

“Performance/Practice Tips”

By John Cipolla

1. When learning solos, concertos, etc. learn them from the piano score, not from the solo part. And also sit at the piano and trudge through the piano part, even if you don't play piano that well. Look for structure (themes, developing themes, returns of themes, keys themes go to), climaxes and how the harmony is often related to the climaxes. This gives us a clearer idea of the ideas and feelings the composer is trying to express.
 2. Try to "internalize" the music as quickly as possible so your own soul and character as an artist can come through the music. The steps should be to read through entire piece at the piano and maybe listen to a recording to hear how it sounds, then read through it at the piano and get a feel for how it's put together, then work out the music phrase by phrase both technically and musically. As you work out each phrase try to play it from memory over and over, while listening and trying to refine the nuances of the phrase-dynamics, playing the line, emphasizing structurally important points in the phrase.
 3. Rotate your reeds daily, they last longer and you don't get used to playing only one reed
 4. Use a metronome!
 5. Practice with a metronome on beats two and four
 6. Practicing, try practicing in 5 minute increments, you'd be surprised how much you can get done. Also you'd be surprised how fast those 5 minute segments add up throughout the day.
 7. Leave your instrument on an instrument stand all day so when you have a spare 5-10 minutes you can practice instantly and not have to put the instrument together.
 8. Soak your reeds in warm water for 3-5 minutes before playing; this will help avoid squeaks and dry reeds.
 9. Warm Ups - the basics still work! Long Tones, slow scales gradually getting faster, tonguing exercises everyday. A good one for flute and clarinet is Langenus Book 3 page 22. When I have 5 minutes I go through it once or twice and it works wonders.
 10. Play by ear a little each day. Put on a CD and just play along with your instrument. You can try to imitate what you hear or make up your own lines in the key the CD is in. It really opens up the ears. Also puts you in touch with your instrument.
 11. Keep a practice log with weekly and daily goals. Also keep a clock near your practice area and time what you work on. If you are still having trouble with a passage look back at how much time you spent on it. You'll often be surprised how little time you spent with that one area. Also SLOW practice still does wonders!!
 12. Keep your instruments in good mechanical condition. Especially when playing more than one instrument, we don't need any more difficulties than what we already have.
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Practicing

General Comments

Practicing shouldn't be a drudgery. It should be fun and done without any sense of self-judgment. This is very important. When we practice we are teaching ourselves to do something without much thought-to make something a habit. This is done by breaking things down into small groups and through slow repetition. Practice things for brief periods each day at reasonable tempos. Remember not to judge yourself. Just do the practicing carefully at reasonable tempos without any judgment whether something is good or bad. With this type of removed attitude, practicing will become much more productive.

Practice Tips

"... You cannot achieve speed by speedy practice. The only way to get fast is to be deep, wide awake, and slow. When you habitually zip through your music, your ears are crystallizing in sloppiness."

Quote About Slow Practice from Larry Kranz' flute pages

... Pray for the patience of a stone cutter. ... Pray to understand that speed is one of those things you have to give up - like love - before it comes flying to you through the back window."

'The Listening Book' by W.A. Mathieu, p. 101.

Take frequent breaks

Try to work on a scale or part of a scale or phrase for 5 minutes. Then take a minute or two break. Working with a time limit makes us concentrate harder and stay focused.

Limit Practice sessions to 45 minutes

After practicing for about 45 minutes to 1 hour our ability to concentrate hard is reduced greatly.

Practice in the same place and at the same time everyday, if possible.

Have all your practice items in your practice area so you don't have to search for them.

pencil	clock	tuner
music	light	instrument
music stand	metronome	swab

Meditate for a few moments before practicing. Close your eyes, take a few slow deep breaths and try to relax your muscles. Don't worry if you have a lot on your mind. Just relax your muscles and take deep breaths. This will help your concentration and productivity.

Divide the practice session into categories. For example:

1. Warm-ups (20 minutes)
 - a. long tones with metronome and tuner
 - b. slow, slurred scales with metronome
 - c. slow tongued scales with metronome
 - d. moderate tempo tongued scales

2. Etudes (10 minutes)

3. Solos (10 minutes)

Later in the day if there is time for another practice session, you can start directly with the solo or etude which might require a little more time.

