

## Inspiration vs. Expiration: Life on the Road - by Michael Lear

Chris Cornell and Chester Bennington mega-contributed to the music world. Tom Petty too. Thinking about the lasting impact of their legacies gives me the chills. Chills also to think about their needlessly shortened lives.

Sex and drugs and rock and roll, a defining meme of the rock star lifestyle. Why not have the rock and roll cake and eat it too with minimal risk of negative trappings and tragic ends? Is that even possible?

Success rarely arrives easily and overnight to stick around. Lasting success requires continued public exposure and reinforcement. Most often that means touring, a perpetually demanding lifestyle with erratic practice, performance and promotion schedules. Little sleep, extended time away from home, family and friends, can disrupt one's natural rhythm, and energetic and emotional foundations producing a chronic state of low-level, potentially devastating stress. While most musicians and performers love what they do, stress from the unceasing demands of celebrity or the road can potentiate addiction, interfere with recovery and result in post-performance depression. Many artists have commented that they are paid to endure the lifestyle, not for the performing.

That lifestyle is demanding! I recall a paraphrased Don Henley quote: "God made some people famous and let the others go free." Performer Moby has been quoted as saying, "Going to AA is the only chance in LA you get to see fellow musicians." Just now breaking her twenties, Lorde stated in a Time Magazine interview that sometimes the pressure to perform to a large crowd is too much and it takes a shot of whiskey and a beta blocker to make it happen. "But I'm a shell of a person after," she said.

We all have limits that are best honored, otherwise we end up living in a constant state of hyper-arousal, fight, flight or even freeze, unable to connect to ourselves or to others in a healthy way. Such a disconnect manifests itself in negatively reactive and impulse behaviors, and is often a conduit to substance abuse to achieve relief. Yoga and mindfulness have been shown to be effective for increasing positive moods, body awareness, and self-regulation.

Learning yoga and mindfulness practices in context, while touring, enables performers to develop for themselves an internal center of the cyclone within the touring environment. Greater emotional resilience and optimal health are the goals even while being pushed and pulled by the pace on the road. Mastering such techniques empowers performers to de-escalate after performances naturally, free from alcohol and other substances, without depression, and to smoothly resume off-the-road life, which has its own inherent and different stresses.

Sleeping cramped and curled into a ball against the hard arm of a plane or a bus seat is just one of the ways that aches and pains can be produced while traveling. The efficacy of alternative pain management methods has been well-documented. Of the methods that can be learned by the sufferer and readily used to relieve pain naturally, breathing exercises rank high on the list. Ask any woman who has experienced natural childbirth using breathing techniques for alleviating excruciating pain. An established yoga practice can also help manage pain and restore balance to a body thrown off by compromised movement patterns.

Our brains are wired to be far more sensitive to our emotions than to our factual thoughts. That's why it's difficult to control emotions and impulses with thought alone. Simply telling yourself cognitively to get a grip and be happy won't work. Through mindful observation, however, paying attention to emotions and associated sensations and with equanimity, strong feelings and impulsivity can be controlled naturally, so no drugs or alcohol are necessary to restore calm acceptance of what is true in the moment.

Mindfulness can serve the touring musician in many ways. Here are just three:

First: As stated, mindfulness helps maintain a calm within in the face of disrupted schedules, unfamiliar surroundings and the stress of being unsettled atop of performance anxiety. A calm within contributes to the performer's joy in the activity of the moment, the autotelic creative flow state, that's captivating to an audience.

Second: Touring is a team effort. Impulsive inflaming exchanges sabotage a team, and can gnaw away at individuals. Mindful breathing helps delay impulse reactions to aggravating situations long enough so that conscious conflict-resolving, harmonious responses can be made.

Third: Touring and keeping performing talent sharp requires stamina, adaptability and overall good health. Mindfulness can mitigate temptation to reach for a stimulant substance to cope with the demands.

Mind precedes everything, but we also have bodies that require care. Yoga naturally maximizes flexibility, muscle tone, strength, aerobic capacity, self-discipline and balance – all leading to increased energy and emotional well-being. Research has also shown that yoga can help relieve musculo-skeletal pain, heal complex trauma and improve heart rate variability so we can respond more flexibly to stress.

