

# The

# NOTEWORTHY

Winter 2024

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## Coach's Comments

Well, not only do we have the holidays upon us, with all the school concerts and other activities, we are also starting to prepare our solos and ensembles for the Winter Recitals on Saturday, January 26<sup>th</sup>, and Monday, January 28<sup>th</sup>, both at 6:00 pm (you choose which day). This serves as our "dress" rehearsal for school (and, eventually, district, region and state) Solo & Ensemble Festivals. This is where we find out how well we have prepared and what we still need to do to play our absolute best.

Everyone has chosen their solo and has a printed copy to start working on, and recordings are still coming! So here's our schedule:

The first part of December is when we start our solo preparation, including filling out the Solo Worksheet. Take your sheet music and follow it as you listen to the recording (and more than one, if you'll take the time to look online). Figure out the form of your solo: Do parts repeat? Do tempos and/or styles change? Mark sections, the Trouble Spots, that you know you'll need to work on more than the rest of the piece. Try playing through it slowly – slowly enough you don't make mistakes and wire your brain incorrectly. Are there more trouble spots to mark for extra learning? Take the time now to build a solid foundation and framework for your solo, then when the holidays have ended, you are ready to do the finish work.

The week before Christmas you'll receive the formal assignment to arrange for an accompanist (you don't have to wait until then to start looking, however!), and we'll start adding in the expressive parts of the solo – dynamics, articulations, phrasings, etc. – that will start making the piece sound like music. You don't have to do the interior decorating yet, but you need the walls up and the roof on, so you can finish the floor coverings and paint the walls. Keep working on getting those trouble spots fixed – you don't want to have to tear open walls to fix the wiring!

In January, we'll start getting up to tempo and becoming comfortable with playing all the way through

without stopping. We'll add the finishing custom touches that make the solo your own. You'll also make sure your accompanist is all ready to go – it would be terrible to have the open house without having all the utilities hooked up.

Your accompanist will play with you on the Recital, and will also need to attend a Coaching Session sometime the week before, so we can be sure you know where you'll be standing when you perform, how to tune and announce your piece, and to acknowledge the audience. Everyone will need to set up a time for this, even if you come at your regular time. You'll also need to plan to rehearse with your accompanist one or two other times before the Recital. It would be best if you can find someone who will also be able to play for you at school, so you don't have to start the whole rehearsal process over.

Yes, it is accepted to pay your accompanist for their time, especially if your piece is a bit more difficult (like mine!). If you don't know anyone – from your or a family member's piano lessons, church, school, a relative or friend – then you can check out local piano teachers listed at [www.utahmta.org/find-a-teacher](http://www.utahmta.org/find-a-teacher) and searching for piano teachers near you. Contact them directly and ask if they would be interested and willing to accompany you for the Recital and for school festivals.

The Recitals will be held at Bountiful Music's Recital Hall, located on the west side of the building, with a wonderful grand piano for accompaniment! You are welcome to park on the west, the south or on the street. We will rehearse here at my Studio the week before the recitals – well, actually downstairs in the Family Room on my baby grand piano. I had planned to return to holding the recitals on Sunday in my Family Room, as in the past, but we'd have to have too many recitals!

Please plan to stay for your entire Recital – it will be an hour or less – for the Certificates and Awards.

Now, it's time to get to work and get our solos learned well, for the Recital and for the school festival(s)!

# 8 Things Top Practicers Do Differently

Some degree of time and repetition is necessary to develop and hone our skills, of course. But we also know on some intuitive level that to maximize gains, we ought to practice "smarter, not harder."

But what the heck does that really mean anyway? What *exactly* do top practicers do differently?

## Pianists learning Shostakovich

A group of researchers led by Robert Duke of The University of Texas at Austin conducted a study some years ago to see if they could tease out the specific practice behaviors that distinguish the best players and most effective learners.

Seventeen piano and piano pedagogy majors agreed to learn a 3-measure passage from Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 1. The passage had some tricky elements, making it too difficult to sight read well, but not so challenging that it couldn't be learned in a single practice session.

### The setup

The students were given two minutes to warm up, and then provided with the 3-measure excerpt, a metronome, and a pencil.

