

Happy New Year from Summerglen Music!

Welcome to a brand new year! We wish you a prosperous 2009, and thank you for being part of our Summerglen family for another year! In this issue, we start the year off right by examining our practice habits, which have a direct impact on the amount of musical progress we're able to make. On the flipside, check out our new series on everyday creativity, and our latest concert calendar. Best wishes for an excellent January!



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7 Common Practice Mistakes and How to Learn from Them

Practice is the work that helps us achieve our musical dreams; with practice we strengthen our skills, unravel problems, and learn new things about music. However, it can be easy to fall into practice habits that actually harm us more than they help us. In this article, we'll discuss seven common mistakes we can make in practice, and learn how doing the opposite of these mistakes can help us become better musicians.

1. Practicing Too Little

The #1 mistake people make with practice is practicing too little. If you feel stuck in your playing and are frustrated that you're not improving, you may want to ask yourself how much you've been practicing. Often, you'll discover that you're not improving simply because you're not putting in enough time. Learning to play music is like getting to know a new friend; if you don't devote enough time to either pursuit, you're not going to get very far. Practice creates results but it requires time and effort; there's no shortcut to learning an instrument.

2. Inconsistent Practice

Practice produces the best results when we do a little bit every day. Practicing 5 hours one day and then taking a week off is about as helpful as feasting on Monday and eating nothing the rest of the week! Just as eating regularly keeps us well-nourished, practicing regularly helps us keep our chops in shape and retain what we've learned.

3. Time-Wasting Pseudo-Practice

Practicing is work, and often, work is the last thing we want to do. When we feel lazy, it can be tempting to engage in time-wasting pseudo-practice. In pseudo-practice, we try to look like we're working hard when we're really not. We might polish our horn for 15 minutes to get it "just right" before playing, practice with the television on, or organize our music instead of practicing. These activities may fool our parents into thinking we've practiced, but will they help our playing?

4. Unfocused Practice

One step above pseudo-practice is unfocused practice. This is like practicing on autopilot--we don't think about what we're doing or keep track of where we are in our music. As a result,

we miss chances to fix trouble spots, and end up not knowing our instrument very well. When we focus on our notes, keep track of how our hands are moving, and make the effort to subdivide, it's possible to practice half as long and accomplish twice as much. (And, we can use the time we save to do other things we enjoy!)

5. Ignoring Your Weak Spots

It's no big deal to have weak spots as a musician--we all do! But when we ignore these weak areas, we can severely cripple our playing. If we have trouble with reading music, playing along with a CD won't help us very much. If scales are tough, not practicing them will only make them harder. We become great players not just because we practice, but because we work on *every* aspect of our playing, even the stuff we're not good at.

6. One Way Practicing

One way practicing means what it says; we use only one approach in our practice, like playing a piece over and over. Sometimes the best practice we can do isn't necessarily playing--it may be counting, fingering, or drilling ourselves on note names. If we're having trouble with rhythm, counting may be the best solution. If we get lost in our music, going through and saying our note names may help us find our way. One Way practicing is a one-way ticket to frustration, but using different approaches in our practice gives us extra freedom and makes practice more productive.

7. Always Starting at the Beginning

This is a trap that is extremely easy to fall into. When we start at the beginning of a piece every time, we end up knowing the first few bars very well, but barely touching the rest of the piece. This approach also keeps us from fixing trouble spots, because always starting at the beginning keeps us from isolating problems in other parts of the piece. Fixing this problem is as easy as starting in a different place. We can start in a random place and see if we can play it, or start right on a troublesome spot. When we start in different places, we get to know the piece from different angles. And the more we know, the better we play!

If these mistakes are hanging out in your practice room, kick them out! You'll notice more progress coming your way.

Creativity Corner! - *SO YOU THINK YOU DON'T HAVE A CREATIVE BONE IN YOUR BODY? THINK AGAIN!*

As responsible, productive adults, it can be easy to forget how creative we really are. In this monthly section, we'll share tips to help you bring more creativity into your daily life.

This month's task: Shift Your Perspective!

Many of us associate creativity with the arts, and if we don't regularly participate in artistic activities, it can be easy to say we're not creative. In reality, though, creativity is one of humankind's signature traits--we all have it, and its use isn't limited to the arts. Consider this: even though humans don't have the speed of cheetahs or the teeth of lions, we've been able to survive and thrive for millions of years. Why? Because we have the ability to create weatherproof structures and weapons to protect ourselves, invent vehicles to get us from place to place quickly, and devise ideas to solve the problems we face each day.



When we shift our perspective on creativity to include inventions, scientific theories, and everyday problem solving, we empower ourselves to tap into humankind's greatest strength--our creativity. This month, be on the lookout for creativity in your life. Notice how often you come up with ideas and solve problems as you go through your day. Look at that proposal you wrote last week, or think about the neat way you came up with to help you remember your New Year's resolution. All of these are examples of creativity! Once we realize that we're already a little creative, it can be easier to invite even more creativity into our lives.

Cool quote of the month:

**"It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare that they are difficult."
-seneca**

Concert Calendar

Some family-friendly concerts in the Triangle area

Sunday January 18 at 4pm, Meymandi Concert Hall in Raleigh

Triangle Youth Jazz Ensemble with the Martin Luther King, Jr. All-Children's Choir

Saturday, January 24 at 8pm, Halle Cultural Arts Center in Apex

The Jackson Brothers with Cyndra Fyore play Latin jazz & swing. \$20.

January 23-24 at 8pm, and January 25 at 3pm, Meymandi Concert Hall in Raleigh

The NC Symphony presents Bugs Bunny on Broadway

Saturday, January 31 at 8pm, Reynolds Industries Theater at Duke

Jazz! The Geri Allen Trio & Patricia Barber Quartet will perform in Evolutions: The Mary Lou Williams Center's 25th Anniversary.