

CHAPTER 1: STABILITY AT THE HARP

Even before today's advances in the understanding of bio-mechanics and overuse syndromes, Miss Lawrence had a gift for guiding her students toward healthy and efficient use of the body. We play a large and difficult instrument which demands enormous physical and mental stamina. The harpist's hands and arms are always in varying degrees of extremity, higher and more forward while playing than with almost any other instrument, and always working against gravity. We also use our legs and feet actively at the same time that our arms and hands are working hard. All this can place our backs and indeed our whole bodies under a great load of stress.

We need stability, strength and flexibility in our inner core to be able to maintain this kind of extreme posture for hours on end, without sacrificing our bodies or our musical aims. We must also be aware of always working *with* our bio-mechanical structure, using our bodies as much as possible in the way that nature intended.

Posture, Hips, Legs and Feet

Miss Lawrence taught that stability, strength and flexibility come from the ground up. Good posture begins with our connection to the earth, through bio-mechanically strong placement and use of our hips, legs and feet, even while they are frequently employed in moving pedals.

We sit on the "sitting bones" – neither on the front nor the back of these bones, but balanced in a neutral position directly on top. In this posture, the pelvis is free to tilt forward and backward and return to neutral, without strain or difficulty, in turn allowing the spine to remain flexible and to move as required by the demands of what we are playing.

We support ourselves by having strong core muscles of the trunk and pelvic floor, which take the strain out of the lower back. The core muscles help to balance us, keep us upright and mobile, and help with the work of moving pedals. They also help us to maintain a healthy balance between stability and flexibility.

We sit near the front edge of the bench or chair, so that our legs are left free to move easily and quickly to reach the pedals. The bench should be flat or tilted very slightly forward – never curved or tilted backward, as this places a cumulative stress on the hips and spine and reduces circulation.