

The

NOTEWORTHY

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Coach's Comments

Keep your fingers crossed for nice warm weather for our Spring Festival Recital here at the Studio (it hasn't been warm since 2020, when we performed in June), taking place on Sunday, May 19th at 6:00 pm!

For the Recital, everyone has been placed in a small ensemble, or two, as well as with the entire group, to perform. So, in order to accomplish this we will need to rehearse these ensembles. I have set up a schedule for May for us to do so, which everyone received when they were given their music.

Ensemble rehearsals will all take place the week before the Recital, as this has proven to be the most effective way of preparing the groups for performance. So the first two weeks of May will be our regular Coaching Sessions; with Rhythms and Scales Pass-Offs the first week (last chance to add on the points!). Then the third week will be the two ensemble rehearsals. They will take place on Monday and Thursday evenings of that week. Makeup Sessions will also be scheduled this week.

Here is our exact schedule:

Monday, May 13th (Week 14):

4:00 pm: Sax Qntet: Charlotte, Izzie, Evelyn, Olma, David

4:30 pm: Sax Quartet: Abrielle, Kinsley, Danielle

5:00 pm: Sax Quartet: Stephen, Kelus, Ben, David

5:30 pm: Clarinet Quartet: Ben, Stephen, Charlotte

6:00 pm: WW Qrtet+1: Abrielle, Avonlea, Blaine, David

6:30 pm: Double Reed Quartet: Danielle, Stella, Ben

7:00 pm: Clarinet Quartet: Kinsley, Abigail, Audrey

7:30 pm: Woodwind Choir: Everyone

Thursday, May 16th (Week 14):

4:00 pm: Sax Qntet: Charlotte, Izzie, Evelyn, Olma, David

4:30 pm: Sax Quartet: Abrielle, Kinsley, Danielle

5:00 pm: Sax Quartet: Stephen, Kelus, Ben, David

5:30 pm: Clarinet Quartet: Ben, Stephen, Charlotte

6:00 pm: WW Qrtet+1: Abrielle, Avonlea, Blaine, David

6:30 pm: Double Reed Quartet: Danielle, Stella, Ben

7:00 pm: Clarinet Quartet: Kinsley, Abigail, Audrey

7:30 pm: Woodwind Choir: Everyone

I know this won't be convenient for everyone (if anyone), but please, for the sake of your fellow ensemble members, as we really cannot have an effective rehearsal without everyone, do all you can to arrange to be here.

The Recital will be held here at the Studio, in the "East Garden," entering through the north front gate. In case of rain, we have access to a great big tent, and additional smaller tents (fingers crossed it isn't cold). And plan to stay afterwards for awards and refreshments.

We will have one final Coaching Session the week after the Recital, where we will review our performances, and for which you should prepare a page or two from one of your method books, on your preferred instrument, to play for me.

We're on break after that for four weeks, then the optional six-week Summer Semester will begin the week of June 24th. If you decide to take a break for the summer, you will still be enrolled in the Studio when we begin again in September. But if you decide to attend for the summer, I promise we'll do something different (and maybe even more fun!) than during the school year. I am working in Logan for Utah Festival Opera & Musical Theater Company during the six weeks of the semester, so my schedule will be crazy, with lots of creative rescheduling to happen. I am hoping to have Sessions for the Summer Semester (mostly) on Mondays and Tuesdays, starting at 4:00; and on Wednesdays starting at 1:00. No problem with skipping a week or rescheduling for any camps or family vacations, etc. You may pay for the six weeks however you'd like - weekly, half-and-half, monthly, all at once. Invite your friends and classmates to join us for the summer, with no contracts and no obligation to continue in the Fall - just an opportunity to improve on playing skills.

Let's have a great, successful Recital!

Brain Research and Practicing

by Molly Gebrain

Most successful musicians learn how to practice well and become adept at perfecting exactly what their arms, hands, fingers, lips, and tongues should do to convincingly express the music they are performing. Fewer musicians, however, spend time practicing what their brains should do during performances. This oversight leads to two common shortcomings in performances: difficulties with tempo and timing and a lack of consistency and reliability.

Effective Metronome Use

Musicians use a metronome to learn how to play with a steady pulse. However, many musicians have had the experience of practicing regularly with a metronome only to find that they still rush or drag when playing the same passage without one. There is a good reason for this: the brain works in a fundamentally different way when the metronome is on versus when it is off.

In a study in 1997, non-musicians tapped to a metronome and then continued tapping at the same tempo after the metronome was turned off while researchers looked at their brain activity. They found that entire areas of the brain that were silent while the metronome was on became very active when the metronome was turned off. This sensorimotor loop is important for the internal self-timing of movements. It makes sense it would be active only when the metronome is off because the metronome provides an alternate external source to help time movements.