Solid research on both Yoga and Mindfulness is accumulating at an increasing rate. Let's take a look. Research demonstrating that breathing exercises are effective alternative pain management strategies has been widely publicized through National Institute of Health publications, National Public Radio, The Medical Express and The Daily Mail. Science Daily, University Health News, Psychology Today and The Fix have all published research stating that Yoga rebalances GABA neurotransmitters within the brain of those who are addicted. Pub Med, a leading research study outlet on-line, lists many studies showing success utilizing Mindfulness-based approaches with stimulant dependent adults.

National Geographic recently cited studies conducted at the University of Washington which showed that Mindfulness protocols were more effective in preventing drug-addiction relapse than 12-Step Programs. Researchers showed that Mindfulness training was twice as effective as the top behavioral anti-smoking program.

Research on Mindfulness and Yoga conducted at The Tanglewood Music Center, the Boston Symphony Orchestra's academy for high-level musical study, showed that Mindfulness and Yoga practices produced increases in dispositional flow and autotelic creative flow experience, as well as decreases in performance anxiety.

Mindfulness, paying attention to the sensations associated with cravings without acting upon them, works to quiet the posterior cingulate cortex in the brain. That's the precinct of the brain involved in perseveration, persistent thought or action which can become obsessive and foster addiction.

In addition to the fitness and health benefits associated with Yoga, research shows that Trauma-Informed Yoga leads to improved emotional resilience, self-regulation and stress management as well as increased focus and concentration. This leads to greater sense of life meaning and purpose, social responsibility, tolerance to the beliefs and values of others.

For the musician, tools such as Yoga and Mindfulness which help in staying grounded, focused, comfortable and relaxed, have immeasurable value.

We'll breathe spontaneously some 600 million times during our lives and most of those breaths will go unnoticed. By consciously observing our breaths, though, we can see how they relate to our thoughts and emotions. Controlling our breathing patterns can allow us to tether the mind and improve physical health as well. Breathing through the nose pulls nitric oxide, produced in the paranasal sinuses, into circulation, into the lungs. Nitric acid, which relaxes constricted blood vessels, helps lower blood pressure along with slowing the heart rate. Nitric oxide is also a bronchodilator, working to open the airways.

We breathe more deeply when we breathe through the nose. Where mouth breathing tends to primarily fill the upper lungs, the region most connected to the fight-or-flight response sympathetic nerves, nose breathing leads air into the lower lungs as well. The lower lungs are more connected with the para-sympathetic nervous system which lowers the heart rate, has a calming effect on the body.

Proper breathing techniques help to keep the mind calm and the energy flowing smoothly, increasing stamina. In a practical context, breath control serves the drummer by keeping one's energy moving through challenging parts, as opposed to holding one's breath or speeding up, which can impact musicality, flow, tempo and the overall performance experience.

Like strong balanced wings of a bird, Yoga and Mindfulness can help anyone fly straight towards their goal even under the most challenging circumstances. Musicians, too, can soar. Yoga and Mindfulness continue to meet with acclaim as they are introduced into the educational system. It would be great to see Yoga and Meditation be embraced more widely by the music industry and become an inherent part of the touring experience.

Given the visibility of celebrities and the far-reaching social impact of their choices and life experiences as reported through the lens of the media, it would be wonderful to hear more success stories regarding recovery using natural approaches accessible to everyone. Even more inspiring would be their avoidance of substances altogether to manage the vicissitudes of the Rock and Roll road.

**About Michael:** A life-long drummer, Michael Lear has been practicing Ashtanga Yoga, Neuromuscular re-education, and Vipassana meditation for decades. He teaches Yoga internationally and directs Yoga and Mindfulness programs for incarcerated youth and adults and for those in substance recovery. In addition to having worked with many business elite and a few Grammy and Academy award winners, Michael has also worked extensively with trauma survivors in post-conflict and drought regions of Africa and disaster areas in South Asia and the Caribbean. Michael also holds a bachelors degree in finance. Drawing upon research in the fields of neuroscience, psychology and somatic movement re-education as well as decades of personal practice and drumming, he has developed a four-hour on-line yoga/mindfulness program, Yoga4Drummers, specifically for drummers and seated musicians. Michael Lear is available to tour both as a drummer and as an integrative Mindfulness/Yoga therapist to support those facing substance abuse challenges or those wishing to maintain optimal health. on the road. Visit [www.Yoga4Drummers.com](http://www.Yoga4Drummers.com) for more information or contact Michael Lear directly at [Michael@Yoga4Drummers.com](mailto:Michael@Yoga4Drummers.com).