so it's vital to work on efficiency and coordination of arms, shoulders, head, mouth, jaw and eyes.

I explain to her that I'll begin the lesson looking at her while she is standing; I invite her to observe and feel herself. It starts a dialogue between us, that brings together what she was feeling and what I could see from my external point of view. It's a very interesting exchange of feedback, we are both learning at the same time.

Monica confirms that her weight is more on the left leg; she also notices a sort of difference between the right and left side of the ribs, but for the moment she is unable to tell what is it.

Let's play a game: I ask Monica to imagine herself playing the flute as she usually does. She traces out some movement of the arms in the air, shifting the weight from side to side. Then with my hands I go along with her movements, I touch her ribs and I realize that her breathing is not so wide as I could expected. Following her movements, at times I exaggerate her patterns. Now she is more aware about the rotation of her pelvis to the right; she also realizes that the ribs on the left side are more closed together (just the same side of her dominant leg) and that the shoulders are contracted, the neck is tense.

I remember Myriam saying: "*Function determines structure*". Indeed, looking at Monica, now I could see how her body, along the time, adapted and blend becoming altogether with the flute. While I invite her to leave it, rest and walk around the room for some moments, I think how the Feldenkrais Method will be helpful for Monica improving her needed organization to play this specific instrument.

The lesson goes on and Monica lies on her back. Now the table can be a "mirror" for her back: "I can feel more clearly the difference between the left and right side of the body!", Monica exclaims, often commenting on her discoveries with a "wow".

I felt it was important to spend some time supporting her shoulders, the neck and the head. I try to create a differentiation lifting and bending the head a little backward and at the same time pushing softly down the chest, toward the pelvis, as if to exaggerate her tendency. I wait, Monica start breathing more deeply, finally something is moving in her chest.

Breathing fully is fundamental for a flutist, I remind myself to work on this aspect in the next lessons.

When Monica takes her sit, there are many changes: her "Wow!" tells me that she is feeling something new. I notice that she sits differently from before, as if her internal volumes were more spacious, her pelvis and her belly fuller and, in a sense, more feminine.

She touches her ribs on both sides: "I feel the left side different, wider than before". I invite her to explore her sitting bones and a more dynamic sitting posture, trying to take root with her pelvis, and her feet on the ground. I suggest her to explore these movements at home with the flute while sitting, in order "to play from the sitting bones", dancing on the pelvis around the clock, as if the sound was coming not only from the mouth, but from the pelvis itself, up through the skeleton. She likes this idea and promises to me that she will play with it at home.

She agrees to take the flute during the next lesson, In this way, observing and listening to her I will be able to notice her habitual movement patterns while playing the instrument, and she herself will be able to feel the differences in the quality of the sound, both before and after the lesson.

We really had fun together during the following lessons!

Monica took the flute and prepared it for playing. When she started playing, I felt a shiver in my body! She is very good, her notes nourish my room of a new energy. It's true that we don't need a 'straight back', but a 'wise back' (as Ruthy Alon was used to say). While Monica is concentrated to playing, I start to listen with my hand what is happening in her chest, which areas are more soft, and where she is the breathing.

I do nothing but trying to be very neutral in order not to interfere with her performance, however, at the same time, I am able to feel her skeletal organisation.

I gently place my hands on her shoulder blades, the humerus and clavicles, then I envelop her long neck with my hands. Then I gently place one hand on the sternum and the other on the thoracic vertebrae. Sometimes Monica stops playing and starts smiling, the game is very stimulating for her. It's astonishing, the sound's already changed!

Wow!

After a while, I invite her to lie on the table. We take a break.

Then, standing with her feet firmly on the table and her flute in her hands, I invite her to observe what is now happening inside her. She takes it very seriously and, attentively focused on her sensations, she starts playing again. At the end of the exploration, Monica says that she is aware now about the tension in her arms and shoulders, she didn't knew to have.

Now I ask her to hold the flute in the opposite way, for some minutes, in order for her to notice which new organization could appears. The unusual request pinpoints almost immediately new sensations and also some difficulties but, just for this, returning to her usual organisation, Monica can integrate new neurological discoveries in new habits.

In the next lesson I want Monica to work actively on the floor. I suggest her some simple ATM processes to help her sense the contact and the weight of the body on the floor, to feel more clearly her skeleton and the relationship with gravity. I invite her to feel that by pushing the feet on the ground it is possible to lift easily the pelvis and the back from the ground, then rolling the weight of the body above the shoulder blades, drawing an imaginary circle.

I invited her to sense differences and changes before/after the lesson, right/left side. Finally, rolling to the side for sitting and then coming into standing, I kept talking to her with many images, such as “a magnet that is attracting you to the ground”, “it’s almost a paradox, you can leave the ground moving up but still being heavy...”

Once standing, Monica paid attention to her sensations for a long time with her eyes closed; then she said: “I feel my feet firmly glued on the earth, I feel more ‘dense’, more present”. Even her voice was now warmer and more profound.

At the beginning of each FI lesson, Monica was able to describe me her sensations, progresses, desires and requests, thanks to her ability of observing and working on herself. This initial dialogue gave me the chance to bring her to focalize the lesson on a particular theme each time; it also allowed me to interlace the “fil rouge” that was accompanying her learning process.

I find very important to accompany the student, zooming between a detail (a movement, a sensation, a little change) and the general direction of the learning process.

In the following lessons I was ‘speaking to her’ more through my hands.

Monica decided to lie on her right side. In this way I could work on the differentiation of the shoulder, the ribs, the pelvis both in extension/flexion and in rotation and, from the proximal to the distal, to integrate the movements of the left arm and leg in relation to the movements of the whole body.

While I was touching her, in my mind I continued to have the initial imagine of Monica standing, leaning on her right leg. And I was curious to see which new organisation could emerge at the end of the lesson.

Observing Monica at the end of this FI lesson, it seemed to me that her self-image was richer; moreover, she said to me that she was more determined in everyday life too. She also was able to regain a private space in her home, where she could place her piano, her books, her music scores and her beloved things.