Participants were allowed to practice as long as they wanted, and were free to leave whenever they felt they were finished. Practice time varied quite a bit, ranging from 8 1/2 minutes to just under 57 minutes.

To ensure that the next day's test would be fair, they were specifically told that they may NOT practice this passage, even from memory, in the next 24 hours.

### 24 hours later...

When participants returned the following day for their test, they were given 2 minutes to warm up, and then asked to perform the complete 3-measure passage in its entirety without stopping, 15 times (with pauses between attempts, of course).

Each of the pianists' performances were then evaluated on two levels. Getting the right notes with the right rhythm was the primary criteria, but the researchers also ranked each of the pianists' performances from best to worst, based on tone, character, and expressiveness.

### That led to a few interesting findings:

~ Practicing longer didn't lead to higher rankings.

~ Getting in more repetitions had no impact on their ranking either.

~ The number of times they played it correctly in practice also had no bearing on their ranking.

### What did matter was:

~ How many times they played it *incorrectly*. The more times they played it incorrectly, the worse their ranking tended to be.

~ The *percentage* of correct practice trials did seem to matter. The greater the proportion of correct trials in their practice session, the higher their ranking tended to be.

### The top 8 strategies

Three pianists' performances stood out from the rest, and were described as having "more consistently even tone, greater rhythmic precision, greater musical character (purposeful dynamic and rhythmic inflection), and a more fluid execution."

Upon taking a closer look at the practice session videos, the researchers identified 8 distinct practice strategies that were common to the top pianists, but occurred less frequently in the practice sessions of the others:

~ Playing was hands-together early in practice.

~ Practice was with inflection early on; the initial conceptualization

of the music was with inflection.

~ Practice was thoughtful, as evidenced by silent pauses while looking at the music, singing/humming, making notes on the page, or expressing verbal "ah-ha"s.

~ Errors were preempted by stopping in anticipation of mistakes.

~ Errors were addressed immediately when they appeared.

~ The precise location and source of each error was identified accurately, rehearsed, and corrected.

~ Tempo of individual performance trials was varied systematically; logically understandable changes in tempo occurred between trials (e.g. slowed things down to get tricky sections correct).

~ Target passages were repeated until the error was corrected and the passage was stabilized, as evidenced by the error's absence in subsequent trials.

### The top 3 strategies

Of the eight strategies above, there were three that were used by *all three* top pianists, but rarely utilized by the others. In fact, only two other pianists (ranked #4 and #6) used more than one:

~ The precise location and source of each error was identified accurately, rehearsed, and corrected.

~ Tempo of individual performance trials was varied systematically; logically understandable changes in tempo occurred between trials (e.g. slowed things down to get tricky sections correct; or speeded things up to test themselves, but not too much).

~ Target passages were repeated until the error was corrected and the passage was stabilized, as evidenced by the error's absence in subsequent trials.

### What's the common thread that ties these together?

The researchers note that the most striking difference between the top three pianists and the rest, was how they handled mistakes. It's not that the top pianists made fewer mistakes in the beginning and simply had an easier time learning the passage.

The top pianists made mistakes too, but they managed to correct their errors in such a way that helped them avoid making the same mistakes over and over, leading to a higher proportion of correct trials overall.

### And one to rule them all

The top performers utilized a variety of error-correction methods, such as playing with one hand alone, or playing just part of the excerpt, but there was one strategy that seemed to be the most impactful.

~ *Slowing things down.*

After making a mistake, the top performers would play the passage again, but slow down or hesitate – without stopping – right before the place where they made a mistake the previous time.

This seemed to allow them to play the challenging section more accurately, and presumably coordinate the correct motor movements at a tempo they could handle, rather than continuing to make mistakes and failing to identify the precise nature of the mistake, the underlying technical problem, and what they ought to do differently in the next trial.

### Take action

What is your number one takeaway? How might you integrate these findings in your own practicing?

## Media Center

Print, Digital and Internet Extras

*Sounding Human: Music and Machines, 1740/2020.* Dierdre Loughridge. University of Chicago Press. 2024. 250 pages. Paperback, \$35.00. Amazon.com.

