



A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Karen Marshall reports
on Piano-Yoga, a physical and
psychological approach to learning
and teaching the piano that
includes web resources, hands-on
courses and a book

What is Piano-Yoga?

Piano-Yoga is an effective and innovative approach that I have recently begun to use with piano pupils aged seven to 70. Developed by GéNIA, a Russian pianist and qualified yoga teacher, it incorporates physical and psychological techniques including:

- » Pure yoga for the whole body – encouraging good posture and correct muscle use at the piano
- » Relaxation techniques to prevent injury while playing
- » Performance psychology strategies to make performing enjoyable (and, for some adult amateurs, possible!)
- » Specific exercises for the hands, wrists and fingers (based on the fundamentals of Russian Piano School) to increase hand span and strengthen fingers


Who is it suitable for?

- » Adult amateurs – for confidence and ideas
- » Teachers – for new teaching tools
- » Conservatoire students /professional performers – to prevent injury and get insider tips from GéNIA on concert performance

What resources are available?

- » **Piano-Yoga membership** Register free of charge (piano-yoga.com/register.php) to access Piano Yoga's support website with information, videos and discounts on courses
- » **Transform your hands: A complete ten week course of piano exercises** The method in print, with some superb illustrations
- » **Piano Retreats** Courses which put the whole Piano-Yoga method into practice. The next event is at Steinway Hall, London on 13 November, 10.30am-5.30pm.

TOP TIPS FROM THE PIANO-YOGA RETREAT AND BOOK

- » Ensure your shoulders don't roll forwards – pulling the shoulders back actually signals to the brain to promote calmness
- » Work on concentration techniques. Standing with one leg raised demands concentration to not fall over; transfer this concentration to your playing
- » With every piece of music, mentally prepare the tempo, character, energy and pedalling
- » Breathe correctly to reduce nerves and improve phrasing
- » Always slow down in psychologically difficult passages – the chances are you will have already increased your speed
- » If you have a memory lapse, improvise and never stop!
- » For a good hand position, place your hands on your knees and bring this hand shape to the piano keys
- » Check your body is correctly aligned when sitting at the instrument. With bare feet, lift your toes one by one; lift your heels; stretch your feet. Engage your abdominal muscles to protect your spine. Check that your shoulders are down and parallel to the floor. Putting your arms straight down either side of your body, stretch your fingers with palms facing away from the keyboard; maintain the posture and turn your palms in the opposite direction. 

piano-yoga.com

» REVIEW: PIANO YOGA RETREAT

The title of this one-day course at London's Kings Place really does not do it justice. Yes, there are yoga techniques included, plus exercises from GéNIA's Piano Yoga book; but for me, this course provided both mental and physical strategies to play the piano to my full potential. GéNIA displayed sensitivity and knowledge during the masterclass sessions, and her own playing was inspiringly beautiful.

The structure of the course consisted of a brief introductory session, then some yoga exercises to develop correct posture of the whole body and use of the arms, wrists and fingers. The correct sitting position was systematically covered and provided me with a new approach to training my own students. The session on breathing was particularly useful: performance nerves were addressed with a range of breathing, concentration and visualisation techniques. GéNIA took questions on an ongoing basis and ended the day with relaxation techniques.

After finishing the course I couldn't wait to get home and play the piano – I was one revitalised pianist and a teacher ready with a new range of tools to support and develop her students! Thank you GéNIA – this was a five-star course.