What this means for musicians is that while practicing with the metronome, the brain is doing something fundamentally different that it will have to do in performance without a metronome. So in the practice room, it is imperative to make sure to practice what the brain must do in a performance situation, not just what the body has to do.

Armed with this new information, here is a step-by-step guide to using the metronome to help improve the sense of pulse.

1. Play a passage perfectly steady with a metronome clicking on each beat. If this is a challenge, practice conducting the passage while singing it, and walking with the metronome while playing until it is perfectly in sync with the metronome.
2. Play the passage with the metronome, but use the clicks as offbeats – the *and* of the beat. Turn on the metronome and tap on the offbeats. Then count out loud with the tapping – *not* with the metronome. Struggling with this exercise is clear confirmation that the internal sense of pulse is weak and is reliant on external reinforcement.
3. Another exercise is to play the passage while the metronome clicks on every other beat.
4. Play it again and have the metronome click only on the downbeat.
5. Have the metronome click only on every other downbeat.
6. Continue to move the clicks further and further apart.

This process gradually makes the brain increasingly responsible for generating the beat itself, while still having something to check in with. It is a great challenge, a lot of fun, and will dramatically improve the sense of pulse and timing.

Random Practicing

All musicians have dealt with the frustration of being able to play something perfectly in the practice room, only to have it completely fall on stage. All know the, "But I played it perfectly yesterday!" excuse. Some of this is performance anxiety, but it also can be attributed to the specific practice method being used, namely blocked practicing. Nearly all musicians are taught to practice this way. It involves doing something X number of times and spending a big chunk of time perfecting a particular piece or passage before moving on to something else. Random practicing is the opposite of this. When it is done correctly, research has shown it to be the most beneficial type of practicing for good performances.

The bulk of the experiments on random practicing come from the sports world. One of the clearest experiments comes from a study on baseball players. Researchers wanted to see whether blocked or random practice improved batting performance more. The results (better performance during training in the blocked practice, but better performance in an actual performance situation in the random practice group) are found over and over again, in a variety of sports.

In 2013, two researchers decided to test this in pianists. In their study pianists had to learn a group of brand new short pieces. Just like the baseball players, the melodies they had learned using random practice were performed much better (measured in terms of note and rhythm accuracy) than those learned using blocked practice. Strangely enough, when they asked the pianists which practice method they thought was better, they said blocked practice, even though they could see that random practice resulted in better performance: the illusion of mastery.

This is because of something called the contextual interference effect and is the whole reason why random practice works so well. When doing something for the first time the brain has to create from scratch how to do it. If it is done again right away, the brain simply repeats what it just did. It creates an illusion of mastery because it seems like the passage is fine, whereas in reality, the brain is just better at repeating something than figuring out how to do it from scratch. During random practicing, the brain has to keep switching between different things, which interfere with each other, forcing the brain to continually have to reconstruct things as if it is the first time. This is exactly what happens in performance: the brain has to reconstruct everything from scratch on the spot to get it right the first time.

Researchers see greater sensorimotor activity during random practice. During later performance, they show activity in higher cognitive areas that are involved in planning and working memory. This is not seen in people using blocked practice.

There are an infinite number of ways to use the principals of random practicing. Try these:

- In order for random practicing to be effective, the passage has to be reliably correct when played X number of times in a row. If it is not, random practicing will never work. One study (with basketball players) found that the most effective way to practice is to do blocked practice (AAABBBCCCC), followed by serial practice (ABCABCABC), followed by random practice (ACBCAABCCCA). After being able to play each passage X number of times in a row correctly, then mark several passages to play (correctly every time) in a serial manner.
- Get an interval timer app and set it to go off every X number of minutes (maybe every five minutes). Go about practicing as usual (blocked practice is fine), but when the timer goes off, immediately switch and play the passage that is difficult. Just play it once, and then even if it was awful, go back to whatever you were practicing. When the timer goes off again, play that tricky passage again. Keep doing this for the duration of the practice session for as many days as it takes. Eventually, that difficult passage will be perfect every time the timer goes off. When it comes time to play it in performance, you will feel confident, and the passage will be secure and reliable.
- At least two weeks before a performance or audition, play through the entire program or do a mock audition at the end of each day. This will mimic what it will feel like to just play everything from scratch with no chance to play the hard spots first.
- In doing scale and arpeggio practice, try incorporating random practice. Put little slips of paper into two bags, one with each key and one with different tempos, articulations and/or dynamics. Each day, pick a slip of paper from each bag to determine which scales you will play and how.

There are many, many more ways to incorporate random practicing. The most important aspect to keep in mind is that its effectiveness comes from forcing the brain to reconstruct how to do something from scratch with no preparation or warm-up.

Musicians tend to think learning to play an instrument is about training the body to perform certain skills, but it is really the brain that is trained. Learn to structure practice sessions so the brain gets to rehearse and not just the body. When the brain becomes the focus of practice, performances feel effortless and reliable.