Tape-record your practice sessions occasionally. Then listen to them later after your practice session is finished. Again, remember to listen to the tape without judging *good* or *bad*. Simply listen for things that you liked and things you'd like to improve. Take pride in the things you do well and start working on the things that you'd like to improve.

Listening

Listen to music everyday. It can be a CD, tape or live performance. When listening, do nothing else but listen and focus on the music. Don't have it on as background music. This is very important for any musician to do; it keeps the ears perked up.

Assessment and Advocacy

There are two tools to assess the student's progress: One is a high tech computer program by Coda Music called Vivace, Smart Music Accompanist and the other is a simple sheet of paper and pencil - keeping track of what is practiced and for how much time. Either will work well.

The Smart Music Accompanist

This computer accompaniment program is essentially like having an accompanist to work with. You can read the whole piece through or repeat sections and these can be done at any tempo with or without the built in metronome and tuner.

The program has 'Practice Report' feature which helps the student and teacher keep track of: Student name, class, group, piece practiced, use of metronome, tuner and time practiced on each section. And this is all kept on the computer so there are no lost papers.

Practice Logs

Enclosed in this packet is a sample practice log which can be copied for use with the students. The point of documenting what is practiced and for how much time is to help the student and teacher track areas of progress and areas of difficulty.

Advocacy

Once the student's abilities have been assessed, the music teacher needs to communicate these statistics to the administration, parents, community and school body. This is very important because this is what can keep the interest in the program and keep the students enthusiastic and playing.

Newsletter

This can be in e-mail form or on regular paper. It doesn't have to be involved. Simply state the goings on of the band, how the students are progressing, maybe even explain how far along the students have progressed. The parents are interested in how their children are doing. And a little item about exactly what they're doing might be of interest to the parents: for instance: "The students have progressed to the 'Langenus Method Vol. 3', which is quite an advanced method for the clarinet and shows their dedication to practicing and mastering their instruments."

List of recent and upcoming performances

Possibly include brief program notes to spark interest in an upcoming performance.

Send e-mail or regular mail to:

Parents
School administrators by name
Community Businesses
Other local schools
Local papers and school newspaper

The Communication aspect of a woodwind doubling program and a band program in general can pay dividends if persistently kept up with. The band director might want to have a few students form a "Newsletter Committee", who will oversee the compiling of the newsletter. The students can of course include this on their applications for college as an extra activity showing initiative.

Internalizing the Music

By John Cipolla

As players, so often we are taught to read music and follow the directions on the page. We read the music, put our fingers in the right place and blow the air. The more notes and the faster they occur the more difficult the music is said to be. We often tend to judge music on how difficult it is. But what actually is difficulty in music? Difficulty is trying to lift a heavy weight. But playing fast sixteenth notes or high notes are not difficulties in music. They are simply areas which we not as familiar to us. These are areas that haven't been explored as much as a C scale for example.

THE PROCESS

Internalizing music means to learn a piece of music or a technique of playing music so thoroughly that it no longer requires any conscious thought to execute. The process of internalizing music is a matter of slow repetition of very small segments of a piece of music or a technique of playing the instrument. This repetition ingrains what is being learned deeply in our subconscious. The goal is to work on something until it seems to play itself.

THE STEPS

The first step in practicing something is to understand what areas of the piece or scale are less familiar to us, what we used to think were the hard parts. The next step is to spend time visiting and revisiting those areas until our fingers, ears and breathing become comfortable and familiar with them. Sound too simplistic? Maybe it is, but it is true. The catch is that it may take weeks or months or sometimes years for our bodies to allow these actions to occur without conscious thought.

One of the most important steps in this process of learning is to not look at a printed page of music. Play things without looking at the music. One might say, I can't memorize things so easily. Well this is not memorization. This is learning something very deeply. Play a small portion of a phrase over and over. But while playing it, use your ears and listen to the music you're playing. Then try to sing the phrase away from the instrument. Try to play the phrase starting on different notes. If this seems too overwhelming take another approach.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY EXERCISE

Sing the first few bars of the song **Happy Birthday**. Now play the song on your instrument starting on any note. Now once you figure it out and it feel comfortable, play it starting on other notes. When this feels comfortable playing the tune on all twelve notes you can feel confident you know that tune. The same holds true for learning any music. The only difference is that some music is longer than a simple tune like **Happy Birthday**, so one needs to spend more time with it. But the concepts are the same. Only work with very small segments of music and don't move on to other areas until that one area is thoroughly learned.

