

Dear World-Changing Musicians,

We are living in stressful times. Our responsibilities require more time, more energy, and more emotional investment than even a few years before. If we could only manipulate the space-time continuum to expand time or slow down the frenetic pace of our lives, we might be able to get control of the traffic jam of tasks and responsibilities that await us each day. Sadly, I'm not here to tell you about the new CMS-branded Time Dilation app, although that would be pretty cool.

I am here to remind you –and myself—that sometimes we are so busy helping everyone else succeed and making sure everyone else is OK, that we forget to make sure we are taking care of our own physical and mental well-being. We *need* to make time to take care of ourselves. The more stress we are carrying, the more anxiety we are holding, and the more worry we are embodying, the more overwhelming our responsibilities, tasks, and commitments become.

So, if we can reduce our stress, anxiety, and worry, we will *feel* like we have more time, more space, and more breathing room to deal with our firehose of responsibilities and challenges. Maybe it isn't a CMS-branded app, but I am definitely talking about a time dilation protocol.

Let's focus on one exercise we can do to reduce stress and help our time expand: making more room to breathe.

Breathwork is the primary means of regulating the nervous system, reducing anxiety, and increasing focus. It is a great way to center yourself, lower your heart rate, and become fully present. You can practice breathwork when you wake up in the morning, when you arrive at your office before work begins, and especially with your students at the start of lessons, classes, or rehearsals.

There are dozens of breathing patterns you can try. There are countless books on the subject, but today I'm going to share one of my favorites: box breathing.

First, find a comfortable position. Relax into an awareness of your breathing. Notice what you notice about how your body moves when you breathe.

Then:

- Breathe in through your nose for 4 counts (expand in every direction).
- Hold your breath for 4 counts.
- Breathe out through your mouth for 4 counts.
- Hold your breath for 4 counts.
- Repeat

I love the box breath because I can practice it anywhere and no one knows. It immediately helps me focus and release tension. It quickly lowers my heart rate.

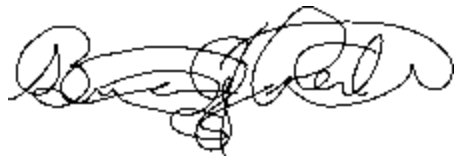
I do a minute or two of box breathing when I get to my office, and before I dive into the sea of unread emails and mountains of other tasks that await me. Before I practiced breathwork, I would start my day already stressed out, dreading the number of tasks that lay before me. Now, after a couple of minutes of box breathing, it feels like time has expanded, and I have more mental energy and space to make decisions, craft responses, and effectively handle previously intractable problems. On the surface, nothing has changed— I have the same crushing amounts of email, same knotty challenges, same responsibilities. But really, everything has changed, because *I have changed*. Breathwork allows me to see the same world with a more in-tune clarity, calmness, and expansive focus.

I encourage you to explore breathwork practice. It only takes a couple of minutes, but the effect can be profound. It may seem like a waste of time, for instance, to spend three minutes at the beginning of a rehearsal breathing together as an ensemble, but just imagine how much more productive, powerful, and fun a rehearsal would be if every ensemble member were calm, relaxed, focused and fully present from the time the rehearsal began. Give it a try. If you have never done breathwork before, or if you are a seasoned practitioner, I would love to hear about your experiences. You can contact me at [\[email protected\]](#)

I have developed a variation on the box breath that you also might find useful. I use my heartbeat as the metronome to count the beats of my inhales, exhales and holds. As the box breathing decreases my heart rate, inhales expand, holds grow longer, exhales lengthen, and the whole cycle lengthens, which helps my heartbeat slow even more. It is a time-bending exercise that allows me to start my day with a spaciousness that completely reframes the "go time" crunch.

Breathwork won't make your challenges disappear, but it may help you expand time just enough to deal with them more calmly, effectively, and thoughtfully. This may be the first step to a deeper more holistic self-care practice.

Keep Breathing. Keep Listening. Keep Changing the World.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Pertl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brian" and last name "Pertl" clearly distinguishable. The signature is positioned above the typed name and title.

Brian Pertl
President, College Music Society
Director, Lamont School of Music, University of Denver