

# The Counterpoint Club

## A Chamber Music Podcast

*Opus 1, Episode 4: Let it Go*

### Centering

“You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.”

~Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn

#### 1. Pick your focal point

Select a fixed point in the distance, somewhere that feels comfortable to you, below eye level. Having a focal point will help minimize distractions.

#### 2. Form your clear intention

Create a specific goal statement. Use declarative and confident language like “I am going to perform radiantly with special attention to color and depth of character.” Do not use words like “don’t”. Words like this can generate fear and doubt. It can take time to learn to focus on what you want instead of what you don’t want or don’t like about your playing or yourself, but it is worth the effort.

#### 3. Breathe mindfully

We tend to breathe more quickly and shallowly when we are stressed or anxious or feeling excess energy in our body. I recommend looking into methods of how to breathe diaphragmatically, as it can activate the parasympathetic nervous system response in your body, releasing muscle tension, slowing heart rate and combating the fight-or-flight state.

#### 4. Scan and release excess tension

As we let our mind wander into all of the things that we need to accomplish, our muscles become tighter and less facile. Scan your muscles head to toe as you continue the third step of breathing mindfully. This is also an important step to “practice into” your routine in the practice room so that you have more awareness about where you carry muscle tension.

#### 5. Find your center

This is very similar to how martial artists or dancers find their center of gravity. The center is the point in your body where most of your energy is congregated. It is often in your chest or below the belly button, depending on your body. Searching for your center is a very calming and grounding act that will also quiet your mind.



## 6. Repeat your process cue

We tend to hyper-focus on minute details when faced with the excess energy of a looming performance. The solution is to focus on a process cue. In essence, this means to remind yourself of what it sounds, feels, and looks like to produce the exact sound you want. For some, finding a cue word like “powerful,” “release,” “calm,” or even something like “guiding fingers” will help. Others may prefer to visualize performing exactly how they would like to play. Do not let your mind wander to the possibility of playing any other way.

## 7. Direct your energy

By now, you should be in a more calm and focused mental and physical state. Do a quick scan to find all of the energy in your body and gather it at your center. Now direct that energy upwards through your body and out of your eyes or forehead at your focal point from step one. I like to think of this as a beam of light or a laser beam. This beam is the conduit for your music and energy so that you can communicate exactly what you want to your audience.

*\*This 7-step version of the technique of Centering was developed and adapted through the work of Dr. Robert Niddefer, Dr. Don Greene, Dr. Noa Kageyama, and Dr. Sarah Pizzichemi. For more techniques and advice like this visit the website/blog of Dr. Noa Kageyama, [bulletproofmusician.com](http://bulletproofmusician.com)*