BRUSHING OUR TEETH AND CHILD WALKING

Here's another analogy. When we brush our teeth, we put the toothpaste on the brush, put it in our mouth and begin brushing. We don't miss our mouths when we put the brush in. We've done it so many times that this action is familiar to our muscles and we do it without thought.

How about walking? Try looking at a child learning to walk. They look a little like Frankenstein. Their legs are stiff and their balance is unsure and after a few steps they fall. But an older child or adult doesn't give walking a second thought. In fact, they literally don't give the action of walking any conscious thought at all. They have a thought like, *I'd like a glass of milk*, then they get up and go to the fridge and get it without having to tell their legs what to do.

Learning music is the same. When we ingrain the techniques of playing an instrument and understanding the rudiments of music so thoroughly we remove the need for conscious thought to help us execute the music. At this point one's unique voice can be expressed through the music.

CHARLIE PARKER AND ART TATUM

Two of the greatest musicians to ever live, Charlie Parker and Art Tatum, often played their repertoire in many different keys. In fact Art Tatum might start a tune out in one key, then play the bridge in a different key. Charlie Parker would play his repertoire in many different keys. Keys didn't matter to these musicians because they were familiar with all 12 keys equally.

What these artists have in common is the ability to let the music flow through them without their egos, opinions, fears and technical difficulties getting in the way. They've achieved this level of artistry by slowly and methodically internalizing the many aspects of music and playing their instrument. They've done this to the point where they don't have to consciously think about executing the music. The music within them is able to flow freely through them. There are no little voices saying uh oh - here comes the hard part.

HOW SHOULD I PRACTICE?

One might say, *that sounds all well and good but I practice 3 hours a day and don't get to that level of proficiency*. Well the point is not the number of hours spent practicing. The most important point is to master what you do practice before moving on to other things. Master means to learn something so thoroughly that one always executes it correctly - similar to the analogy of brushing the teeth. This type of practicing can seem to take a long time. One might say, *I can't spend too much time on this scale or pattern now because I have two etudes to learn, some orchestra music and my other study material*. The volume of

demands becomes overwhelming and the practice session is spent skimming over things and not really learning any one thing thoroughly.

But the time spent internalizing something is shorter than one thinks. Try to remember the times when you practiced a piece over and over and there were a few passages that were always difficult which never felt quite right. You perform the piece and *kind of get through* those passages and say to yourself *glad that's over*. But then some years later you have to play the piece again for a student or for a recital and those same passages are no easier.

If one took the time to properly internalize that music it would not only always be with you but any of the problems that were conquered while spending time with the piece would carry over to other pieces that have similar challenges.

What happens then is that the more material which is learned in this thorough manner, the easier music in general starts to become. When enough facility is gained, most music played will be done with little or no conscious thought, thus allowing one's unique personality to emerge. This will happen because there will not be any technical hurdles to conquer in the music or on the instrument.

When practicing, don't try to conquer an entire work at once. Live with a small passage until it becomes easy. One teacher said something is properly learned when one can play it flawlessly six times in a row. Generally, if something is not learned thoroughly enough, there will probably be a lapse in concentration when trying to play something six times in a row perfectly. So use this six times rule as a test. If a mistake is made, then go back and spend more time working the passage slowly until you don't have to *think* about what you are doing.

PATIENCE AND HAVING FUN PRACTICING

Most importantly, remember not get discouraged. Have patience with yourself, carefully listen to what you play-find the problem areas and fix them through slow repetition. Also enjoy the process of practicing and the sounds you produce. Music is fun and food for the soul and this includes music made while practicing.

Recommended books:

The Inner Game of Music by Barry Green with W. Timothy Gallway published by Doubleday;
Effortless Mastery by Kenny Werner, published by James Aebersold Jazz.

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