Molly Gebrain is a professional violist with a background in neuroscience. Her area of expertise is applying the science of learning and memory to practicing and performing.

Brain Research and Practicing, Molly Gebrain, The Instrumentalist Magazine, April/May 2024, pgs 24-27.

Media Center

Print, Digital and Internet Extras

The Musical Brain: What Students, Teachers and Performers Need to Know. Lois Svard, 2023. Hardcover, 288 pages. Oxford University Press. Amazon.com, \$26.89, Kindle \$14.99.

We make or listen to music for the powerful effect it has on our emotions, and we can't imagine our lives without music. Yet we tend to know nothing about the intricate networks that neurons create throughout our brains to make music possible. *The Musical Brain* explores fascinating discoveries about the brain and music, often told through the stories of musicians whose lives have been impacted by the extraordinary ability of our brains to learn and adapt. Neuroscientists have been studying musicians and the process of making music since the early 1990s and have discovered a staggering amount of information about how the brain processes music. There have been many books discussing neuroscience and music, but this is the first to relate the research in a practical way to those individuals who make or teach music.

Research in mirror neurons, neuroplasticity, imagery, learning and memory, the musical abilities of babies, and the cognitive advantage of studying music can offer valuable insights into how and when we should begin the study of music, how we can practice and teach more effectively, how we can perform with greater confidence, and can help us understand why experiencing music together is so important in our lives. An accompanying website provides links to interviews, performance clips, demonstrations, photos, and essays involving the concepts or musicians discussed in the book.

Reverberation: Do Everything Better With Music. Keith Blanchard and Peter Gabriel, 2023. Hardcover, 240 pages. Harry N. Abrams. Amazon.com, \$16.39, Kindle \$11.99.

Music is a universal human experience that's been with us since the dawn of time. You've listened to music all your life... but have you ever wondered why? It turns out music isn't just about entertainment – it's a deeply embedded, subtly powerful means of communication. Songs resonate with your brain wave patterns and drive changes in your brain: creating your moods, consolidating your memories, strengthening your habits (the good ones and the bad ones alike)...even making you fall in and out of love. Your music is molding you, at a subconscious level, all day long. And now, for the first time ever, you can take charge.

Every Good Boy Does Fine: A Love Story, in Music Lessons. Jeremy Denk, 2022. Hardcover, 384 pages. Random House. Amazon.com, \$17.05, Kindle \$9.99.

Renowned pianist Jeremy Denk traces an implausible but true journey starting out as a precocious, temperamental six-year-old piano prodigy in New Jersey who grows up and ultimately becomes a world-touring pianist, a MacArthur "Genius," and a frequent performer at Carnegie Hall. Many classical music memoirs focus on famous musicians and professional accomplishments, but this book focuses on the everyday: neighborhood teacher, high school orchestra, local conductor. There are few writers capable of so deeply illuminating the trials of artistic practice – hours of daily repetition, mystifying advice, pressure from parents and teachers. But under all this struggle is a love letter to the act of teaching.

Parent's Column

Reminders & Helps to Enhance Your Child's Musical Experience

How can you keep your child's interest in training and attending sessions at a high level through the summer months, especially if they're taking the summer off?

Perhaps a glimpse at what is possible in the future if they stick with it will help. Showing and allowing students to discover what their potential is can be an excellent motivator.

One activity that is free and appropriate for the entire family is a professional level Symphonic Band Concert. Utah State University's Alumni Band is scheduled to perform on five Sunday evenings, June and July, outside on the Quad east of Old Main, and in the Daines Concert Hall in the case of rain. Performances begin at 7:00 pm. and last about an hour.

These fifty to seventy professional-level musicians, many whose careers are not in music, meet for just over an hour prior to the concert to prepare the music, and then deliver a polished and varied performance of traditional marches, classic standards and new publications.

The drive to Logan is pleasant, the temperature is much cooler, and the music is great! Plan your family outing(s) now:

June 16th

June 30th

July 14th

July 21st

July 28th.

Closer to home are the many, often free, community band and orchestra concerts, especially for Independence Day and Pioneer Day (don't forget about the parades!); and a number of musicals using live musicians in area cities including Murray, Sandy, Cottonwood Heights and Herriman. Here's just a few:

"South Pacific in Concert," Murray Amphitheater, June 6-15.

"Matilda," Butterfield Park Pavilion, Herriman, June 6-17.

"Beauty & the Beast," Butler Middle School, Cottonwood Heights, July 12-20.

"The Hunchback of Notre Dame," Murray Amphitheater, July 18-27.

"Mamma Mia!" Sandy Amphitheater, August 2-17.

More information on exact locations, times and prices can easily be found with a simple internet search including the name of the show and the city.