

Musing on a tuning fork and patella hammer

Chris Ellis

I am a bit concerned about my tuning fork. For several years it has been used as a paper weight and must feel spurned and neglected. Every now and then I hit it against the edge of my desk to check that it is still alive. It returns a high pitched "ping" of alarm.

My partner next door has a great thick one, of which I am rather envious, as mine is long and thin and tends to topple over. His, on the other hand, gives off a much lower note than mine, a rather vulgar base vibratto. Occasionally I can hear its earthy music through the wall as he, in a fit of boredom, also tests his against the edge of the desk.

I have often wondered if it is an essential prerequisite for the administration of my life's work. When it is to be used, an impressive ritual is enacted. The sleeve of the shirt is drawn up and I give it a cavalier shake in the air before the victim is approached with a demeanour of exaggerated clinical acumen. Due to disuse atrophy I have actually forgotten on which anatomical features it should be placed, if at all. Perhaps it should be played with a non touch technique. I seem to remember our neurological impresario putting it on the ankles, or was it in the middle of the forehead? Perhaps it would be a therapeutic agent in Mrs Stuffallwrong's headaches.

The other piece in my room that is used for solo virtuoso performances is my patella hammer. It is also a neglected member usually left standing upright by the bed. I only use



it in life threatening conditions, like having to write a letter to a specialist. It pads out my clinical examination. Actually it's rather a fine hickory shafted one. One of the old sort, well balanced and right handed too. With a good stance and a follow through, you can get a very satisfactory response. I play it off the front foot with the elbow ever so slightly bent, combined with some elegant wrist action. If the rhythm is not right then it doesn't work. The only problem is the rubber at the end.

It is becoming perished and cracked but I'm loathe to trade it in for one of the new carbon fibre models, as I know exactly how to interpret the effects of my old one. I record them from one + to four + and then !. A ! comes from too much follow through, the patient sits up and grabs you by the bow tie and says "Don't you ever do that to me again!"