

Some Thoughts on Practicing Effectively And Preparing for Performance

by

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Practice very slowly, with many repeats, of very small chunks of music (usually one or two beats)

Decide on fingerings as soon as you start looking at a piece (side or bis Bb. Fork or regular F#, side C or regular, etc)

Decide on page turns early on in your learning process, as these need to be as comfortable and familiar in performance as the rest of the text. Making changes just prior to performance can make you less comfortable in the moment of performance.

Put the metronome on the eighth-note subdivision and practice small chunks of music slowly enough so that you are not making any note mistakes. A very slow tempo allows you to be totally in control of fingers, tone, articulations, pitch, etc...students usually practice too fast.

Look up and pencil in (in English) all of the Italian or other foreign language terms in the score (ex. "dolcissimo" , "con moto" etc.).

Practice with an active imagination, that is, pre-hear in your imagination the beautiful tone, pitch, articulations, phrase shapes, etc that you are aiming for each time you practice.

Practice with a sound you are increasingly proud of regardless of whether you are practicing scales, long tones or the repertoire being studied. Never have a "practice room sound" that is anything short of what you want in performance.

Be patient with the process. If you find a day when "it just isn't happening" it usually simply means you are trying to practice at a tempo that is too fast!

Keep in mind that we are learning to work with sound in the same way that visual artists are learning to work with clay or paint. We first learn how to *make* the sound (the artistic raw material for a musician) correctly, then we try to get better at *using* it to express *musical* shapes, ideas and emotions...the parallels to the visual arts are really interesting to me. We learn how to make the raw material- our sound- to be pretty, in-tune, how to articulate it, to slur it, to phrase/shape it, to color it. etc similarly to how an art student learns to do the same in clay or oil. Be patient, and try to love the *process* of arriving little by little, moment by moment at a satisfying result. Sound is very expressive and communicates deeply to listeners. Keep the goal of creating something *artistic* in sound- an "artistic sound object"- in mind! Practicing, then, is taking daily "baby steps" toward your goal of profound expression...as we constantly in practicing produce increasingly

more interesting and accurate “sounds”, whether in the context of long tones, scale work, etudes or phrases of repertoire being studied. Anytime we are practicing, we can always be making sounds we are aiming for, pre-hearing, imagining and believing in, or at least we can always be trying to do this, even at the slowest tempo, or on the smallest musical fragment...each sound, color, pitch, articulation, and so on can be intended and chosen. This imaginative choosing is very artistic! Aim for this active imagination when you practice! Your ear and imagination will also then be guiding your body and physiology at the subconscious and the conscious levels.

Keep listening to all kinds of music, and thus learn a vocabulary of great articulations, tone colors, shapes, styles...that you draw on when practicing and playing your instrument.

Map out times for practicing on your daily schedule- three hours total daily is the expectation. Learn to use small chunks of time well- we can all make good progress even in a half-hour session if we practice slowly in a focused way, centering on a specific goal or problem.

Repeatedly study several recordings of your work- with the piano score in hand. Learn both parts. Know what great “ensemble” is for every measure before you meet with your pianist.

Write in your part in small note values the piano rhythms of any passages that may be problematic or complex so that your rehearsal time is not spent learning “what the piano part has in measure...” This is especially helpful in transitions and after your part has rests – write in piano cues that aurally signal your entrance.

There is a difference between *playing* and *practicing* – the former is doing what you can already do, and the latter is taking small, methodical, intelligent and disciplined steps towards becoming better, towards mastery of that which you cannot yet do. Be sure you are truly *practicing* each day in your practice room!

Use ear plugs if practicing altissimo or very loud passages in a small or live space.

(Umble-YSU 2007)