*Sounding Human* enters the debate on posthumanism and human-machine relationships in music, exploring how categories of human and machine have been continually renegotiated over the centuries. Loughridge expertly traces this debate from the 1737 invention of what became the first musical android to the creation of a “sound wave instrument” by a British electronic music composer in the 1960s, and the chopped and pitched vocals produced by sampling singers’ voices in modern pop music. From music-generating computer programs to older musical instruments and music notation, *Sounding Human* shows how machines have always actively shaped the act of music composition. In doing so, Loughridge reveals how musical artifacts have been—or can be—used to help explain and contest what it is to be human.

*Beyond the Creative Species: Making Machines That Make Art and Music.* Oliver Bown. The MIT Press. 2021. 416 pages. Hardcover, \$45.00, Kindle, \$27.99. Amazon.com.

As algorithms get smarter, what role will computers play in the creation of music, art, and other cultural artifacts? Will they be able to create such things from the ground up, and will such creations be meaningful? In *Beyond the Creative Species*, Oliver Bown offers a multidisciplinary examination of computational creativity, analyzing the impact of advanced generative technologies on art and music. Drawing on a wide range of disciplines, including artificial intelligence and machine learning, design, social theory, the psychology of creativity, and creative practice research, Bown argues that to understand computational creativity, we must not only consider what computationally creative algorithms actually do, but also examine creative artistic activity itself.

*Keep Going: 10 Ways to Stay Creative in Good Times and Bad.* Austin Kleon. Workman Publishing Company, 2019. 224 pages. Paperback \$12.29, Kindle \$3.99. Amazon.com.

The creative life is not a linear journey to a finish line, it’s a loop—so find a daily routine, because today is the only day that matters. Disconnect from the world to connect with yourself—sometimes you just have to switch into airplane mode. *Keep Going* celebrates getting outdoors and taking a walk (as director Ingmar Bergman told his daughter, “The demons hate fresh air”). Pay attention, and especially pay attention to what you pay attention to. Worry less about getting things done, and more about the worth of what you’re doing. Instead of focusing on making your mark, work to leave things better than you found them.

*Step-by-Step Guide to Making a Music Video.* Alison Doyle. <https://www.liveabout.com/how-to-shoot-a-music-video-step-by-step-2460783>.

This quick and easy to read tutorial presents its ideas in a logical sequence, with just the facts, providing value without belaboring each element with jargon or too much detail. Here’s a perfect primer for anyone about to dive into the making of a music video.

## Parent’s Column

*Reminders & Helps to Enhance Your [Child’s] Musical Experience*

### A Family Guide to Parenting Musically

Lisa Huisman Koops

*A Family Guide to Parenting Musically* is for families who want to make music a more meaningful part of their daily life. It is full of creative ideas about how to engage in musical parenting (doing things to help your child grow musically) as well as parenting musically (using music to achieve parenting goals). Designed for parents, grandparents, caregivers, and friends, this book breaks down activities by age bracket and by various scenarios. Seventy activities offer specific ways to explore the ideas at the core of this book: that all humans are musical, that music can make an important difference in family life, and that there are many ways to be musical.

Based on two decades of Lisa Huisman Koops’s research and teaching with families, as well as mothering her own four children, *A Family Guide to Parenting Musically* provides developmental information and research-based discussions in a clear and engaging way. The companion website features author-recorded audio examples of songs, chants, and activities as well as links to Koops’s popular *Parenting Musically* podcast, which provide an ongoing resource to further explore the ideas in this book. The book also includes tips from podcast interviewees, such as Ziggy Marley and Maggie Baird (mother to Billie Eilish and FINNEAS).

Contents Include:

Introduction: What is “Parenting Musically” All About?

Part One: Music is Important

Part Two: Many Ways to Be Musical

Part Three: All Humans are Musical

Part Four: Expressing Agency as a Family with Music.

Epilogue: Parenting Musically and Musical Parenting in Context.

*A Family Guide to Parenting Musically*, Lisa Huisman Koops, Oxford University Press, 2024, 296 pages, \$24.95 Amazon.com.