

Poker Tells and “Secret” Tension

We all have involuntary physical “ticks” that can reveal hidden aspects of our inner thoughts. In poker this is known as a “tell” and is described as “a change in a player’s behavior or demeanor that gives clues to that player’s assessment of their hand”. Other players can gain an advantage if they are able to observe and understand the meaning of another player’s tell, especially if the tell is unconscious and consistent. Top poker players go to great lengths to hide their tells including wearing hoodies and sunglasses during a game.

These cues are an integral part of the game. Awareness and control over your tells allow you to use more advanced strategy in order to get your opponents to think you have a stronger hand than you actually do.



We will be leveraging tells in the opposite fashion with bass playing. Frequently when practicing, players are very oriented on results as opposed to process. Tells allow us to shift the focus to process and push past previously insurmountable limitations. Excess physical tension or mental anxiety will often manifest in the face, neck, and shoulders. Learning to read these signs can be a clue to areas that need attention in practice.

To illustrate this I will reveal my personal “bass tell”. If I am unsettled about a passage, playing faster than I should, etc. I will unconsciously roll my lips inward and manifest tension in my mouth and jaw. This tension will remain unnoticed and “secret” may not catch my awareness as it is indirectly related to the action I am performing. Other examples of this could also be facial tells, but they also include raising the shoulders, holding the breath, and

curling the toes. The feeling is one of a lack of understanding of a movement, and so the body recruits excessive muscular tension in a misguided but well-intentioned effort to “help”. Aside from being generally unsightly, for many years I overlooked the potential to leverage awareness of this tension to direct me toward a change in my approach.



The Alexander Technique is a movement re-education practice that is popular with many musicians as it focuses on how our thinking can bring about a change in the body’s habitual manner of performing a movement to facilitate greater ease and a release of tension. The specific practice that I am most interested in highlighting here is called “inhibition”. Inhibition is a momentary pause that is in itself the act of “non-doing”. It precedes the action itself and gives you the chance to consciously release tension, check in with breathing, and choose a different approach to the action. Your “bass tells” can point out the moments where inhibition can be most productively utilized. Our tendency is to “try” and “effort” our way through obstacles. A popular quote attributed to Einstein is, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results”. Utilizing inhibition and visualization we can break that chain, and find solutions in practice that can yield more consistent and effortless results.

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This invite-only YouTube channel will be a continuation, development and place to share these ideas and principles. Although the entire Fractal Fingering course and samples are available online and at DiscoverDoubleBass.com, this channel will provide a forum for more in-depth content and to address questions on a more individual basis.

If you have any questions, comments, ideas you'd like explored, or inspiration you'd like to share please email: davidallenmoore@fractalbassist.com.

With Love,

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